EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES LEARNING TO MEET ADAPTIVE
CHALLENGES INVOLVING ENGLISH LEARNERS WITHIN THE LEARNING-
ORIENTED LEADERSHIP MODEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES LEARNING TO MEET ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES INVOLVING ENGLISH LEARNERS WITHIN THE LEARNING-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP MODEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Sarah Elizabeth Benis Scheier-Dolberg

Little is known about how engaging in the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) can support educators to address the adaptive challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work teaching English learners. My qualitative study examined how 11 educators whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillar practices as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges.
I conducted three one-hour interviews with each of 11 participants (teachers and specialists) from a public elementary school (n=7) and a public charter elementary school (n=4). I selected sites based on the school leader’s experience with and implementation of Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model and the number of educators who taught English learners. Data analysis included: 1) writing analytic memos, 2) transcribing interviews verbatim, 3) coding, 4) crafting profiles, 5) categorization, 6) within-case and cross-case analysis, and 7) creating matrices.

I found that participants understood cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming as adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners. Furthermore, all participants understood adaptive challenges involving English learners as opportunities for growth and development. The overwhelming majority of participants experienced the pillar practices as a holding environment for their growth and understood that building-level and district-level leaders played a pivotal role in creating an infrastructure for the pillar practices to support their growth. Key features of the holding environment participants described included: provision of information and access to expertise; time and space for reflective discussion and/or collaborative problem solving; and opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives.

Recommendations for principals, superintendents, and policymakers include: employing the pillar practices of the learning-oriented leadership model to support educators in their work with diverse learners, specifically English learners and providing financial and human resources to support educators and principals to gain expertise relating to English learners.
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SBSD
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Increasingly public P-12 education demands school leaders who can engage educators and adults at all organizational levels in tough change processes that require individual and organizational learning to create new knowledge and tools to address today’s complex educational challenges (Fullan, 2004, 2006; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Macpherson, 2009; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006). Addressing long-standing historical educational inequities for an increasingly diverse population of English learners (i.e., students who participate in language assistance programs to become proficient in English) in P-12 public schools is among the most difficult and most important challenges American schools face (Coburn & Riley, 2000; Gándara & Cantreras, 2009; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Gándara & Rumberger, 2007) as the number of English learners has more than doubled in the last 30 years, totaling over 5 million children (NCELA, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010b).

Two decades of research support the learning-oriented leadership model as an effective approach to offering adults differentiated and developmentally appropriate holding environments for growth through engagement in the pillar practices of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStephano, & Asghar, 2013). At this date, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research that has been published that explores exclusively how, if at all, the pillar
practices of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) support educators, who teach English learners, to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges—complex problems for which there are no easy answers—in their work. Further, prior studies on the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) have focused in large part on school leaders’ and aspiring school leaders’ experiences implementing the model. These studies of the learning-oriented leadership model have not exclusively explored how educators, who teach English language learners, define the adaptive challenges in their work and how, if at all, the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) support them in better meeting those challenges. My study explores these gaps.

In my qualitative multi-site interview study, I explore how educators, who teach English learners and who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. I conducted this study to contribute to the field of educational leadership, specifically to inform the work of building-level and district-level leaders who support educators in teaching English learners.
I conducted three one-hour interviews with each of 11 participants (classroom teachers and specialists) from a traditional public elementary school (n=7) and a public charter elementary school (n=4). I selected sites based on the school leader’s experience with and implementation of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model and the number of educators who taught with English learners. Data analysis of interviews included: 1) writing analytic notes and memos; 2) transcribing interviews and reviewing transcripts; 3) reducing data to profiles; 4) coding 5) categorizing by coding; and 6) within-case and cross-case analysis and data matrices.

I organize this chapter into eleven sections. I begin with context and background, followed by a discussion of the problem statement and research purposes. I then discuss my personal interest in the project before naming my research questions and hypothesis. I then discuss my methodology, followed by implications and significance for my study. Then I discuss my researcher assumptions and the study’s limitations. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

**Context and Background**

In this section, I begin by discussing the concepts of adaptive challenge, holding environment and internal capacities, and then I move into a discussion of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Next, I discuss how the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education help to support the connections I make between the learning-oriented leadership model and the adaptive challenges of educators teaching English learners. Next I discuss why I chose the term English learners. I then situate my study by providing the historical
background of educational reform relating to English learners. I also focus on how these reforms present adaptive challenges for educators teaching English learners. In providing this background, I offer a basis for understanding how the legal, political, and education reform context present in public schools might shape the ways that educators make sense of the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners. I then consider the context of how 21st century skills present educators with adaptive challenges in their work in schools and also look specifically at how the adoption of 21st century skills also presents adaptive challenges for educators who teach English learners. Finally, I discuss the professional learning context for teachers generally and then consider professional learning for educators teaching English learners to show that the current professional learning context is falling short to support educators in their efforts to address the adaptive challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work with English learners.

Throughout this work, I have chosen to use the term educators rather than teachers to broaden the potential impact of this work to those adults teaching English learners as classroom teachers and as specialists—coaches, nurses, guidance counselors, speech and language specialists, etc.

**Concepts of Adaptive Challenges, Holding Environment, and Internal Capacities**

While many challenges encountered by educators in schools can be classified by what leadership theorist Ronald Heifetz (1994) refers to as *technical challenges*, problems that are well defined and the solution requires application of existing know-how, educators also face adaptive challenges. *Adaptive challenges*, in contrast, are problems in the workplace where new learning is required because the problem is not yet well defined and/or there is not yet a known solution for that problem (Heifetz, 1994).
Simply put: “adaptive problems are often systemic problems with no ready answers” (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001, p. 132). Adaptive challenges, such as engaging and educating increasing numbers of English learners in language acquisition as well as the core curriculum within the mainstream hierarchical education systems in the U.S., require adaptive leadership in P-12 education capable of creating holding environments for both individual and organizational growth (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Gates and Robinson, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Wagner et al., 2006).

The concept of holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) holds a central place in constructive-developmental theory and work of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994, 2000). It can be defined as a specific context with high supports and challenges where adults (1) are met at their developmental level, or way of knowing (i.e., a meaning making system), (2) are stretched toward a more complex way of knowing (e.g., through encountering alternative perspectives), and (3) are provided with a growth environment that offers continuity and stability (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a). Creating conditions to support increases in the internal capacities of educators, especially those educators teaching English learners who face numerous adaptive challenges, is a crucial consideration for school leaders faced with the challenge of successfully engaging increasing numbers of English learners. By internal capacities, I refer to the “cognitive, affective (emotional), intrapersonal (self to self), and interpersonal (self to other) capacities that enable a person to better meet the demands of life and work” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 2).

The Learning-Oriented Leadership Model

Eleanor Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) research-based learning-oriented model of leadership redefines schools as centers of learning for adults and students alike.
Adopting a learning orientation to leadership and explicitly working toward increasing adult developmental capacity by employing four pillar practices (i.e., teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) to foster transformational learning shows promise for helping adults acquire new internal capacities and new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving to better meet adaptive challenges (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Transformational learning, or internal growth, is an important concept within Drago-Severson’s studies and research-based models. The concept comes from Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) neo-Piagetian research and theoretical work with constructive-developmental theory. Transformational learning, in contrast to informational learning (i.e., acquiring new knowledge and skills), changes how we know (Kegan, 2000; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b). According to Piaget (1954), this type of learning is part of an accommodative process where new experiences change the underlying knowledge structures themselves. Kegan (2000) asserts that the form is changed in transformational learning and thus transformational learning is an epistemological change and not simply a behavioral change. There is a direct link between Heifetz’s (1994) adaptive learning and Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) transformational learning in constructive-developmental theory. Drago-Severson in her research (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) builds on Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) definition of transformational learning and constructive-developmental theory to understand the learning and internal growth processes of educators as they encounter and learn to better meet adaptive challenges. When referring to transformational learning throughout my study, I am also using Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) definition of the concept of
transformational learning: changing how we know. I use the concept of transformational learning to support my assertions about the importance of expanding the internal capacities of educators.

Within the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) leaders can work toward helping to build the internal capacities of educators through employing the four pillar practices of teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. The learning-oriented leadership model supports “effective, differentiated approaches to adult development in schools” (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 270). The pillar practices (hereafter I will simply refer to the pillar practices as the “pillars”) provide robust and growth-enhancing opportunities for educators within their professional learning environments. More than two decades of research support the idea that school leaders can employ a framework that integrates adult development theories and educational leadership theories to lead with a developmental orientation to transform schools into places where adults can grow (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Drago-Severson’s research (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) also highlights findings that prior studies suggest that professional development that invests in adult learning and development is linked to improved student achievement (Guskey, 2000).
Bridging the Learning-Oriented Leadership Model with Adaptive Challenges for Educators Teaching English Learners through the Literatures of Multicultural Education, Sociocultural Theory, and Bilingual Education

At the start of my study, I assumed that school leaders who implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) can support educators to realize the powerful growth potential of their efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners through the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. Findings from multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education research underscore the critical role culture plays in teaching all children (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephan, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Macias, 1988; Nieto, 2004, 2009), especially English learners in diverse American schools. Further, because the context of American schools more often than not present cultural, linguistic, and/or community discontinuities for English learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009), educators teaching English learners must serve as the bridging relationships that counter and lesson these discontinuities for children, presenting complex, adaptive challenges for educators teaching English learners.

As the numbers of English learners have increased, a prolonged shortage of teachers qualified to teach English learners has emerged (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). Further, Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) found even with the availability of federal Title 1 funds for professional development associated with Limited English Proficient (LEP) students only 27% of teachers nationwide received any training in 2008 regarding LEP student instruction. These trainings offered to a small percentage of those
teaching English learners fall within the professional development paradigm most concerned with informational learning (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). The literature shows that professional development trainings for educators teaching English learners focus solely on the knowledge base and skill set (Collier & Thomas, 1995; Cummins, 1980; Delpit, 1995; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Musanti, 2005; Nieto, 2000; Rice Doran, 2011; Santos, 2009) and not on teachers’ internal capacity to adapt to complex challenges in their work.

There is an important and unexplored link between the practices of learning-oriented leadership (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and the adaptive challenges educators teaching English learners face daily in public schools, which my study addresses. Transforming teaching for English learners in American schools requires that all teachers expand their internal capacities in core cultural competencies because of the increasing numbers and diversity of America’s English learner population.

A number of scholars have published work across the literatures of sociocultural theory and multicultural education theory that pertain to the concept of cultural proficiency. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 2009) research on culturally relevant pedagogy emphasized the critical role that educators serve in bridging the discontinuities between students’ home cultures and the school culture by empowering students to develop and maintain academic success, cultural competence in mainstream—or school—cultures, and develop critical consciousness. Geneva Gay (2000, 2002) codified many of these ideas in her research on culturally responsive teaching; she defined this as teaching from students’ strengths by using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students. Nieto’s (2004, 2009) research in the sociocultural
and sociopolitical aspects of teaching, learning, and schooling also emphasized the power of educators to become caring and critical advocates for all students by affirming the diverse identities of students and seeking to learn from diverse perspectives by challenging personally-held biases and assumptions. I rely on these researchers’ work to define the concept of cultural proficiency for my study. I use the term cultural proficiency to reference a transformational movement intended to spur personal, collective, and institutional change to promote a sociocultural perspective in teaching and learning and to advance our society’s commitment to social justice and equal opportunity for all students. On an individual level, cultural proficiency is a lifelong journey to affirm diversity and, as educators, to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217) about their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of their students. Gaining greater cultural proficiency is a critical opportunity for growth and development that educators have in their work teaching English learners.

It is also important to note here that in attempting to build bridges among these literatures (i.e., the constructive-developmental theory underpinning the learning-oriented leadership model, adaptive leadership, and selected portions of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education literatures), I found both synergy and tension. For example, sociocultural and constructivist theories of learning share some important overlaps regarding the process and importance of transformational learning in adults, and yet they differ radically in what they emphasize. For instance, sociocultural theory emphasizes the social transformation and constructivism emphasizes personal transformation (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). While it was not the explicit purpose of this dissertation to explore these intersections in detail, due to limits of time and scope, I
do want to emphasize the important contribution future research could play in exploring these synergies and tensions further.

Choosing the Term English Learners

Throughout my dissertation, I use the term English learners to refer to students who participate in language assistance programs to become proficient in English. When discussing English learner policy the U.S. I also use the federal government’s definition: school-age children in a P-12 school setting who are either: 1) identified by federal Title 1 labels “LEP” (Limited English Proficient) or “FLEP” (Formerly Limited English Proficient) or 2) who are arriving at schools unable to perform grade-level academic tasks in English. In federal and state legislation as well as district policies, the term English learner, English language learner, Limited English Proficient (LEP), or FLEP (Formerly Limited English Proficient) are used. I chose to use the term English learners because I wrote my dissertation primarily for an educational leadership audience, and English learner and English language learner are the terms commonly used in published research. Most educational leaders and practitioners educate students within the confines of English-only policies, and in the particular over the last 15 years, those programs that prioritize English acquisition over bilingualism (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010).

While I personally prefer the term emerging bilinguals because it frames students in terms of their capacities rather than their deficits, it is a term not yet commonly used among educational leaders. I have learned from my teaching and leadership experiences as well as through a review of research in English learners and bilingual education that bilingualism does not have to come at the expense of English proficiency; on the contrary, the first language is the bridge to learning English (Brisk & Harrington, 2000;
Delpit, 1995; Hakuta & Gould, 1987; Molyneux, 2009; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Tabors, 1997). Because I situate this study within the field of educational leadership, I mostly use the term English learners rather than bilingual students unless describing studies where findings relate to schools, districts, or teacher training programs that are designed specifically to support bilingual education. Additionally, when referring to the educators teaching English learners, I have also chosen terms to try to be as inclusive as possible to the variety of programs that teach English learners—mainstream, bilingual, Structured English Instruction (SEI), English as a Second Language (ESL), etc. I use the term “educators teaching English learners” unless describing studies where a specific language program is employed; in those cases, I use terms such as “bilingual teachers” or “ESL teachers.”

**Education Reform for English Learners**

English learners have been subject to American policy-making through Supreme Court case law (*Mendez v. Westminster*, *Lau v. Nichols*, *Casteñeda v. Pickard*, *Plyler v Doe*), federal statutes (Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], or Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], of 2001), and varied state statutes. States receive federal Title III funding through ESEA to support the use of best practices for English learners and to monitor their academic progress. Additionally, each state has developed its own legal statutes and reform efforts that are led by state education departments, leaving the educational programming for English learners varied in design, staffing, implementation, and performance across the country. The intent of the Supreme Court cases *Mendez, Lau, Casteñeda*, and *Plyler* was always to insure that English learners had equal access to
education. Politically, states find themselves couched between the more inclusive promise of equity and opportunity of the Civil Rights Era and the constrained, contentious politics of English Only, anti-immigrant fervor over the last two decades. Further hemmed in by NCLB, the reality is that most states and school districts offer few opportunities for recently arrived English learners to demonstrate mastery of the curriculum in their home languages while they undertake the arduous task of proficiency in academic English. Even within the policy patchwork of Supreme Court, federal legislation, state statutes, and local policies, English learners enter most American schools within the context of monolingual English instruction, regardless of their English language proficiency level upon entering the classroom.

The current climate of educational reform impacting English learners also includes a nationwide movement toward common standards and assessments with the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, Partnership for the Readiness of College and Career (PARCC), and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The federal Race to the Top grants awarded to states for innovation in four areas (common standards and assessments, use of data systems, teacher and principal recruitment and retention, and school turn-around) has spurred this movement to adopt the Common Core and to transition to one of the two new year-end assessment systems (PARCC or Smarter Balanced). Because of the sweeping changes enacted by states in the past few years—and future changes in the coming years—to receive Race to the Top grants, programming and achievement for struggling students, especially English learners, are undergoing great upheaval and change (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Katz, 2013). While the programs and assessments for English learners and their teachers continue to be revised and reworked,
what has become a clear result of recent policy changes is that now all teachers are assumed to be educators teaching English learners.

**Adaptive challenges within the Accountability Era context.** This current Era of Accountability affects public schools and educators teaching English learners by shining a compliance-driven spotlight on the teaching of English learners. Current research points out that in large urban districts in particular, an emphasis on compliance has the effect of encouraging gaming of the accountability system (Boother-Jennings, 2006; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Jacob, 2004) which can lead to educators and leaders in schools labeled as low performing to respond narrowly to policy compliance demands within benchmark grades and subject areas and selectively focus on improving the performance of certain students. Educators teaching English learners are then faced with the dilemma of either playing the accountability game or addressing the needs of English learners in ways that support their success over their schooling careers.

English learners do not acquire academic English proficiency in one year and thus many students cannot pass achievement tests simply due to English proficiency issues. During the first six months to two years after arriving in a new country children are able to develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) that facilitate social language use at school and home (Cummins, 1980). This helps them to a limited extent on achievement tests demanding academic English proficiency (Cummins, 1980; Collier & Thomas, 1995). To develop the academic language expected on grade level assessments, on average, it takes students five to seven years to gain Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) for children with prior schooling and seven to ten years for children with no prior schooling or native language education (Collier & Thomas,
1995). The context of current accountability systems and the urgency associated with schools labeled as underperforming or failing implicitly demands that schools do more than teach English and grade-level knowledge and skills in the same way that general education teachers do. If teachers, students, and schools are to perform within the accountability system parameters, they must find new ways to overcome the reality of how long language acquisition takes. This presents educators teaching English learners with a critical adaptive challenge for which there are no ready-made solutions.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss in detail the issue of appropriate programs for English learners (Transitional Bilingual, Two-way Bilingual, English as a Second Language and Sheltered English Instruction, Sheltered English Immersion, etc.). It is important to note that the on-going political discourse, legal action, and educational polices regarding language program decisions factor into the context of public school leadership and are subject to serious scrutiny within the Era of Accountability. Language programming decisions impact placement of students, curriculum, assessments, and assignment of teachers. These decisions greatly impact the challenges faced by educators teaching English learners. Short-term progress—or lack thereof—on achievement tests in English demanded by the accountability systems play a role in the often political decisions made regarding programs for English learners (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The option of exploring educational programming and practices that might better support the difficulty of teaching English language in addition to grade-level skills and knowledge is usually off the table because of the urgency and potential sanctions associated with attending to accountability measures first (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Language programming is one more area in which the current
accountability context in public schools ask educators to continually adapt to new policies year after year, presenting even greater challenges to educators teaching English learners. My dissertation extends what is known about educators teaching English learners’ and explores their experiences with adaptive challenges associated with programming for English learners as well as how, if at all, engaging in the pillars might increase their internal capacities to meet the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work.

**Adaptive Challenges Relating to 21st Century Skills**

The concept of 21st century skills has dramatically changed the landscape of education for educators in American schools by providing a more robust framework for educating students in a new millennium. Trilling and Fadel (2009) presented a framework for 21st Century Learning that represents the Partnership of 21st Century Skills research on this emerging field in education that includes the core subjects and 21st century themes (i.e., global awareness; financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health literacy) as well as a range of skills (i.e., life and career skills; learning and innovation skills), and informational, media, and technology skills. Figure 1 below visually represents their framework which impacts American schools from top to bottom as it proposes revisions to standards and assessments, curriculum and teaching, professional development, and learning environments. This new framework also impacts the work of educators teaching English learners as they strive to teach this expanding 21st century core curriculum in addition to teaching language.
The American educational system was not designed to equip all students for the challenges and demands of the 21st Century (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Elmore, 2002; Resnick, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wagner et al., 2006). Recent research addresses progress in American schools in providing an adequate education of basic skills for all (Resnick, 2010; NCES, 2010a, 2010b), but teaching basic skills is only part of what schooling now entails. Today’s educational systems require leaders and teachers to offer students a thinking curriculum (Resnick, 2010) that allows them to be “college ready” for the new knowledge economy (Wagner et al., 2006). These new expectations present adaptive challenges for all educators because there are few ready-made answers for a
framework that impacts schooling on so many levels (i.e., standards and assessments, curriculum and teaching, professional development, and learning environments).

Educators will have to develop new internal capacities while simultaneously addressing problems for which there are few easy or ready-made answers relating the new 21st century skills paradigm confronting all American schools. For educators teaching English learners, these challenges have increased layers of complexity because providing basic skills to English learners has always plagued American schools, so there is even less expertise or technical knowledge to support the transformation that will have to happen in American schools with larger numbers of English learners. My study explored what educators teaching English learners named as adaptive challenges and the extent to which their experiences engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) supported their growth. My study has potential implications for how school leaders can employ the pillars to help educators develop new internal capacities to better meet the teaching demands of the 21st century skills paradigm shift.

Professional Learning for Teachers

In considering the adaptive challenges that educators in public schools face, it is important to understand how professional learning contexts for teachers have changed over time. Professional learning standards for teachers have been subject to constant changes tied to reform initiatives at federal, state, and local levels. The 1970s brought teachers professional learning opportunities through curriculum trainers who provided isolated workshops to demonstrate “teacher-proof” curriculum (Katzenmeyer & Moller,
In the 1980s the idea of teacher innovation infiltrated many professional learning environments in American schools, and this brought an emphasis on teacher leadership, coaching, and local solutions to teaching and learning school- and district-wide challenges (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Yet in the same decade, reforms also focused on top-down mandated changes for school- and classroom-level implementation; the overriding ethos of this “expert” training model was one rooted in a deficit orientation where professional learning was meant to “fix” the teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 41). Through the late 1980s, 1990s, and present day, reforms have by and large maintained this deficit orientation to teachers while the professional learning models have become more nuanced than the original workshop and “expert” models (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). For instance, professional learning now is more likely to be collaborative and job-embedded than in earlier decades (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) with teachers meeting together to review student performance data and participate in action-planning for instructional changes to better support students, and at the same time, school leaders often rely on experts outside of the school building to facilitate teacher learning within the collaborative, job-embedded professional learning spaces (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

In a recent study of professional learning for teachers in American schools, findings suggested that professional learning be designed to engage teachers in active learning so that they could make sense of their learning in meaningful ways and develop their capacities to teach (Wei et al., 2010). This study was sponsored by Learning Forward (formerly known as the National Staff Development Council) and investigated the trends and challenges of professional learning for K-12 educators. It included an in-
depth review of research on effective professional learning practices. Wei et al.’s (2010) report analyzed data from three sources: the national Schools and Staff Surveys from 2000, 2004, and 2008 using quantitative methods to explore various composite variables and a professional development access index within and across states; the Met Life Survey 2009 including purely descriptive data; and the first Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) that allowed the researchers to compare professional learning conditions in the U.S. to conditions in other countries, including 24 countries in Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania.

Major themes from the study clustered around participation in professional learning, opportunities for teacher collaboration, highest priorities for future professional learning, induction supports for new teachers, and variation in professional learning opportunities across states (Wei et al., 2010). Wei et al. (2010) recommended that professional learning for teachers should include discussion, reflective writing, collaborative planning, and other collegial inquiry activities to promote more active and meaningful learning for teachers.

**Professional learning for educators teaching English learners.** As the numbers of English learners have increased, a prolonged shortage of teachers qualified to teach English learners has emerged (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). Each reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by the federal government emphasizes the need to recruit and train teachers with the knowledge base and skills adequate to provide appropriate education for English learners. Yet, even with this intense focus on training teachers to better serve English learners and with the availability of federal Title 1 funds for professional development associated with Limited English Proficient (LEP)
students, Wei et al. (2010) found that only 27% of teachers nationwide received any training in 2008 regarding LEP student instruction. These trainings offered to a small percentage of those teaching English learners fall within the professional development paradigm most concerned with informational learning (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010).

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda conducted an mixed-methods study of a nationally representative sample of first-year teachers (n=641) exploring their experience with training, professional development, recruitment, and retention. In their 2008 report, they found that “large numbers of teachers describe themselves as distinctly underprepared for the challenges of dealing with the ethnic and racial diversity that they find in the classroom at the same time when many schools have increasingly varied populations” (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, 2008, p. 11). Taken together this research suggests that a limited number of educators receive any training regarding English learners.

Further, according to research, the limited training that educators have received is focused almost exclusively on the knowledge base and skill set (Collier & Thomas, 1995; Cummins, 1980; Delpit, 1995; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Musanti, 2005; Rice Doran, 2011; Santos, 2009). Providing new information and skills are essential to prepare educators for their work with English learners, yet research suggests that these professional learning opportunities do not attend to supporting teachers to grow their internal capacities to adapt to complex challenges in their work with linguistically, ethnically, and racially diverse students (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, 2008; Wei et al., 2010). My research explores how educators teaching English learners experience the
learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) as providing opportunities to grow in order to better meet the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work.

In this section, I first defined three concepts central to my study: adaptive challenges, holding environment, and internal capacities. Next I discussed three areas relevant to the context and background of my study: the historical context education reform for English learners, the current context of 21st century skills, and professional learning contexts for teachers (past and present). I discussed how each of these contexts present adaptive challenges for educators teaching English learners and related those discussions to potential implications related to my study. Next, I present the problem statement for my dissertation.

**Problem Statement**

Scholar Ron Heifetz writes about adaptive challenges and adaptive leadership both in and outside of schools (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). Since the publishing of *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Heifetz, 1994), educational leadership scholars have applied Heifetz’s concepts of technical and adaptive challenges as well as adaptive leadership to help leaders in a variety of settings to tackle the most challenging aspects of their work. He suggests that leaders create cultures that facilitate growth in individuals and organizations where capacities—not just knowledge and skills—are developed in pursuit of actively solving adaptive challenges in teaching (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013;

For educators, key adaptive challenges in public schools involve supporting English learners (i.e., as mentioned earlier, these are students who participate in language assistance programs) to become proficient in English. Attending to the sociocultural as well as the academic aspects of teaching English learners presents adaptive challenges for educators that require significant growth among the educators teaching English learners as the population of English learners steadily grows in the United States. There is a gap in the research literature in this area since no studies, to the best of my knowledge, have been published that use the lens of adaptive challenges to ask educators teaching English learners to reflect upon and describe the adaptive challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work with English learners. My research addressed this gap by exploring how educators teaching English learners describe and understand the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work.

Further, two decades of research supports the learning-oriented leadership model as an effective approach to provide adults with differentiated and developmentally appropriate holding environments for growth and development through engagement in the pillars (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). At this time, to the best of my knowledge, there is limited research that has been published that explores exclusively how, if at all, the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) support educators, who teach English learners, to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges. Further, prior studies on the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-
Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et. al, 2013) have focused in large part on school leaders’ and aspiring school leaders’ experiences implementing the model. These studies of the learning-oriented leadership model have not explored how educators, who teach English language learners, define the adaptive challenges in their work and how, if at all, the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) support them in better meeting those challenges. My study explores these gaps.

**Purposes of This Research**

In this qualitative multi-site interview study, I sought to understand how educators who teach English language learners and who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s research inquiry (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) into how principals, superintendents, and teachers provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators, who teach English language learners, build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges they name as important in their work in schools by focusing
on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explored the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with the adaptive challenges they experience in their work teaching English learners.

**Personal Interest**

My interest in this topic grew from several important sources. As a well-educated white woman from a rural, stable upbringing in New England, I carry with me both a privileged complexion and command of spoken and written academic English that open doors for me. My high school and undergraduate education and my professional work with educators, students, and families from diverse backgrounds have afforded me a critical consciousness of those privileges. Opportunity in America in many ways is defined by zip code and first language, and the awareness of that basic and gross inequity for Americans who grow up in poverty and grow up with a first language other than standard academic English drives my work as an educator and researcher. As an educator, I am motivated by the fulfillment I feel when I serve as the bridge that makes equity in educational opportunity possible for families who both do not speak standard English as their first language and live in low-income communities. As a researcher, I seek to ask and answer questions that stem from my previous work in public schools as an educator struggling to provide access to learning standard academic English while benefiting from a high quality education in all other subjects.
I entered the profession of teaching because I had great teachers and because I believed that all children and families, especially those operating at the margins of American society, are entitled to equitable access to high quality education. As a teacher, I quickly learned that becoming and remaining a teacher required more than passion and vision, more than knowledge of my content areas and pedagogical practices, and more than the skill set found in great teachers. I struggled often, and like my colleagues next door and across the hall, I had difficulty coping with the myriad challenges of teaching in urban schools with students chronically absent, usually behind grade level in multiple subjects, and turned off of learning; led by principals unable to provide adequate resources for teaching or meaningful professional development, often overwhelmed by district-level policies; and building facilities unsafe, unsanitary, and unfit for learning. In short, the problems I encountered in my work as a teacher were often adaptive in nature, and upon learning about adaptive leadership, I found comfort and hope in the practices of adaptive leadership in response to adaptive challenges in schools.

I chose also to study a model of school leadership that provides the spaces, supports, and challenges for teachers to grow in order to better meet the complex challenges they face every day as they support English learners and their families. I focus on the growth that educators’ experience where they experience the expansion of their internal capacities because those personal growth experiences have been so profound in my experiences as an educator, researcher, and graduate student. Making the transition from classroom teacher in Boston, Massachusetts to graduate student and education consultant in New York City schools over the past five years provided an opportunity to learn about and experience Ellie Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model.
(2004b, 2009, 2012a) as a graduate student in the Urban Education Leaders Program at Teachers College as well as a member of her teaching team for a graduate level course in the Summer Principals Academy at Teachers College. Both learning about adult developmental theory and experiencing the pillars of mentoring, teaming, collegial inquiry, and assuming leadership roles in my work at Teachers College inspired this dissertation. I am also eager to explore how ideas of language, power, culture, and teaching inherent to the topic English learners in American schools connect to the adaptive leadership theory and learning-oriented leadership model.

**Research Questions**

My process for crafting research questions was both iterative and interactive, guided by Maxwell’s (2005) work on qualitative research design. The following questions guided my study:

1. How do 11 educators serving in elementary schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) describe and understand the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?

2. How do participants describe and understand their experiences engaging in the pillar practices of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring?

3. In what ways, if any, do participants describe and understand engaging in the pillar practices as supportive of their efforts to address the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?
Research Methodology

In this section I briefly outline my study’s design, selection criteria for sites and participants, data collection methods, and analytic methods. My third chapter along with Appendix A (Data Collection and Analysis Timeline), Appendix B (Informed Consent), Appendix C (Interview Protocol 1), Appendix D (Interview Protocol 2), Appendix E (Interview Protocol 3), Appendix F (Preliminary Coding Scheme), and Appendix G (Coding List) provide a more comprehensive description of my methodology. Given the research purpose and problem statements, I chose to use a qualitative interview study approach (two sites), drawing heavily from Merriam (1998), Maxwell (2005), and Creswell (2007) for research design and methodology. Qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning making in context, allowing the researcher to gather and interpret data that reflect how people make meaning of key experiences as well as the effects of a particular context on participants actions and understandings (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

In this study, I was interested in describing and understanding: a) participants’ experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners; b) participants’ experiences of participating in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring; and how, if at all, those experiences supported participants’ efforts to address the adaptive challenges involving English learners. A qualitative interview study approach to data collection that included in-depth semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) matched my research purposes. I chose to design a qualitative multi-site interview study because it would allow me to understand how participants made meaning of key experiences and how their particular contexts may have influenced their actions and understandings. Thus, a quantitative approach (e.g.,
survey research) would not have enabled me to address the research questions that guided my study.

Data collection included 33 hours of interviews with participants from two elementary schools in the North East. These schools were selected based on the school leader’s experience with and implementation of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model. This included school leaders who invited educators, who work with English language learners, to engage in the four pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring to build their capacity in order to better meet adaptive challenges. Sites were also selected based on the number of educators who worked with English learners within their classroom contexts. These site selection criteria (discussed in more detail in Chapter III) allowed me to address my research questions that center on the experiences of educators who teach English learners who were engaging in the pillars.

I conducted three one-hour interviews with each of the 11 participants from two schools, including seven teachers from Woodland Heights (a pseudonym) and four teachers from Springford Academy (a pseudonym). Each of the three interviews focused on a separate research topic in order to allow participants time to describe and reflect on: 1) experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners; 2) experiences engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring; and 3) educators’ personal cultural backgrounds. Participants were selected from each site based on two criteria. The first criterion was to help ensure the presence of English learners in their classroom. The second criterion was at least one full year of experience engaging in the pillars. Data analysis of interviews included: 1) writing
analytic notes and memos; 2) transcribing interviews and reviewing transcripts; 3) reducing data to profiles; 4) coding 5) categorizing by coding; and 6) within-case and cross-case analysis and data matrices.

**Implications and Significance**

My study’s findings suggested two major implications for *schools*: a) building-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners, particularly English learners, and b) educators with expertise relating to English learners can be critical actors in the professional learning of all educators in a school. My findings also suggested two major implications for *school districts*: a) district-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners, particularly English learners, and b) districts can support educators and principals to gain expertise relating to English learners. Findings from my study will enable school leaders (e.g., principals, district leaders) and policymakers, to gain a clearer understanding how they can provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators, who teach English language learners, and how they can support growth in educators’ internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges they encounter with diverse populations of students.

**Researcher Assumptions**

Maxwell (2005) recommends that researchers make explicit the assumptions of the multiple paradigms in which they operate. First, I initially operated from the assumption that the pillars, which compose the learning-oriented leadership model
(Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), have the capacity to provide educators teaching English learners with a robust and supportive context for growth. I also assumed that educators’ efforts to address the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work with English learners could be supported by their experiences engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. Further, I assumed that schools where leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model could potentially provide a holding environment for educators to build their capacity to better teach English learners.

Second, with regard to appropriate programming for English learners, I believed native language instruction facilitates teaching and learning for English learners and their teachers. In my study, both sites employed Structured English Immersion (SEI) programming to serve English learners, which, from my point of view, places limits on how educators can successfully teach English learners. I made the assumption going into this study that schools that employed SEI programming for English learners created more adaptive challenges for their teachers because native language was not explicitly used to facilitate teaching and learning in classrooms.

Third, from a methodological standpoint, I designed this research with assumptions embedded in the realist paradigm that posits that data about unobservable phenomena such as feelings, beliefs and intentions can be critically examined to develop and test ideas (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, I designed my study to answer research questions in terms of data that instrumentalists may characterize as unobservable—“the feelings, beliefs, intentions, prior behavior, effects” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 73)—but data nonetheless, that I assume are real and capable of critical analysis. Conducting research within this
paradigm required that I treat seriously the risks involved in relying on my inferences and the potential erroneous conclusions I might draw based on my personal assumptions (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) suggests ways for the qualitative researcher in this paradigm to “systematically and rigorously” address the validity threats, and I address those concerns in my methodology chapter.

**Study Limitations**

There are several limitations to my study that are important to consider. I selected sites that represented two of the best examples of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) in order to better understand how the pillars might support educators, who teach English language learners, to address the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work. Woodland Heights Elementary and Springford Academy were two of best examples of this learning-oriented leadership theory in action because: a) their school leaders understand and apply constructive-developmental theory and pillars that compose Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model in their leadership practice with adults in their schools; b) Drago-Severson has consulted and worked with leaders and their teachers at both sites in ongoing ways over the course of at least one year (Woodland Heights) and over four years (Springford Academy). In each case, she has collaborated with principals and educators to support adult learning and development; and both sites have significant, ongoing district support for robust professional development. School contexts that do not employ the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring to provide educators with holding environments, or appropriate supports and challenges to support adult
development, may not have the same capacities to support teacher growth, and leadership in response to adaptive challenges involving English learners. Thus, the extent to which findings from my study can be generalized is limited.

Furthermore, my sample was limited to 11 participants, and the linguistic and racial diversity of my sample was limited (only one bilingual participant, no participants whose first language was not English, and only one non-White participant), which further reduced the generalizability of my findings. Finally, I chose to focus on only the three adaptive challenges most widely discussed by participants, so my findings did not address other adaptive challenges participants experienced in their work with English learners (e.g., Common Core Standards).

Overview of Dissertation

I organized my dissertation into eight chapters. In this first chapter, I introduced the background of the study’s topic and described the history and context of educational reform for English learners and professional learning for teachers. I described the purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology of this study. I explained my interest in the topic and the significance and limitations of my study. In Chapter II, I review the literature relating to the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); the literature regarding adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz, 1994) and the ways in which the concept of adaptive challenge has been applied to the field of education; and the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education. In Chapter III, I discuss my methodology. In doing so, I describe site and participant selection, data collection and analysis, and
validity threats. In my fourth chapter, I present contextual information about each of two sites involved in my study. In Chapters V, VI, and VII, I discuss my findings. In Chapter V, I discuss findings relating to participants’ understandings and descriptions of the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners. In Chapter VI, I present findings relating to participants’ reported experiences engaging in the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). In Chapter VII, I discuss the extent to which participants described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address their adaptive challenges. I conclude by presenting implications, recommendations, conclusions, and final thoughts in Chapter VIII.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my study I sought to better understand how educators who teach English learners and who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. In this chapter, I present my literature review in support of this inquiry. I first introduce my conceptual framework. In a second section, I review the learning-oriented leadership model literature. In a third section, I review the literature of adaptive leadership theory and make connections to the concept of adaptive challenge and how adaptive leadership theory has been applied to public school settings in work with English learners, and connections to the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). In a fourth section, I review literature related to multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education to explore what those literatures reveal about the adaptive challenges that educators encounter when teaching English learners and the professional learning environments that have supported them to address those
challenges. I conclude with a chapter summary of the literature reviewed that informed the design of my study and analysis of my data.

**Conceptual Framework**

This chapter illustrates the conceptual framework that informed my research. In the sections that follow, I review the literatures of a) the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), b) adaptive leadership and adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1994), and c) multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education. In answering my research questions, I integrated and synthesized concepts and theories from these three areas. My primary lens was the learning-oriented leadership model (2004b, 2009, 2012a) as I chose to understand the experiences of educators who teach English language learners and their experiences of engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. As mentioned in Chapter I, the concept of holding environment from constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994) informs Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model (2004b, 2009, 2012a). This was central to how I made sense of participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars and the extent to which they experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges they experienced teaching English learners.

Within my conceptual framework I also relied on Heifetz’s (1994) theory of adaptive leadership to define how I understood the concept of adaptive challenges, which was instrumental in answering my first research question about participants’ experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners. Drago-Severson’s research informed
my choice to incorporate Heifetz’s work into my study because I was interested in exploring how, if at all, the pillars supported educators’ in their efforts to address adaptive challenges involving English learners. As discussed in Chapter I, Drago-Severson’s research-based learning-oriented leadership model (2004b, 2009, 2012a) asserts that the pillars can serve as holding environments for adults to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges they face in their work in schools.

Finally, I chose to include concepts from the literatures on multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education to inform my research questions and research because I was interested in how, if at all, the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) might support educators, who teach English language learners, in their work in particular.

Neither adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz, 1994) nor the learning-oriented leadership (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) explicitly addressed questions pertaining to linguistic and cultural diversity. Heifetz’s (1994) adaptive leadership model was developed to support leadership broadly, across professions and across social science research literatures, and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) highlights developmental diversity among adults. In order to adequately address my first and third research questions which focused on educators’ experiences with the adaptive challenges involving English learners in their day-to-day work, I decided to conduct a focused review of the multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education literatures. This literature review supported my efforts to make sense of participants’ experiences in ways that a focus on adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994) and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a)
could not do alone. Future research might further explore the synergies and tensions among sociocultural theory and the constructive-developmental theory underpinning the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This, I think, could help to extend my research, which would open the door to explore these questions in greater depth.


The Learning-Oriented Leadership Model and the Pillar Practices

To understand the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring), and how engaging in the pillar practices (hereafter I will simply to the pillar practices as the “pillars”) might support educators in their efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners, in this section I discuss Drago-Severson’s research and related adult development theory in this section.

The Learning-Oriented Leadership Model

In a series of qualitative and mixed methods studies from 1995 to present, Drago-Severson (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et. al, 2013; Drago-Severson & Pinto, 2006) inductively developed and extended a theory of what she calls learning-oriented leadership. She sought to understand, from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders what practices they used or experienced that promoted adult transformational learning (i.e., the increase of internal capacities or growth) and what developmental principles informed these
practices. These research participants represented three different types of schools (public, private, Catholic) that differed in grade level, student population, geographic location, financial resource levels, and level of human resource support (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009). Participants selected were diverse in terms of “gender, ethnicity, number of years in leadership positions, and educational backgrounds” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 293).

Drago-Severson’s research (Drago-Severson, 1996, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et. al, 2013) highlights the findings of prior research (Guskey, 2000), which found that improving school-based professional development for adults by investing in adult learning and development are linked to improved student achievement. The learning-oriented leadership model names and connects the practices that support transformational adult learning in the professional context of school teachers and leaders, mapping directly onto Heifetz’s adaptive leadership theory (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et. al, 2013), which I describe in greater detail in the next section.

Transformational learning is a central concept within Drago-Severson’s studies. The concept comes from Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) neo-Piagetian constructive-developmental theory. As noted earlier, transformational learning, in contrast to informational learning, changes how we know (Kegan, 1982, 2000). Kegan (2000) asserts that the form is changed in transformational learning and thus transformational learning is an epistemological change and not simply a behavioral change.

Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) learning-oriented model is represented in Figure 2 where the four pillars of teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring are at the center of the model and serve to support the learning and internal capacity building of adults working within schools. Below the base of the pillars in Figure 2 rests constructive-developmental theory and Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000). Drago-Severson draws on Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-developmental theory as the theoretical foundation of the learning-oriented leadership model where the concepts of holding environment and transformational learning shape the adult capacity building opportunities within each of the four pillars depicted in Figure 2. Above the pillars in Figure 2, the four ways of knowing are represented because the pillars are used by leaders as robust professional learning environments to support growth among educators who represent the full range of developmental diversity.

**Three common ways of knowing in adulthood.** According to research, the three common ways of knowing among adults are shown in Figure 2: instrumental, socializing,
and self-authoring (Kegan, 2000; Drago-Severson, 2004b). The less-common way of knowing, self-transforming, is also included in the figure. In using the term way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013), or developmental level (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000), I am referring to the system an adult uses to make meaning, as defined in constructive-developmental theory through Kegan (1982, 1994, 2000) and Drago-Severson, (2004b, 2009, 2012a). Finally, in Figure 2, the upper layers of the building depicted in the figure represent several important intents behind the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a): creating a context for the learning for all adult learners in schools and thus enhancing the learning and achievement contexts within schools for all students.
Figure 2
*Learning-Oriented Leadership Model and Pillar Practices*

The **pillar practices**. The first pillar of *teaming* refers to a practice within the learning-oriented leadership model that “provides adults with opportunities to question their own and other people’s philosophies and assumptions about leadership, teaching, and learning. It provides a context, a holding environment, in which adults can examine and question their assumptions and engage in collaborative decision making” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 312). Teaming is one way to provide appropriate supports and challenges to promote transformational growth in adults within their professional context. *Providing leadership roles* is a second pillar intentionally used to support adult growth through the “opportunity for adults to share power and decision-making authority…
[promoting growth] from being responsible for an idea’s development or implementation, as well as from different kinds of opportunities to assume leadership” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 311). *Collegial inquiry* within the learning-oriented leadership model is defined as “a shared dialogue in a reflective context that involves purposefully reflecting on one’s assumptions, convictions, and values as part of the learning, teaching, and leadership processes” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 309). *Mentoring* is a fourth pillar that can take many forms:

1. pairing experienced teachers with new teachers,
2. pairing teachers who have deep knowledge of the school mission with other teachers,
3. pairing experienced teachers with graduate student interns from local universities,
4. pairing experienced principals with aspiring and/or new principals,
5. team mentoring. (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 311)

Teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring are all well-established professional learning practices within education (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a).

Drago-Severson unifies the four pillars within her model of leadership by illuminating the ways in which constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994) can support school leaders and teachers respond to adaptive challenges by changing not just what teachers know, but *how* they know. These four pillars are derived from extensive, longitudinal qualitative and mixed-methods research within educational settings where leaders intentionally work toward transformational change in their schools by attending to the developmental diversity and building developmental capacity in light of Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This model of leadership orients leaders to use the pillars in their professional development work. Such an approach promotes internal capacity building.
that enables adults in schools to better address the complex adaptive challenges in the professional context of their lives. The learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) is the context for which my study is situated because of its approach to helping build the internal capacities of teachers to help them better meet adaptive challenges involving English learners. I have purposefully selected schools where school leaders have learned about the learning-oriented leadership model with Drago-Severson and are committed to using the pillars in their work to support the internal capacity building of the adults in the building.

In the next subsection, I elaborate on the concept of ways of knowing within the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) by showing the important relationship between the concept of developmental diversity and professional learning spaces for educators. I include this section below within the literature review to make an explicit connection between how the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) may provide unique professional learning spaces for educators teaching English learners because of its sensitivity to and support for adults who represent the spectrum of developmental diversity within a school faculty.

**The Concept of Developmental Diversity and Professional Learning Environments for Educators Teaching English learners**

In this subsection, I further define the concept of developmental diversity (ways of knowing), how the concept of developmental diversity informs the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and how it may influence how educators working with English learners make sense of their learning experiences
engaging in the learning-oriented leadership model and their experiences with adaptive challenges. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider how developmental diversity, or one’s way of knowing, relates to educators’ experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners, their experiences with the pillars, or the extent to which the pillars support them to meet those adaptive challenges, presenting the adult development theory here provides a framework for hypothesizing about how future research might include this lens. Exploring the concept of developmental diversity also helps to show how the learning-oriented leadership model can support a full range of adults who make meaning in very different ways.

One of the defining features of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) is its emphasis on the importance of leaders attending to developmental diversity. Like other forms of diversity, developmental diversity is an important concept for school leaders because within any school organization there are varying developmental levels, or ways of knowing, and because these ways of knowing represent different systems of meaning-making, school leaders need to consider the developmental diversity of their teachers when designing professional learning spaces. The four pillars in the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) help leaders facilitate the internal capacity building that aids individuals in growing to meet technical as well as adaptive challenges because the practices both honor and challenge adults’ existing ways of making meaning.

“Constructive-developmental theory invites those with an interest in transformational learning to consider that a form of knowing always consists of a relationship or temporary equilibrium between the subject and the object in one’s knowing” (Kegan, 2000, p. 53). In constructive-developmental theory, what one is able to hold out as object and examine helps to define how he or she makes meaning. Additionally what one is subject to also defines his or her way of knowing; it is “what ‘runs’ us” (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 57). Within Kegan’s (1994, 2000) theory, there are six distinct systems of thought, or ways of knowing (Drago-Severson’s term), and each is defined by what individuals are subject to and what they can hold as object.

Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) provides a framework for school leaders to support a full range of developmental diversity within their schools. There are three ways of knowing that are common in adulthood: instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring. Each way of knowing grows in complexity and expansion of the form, or meaning-making system, so the theory is hierarchical. Each way of knowing incorporates the earlier ways of knowing, so if you consider Table 1 (below) which shows the progression from instrumental to socializing to self-authoring, you can see that a self-authoring knower has the developmental capacity of self-authoring, socializing, and instrumentation. In my study, I selected school sites based on school leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) because I was interested in understanding how a leadership model that supported adults across a full spectrum of developmental diversity might support educators teaching English learners to address the adaptive challenges in their day-to-day work.
### Table 1

*Three Most Common Ways of Knowing in Adulthood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th>Underlying Thought Structure</th>
<th>Self Definition (SD) &amp; Guiding Questions (GQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject (S): What a person is identified with</td>
<td>Object (O): What a person can reflect on and take perspective on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
<td>S: Needs, interests, wishes</td>
<td>SD: Orients to self-interests, purposes, and concrete needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O: Impulses, perceptions</td>
<td>GQ: “Will I get punished?”, “What’s in it for me?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socializing</strong></td>
<td>S: The interpersonal, mutuality</td>
<td>SD: Orients to valued others’ (external authorities’) expectations, values, and opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O: Needs, interests, wishes</td>
<td>GQ: “Will you (valued other/authority) still like/value me?”, “Will you (valued other/authority) approve of me?”, “Will you (valued other/authority) still think I am a good person?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Authoring</strong></td>
<td>S: Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology</td>
<td>SD: Orients to self’s values (internal authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O: The interpersonal, mutuality</td>
<td>GQ: “Am I maintaining my own personal integrity, standards, and values?”, “Am I living, working, and loving to the best of my ability?”, “Am I achieving my goals and being guided by my ideals?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Adapted from Drago-Severson (2004, 2007, 2009).

It is critical to note that constructive-developmental theory does not privilege or value one way of knowing over another. Rather, a constructive-developmental approach encourages us to look at goodness-of-fit between the challenges in the environment and
the individual’s way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). For example, if work or family life requires a person to have a more complex system for making sense of experience, then a more expansive, complex way of knowing is called for in order for the individual to better manage these complexities (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). At the same time, an adult’s personal and professional context may not demand that they make meaning in more complex ways; thus, the match between one’s developmental level and their environment is what is most important (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

**Developmentally-appropriate supports and challenges for adults with different ways of knowing.** While I did not assess participants’ ways of knowing since it was beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is still important to note that adults do have different ways of knowing that impact how they experience the context of schools and their professional learning environments. Drago-Severson (2009) explains:

> In the context of education, our way of knowing shapes the way we understand our role and responsibilities as a teacher, principal, superintendent, or learner and the way we think about what makes a good teacher or a good superintendent. A person’s way of knowing is not random; it is stable and consistent for a period of time and reflects a coherent system of logic. A way of knowing might feel more like the way we are rather than something we have (Drago-Severson, 2004ba, Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan et al., 2001a). (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 39)

In the context of school, educators teaching English learners, according to constructive-developmental theory, will experience professional spaces differently in ways that are tied to their ways of knowing. Within the context of Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model (2004b, 2009, 2012a), school leaders can attend to the developmental
diversity within their teams by learning about constructive-developmental theory and using that understanding to support teachers with different ways of knowing.

Supports and challenges offered to educators by school leaders will be experienced differently by adults with different ways of knowing, as displayed in Table 2. In addition, as detailed in each subsection below, I describe how, according to constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), adults with different ways of knowing might experience the supports and challenges of the pillars differently to inform the analysis of my second and third research questions relating to how educators teaching English learners experience the pillars and the extent to which they experience the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address adaptive challenges involving English learners. While I did not assess the developmental level of educators in the study, knowing how one’s developmental level, or way of knowing, can influence one’s experience of the pillars presents implications for future research.

Future research could extend my research by including subject-object interviews that assess participants’ ways of knowing, thereby expanding the data analysis focus to include patterns of participants’ developmental level, or way of knowing, to understand how the supports of the pillars serve as holding environments for educators who represent the full range of developmental diversity.

Constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012) also provided a critical lens for understanding how the pillars could provide a holding environment for growth: the concept of *growing edge*. I understand the concept of *growing edge* as it is used by Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a) and Kegan (1982, 1994) to indicate the edges of an adult’s thinking and sense making—
where an adult can see the limits of their thinking, knowledge, and capacities “and thus begin to stretch those limits” (Berger, 2004, p. 338). As I discuss below, exploring the relationship between developmental diversity and the role of considering one’s growing edge is important for the concept of holding environment, which is central to my research questions and which I discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

In the next subsections, I briefly describe the attributes of each knower’s system for making meaning as well as what happens as learners transition from one level to the next. The ideas within these subsections on the three ways of knowing all stem from Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) work with learning-oriented leadership. To avoid extensive citations within the text of these four subsections, I only cite Drago-Severson directly when using quotations since I drew primarily from her work.

**Instrumental knowers.** Instrumental knowers make meaning in a school setting by seeking to learn the “rules” of the job. They have a dualistic way of thinking in that they believe there are “right” and “wrong” answers. As is evident in Table 2 below, they find leadership supportive when principals share explicit and clear goals, rules, and step-by-step procedures for teaching. They tend to ask: “What do you have that can help me?” or “Will I get punished?” Instrumental knowers feel supported and “comforted by concrete, more tangible expressions of support” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 44). Because they are unable to make generalizations from one situation to another and do not have the capacity to think abstractly, they tend to express their concerns and needs in concrete terms, hence Drago-Severson’s characterization of instrumental knowers as making meaning as a “rule-bound self.” Instrumental knowers also tend to organize their experiences by attributes, events and sequences; noticeable actions and behaviors; and
their own individual point of view, needs, interests, and preferences. They may say things like: “I am good at my job”; “Good teachers follow the rules, work hard, and do things the ‘right’ way”; “If I do this assigned work, I will have a better chance of getting a better evaluation”; and “Other teachers are helpful or obstacles to my work.”

**Socializing knowers.** Socializing knowers make meaning within their work lives by reflecting on their actions and the actions of others. Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a) labels these knowers “other-focused self” because they orient their lives and define themselves in relation to others. Socializing knowers think abstractly and reflect on how they impact others and are viewed by others. They may ask themselves: “What does my principal think I should do?”; “Will my teammates still like me if I disagree with them?”; or “Am I meeting expectations that others have for me?” Socializing knowers may ask others: “What do you think?” or “What should I do?” As shown in Table 2, they can be supported to share their own ideas first before turning to another for guidance or the answer. This kind of support can feel frustrating, at first, for socializing knowers because it does not directly answer their questions or affirm their sense of self which is defined by others. Socializing knowers will look outside themselves for definition to ideas and people they value (partners, family, boss, religion, political ideology, societal expectations). Socializing knowers can think concretely like instrumental knowers, but in this expanded way of knowing, they do not have to because they can make meaning in ways that allows them to subordinate their perspective and needs to those of others; hence, they have developed enhanced empathy for others as well as enhanced capacity for reflection, making generalizations, and thinking about thinking.
Table 2

Ways of Knowing and Developmentally Appropriate Supports and Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th>Supports (Provided by leaders/peers)</th>
<th>Challenges/ Growing Edge (Provided by leaders/peers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Instrumental   | • Set clear goals and expectations.  
• Provide step-by-step procedures for dialogue and working with other colleagues.  
• Share examples of rules, purposes, and goals—and how to share them with others.  
• Engage in dialogue that provides specific advice, skills, and information about practice.  
• Invite this detail-oriented person to read policy/procedure and then report on it.  
• Collect reflections and give positive feedback/praise.  
• Give clear, concise written and oral feedback.  
• Offer concrete advice and feedback.  
• Clarify the purpose of reflective writing. | • Provide opportunities to learn about multiple perspectives through dialogue.  
• Create tasks that demand abstract thinking and scaffold knower through the process.  
• Encourage movement beyond “correct” solutions and toward other perspectives.  
• Discuss how multiple perspectives could build abstract thinking and increase perspective broadening.  
• Encourage this learner to expand beyond information given.  
• Provide the opportunity to take on a leadership role in planning a grade-level assembly.  
• Use teamwork such that this person encounters situations where one must consider another perspective.  
• Give permission and encourage “thinking outside of the box” and being “constructively critical.”  
• Encourage reflective writing. |
| Socializing    | • Ensure that learner feels known and accepted.  
• Beliefs are confirmed by authorities.  
• Supervisors and valued colleagues and/or loved ones show acceptance.  
• Provide opportunities to share perspectives in pairs or smaller groups before sharing with larger groups.  
• Ensure that interpersonal relationships are not jeopardized when differences | • Provide opportunities to develop own beliefs, becoming less dependent on others’ approval.  
• Encourage this knower to construct own values and standards, not co-construct them.  
• Support the acceptance of conflicting points of view without feeling threatened.  
• Support this learner in separating own feeling and responsibilities from another person’s.  
• Support this knower in distinguishing own perspective from need to be |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th><strong>Supports</strong> (Provided by leaders/peers)</th>
<th><strong>Challenges/ Growing Edge</strong> (Provided by leaders/peers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of opinion arise.</td>
<td>accepted.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Affirm performance</td>
<td>• Provide this knower the opportunity to become a facilitator.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with collaborative learning teams.</td>
<td>• Ask open-ended questions that call for a person to voice own views.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities to learn about diverse points of view.</td>
<td>• Challenge knower to let go of own perspective and embrace diametrically opposing alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide opportunities to analyze and critique ideas and explore own goals.</td>
<td>• Support this knower’s acceptance of diverse problem-solving approaches that differ from own.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that learning from the process takes place.</td>
<td>• Challenge knower to set aside own standards for practice and open up to other values.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support learning about and demonstrating own competencies.</td>
<td>• Support critique of own practices and vision.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Emphasize competency.</td>
<td>• Encourage the acceptance of diverse ways to explore problems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Invite demonstration of competencies and dialogue.</td>
<td>• Encourage critique of own ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage dialogue.</td>
<td>• “Know when to hold them and when to fold them.” Encourage person to practice “wait time” and to self-regulate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make time for sharing feedback on performance and goals.</td>
<td>• Invite learner to assume a leadership role among staff (e.g., to clarify confusions, facilitate discussions, and dialogue at a staff meeting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage self-evaluation.</td>
<td>• Expose person to people with opposing points of view and encourage learner to withhold decisions until all points of view, especially opposing ones, are considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Value the person’s ideas.</td>
<td>• Discuss differences in opposing perspectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Validate the person’s critical thinking and willingness to challenge the status quo.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide leadership opportunities with plenty of time for dialogue with the principal.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Adapted from Drago-Severson (2009).
Self-authoring knowers. This knower has grown to have a “reflective self” as Drago-Severson (2009) puts it. In other words, self-authoring knowers can “hold, prioritize, and reflect on different perspectives and relationships” (p. 37). The self creates a system of values, assertions, and priorities that can both reflect larger societal values and concerns (socializing) and reject the ideas of others. Self-authoring knowers are self-regulating and become the authors of their relationships and the values external to the self rather than being subject to them. Rather than asking what others think, they ask: “Am I maintaining my own standards? Am I competent? Am I achieving my goals and living by my ideals?” Self-authoring knowers can reflect on the multiple roles they play as citizens, educators, leaders, partners, parents and can make sense of their work obligations and feelings in light of the responsibilities and values embedded in these different roles. Unlike socializing and instrumental knowers, self-authoring knowers can hold opposing viewpoints and feelings without being torn apart; instead, they author a way of understanding themselves and the world that allows for these conflicts. They may want others to “think with” them, but ultimately see themselves as the sole authority of what course of action is best for them. They tend to hold tightly to their own belief and meaning-making systems, noting differences in opposing viewpoints rather than considering possible interrelationships in meaning-making with others presenting opposing views. Table 2 highlights some of the supports and challenges for these knowers.

Transitioning from one way of knowing to another. Growth from one way of knowing to the next is “gradual and incremental” and it rides along its trajectory at an unpredictable pace (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 54). Kegan (1982) presents the trajectory
of growth from one developmental level, or way of knowing, as a helix with multiple transitional stops between each way of knowing. Most adults make meaning within these transitional places or phases (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). During one’s journey to a new way of knowing, the new way of knowing will gradually take over as the self works to maintain a coherent system of meaning-making. Once that coherence cannot be maintained any longer because of new experiences and information, the new way of knowing will become the dominant way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Much like Piaget’s (1954) assimilative learning process in child development. Once the form has been changed to assimilate the information and experiences, one’s way of knowing has changed and transformational learning has occurred.

Transitions can take as little as a year and can last indefinitely depending on the holding environment of the individual—i.e., the supports and challenges in the environment that a person’s benefits from (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). For the transition to self-transforming, adults can experience a philosophical crisis or pain which is common to developmental change as they rethink what was previously taken for granted and previously the way of knowing to which the person was subject. In that transition, the “person can experience a sense of loneliness and dissatisfaction with his or her self-system” that will eventually lead to that knower’s new ability to “see through their system” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 49). Because the person has invested so much in developing the self-system, reaching the next level of development, or way of knowing, can be both negative (as described above) and positive as it can free a person to develop a freer and more playful sense of self (Kegan, 1982).
Connecting the concepts of ways of knowing and professional learning environments for educators teaching English learners. Understanding the characteristics of each way of knowing as well as the transition process between the different ways of knowing informs the analysis of how educators teaching English learners experience the pillars and the extent to which they understand the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners.

Teachers’ developmental levels were not assessed in my research because of the limited scope of this study, but still developmental levels might likely influence educators’ experience of the pillars and did inform the analytical framework I used during data analysis. The questions I created within interview protocols aligned to my research questions and several of them did illicit responses from participants that suggested how they may have been making meaning and the ways in which engaging in the pillars supported and challenged them to grow. During data analysis, I noticed patterns in the data that suggested relationships between participants’ ways of knowing and how they made sense the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work with English learners. These patterns warrant further study in order to explore in subsequent research. As mentioned, this was beyond the scope of my research. Looking through the lens of constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994) at educators’ descriptions and understandings of the professional learning spaces they engage in through the learning-oriented leadership model help to both guide future research and interpret the data, especially regarding my third research question, which sought to understand the
extent to which the pillars supported educators with their efforts to address adaptive challenges involving English learners.

In the next section, I discuss the pillars in greater depth as they played a central role in addressing my second and third research questions. Understanding how each pillar offers a robust holding environment for capacity building among educators teaching English learners was central to the data analysis process, especially since I used Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a) and Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) theories to guide my analysis of how educators described and understood their experiences with the pillars.

The Pillar Practices

In this section, I describe the concept of holding environment from Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory and its relationships to developmental diversity because holding environment is a pivotal concept for understanding how the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) are robust enough to support the internal capacity building of educators, who teach English learners, to address adaptive challenges. This is important in my research because I selected school sites where school leaders had learned about the learning-oriented leadership model from Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a), including learning about the concept of holding environment and how essential it is for educators who are engaging in the pillars. I then describe what each of the pillars is and how each practice serves to support the growth of adults across the spectrum of developmental diversity. These descriptions of the pillars supported the analytical framework I used during data analysis.
**Holding environment.** The concept of holding environment from constructive-developmental theory is critical for understanding the pillars. As I noted earlier, a holding environment is understood as a specific context with high supports and challenges which serves three functions (1) to meet an individual at his or her developmental level, or way of knowing, and accept him or her for who he or she is, (2) to stretch an individual, when ready, toward a more complex way of knowing through encountering alternative perspectives, and (3) to provide an individual with a growth environment with continuity and stability as he or she grows to demonstrate his or her new way of understanding his or her experiences and the world (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Kegan, 1982). For teachers working in a school context, providing “developmentally appropriate supports and challenges” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57) through the pillars supports internal capacity building, or growth.

In discussing how each of the pillars of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model provides appropriate developmental supports and challenges for educators to grow, I also explore different types of holding environments—relationship with one person, situations, and organizations themselves (Drago-Severson, 2009). But in a more general sense, a school that acts as a holding environment for adult growth is well described by Drago-Severson (2009):

A developmental challenge presents a person with helpful, stretching sorts of questions and alternative perspectives—over time and when he or she is ready—to gently push or stand at the edges of his or her thinking, feeling, and knowing. This growth-promoting engagement raises the bar just a little bit—enough to give the person something to strive for while standing beside the person to spot his or her reach. (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57)

This role of simultaneously standing beside one in support while raising the bar of developmental challenge is a critical experience for educators teaching English learners
to have as they strive to grow over time to better meet the adaptive challenges in their work.

**Teaming.** Teaming takes diverse forms: “Team teaching, pairing veteran and new teachers, forming school leadership teams, examining student work and/or teacher practice, or working collaboratively on reform or improvement issues” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 72). Teams may also have a variety of purposes including leadership work, day-to-day teaching, curriculum alignment, student work, inquiry, and professional development (Drago-Severson, 2009). While the members, types, and purposes of teaming will vary across contexts, teaming in general provides a set of experiences that support adult growth. Teachers give and receive feedback, learn from multiple perspectives, make shared decisions, alter practice based on the feedback of others, make recommendations and suggestions to others, develop an awareness of the assumptions underlying thinking and practice, take on different roles within teams, question own and others’ philosophies on education, reflect on the meaning of the school’s mission, and meet to set and assess professional learning goals (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Teachers with different ways of knowing will experience teaming opportunities differently. A facilitator of teaming who can account for these differences will ask different kinds of questions of teams in an effort to attend to these developmental differences. Attending to these differences helps adults with certain ways of knowing feel supported. Attending to developmental differences also helps adults work toward their growing edges as they transition to new ways of knowing. In a team project focused on instructional practice, for example, a facilitator may ask the group to consider several
questions: “What does high-quality teaching look like?” (for the instrumental knowers); “What’s an example of quality teaching in *your* practice?” (for socializing knowers); and “What are high-quality practices would you like to adopt from others and develop in our practice? Why?” (for the self-authoring knowers). Within Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented model of leadership, school leaders actively construct holding environment contexts through the pillars. This example of a team engaging with questions meant to challenge and grow learners with different ways of knowing demonstrates the choices a team facilitator might make to create a holding environment context for all adults (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). As I describe each of the pillars and how adults with different ways of knowing experience the supports and challenges of pillars, I borrow heavily from Drago-Severson’s scholarship (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013). At the end of these paragraphs, I site once indicating that ideas from the entire paragraph came from this source.

**Providing leadership roles.** Providing leadership roles to teachers within and outside of a school can encourage growth by broadening teacher perspectives; heightening awareness of assumptions one makes; and providing opportunities for self-authorship, risk-taking, and reflection with colleagues. The leadership role itself can serve as the holding environment for teacher growth when the individual is operating in a transitional space between two ways of knowing or when the adult is ready to engage in the difficulties and ambiguities of assuming a new leadership role. As Drago-Severson (2009) states: “these roles enable us to experience the complexities of exercising leadership to become more aware of our and other people’s assumptions, values, and
perspectives” (p. 122). As with other pillars, how adults make sense of the challenges and opportunities for growth in assuming leadership roles depends on how they make meaning, or their way of (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Instrumental knowers tend to approach leadership roles in a task-oriented way and be rules-oriented in how they complete tasks, hoping to be rewarded after getting the job done the “right way.” Whereas instrumental knowers will seek out authority help to provide step-by-step directions for task completion, socializing knowers approach leadership roles wanting authorities or valued others to offer approval, guidance, and confirmation of their leadership decisions. Socializing knowers taking on leadership roles tend to experience conflict and disagreement among colleagues as a threat to the self and may tend toward emphasizing group loyalty and shared understanding as a way to move away from conflict. By comparison, self-authoring knowers tend to have a learning-oriented approach to conflict and difference in opinion when taking on leadership roles; they tend to see difference as a way to gain self-understanding and improve their own leadership. Self-authoring knowers also tend to lead by encouraging dialogue, listening to ideas, attending to new ideas, and identifying solutions that include many points of view while driving the team towards its goals. Given that each way of knowing demands a different set of supports and challenges that are developmentally appropriate, or different holding environments, this pillar is similar to teaming and mentoring in that it requires a learning-orientation to leadership to help teachers grow (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

**Collegial inquiry.** Collegial inquiry is a “shared dialogue with at least one other person in a reflective context” (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 267) that purposefully
supports adults to discuss and reflect on their “assumptions, convictions, and values as part of the learning, teaching, and leadership processes” (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 267). Collaborative inquiry includes a variety of practices, including: writing, dialogue, decision making, and helping or advising others. As a process of writing, teachers may experience this pillar as journal writing, freewriting, goal-setting, completing self-evaluations, and proposal writing for grants or conference presentations. Through the invitation by leaders to write as part of collegial inquiry, teachers are able to articulate their thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and beliefs. As dialogue, collegial inquiry in schools takes place in grade-level and cross-grade meetings focused on inquiry about student work and/or teaching, in book groups where teachers apply theory to practice, in learning walks, in the school quality review process, in faculty meetings where meaningful conversation is focused on reform or instructional issues, in curriculum development teams, in the processes of conflict resolution, or in small group settings dedicated to inquiry.

Dialogue, which is part of collegial inquiry, enables teachers to have the opportunity to give and receive feedback. This is critical for supporting growth. As decision making, the pillar of collegial inquiry highlights the importance of shared inquiry that involves teachers in decision-making “about schoolwide goals, dilemmas and challenges, and alignment of mission and practice” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 188). Also, collegial inquiry can support educators when they assume leadership roles in inquiry teams or action research teams wherein they examine student achievement data. As part of the collegial inquiry, team members become the experts and serve as the internal resource for other teachers in the school. Indeed, the ways that school leaders imagine the
pillar of collegial inquiry are numerous and diverse. Underlying all of these variations is the idea that teachers collaborate on practice together—with at least one other colleague (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

As with the other pillars, how a teacher experiences collegial inquiry as enhancing or inhibiting his or her growth depends on his or her way of knowing and the supports and challenges in the holding environment of the practice of collegial inquiry. For example, instrumental knowers will feel supported by step-by-step procedures and descriptions of the “right” way to complete tasks, and they will be stretched by leaders who scaffold their collegial inquiry experiences to require these teachers to think differently, think abstractly, and consider multiple points of view. Socializing knowers will evaluate their collegial inquiry work based on what authorities, experts, or “valued others” (Drago-Severson, 2009) express, and they will likely express concern about differences of opinion if they disrupt or threaten interpersonal relationships. Socializing knowers in collegial inquiry work are best supported by opportunities to develop and voice their own thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a safe space. In the context of collegial inquiry, self-authoring knowers will want to design, critique, and evaluate proposals and ideas. Leaders or colleagues who challenge their deeply held belief and help them become less invested in the self-authoring knower’s own system for making meaning will support growth through collegial inquiry. Given the diversity of possible responses to the pillar of collegial inquiry, it is important to keep developmental diversity in mind (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Mentoring. The pillar of mentoring involves pairing two or more adults to work together and can take numerous forms (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-
Severson et al., 2013). This pillar allows teachers to have one or more mentoring relationships within the context of school that serve as a safe and robust holding environment for professional growth. As Drago-Severson (2009) states: “the mentoring relationship provides a safe context for broadening perspectives, taking risks, engaging in dialogue through reflective practices, examining assumptions (our own and other people’s) and behaviors over time, possibly reframing them” (p. 220). These mentoring relationships can occur between student-teachers and supervising veteran teachers, between teachers new to a building and teachers familiar with the school context, between new and veteran teachers, between administrators and teacher leaders, as well as other configurations. In providing supports and challenges these mentoring relationships that help teachers’ growth both personally and professionally (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Teachers with different ways of knowing will likely experience mentoring relationships differently. Mentees with an instrumental way of knowing will ask mentors for clear guidelines and rules, look for “right” and “wrong” answers, and want step-by-step procedures. They are making sense of their work as teachers within the system of a “rules-bound self” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 43). Instrumental knowers as mentees will be challenged by making sense of multiple perspectives offered by a mentor; similarly, they will have a hard time with tasks that require abstract thinking if they are not scaffolded through the process by their mentor. Mentees with a socializing way of knowing will tend to need mentors who show care for their feelings and validate the mentee’s way of thinking. A socializing knower as a mentee may tend to avoid conflict or take risks without being sure the mentor will accept his or her point of view. A self-
authoring knower as a mentee will expect a mentor to listen to his or her point of view and will want to think with the mentor about different ways to approach a problem or task. A self-authoring mentee will also want to determine his or her goals, often seeking independence and acceptance as a competent, independent teacher; he or she may struggle with remaining open to the mentor’s ideas when they conflict with his or her ideas and deeply held beliefs. It is also important to note that how a mentor experiences mentoring depends on his or her way of knowing and how the mentee does or does not provide the developmentally appropriate supports to what the mentor needs and expects from the relationship (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

**Bringing the pillar practices together within the learning-oriented leadership model.** While each pillar represents a distinct set of learning activities for adults, it is important to note that one pillar will not support the edifice of transformational learning in schools. As Drago-Severson points out:

> It is important to note that as adults, we need more than one source of support for development. In fact, schools as learning centers can also be mentoring communities in which adults share in reciprocal mentoring relationships or networks of support (2009, p. 211).

The model of learning-oriented leadership highlights these four pillars to inspire leaders to commit to transformational learning in schools so that teachers and leaders might better meet the complex, adaptive challenges they confront. Through the pillars of teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring, schools can be centers for adult learning and growth (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), including educators teaching English learners, and thus it is critical to answering the second and third research questions which focus on educators’ experiences engaging in the pillars
and the extent to which those experiences supported their efforts to meet adaptive challenges involving English learners.

**Section Summary**

In this section, I began by reviewing Drago-Severson’s research and related adult development theory to address my second and third research questions that sought to understand educators experiences engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring), and the extent to which engaging in the pillars supported educators in their efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners. I described the leadership model in detail, and then I looked at the concept of developmental diversity and how it relates to educators teaching English learners and their experiences with the pillars. I finished this section by examining the concept of holding environment and the pillars themselves to help provide context of the analytic framework that I used to analyze data pertaining to my second and third research questions. Next, I turn to examine Heifetz’s (1994) theory of adaptive leadership and the concept of adaptive challenge.

**Adaptive Leadership Theory and Adaptive Challenges**

In this section, I introduce the adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz, 1994). I define the concept of adaptive challenge, which is central to my study’s first and third research questions. I then review literature that relates Heifetz’s (1994) adaptive leadership theory and in particular the concept of adaptive challenge to the context of public education and specifically educators’ work teaching English learners. I conclude the section by exploring connections between adaptive leadership theory, the concept of adaptive

I begin the literature review with Ronald Heifetz’s (1994) theory of adaptive leadership because many of the areas of professional growth that educators teaching English learners named, such as redressing chronically low societal and school expectations for English learners or navigating cultural and linguistic differences between school and home, can be classified as *adaptive challenges*. Within the context of P-12 American public schools, I call these challenges that educators teaching English learners name *adaptive challenges* to reference the unique institutional context of teaching and learning within the public school system.

**Adaptive Leadership Theory**

Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) suggest that today many leaders find themselves needing to practice adaptive leadership in a leadership context that demands a response outside of a leader’s current repertoire. This kind of adaptation requires painful change as leaders guide organizations to avert failure in the face of changing circumstances. Heifetz at al. (2009) point out examples across industries to illustrate this point. For example, they consider Sony’s failure to adapt to a new marketplace as society shifted from portable CD players to iPods and MP3 players. Sony engineers had redesigned changes to Sony CD players similar to those seen in the iPod, but the company was unable and unwilling to shift to a new technology.

**Technical versus adaptive challenges.** A critical conceptual distinction made by Heifetz is between adaptive and technical challenges. What distinguishes technical
challenges from adaptive challenges is whether or not the gap can be closed through applying existing know-how (Heifetz, 1994). A technical challenge is a problem where technical know-how can be applied, hence the problem can be identified and the solution is already known, and there are existing capacities and there is knowledge to solve the problem, for example an expert who can solve the problem (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009). These challenges are not necessarily simple nor the results of solving the technical challenge trivial, but they often do not require a change in one’s paradigm (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Wagner et al., 2006).

Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, require individuals and organizations to change themselves (i.e., values, beliefs, priorities, attitudes, habits, loyalties, ways of working, ways of life and/or norms) in order to create a solution (Heifetz, 1994). These adaptive challenges do not have easy or ready-made answers; solutions to adaptive challenges require learning that is difficult, nonlinear, takes extended time, and requires transformation of long-standing habits and deeply held assumptions (Heifetz, 1994). The differences between technical and adaptive challenges according to Heifetz’s (1994) theory are represented visually in Table 3 below.
Table 3

*Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Challenges</th>
<th>Adaptive Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Problem is well-defined</em></td>
<td><em>Challenge is complex; no ready-made answers exist</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Knowledge and capacity exist to solve the problem</em></td>
<td><em>Requires the transformation of long-standing habits and deeply held assumptions, values</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Solution requires application of existing know-how</em></td>
<td><em>Involves feelings of loss, sacrifice (sometimes betrayal of deep values)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Implementation is clear</em></td>
<td><em>Implementation requires learning and a new way of thinking, new relationships</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Leadership required is related to management</em></td>
<td><em>Leadership required involves a substantial change and learning process, including adjusting values, changing perspectives, and developing new habits of behavior</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Adapted from Heifetz (1994).

According to Heifetz’s theory of adaptive leadership, leaders in all types of organizations experience both adaptive and technical challenges in their work and must understand the distinction in order to know when to apply what already exists within their repertoire, for technical challenges, and when to engage in an adaptive leadership approach for adaptive challenges.

**Adaptive Leadership Theory within the Context of Public Education**

In the past decade educational leadership researchers have linked Heifetz’s (1994) work to the field school improvement research and practice, showing that both adaptive leadership and technical leadership are important for understanding how school leadership positively impacts student achievement (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; McREL, 2003; Wagner et al., 2006). Daly and Chrispeels (2008) note the promise of adaptive leadership to facilitate transformation processes in schools that could lead to lasting
reforms that positively impact student achievement given persistent educational inequalities. James’ (2006) study of a participatory action research project involving school administrators and teachers in Colorado highlighted the importance of creating a holding environment within the context of addressing adaptive challenges in a school context, specifically those challenges that relate to educational disadvantage. Gates and Robinson’s (2009) multisite case study of urban high schools also used Heifetz’s (1994) adaptive leadership theory to consider how teachers approached both technical and adaptive challenges involving teacher collaboration; this study’s findings revealed that problems of practice involving English learners were the most noteworthy examples of adaptive challenges experienced by teachers. Existing literature in educational leadership and specifically school improvement highlight the relevance of using Heifetz’s concept of adaptive challenge to support school leaders’ efforts to address long-standing educational inequalities, specifically transforming schools into places that facilitate the learning and achievement of English learners (Gates & Robinson, 2009; James, 2006).

**Adaptive leadership within the context of teaching English learners in public schools.** In the example of Sony’s failure to adapt to the new marketplace for MP3 players and iPods, the adaptive challenge facing Sony’s leaders required the organization to change its mindset, organization, and strategies. Schools face similar circumstances when it comes to helping educators successful engage English learners whose needs and capacities challenge teachers to change their mindsets, organization, and strategies. As I discuss in greater detail in the next section that focuses on multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education literatures, to truly make schools equitable places for linguistic and cultural minority groups, educators and schools have the
opportunity to see their work with English learners as important opportunities for growth and development in terms of cultural proficiency. This is adaptive work, as Heifetz (1994) understands it. Individuals and organizations, Heifetz suggests, must endeavor to change themselves (e.g., their values, behaviors, priorities, attitudes, habits, loyalties, ways of working, ways of life, etc.) in order to address the adaptive challenges they face. (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). Additionally, addressing an adaptive challenge requires a paradigm shift (Heifetz, 1994). These changes demand intensive individual and organizational learning since often the internal capacities of people within an organization must be expanded (Fullan, 2006; Hingham, Hopkins, & Ahtaridou, 2007; Hopkins, 2006). This learning is difficult work that takes time; it involves progress that is nonlinear, and it requires teachers to choose between competing values and priorities which is extremely difficult (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009).

**Pilot study of teachers’ experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners.** In 2011, I conducted a pilot study to support my dissertation project. I interviewed five classroom teachers serving English learners in urban American schools in the North East, and I asked them to identify and describe the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners. Based on analysis of those interviews and a literature, I discovered eight potential adaptive challenges relating to classroom teachers’ work with English learners: 1) diagnosing learning issues, 2) family communication, 3) low expectations, 4) curriculum, 5) teacher collaboration, 6) assessments, 7) student characteristics, and 8) programming (Benis Scheier-Dolberg, 2011). Because of the lack of research investigating adaptive challenges and teachers of English learners in the
educational leadership literature, I sought out other areas of literature to review to build a research-based initial list of adaptive challenges involving English learners to help inform data analysis relating to my research inquiry into what teachers named as adaptive challenges. This pilot study literature review and data analysis informed the preliminary coding list I created for this study (presented in Appendix F). It is important to note that participants in my pilot study were selected as a part of a convenience sampling and thus did not serve in schools whose leaders implemented the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a).

Connections between adaptive leadership and the learning-oriented leadership model. As a field educational leadership has embraced Heifetz’s (1994) concept of adaptive challenge so too has the field emphasized models of leadership that seek to help educational organizations better meet adaptive challenges through a more learning-oriented and change-oriented focus on leadership (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2006). My study examined one of these educational leadership models—the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b)—that embraces Heifetz’s (1994) concept of adaptive challenge. Within the learning-oriented leadership model the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring help teachers develop their internal capacities to better meet adaptive challenges in their work. Drago-Severson (2012a) describes the link between the adaptive challenges educators face and the need for leaders to support their growth and internal capacity building to better meet those challenges:
The work of educators has become palpably more complex in the twenty-first century. Building school capacity, implementing the Common Core, managing complex reform initiatives, meeting accountability demands, caring for students’ diverse needs, closing the achievement gap, and working effectively in an era of standards-based reform are some of the pressing issues facing all educators today. As scholars and practitioners have emphasized, navigating these murky and obscure adaptive challenges requires not only new approaches but also often greater *internal developmental capacities.* (Drago-Severson, 2012a, pp. 8-9)

Drago-Severson’s research, as she describes above, is predicated on the assumption that the work of educators and school leaders has substantially increased in terms of complexity over the years. Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model in many ways grew out of a response to studying how school leaders effectively supported the educators in their buildings to grow to better meet these challenges. In this study, I was interested in investigating the extent to which educators teaching English learners in schools whose leaders implemented Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model experienced the pillars as supportive of their growth to meet an important subset of the adaptive challenges in their work, those involving English learners.

**Section Summary**

In this section, I began with a discussion of Heifetz’s (1994) adaptive leadership theory and the concept of adaptive challenge. I then reviewed literature relating to adaptive leadership theory (Heifetz, 1994) and the ways that the concept of adaptive challenge has been applied to the context of public education and specifically applied to the work of educators who teach English learners. I concluded the section by exploring the connections between adaptive leadership theory and the concept of adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1994) and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b,

**Integrating the Literatures of Multicultural Education, Sociocultural Theory, and Bilingual Education: Cultural Proficiency as an Adaptive Challenge and the Intersections Between the Learning-Oriented Leadership Model and Promising Professional Learning Environments for Educators of English Learners**

In this section, I review selections from the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education to explore what those literatures reveal about the adaptive challenges that educators encounter when teaching English learners and the professional learning environments that have supported them to address those challenges. In my review, I found one overarching concept that helped me make sense how participants in my study might understand the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work with English learners: cultural proficiency. In the first subsection of this chapter, I explore what the research these literatures offer to explain how educators might experience cultural competency as an adaptive challenge. In the second subsection, I explore these literatures to demonstrate the intersections between the professional learning environments constructed within the framework of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a)—i.e., the pillars of teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring—and what research points to
as promising professional learning environments for supporting educators in their work with English learners.

**Integrating the Literatures of Multicultural Education, Sociocultural Theory, and Bilingual Education: Cultural Proficiency as Adaptive Challenge**

Findings from multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education research underscore the critical role culture plays in teaching for all children (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephan, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Macias, 1988; Nieto, 2004, 2009), especially English learners in diverse American schools. Researchers have defined and understood the concept of cultural proficiency in a variety of ways within the field of education (Gastón Institute, 2011). My purpose in this section is not to provide an exhaustive review of the literature on the history of the concept but rather point out the areas where researchers agree that cultural proficiency demands teachers to change themselves (i.e., their values, loyalties, habits of working, beliefs, etc.) to better teach English learners. Informed by these literatures, I use the term *cultural proficiency* to reference a transformational movement intended to spur personal, collective, and institutional change to promote a sociocultural perspective in teaching and learning and to advance our society’s commitment to social justice and equal opportunity for all students. On an individual level, cultural proficiency is a lifelong journey to affirm diversity and, as educators, to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” about their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of their students. Gaining greater cultural proficiency is a critical opportunity for growth and development that educators have in their work teaching English learners.
Nieto’s (2004, 2009) research in the sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects of teaching, learning, and schooling emphasize the power of educators to become caring and critical advocates for all students by affirming the diverse identities of students and seeking to learn from diverse perspectives by challenging personally-held biases and assumptions. Researchers have found that educators tend to see diversity within a deficit framework (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Zeichner, 1993). In her review of the literature on teacher training programs for educators teaching second-language learners, Liliana Minaya-Rowe (2004) reported when student teachers enter diverse schools, they “tend to see diversity as a problem to overcome rather than as an asset in promoting discourse and learning” (Minaya-Rowe, 2004, p. 21). In this regard, cultural proficiency demands that educators question the underlying assumptions they hold; reflect upon and identify personal attitudes toward racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups; and reflect critically on the biases within themselves and within educational institutions and (Banks et al., 2001; Nieto, 2009).

Researchers point to the need to support educators in examining and shifting their beliefs about English learners (Gay, 2000, 2002; Minaya-Rowe, 2004; August, Beck, Calderón, Francis, Lesaux, Shanahan, Erickson, & Siegel, 2008) to address this aspect of cultural proficiency. Geneva Gay (2000, 2002), for instance, codified this idea in her research on culturally responsive teaching, defined as teaching from students’ strengths by using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students. Mariana Souto-Manning’s (2010b) research using classroom discourse analysis highlights this shift that educators can make to change “perceptions of ELLs [English language learners] from students needing to be fixed to experts from whom teachers may
learn” (Souto-Manning, 2010b, p. 249). This approach to teaching English learners moves educators from beliefs and assumptions rooted in a deficit model to one focused on the assets of diverse learners such as English learners.

Another important aspect of cultural proficiency also appears in these literatures as an adaptive challenge: bridging home and school cultural divides. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 2009) research on culturally relevant pedagogy emphasized the critical role that educators serve in bridging the discontinuities between students’ home cultures and the school culture by empowering students to develop and maintain academic success, cultural competence in mainstream—or school—cultures, and develop critical consciousness. In their review of recent literature pertaining to effective teaching for English learners, Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011) emphasized the powerful role educators have in establishing positive, open relationships with families of English learners given the difficulty English learners face when trying to navigate cultural, linguistic, and social differences between home and school cultures. Souto-Manning’s (2010a) action research with two early childhood education teachers and a teacher educator takes this concept a step further, suggesting ways that educators can weave English learners’ home and community literacy practices into classroom teaching and curriculum.

Souto-Manning and Swick’s (2006) research also suggests that building partnerships with families of English learners is both connected to cultural proficiency and distinct from it when overlaid with the concept of adaptive challenge. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) posit that educators’ beliefs about families often fall within the bounds of a traditional parent involvement paradigm. This traditional paradigm of
parent and family involvement embraces “home-based learning rituals [that] seem to have a positive impact on children’s school success… [but] it impedes a full and valid view of how parents and families are indeed involved in their children’s lives” (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 188). An unexamined practice of operating from this status quo when working with families of English learners elicits a deficit orientation to partnering with families. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) advocate that educators rethink their definition of parent involvement and suggest Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model, which explores the multiple sociocultural contexts for families, as an alternative to the traditional paradigm that is anchored in the assumption that school culture is the one accepted norm for family involvement. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) emphasize the power of reflective practice to support educators in shifting their beliefs and habits of working to demonstrate a deep value and respect for family’s funds of knowledge and rich, complex sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. Their research highlights how the shift required by cultural proficiency from a deficit orientation to English learners to an asset orientation is a parallel capacity that educators can develop to redefine and improve their partnerships with families of English learners.

Developing the ability to see the discontinuities that English learners and families experience between home and school cultures and then embrace the personal responsibility for working to address discontinuities through using culturally-responsive teaching strategies in all aspects of teaching and work with families (Banks et al., 2001; Nieto, 2009) appears to be an adaptive challenge for educators. Addressing these discontinuities between home and school cultures requires educators to change their habits of working and assumptions that school culture is the “right” and only culture
students need to navigate. Ladson-Billings’ work (1995, 2009) highlights the ways in which educators must shift their beliefs, values, and ways of working in terms of curriculum and teaching to actively empower students to navigate multiple cultures. In reviewing these literatures, I found these two aspects of the concept of cultural proficiency demonstrate adaptive challenges educators face in their work with English learners: affirming diversity of students by examining underlying beliefs, assumptions, and alternative perspectives; and empowering students to successfully navigate the cultural discontinuities between home and school cultures.

**Integrating the Literatures of Multicultural Education, Sociocultural Theory, and Bilingual Education: Intersections between the Learning-Oriented Leadership Model and Promising Professional Learning Environments for Educators of English Learners**

In exploring the nexus of the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), I found a clear overlap. In this section, I review studies that highlight these intersections.

**Informational and transformational learning in professional learning environments.** Casteel and Ballantyne (2010) in their review of professional learning for educators teaching English learners for the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs named five core principles for professional learning. The first centered on professional learning that builds on the foundation of skills, knowledge, and expertise. In Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009,
2012a), this is referred to as informational learning which is an important aspect of professional learning environments in schools. Researchers across multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education also emphasize important aspects of informational learning for educators teaching English learners (Calderón et al., 2011; Gay, 2000, 2002; Minaya-Rowe, 2004; Nieto, 2004, 2009; Torres-Guzmán & Goodwin, 1995). Minaya-Rowe (2004) points to a number of areas of knowledge and skill educators in general education settings serving English learners need the opportunity to acquire: principles of additive bilingualism, the stages of second-language acquisition, ability to create language-rich environments, and a working knowledge of minority languages represented in their classrooms. Minaya-Rowe (2004) and Calderón et al.’s (2011) studies also emphasize the need for professional learning environments to support educators with applying new knowledge and teaching techniques in their classrooms.

Casteel and Ballantyne’s (2010) review also centered on developing new models for professional learning support educators to challenge their beliefs and assumptions in professional learning contexts that include ongoing, site-based, collaborative learning among educators and involve elements of coaching, mentoring, collaborative inquiry, or reflective practice. These are the kinds of professional learning environments that support educators in a developmental sense and focus on transformational learning, in addition to informational learning. As discussed earlier in the chapter, transformational learning is the kind of learning the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring are intended to support within the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This kind of learning is also highlighted in the multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education literatures.
For example, Victoria Hunt (2009) in her qualitative comparative case study of transformative leadership in three bilingual schools in New York City focused on the work that school leaders do to establish professional learning communities for educators teaching English learners as well as other students in the school. Hunt’s (2009) data included over thirty interviews and over 200 hours of observation data of principals and teachers. Hunt (2009) emphasized reflection and collaboration as critical elements of the on-site training and learning that teachers engaged in to transform their schools.

Across the literature, it is often the individual school leader who decides to commit to improve the learning and achievement of English learners through a collaborative and reflective process that includes ongoing, site-based professional learning that aims to build the foundational knowledge and skills of teachers while making teacher learning an engaging, reflective, and collaborative process (Hunt, 2009; Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999; Pardini, 2006).

**Teacher-centered collaborative spaces as professional learning.** Collaborative research by Maria Torres-Guzmán, Victoria Hunt, and teachers from PS 165 in New York City (Torres-Guzmán, Hunt, Torres, Madrigal, Flecha, Lukas, & Jaar, 2006; Torres-Guzmán, 2010) shows the promise of leadership practices that open spaces for teachers to develop professionally and intellectually through collaborative study groups. Torres-Guzmán (2010) explored how embracing language development, professional development, and intellectual development as freedoms empower teachers and teacher teams to grow both personally and professionally in support of bilingual learners.

More specifically, Torres-Guzmán’s (2010) six-year case study of an urban K-8 school explored the school and leadership context for school transformation where spaces
are opened for bilingual student and bilingual teacher learning. This case study combined with other recent studies on the professional learning of educators teaching English learners have raised concerns about the historical dominance of this top-down informational learning approach to professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Heiligenstein, 2010; Johns, 2008; Musanti, 2005; Pardini, 2006; Santos, 2009; Torres-Guzmán, 2010; Torres-Guzmán et al., 2006). Torres-Guzmán’s (2010) findings suggest a central role for professional learning environments in supporting bilingual teachers to develop their “individual capabilities” (Torres-Guzmán, 2010, p. 181) and the meaningful context that one school provided teachers to do this through developing the linguistic, intellectual, and professional freedoms of students and educators alike which resonates with Drago-Severson’s discussion of internal capacity building within the learning-oriented leadership model.

Another case study by Janet Johns’ (2008) of a high school peer coaching professional learning program that employed culturally relevant pedagogy also highlighted the importance of providing educators teaching English learners meaningful, collaborative professional learning opportunities. Johns’ (2008) study outlined an approach to professional learning for educators teaching English learners that was also site-based, ongoing, collaborative, and focused on problem-solving tasks where the teachers are at the center of the learning. This peer coaching study explicitly lays out a framework that embraces a “new paradigm for professional development” (Johns, 2008, p. 27) oriented away from the top-down, centralized approach to delivering workshops, courses, and large-group presentations focused on presenting research-based strategies and knowledge. These new models include research-based strategies and the knowledge
base necessary to be a highly effective teacher, but increasingly studies are being conducted that do so with a more developmentally-appropriate approach using site-based methods that focus on adult learning and internal capacity building in addition to focusing on informational learning.

While research is beginning to reflect a change in professional learning for educators teaching English learners toward site-based, collaborative, teacher-centered learning, little has been written about building a developmental model of professional learning spaces for educators teaching English learners. Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model shows promise as a professional learning model to support the growth of teachers across a spectrum of developmental diversity. But nothing has been written about the experiences of educators teaching English learners with transformational learning supported by the pillars of teaming, mentoring, providing leadership roles, and collegial inquiry. My study addresses this by focusing on the experiences of educators teaching English learners, particularly asking teachers to describe the 1) adaptive challenges in their work, 2) their experiences of the pillars which are designed and employed by their principals to explicitly encourage the internal capacity building of educators teaching English learners, and 3) the potential influences of cultural background on their work as teachers and in their experiences within their professional learning spaces.

**Mentoring and coaching as professional learning.** In a literature review published for the journal *Education and Urban Society* on the state of America’s mentoring programs for urban bilingual teachers K-12, Torres-Guzmán and Goodwin (1995) identified four competency areas critical for adults teaching in bilingual settings:
1) language and instruction, 2) culture and instruction, 3) language and cognitive
development, and 4) educational for social justice and transformation. They discuss these
areas of teacher competencies in light of the complexities of mentoring relationships in
urban bilingual schools (e.g., peer evaluative assessments and mentoring roles). Torres-
Guzmán and Goodwin (1995) noted the importance to bilingual teachers posing questions
and considering alternative perspectives within mentoring and coaching relationships to
support their growth in terms of competency of language and instruction:

What do I teach in what language? How do I teach in two languages? What
children do I teach in what language? For teachers to discover how to go about
doing this within their own circumstances and classrooms, they need more than
pedagogical theory… Even when the teacher is clear and his or her practices are
consistent, there are many other aspects to consider: subject matter and student
composition, linguistic heterogeneity, and district policies. (Torres-Guzmán &

Developing this competency as a bilingual teacher requires an individual to grow
cognitively as well as interpersonally as he or she considers how best to answer these
questions pertaining to classroom, school, and district language policy in light of
pedagogical theory and the actual students learning in the classroom. Torres-Guzmán and
Goodwin (1995) suggest that mentoring relationships can help teachers navigate the
complex waters of these questions common to educators teaching English learners.

Mentoring is one of the four pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model
(Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and I describe Torres-Guzmán and Goodwin’s
(1995) research on mentoring relationships for bilingual teachers to support my assertion
that the learning-oriented leadership model’s pillars will provide important professional
learning spaces for educators teaching English learners.
As a part of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model, mentoring plays a critical role for supporting teacher growth, so it is not surprising to find research on professional development for educators teaching English learners to point to mentoring as a promising model. Beyond employing mentoring as a strategy to help bilingual urban teachers learn the core competencies of bilingual classroom teaching, Torres-Guzmán and Goodwin (1995) suggest that building bridges between bilingual language programs and mainstream programs through mentoring relationships including teachers across both programs would serve to support the learning of English learners more broadly. Specifically they argue that an interactive model of mentoring that allows for reciprocity between mentor and mentee and simultaneous giving and receive of support that would serve to build bridges between teachers and the bilingual students they serve as well as between mainstream and bilingual teachers.

Similar to Drago-Severson’s (2009) discussion of the developmental benefits of mentoring for both the mentor and mentee, Torres-Guzmán and Goodwin (1995) recommend redefining mentoring roles in bilingual contexts so that both teachers approach the relationship as simultaneous learners and instructors. The potential synergy of applying constructive-developmental theory principles—as Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a) does to schools and educational leadership generally—to the existing research suggesting the benefits of mentoring and other pillars to the growth of teachers in bilingual settings and other programs supporting English learners is important. My work is poised to deepen the connections between Torres-Guzmán and Goodwin’s (1995) research on mentoring relationships for bilingual teachers, Drago-Severson’s (2004b,
2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model, and my assertions that the learning-oriented leadership model has the capacity to provide transformational learning spaces for educators teaching English learners.

Several other studies of professional learning for educators teaching English learners spotlight another form of mentoring: coaching (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010; Pardini, 2006). Rather than an implicit hierarchical relationship between expert and novice assumed in the mentoring model, coaching presents a slightly different spin on mentoring where the coach sits at the elbow of the teacher as a critical friend and reflective partner. Coaching in many ways overlaps with mentoring in terms of how the terms are used in the literature, though mentoring usually refers to a more long-term relationship that “often has an emotional dimension” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 218). Coaching models often focus an individual or group of individuals within an organization that would benefit from the support of a coach who can help the coachee, or client, work through a process to reach a desired professional result.

One example of coaching for educators teaching English learners in an urban public school context was discussed by Priscilla Pardini (2006). Pardini (2006) describes the coaching model employed by an urban district in Minnesota working to reduce the achievement gap between English learners and native English speakers in their schools. Pardini’s (2006) article published by Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) is based on a 2006 report released by the Council of Great City Schools, which conducted a city-by-city analysis of student performance on state test achievement gaps. The school district reshaped its professional learning spaces for educators teaching English learners by in a number of ways. First, mainstream teachers
attending summer institutes alongside educators teaching English learners to receive informational trainings; in the past educators teaching English learners alone would receive those trainings (Pardini, 2006). Second, the district provided “resource teachers” who acted as coaches across the schools in the district. These coaches worked directly with educators teaching English learners doing site-based coaching tailored to teachers’ needs, and the coaches worked with leadership and teaching teams on specific concerns to the schools as they addressed the achievement gaps among English learners and mainstream students in their schools (Pardini, 2006).

The school district hypothesized that in order to raise student achievement of English learners, they would need to transform their curriculum and their approach to teaching English learners, and the district decided to do so using a collaborative leadership approach with coaching at the foundation. As mentioned above, professional development in the form of workshops and trainings were refocused to develop collaborative coaching relationships between mainstream teachers and specialized educators teaching English learners. District leaders in Saint Paul, Minnesota refer to their work as “authentic, site-based professional development” (Pardini, 2006, p. 25). This example of coaching from Pardini (2006) highlights the benefits to both English learners in terms of achievement and educators teaching English learners in terms of the on-site collaborative spaces created to help them solve problems of practice relating to educating English learners. Pardini’s (2006) article supports my claim that the pillar of mentoring (or developmental coaching) can serve as a professional learning space for educators teaching English learners that help them grow to better meet the challenges in their work.
In a contrasting example, Keira Casteel and Alicia Ballantyne (2010) note other studies that provided university-designed coaching and mentoring to educators teaching English learners in California, Kansas, and Alabama where results were mixed. In the Alabama mentoring program, the authors concluded that: “traditional mentor training is insufficient for transforming teachers, even caring and dedicated teachers, into teacher mentors—especially for the mentoring of veteran colleagues. Rather, optimal conditions can nurture collaborative mentoring and, in turn, generate on-site PD” (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010, p. 31). While the authors measured varying degrees of success, all noted the need for mentoring and coaching programs to deliver more intense work on-site.

**Collegial inquiry teaming as professional learning.** The Pardini (2006) study of professional learning for educators teaching English learners also focused collaboration and collaborative inquiry as critical to transforming educational opportunities for English learners through transformation of teaching. Olsen and Jaramillo’s (1999) review of educational leadership practices to promote program improvement for English learners also centered on important roles of sustained, ongoing collaborative inquiry within professional learning opportunities for teachers. Calderón et al. (2011) also noted in their literature review of effective teaching for English learners that the practice of establishing school-based action teams that involve families and school faculty in collaborative problem-solving work to address issues such as discipline, family and community involvement, homework expectations, and school climate. Similarly in a study of teacher learning communities, Calderón (1999) suggested that the practice of having teachers, families, and administrators come together in cooperative
teams to discuss issues relating to teaching diverse learners in teacher learning communities supported school improvement efforts. All of these studies point to benefits of reflective practice done in the presence of colleagues—namely, collegial inquiry—is an important and promising practice for supporting the growth of educators teaching English learners.

Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) model of learning-oriented leadership shows significant overlap with existing research in the field of professional learning for educators teaching English learners with regard to mentoring (or coaching), collegial inquiry, and teaming. Little has been written about the pillar of providing leadership roles within the literature on the professional learning for educators teaching English learners. Overlaying Drago-Severson’s model and existing research on mentoring and collegial inquiry as meaningful and growth-enhancing professional learning spaces for educators teaching English learners is exciting, unexplored territory. In summary, a focused review of the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education revealed important intersections with the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a): the distinction between informational and transformational learning; creating teacher-centered collaborative spaces; and the pillars of mentoring (or coaching), collegial inquiry, and teaming.

Section Summary

In this third and final section of my literature review, I integrated a focused literature review of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education with the concept of adaptive challenge and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). I discussed how the concept of cultural
proficiency represented in these literatures could be understood as an adaptive challenge for educators teaching English learners. I then explored how studies pertaining to promising professional learning environments for educators teaching English learners overlapped with several important aspects of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I began by reviewing Drago-Severson’s research and related adult development theory to address my second and third research questions that sought to understand educators experiences engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring), and the extent to which engaging in the pillars supported educators in their efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners. I described the leadership model in detail, and then I looked at the concept of developmental diversity and how it relates to educators teaching English learners and their experiences with the pillars. I finished the section by examining the concept of holding environment and the pillars themselves to help provide context of the analytic framework that will be used in analyzing data pertaining to my second and third research questions. In the second section of this chapter, I then reviewed Heifetz’s (1994) concept of adaptive challenge, providing key definitions and relating those definitions to the context of education and educational leadership. I then related Heifetz’s (1994) concept of adaptive challenge specifically to teaching English learners. In the third section of the chapter, I integrated a focused literature review of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education with the concept of adaptive challenge and
the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This section helped to build a theoretical framework from the literature for my analytic framework in addressing my first research question regarding educators’ experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners. Next in Chapter III, I describe the qualitative methodology I used to design and conduct my dissertation study.
Chapter III

METHODLOGY

In Chapters I and II, I presented a review of the bodies of literature and theory that informed my research questions for this study of how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the study’s research questions. In the sections that follow, I present my rationale for the use of qualitative methodology, site selection, participant selection, data collection methods, analytic methods, and validity.

Research Questions

The following questions guide my study:

1. How do 11 educators serving in elementary schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) describe and understand the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?
2. How do these participants describe and understand their experiences engaging in the pillar practices of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring?

3. In what ways, if any, do participants describe and understand engaging in the pillar practices as supportive of their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?

It is important to note that in my dissertation proposal, I had slightly different research questions which I list here: 1) What do 16 teachers of English learners from two urban schools name as the adaptive teaching challenges they face in their teaching? How do they describe and understand these adaptive teaching challenges? 2) How do 16 teachers of English learners describe and understand their experiences participating in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, mentoring, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry) that compose the learning-oriented model? In what ways, if any, do they describe how participating in the pillar practices has helped them to better meet the adaptive teaching challenges they face? How so? What kinds of learning do they name from participating in these practices? 3) In what ways, if any, do participants describe how their cultural background influences their instructional decision making, how they relate to students, and how they relate to colleagues? How, if at all, do participants describe influences of their cultural background on their participation in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming mentoring, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry)?

Once I collected my data, I realized that the task of answering all of these research questions was too large given the constraints of completing my dissertation on-time;
therefore, I omitted the third research question from my study, and I divided my second research question into two questions to facilitate data analysis, given the complexity of how I initially framed my second research question in my dissertation proposal. Additionally, because I ended up having 11 participants and not the 16 I had planned to recruit, I revised the research questions further to particularize them (Maxwell, 2005).

In the next section I describe my rationale for using qualitative methodology and a qualitative interview study approach.

**Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

In my study, I employed a qualitative interview study approach, drawing from Merriam (1998), Maxwell (2005), and Creswell (2007) work to inform my methodology. Qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning making in context, allowing the researcher to gather and interpret data that reflect how people make meaning of key experiences as well as the effects of a particular context on participants actions and understandings (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). I was interested in how educators serving English learners made meaning of their experiences within the context of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) for this dissertation; hence, I chose to design a qualitative multi-site interview study that would allow me to understand how participants made meaning of key experiences and how their particular contexts may have influenced their actions and understandings. Thus, a quantitative approach (e.g., survey research) would not have enabled me to address the research questions that guided my study.
In my study I focused on how participants made sense of their lived experiences. In particular I explored how a group of educators who serve in two schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (hereafter I simply to the pillar practices as the “pillars”) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet adaptive challenges involving English learners. I sought to understand those lived experiences of participants and the meaning they made of their experiences rather than the relationships between variables, so I chose a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach (Maxwell, 2005). More specifically, I chose a multi-site interview study approach to strengthen my data collection and analytic methods and thus enhanced the external validity and internal generalizability of my findings by offering both within case, cross-case and cross-site analysis (Merriam, 1998). In the next section, I describe my rationale for using the interview study approach in my study.

**The Interview Study Approach**

The interview study approach, as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest, allows a researcher to explore both how participants understand and describe their experiences, thereby providing a researcher the opportunity to obtain thick, rich description. In my study, as noted above, I sought to understand the experiences of educators serving English learners within the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b,
2009, 2012a). The educators I was interested in studying represented a unique case and possess knowledge we do not yet have access to, so I also incorporated methodology from the case study approach to explore the experiences of educators serving English learners within such a new model of school leadership which allowed me to gather concrete, contextualized data relating to their experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners and the pillars in two distinct sites (Merriam, 1998). The data I collected came from interviews, so I did not triangulate my data as is typical for a case study by analyzing documents and conducting observations; hence, I refer to my study as an interview-study. I did, however, use case study methodology to guide my study design because I was studying the phenomenon of school leaders who implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) through conducting interviews with educators who experience the pillar practices.

Next, I describe my rationale for choosing to conduct a multi-site interview study.

The Multi-Site Interview study

I chose a multi-site interview study approach because I wanted to make comparisons across sites in addition to across cases (i.e., meaning individual participants’ experiences). Using a multi-site interview study approach strengthened my data collection and analytic methods. While my findings allow me to make internally generalizable conclusions only, it is likely that, as Maxwell (2005) asserts, that these findings are likely to be applicable to other cases. I choose to include multiple cases across two sites to enhance my ability to generalize across the sample. Additionally, the multi-site interview study approach enabled me to analyze both the site as context and the
individual cases within each site, providing in-depth understanding of the site context and meaning for the individuals involved (Merriam, 1998). On this topic, Maxwell states:

> The teachers are treated not as a *sample* from some much larger population of teachers to whom the study is intended to generalize, but as a *case* of a group of teachers who are studied in a particular context (the specific school and community). The *selection* of this particular case may involve considerations of representativeness (and certainly any attempt to generalize from the conclusions must take representativeness into account), but the primary concern of the study is not with generalization, but with developing an adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of this case. (Maxwell, 2005, p. 71)

Employing an approach of investigating two sites, each with multiple participants, enabled me to study the two sites as case studies, as Maxwell notes above, as well as the experiences of each participant as individual cases. Studying each site and the experiences of each site helped to provide the fullest understanding of the phenomenon possible (Merriam, 1998).

In the next section, I explain my methodological decisions regarding site selection. Following in the qualitative methodology tradition, I describe my methods for using purposeful sampling to select sites (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) that will produce information-rich cases where the most can be learned from participants (Merriam, 1998).

**Rationale for Site Selection**

In this section I describe the criteria I used for selecting the two school sites for my study. I chose two sites based on several criteria chosen to enable me to gain access to the target population of research participants (Berg, 2009; Maxwell, 2005), as described below.
Site Selection

This study rests on the assumption that when school leaders use the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), then educators have the opportunities to build internal capacities through the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) to be able to better meet the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work teaching English learners. In my study, I sought to explore the experiences of educators serving English learners so it was important to choose sites that had ample numbers of these potential research participants. My criteria are listed below:

1. School leaders using learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) with educators serving English learners

2. Ample numbers of educators serving English learners (at least 20)

Gaining access to the site locations through gatekeepers was an important concern for choosing sites for my study (Berg, 2009), so site selection was made based on professional relationships between myself, Eleanor Drago-Severson, and the school leaders. Prior to interviewing participants, I collected and analyzed documents that were publicly available online; these documents included handbooks, school and district website materials, school report cards, and any documentation of regular opportunities for all educators serving English learners to engage in the pillars weekly. These data sources were used only for site selection purposes and were not part of formal data analysis. Below I discuss this in more detail.

School leaders using the learning-oriented leadership model with educators teaching English learners. Because I sought to explore the context of schools where
school leaders employ the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) with educators serving English learners, my first selection criterion for sites related to the principal, or head of school, at the site and his or her use of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) with educators serving English learners in order to support increases in their internal capacity. At each site, school leaders satisfied the two following criteria:

1. The school leader has at least one semester of professional learning experience with Drago-Severson relating to engaging the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a).

2. The school leader employed the four pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) for educators to engage in regularly (weekly) in order to build their internal capacities.

I designed my study to explore the experiences of educators serving English learners who work within the context of schools where they can engage in the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) because of the opportunities the learning-oriented leadership model provides for internal capacity building. This set of site selection criteria was essential because it helped me determine whether or not the site provided a context where educators do regularly (weekly) engage in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. I set the first criterion relating to learning with Drago-Severson for at least one semester (or the equivalent) because it is more typical for school leaders to have the experience of working intensively with Drago-Severson for one semester or more as part of course work and/or leadership programs at the university level. It is typical for school leaders
themselves to learn about the learning-oriented leadership model from Drago-Severson and then use the pillars with their teachers; thus, I chose to use this criterion for selecting sites where school leaders have learned about the learning-oriented leadership model directly from Drago-Severson for at least one semester or the equivalent.

For my second criterion, I chose to define “regular” as weekly opportunities to engage in the pillars because of my professional experience working within schools where leaders attempt to use the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and weekly engagement in the pillars seemed to be a reasonable expectation for expecting all educators serving English learners to engage in teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring.

Ample numbers of educators teaching English learners. My study was focused on the experiences of educators serving English learners; hence, it was important to choose sites that had ample numbers of potential research participants. Because I sought to select 8 participants from each site, I planned that having at least 20 educators serving English learners at each site would allow for a large enough pool to select participants willing to participate in the study. In the next section on sample selection, I provide a detailed explanation of my selection criteria for participants in the study.

Selected Sites

I chose two sites for my study: Woodland Heights and Springford Academy (pseudonyms). I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants and their schools. In Table 4, I present demographic information for each site, which I describe in greater detail in Chapter IV when I present the context of each site.
When I first designed the study, I had no preference for whether school sites were elementary, middle, or high schools. In reaching out to principals who met the criteria described above, two school leaders accepted my invitation to host the study at their schools. One site, Woodland Heights, was a suburban public elementary school serving students in grades K-5. The other site, Springford Academy, was an urban charter school with multiple campuses serving students in grades K-12. The head of school for the entire charter school, Sol Harbour (pseudonym), had taken a course with Ellie Drago-Severson and then invited her to work with his faculty in order to support them in building their internal capacities and helping others to do the same. While he was not the building principal at either of the elementary school campuses at Springford Academy, he served as both head of school and district leader to implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Kate Villa, the principal of Woodland Heights had also worked extensively with Drago-Severson and also invited her to work directly with her faculty. Both sites also served a large number of English learners (please see Table 4), so the majority of educators at both sites served English learners; hence both criteria for site selection were met.

My site selection criteria and process demonstrate a purposeful, qualitative approach to site selection. In the next section, I explain the rationale and criteria for selecting the participant sample.
Table 4

Site Demographic Information (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Student Enrollment</th>
<th>% Student Race</th>
<th>Language Status</th>
<th>% Low Income</th>
<th>% Meeting Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African-American or Black</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Multiracial or Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Heights K-5</td>
<td>Suburban Public Elem.</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springford Academy Gr K-3</td>
<td>Urban Charter K-12</td>
<td>358*</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr 4-6</td>
<td></td>
<td>292*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from State Department of Education Data (2012)

1 Two different terms are used when describing populations of children learning English:
   First Language not English: A student whose first language learned or used by the parent/guardian with the child is not English.
   English Language Learner (ELL): A student whose first language is a language other than English who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.

2 Low income: An indication of whether a student is eligible for free or reduced price lunch; or the student receives Transitional Aid to Families benefits; or the student is eligible for food stamps

*Based on 2012-2013 enrollment data because 2012 report card data did not disaggregate enrollment data by grade.

** These percentages indicate those 3rd grade students who scored a Level 3 (Proficient) or Level 4 (Advanced) on comprehensive state assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2012.

*** These percentages indicate those 5th grade students who scored a Level 3 (Proficient) or Level 4 (Advanced) on comprehensive state assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2012.
Rationale for Sample Selection

In this section, I describe my rationale and criteria for selecting the participant sample of educators. It is important to note that the criteria used for site selection, as described in the preceding section, helped to ensure selection of participants who had the opportunity to engage in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring because they worked at sites where school leaders have learned about and employ the pillars through their direct work with Drago-Severson.

Sample Selection

To select participants I used ongoing criterion-based sampling (Creswell, 2007) to identify 11 participants for the study. I had hoped to recruit 16 participants, eight from each site. I was only able to recruit a total of 11 participants, seven from Woodland Heights and four from Springford Academy. In Table 5, I present participants’ characteristics. Participants were selected on a volunteer basis. I asked participants to give 3-5 hours of their time, scheduled as three separate one-hour interviews during the 2011-2012 school year. I visited each site and attended faculty meetings to ask educators to participate in the study. In March and April of 2012, I distributed an introductory letter and sign-up sheets for interested educators and collected the sign-up sheets at the meetings—rather than asking school leaders to help screen or select teachers. The principal at Woodland Heights, Kate, supported my recruitment efforts by encouraging educators who served in teacher leadership roles to participate.
Table 5

Participant Characteristics (2011-2012 data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Woodland Heights (n=7)</th>
<th>Springford Academy (n=4)</th>
<th>Entire Sample (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American/Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial/Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After potential participant volunteers signed up, I followed up with interested
educators who met the criteria, which I describe below. I used two criteria for selecting
participants at each site:

1. At least one year of teaching experience at school site
2. Taught at least one English learner within a classroom context

The first sample selection criteria enabled me to confirm that each participant had at least
one full year of experiences engaging in the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-
Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This criterion helped to ensure that participants had
sufficient time to experience the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial
inquiry, mentoring) and reflect on their experiences during interviews. My second sample
selection criterion allowed me to confirm that each participant was an educator of English
learners. By teaching at least one English learner within a classroom context, I discerned
that each participant was eligible for my study.

I conducted my research during the second half of the 2011-2012 school year
(March-June 2012), so I also asked potential participants to confirm that they had taught
at least one English learner during both the 2011-2012 and 2010-2011 school years.
Because my study sought to explore educators serving English learners’ experiences
within the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), it
was crucial for each participant to have had ample time engaging in the learning-oriented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
leadership model, defined as at least one year working at the school site where the school leader employed the pillars.

When I first designed the study, I had envisioned that only classroom teachers would participate; however, at each site, specialists were also eager to participate. At Woodland Heights and Springford Academy, specialist roles included literacy and math coaches, guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, and therapists who support students with disabilities, among other roles. For those interested participants who served in the role of specialist, I followed up via email, over the phone, and/or in person to confirm that they taught English learners in a classroom context on a regular basis, thereby meeting the selection criteria. Table 5 shows that approximately half of my sample (5/11) were serving in the role of specialist during the 2011-2012 school year. Having specialists participate broadened the original focus of the study from classroom teachers to educators, which has positive implications for generalizability of findings.

In the next section, I discuss my data collection methods. I explored the experiences of educators serving English learners engaging in the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) though collecting and analyzing in-depth interview data.

**Data Collection**

In this section, I describe the data collection methods I employed to address my research questions. I used interview data as my primary data source. I conducted three interviews with each of the 11 participants, totaling approximately 33 hours of in-depth interview data. I interviewed seven participants from Woodland Heights and four
participants from Springford Academy. I had hoped to interview equal numbers of participants at each site, but fewer educators volunteered at Springford Academy.

I scheduled the first round of interviews with each participant for March and April 2012. I conducted interviews at both sites simultaneously to accommodate participants’ schedules as best as I could. I conducted the second round of interviews between April 2012 and May 2012 and the third round of interviews between May 2012 and July 2012 (see Appendix A Data Collection and Analysis Timeline). To accommodate participant schedules, I allowed participants to schedule and complete interviews at their own pace. For example, most participants at Woodland Heights completed interview one in March, interview two in April, and interview three in May while most participants at Springford Academy completed interview one in April, interview two in May, and interview three in June or July.

At the start of the second and third interviews, I provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their responses from the previous interview by asking them follow-up questions. Seidman (2006) points out that one key advantage of the three-part, in-depth interview series is the ability to give participants multiple opportunities to reconstruct and reflect as they tell their stories. In addition to giving participants time to reflect on prior interviews, I also provided copies of the protocol before each interview to allow time for participants to reflect on the questions. I also communicated with participants via email after each interview to provide opportunities for them to review interview transcripts (member-checking) and for the purpose of asking follow-up questions after the final interview; eight of eleven participants offered feedback.
As noted in the preceding section on participant selection, I also attended school meetings to communicate with potential participants about the study. Prior to interviewing participants, I also reviewed documents that were publicly available online, such as website material, handbooks, etc., and spoke informally with school leaders to gauge whether or not participants had regular opportunities to engage in the pillars (at least weekly) as part of the site selection process. These data sources were only used for site selection purposes and thus were not part of formal data analysis. Additionally I conducted observations for the sole purposes of building relationships (i.e., rapport) and trust with potential participants and understanding the context of the site; this data source was not used for analysis purposes. Appendix A displays my timeline for data collection and analysis. In addition to being mindful about building rapport with participants, because my intention was to learn from participants about their own experiences, in my interview protocols, I shared myself and my experiences. For example, my opening question in my first interview protocol included the preamble: “Having been a teacher, I know the rewards of teaching. I also know that as teachers that we all face tremendous challenges in our work.”

I chose to conduct a three-part interview series because in-depth interviewing is a strategy used by qualitative researchers who have “an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). I used main questions, probes, and follow up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). My purpose in using qualitative methodology was to gain insight related to my research questions by gaining access to participants’ experiences, perceptions, and
understandings; thus my main questions translate “the research topic[s] into terms that the conversational partner can relate and discuss” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 135).

Further, in-depth interviewing serves as a strategy for giving more context to the participants’ responses (Seidman, 2006). While each of the three interviews did focus on a separate research question, interviewing in a three-part series allowed for a beginning, middle, and end structure for the participant and interviewer (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, a one hour time period is a standard unit of time that I chose because of the limited time that educators have during the school year to schedule additional activities outside of the demands of teaching.

While I did not follow Seidman’s (2006) approach to interviewing exactly, his methods guided my methodology as I designed an in-depth interview series that matched the constraints of my study. Seidman (2006) notes that alternatives to the standard method he outlines exist. For instance, Seidman (2006) suggests spacing interviews within a series three days apart, but he also relates a number of successful in-depth interview studies where that timing procedure was not adhered to because of study constraints.

Next, I focus on the data collection procedures I used for interviewing educators teaching English learners, my primary data collection method.

**Interviews with Educators Teaching English Learners**

As described above, I interviewed a total of 11 educators teaching English learners, seven educators from Woodland Heights and four educators from Springford Academy. I interviewed each participant three times. Before the first interview, each participant completed an informed consent form (Appendix B). At the beginning of the
first interview I also administered a demographic survey. Below, I detail the procedures and topics for each of the three interviews.

**Interview one: Adaptive challenges involving English learners.** The first interview with teachers lasted approximately 60 minutes for each participant. My purpose for this first interview was to develop rapport and give them time to adjust to the interview process while also investigating my first topic in connection with my first research question on adaptive challenges involving English learners. I asked warm-up questions about participants’ history and positive experiences teaching as a way to help participants begin talking. After the warm up, I invited participants to respond to questions pertaining to the challenges they faced in their work with English learners and specific challenges for which there were no ready-made or easy answers.

As noted above, before the interview, I also participants to complete short demographic survey; this demographic survey is included in the Interview Protocol 1 (Appendix C). The protocol was semi-structured din that it provided a plan for each interview, but I also allowed each interview to unfold in unexpected ways as I sought to respond to and understand what each participant shared as the interview proceeded (Seidman, 2006). Topics for this interview included challenges participants faced in their work teaching English learners, challenges for which there are no easy or ready-made answers, and what might help educators better meet the challenges described.

**Interview two: Pillar practices.** The second interview lasted approximately 60 minutes for each participant. I used Interview Protocol 2 (Appendix D) to invite participants to reflect on their experiences engaging in the pillars to understand how, if at
all, they developed internal capacities through the professional learning spaces provided
by the pillars.

My purposes for this second interview were to allow participants to reflect on the
first interview session, to help me member-check the what they share in transcripts, to
check my interpretations, and to explore the second topic related to my second research
question on the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and
mentoring). In this interview, I asked participants to reflect on what they shared during
the first interview as a warm up. I then moved into the primary focus of the interview by
asking participants to reflect on their experiences engaging in the pillars; what, if
anything, they felt they had learned as a result; and how, if at all, their experiences with
the pillars helped them to better meet the adaptive challenges involving English learners
they described in the first interview. Ahead of each interview, I provided participants
with a copy of the transcript from the first interview to review and check for accuracy via
email and also provided a hard copy for participants to review during the first ten minutes
of the interview. In addition to providing participants with this memberchecking
opportunity, I also used that first 10 minutes of that interview to ask follow-up questions
based on the first interview. Topics for this interview included reflecting on experiences,
learnings, and potential connections to better meeting adaptive challenges through each
of the pillars.

**Interview three: Influences of cultural background.** The third interview lasted
approximately 60 minutes for each participant (Interview Protocol 3: Appendix E). In this
final interview, my purposes were to allow participants to reflect on what they shared in
the first two interviews, member-check the transcript from the second interview and to
check my interpretations, and explore the third and final topic relating to my original third research question on the potential influences of cultural background. In my original dissertation proposal, I included a question about participants’ cultural background and the potential influences of that background on their professional learning experiences and their work with English learners. During data analysis work, I decided to adjust my research questions for the dissertation to not include this third research question. My original intent for this third interview was to discuss topics that would help me address this third research question, a question that ultimately did not make it into the final version of this study.

In the third interview, I began by asking participants to reflect on what they shared during the first and second interviews. I then moved into the primary focus of the interview by asking participants to reflect on the potential influence that their cultural backgrounds had on their experiences with instructional decision making, relationships with students and colleagues, and the pillars. Before of the third interview, I provided participants with a copy of the transcript from the second interview and invited them to review and check for accuracy via email. I also gave each of them a hard copy to review during the first ten minutes of the third interview. In addition to providing participants with this memberchecking opportunity, I also used that first 10 minutes of the third interview to ask follow-up questions based on the second interview.

After the third interview was transcribed, I sent the transcript via email to each participant to check for accuracy and to provide a final opportunity for participants to reflect on what they shared during the third interview. I did this from June 2012 to September 2012.
In summary, in this section on data collection, I described my selection of data collection methods and explained how those methods align to my research questions. I also explained my primary data collection method of in-depth interviewing. In the next section, I describe my data analysis methods, which were iterative (Maxwell, 2005) and began simultaneously with my data collection methods.

### Data Analysis

In this section, I describe my data analysis methods, which involved an iterative, ongoing, and systematic process (Creswell, 2007; Drago-Severson, 2004, Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I carefully selected strategies for qualitative data analysis that provided a robust, structured process that was both systematic (emphasis on the science) and open (emphasis on art and interpretation). Acknowledging that multiple stories can be told from the same data set, I strive to articulate clearly my methodological decision-making as I outline the data analysis steps I used for understanding my in-depth interview data below. Appendix A outlines my timeline for data analysis.

Below, I describe my analysis process in step-by-step detail. Throughout the data analysis process, I wrote analytic notes and memos (Maxwell, 2005). After each interview, I took reflective notes on my reactivity to participants, my experiences conducting interviews within the school context, and on my initial analysis of potential themes and how the interview addressed my research questions. Throughout the data analysis process, I interpreted the data by writing in-depth analytical memos and discussed possible findings with a dissertation partner, other graduate students, a writing coach, and my advisors—all of whom are trained in qualitative analysis. While coding I
also draft an analytic framework and wrote analytic memos to help me build an analytic framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also wrote summary analytic memos answering the research questions for the study (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2004c, 2009; Maxwell & Miller, 1998). In each of the steps listed below I note where I included analytical memo-writing specific to the data analysis step.

**Step One: Analytic Notes—Writing Reflectively after Interviews**

The first step of my data analysis began with writing analytic memos after each interview (Drago-Severson, 2009). After finishing each interview, I took notes on possible themes and connections to the research questions. Writing reflectively after each interview allowed me to help identify and record issues pertaining to research bias and reactivity while also allowing me to record my initial impressions as ideas emerged and evolved regarding possible themes and relationships to answering my research questions (Maxwell, 2005).

**Step Two: Transcribing Interviews and Reviewing Transcripts**

In this second step of data analysis, each digitally recorded interview was transcribed verbatim by a reputable transcriber (whom I hired) to create a transcript of each interview to help insure descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2005). As suggested in Maxwell (2005) and Maxwell and Miller (1998), I read all interview transcripts and listened to the interview recordings to ensure descriptive validity. My transcribers were unfamiliar with specific school contexts and were not always familiar with specific terms and at times misunderstand participants’ words. Listening to the recordings while reviewing the transcripts allowed me to deal with these kinds of descriptive validity issues. I also shared each interview transcript with participants to member-check for
accuracy via email and in the first 10 minutes of the second and third interviews to check for descriptive validity. I also wrote analytical memos during this step to help me reflect on the transcription recording and reviewing process to help me insure that I attended to descriptive validity threats (Maxwell, 2005).

**Step Three: Reducing Data by Crafting Profiles**

I used a variety of data reduction techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994) such as segmenting the data in each transcript according to what was of interest to the study by identifying key relationships that a) connect data in a narrative flow and b) eliminate data that is unhelpful to answering the research questions (Maxwell & Miller, 1998). As noted earlier, part of my data reduction process included eliminating one of my original research questions to make data analysis more manageable. After collecting and beginning to reduce the data for analysis, I realized that I needed to further refine my questions to narrow the focus of my dissertation to complete my data analysis. Thus, I eliminated my original third research question. As I reviewed transcripts I also took notes, wrote memos about initial answers to my research questions (as noted above), and revised the preliminary coding scheme I developed prior to the start of interviewing (see Appendix F: Preliminary Coding Scheme and Appendix G: Coding List).

After conducting these first data reduction techniques, I realized I needed to reduce the data further and decided to craft profiles (Seidman, 2006) for each participant before beginning coding and categorization. I generated analytic questions (e.g., How do participants describe the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?) based on initial coding and interview questions (Seidman, 2006). I then read transcripts to answer the analytic questions (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009). Next I marked passages that
were of interest—given my research questions, including conflict, hopes, beginnings/middles/ends of processes, frustrations, resolutions, collegiality, community class, ethnicity, gender, hierarchy, and power (Seidman, 2006). I then bracketed and removed researcher words in the transcripts and then further reduced the data by removing text that did not address my analytic questions (Seidman, 2006). Finally, I reorganized the text to place examples of particular situation together and checked for confidentiality concerns (Seidman, 2008). This data reduction strategy was used before uploading the data to a computer-based data analysis program, HYPER Research. During this process I continued to write analytical memo-writing to help insure that I was attending to issues of interpretive validity (Maxwell, 2005).

**Step Four: Coding**

The coding process I used also included both open coding (emic) and theoretical coding (etic) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009).

Preliminary coding involved a several step process: 1) reading a section of the transcript and recording mega-themes afterward; 2) re-reading the section and underlining one-, two-, and three-word phrases that stand out for me as regards one research question (invivio coding); 3) re-reading the section a third time and recording themes in the margins (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process then allowed me to revisit my preliminary coding scheme (Appendix F), make needed adjustments, and then use the revised coding scheme (Appendix G) to code each transcript using the computer-assisted program HYPER-Research. While coding transcripts, I also cross-checked all of my codes across interviews and with other researchers bimonthly (Maxwell, 2005; Drago-
Severson, 2004, 2009) and wrote analytical memos weekly (Maxwell, 2005) to help identify and address issues of interpretative validity.

**Step Five: Categorizing by Coding**

In this fourth step of my analytic process, I coded (emic and etic coding) interview transcripts (see Appendix G: Coding List) from the first set of interviews in one batch in order to group data according to similarities and differences to find patterns in the data (Maxwell & Miller, 1998) relating to my first research question relating to adaptive challenges involving English learners. To do this, I reduced and segmented data (Maxwell & Miller, 1998) according to this first research question. I looked at data from one interview at a time, and then created matrices and visual displays to help me begin to make within case, cross-case and cross-site comparisons (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I repeated these steps with interview two and interview three. During this time, I continued revising the analytic framework and writing profiles and memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

**Step Six: Within-Case and Across-Case Analysis and Data Matrices**

My final analytic step involved creating within-case and across-case analysis once all interviews and my analytical framework have been developed and once the profiles were complete. I created displays for cross-case analysis and cross-site analysis to help me understand my findings and answer my research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to present in my findings chapters. I organized findings into three chapters, each focused on a separate research question. Each findings chapter (please name chapters here) described findings across the sample (both sites), and then were relevant compared findings at each of the two sites.
During the process, I continued to refine my analytical framework to ensure that I was analyzing data to address my research questions. As findings were generated for each research question (and thus for each chapter), I looked for patterns of similarities and differences according to demographics and according to potential emerging relationships among the data gathered to address each research question. This final step in my data analysis process yielded a comparison of data across research, concepts, themes, and sites using visual displays, data matrices, and word tables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2004c, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also wrote summary analytic memos answering the research questions for the study (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009; Maxwell & Miller, 1998) during this final data analysis step.

Validity

The field of qualitative research presents the researcher with multiple ways to attend to validity threats. Acknowledging the researcher assumptions, study limitations, and conceptual framework in preceding chapters was an important part of the approach advocated by Maxwell (2005) to address validity threats in qualitative research. “Any view is a view from some perspective, and therefore is shaped by the location (social and theoretical) and ‘lens’ of the observer” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 39). I did my best to present my assumptions, prior experience, and literature reviewed in attending to validity threats. Below I more systematically discuss critical issues concerning the validity threats. First I discuss validity threats with respect to study design, namely: researcher bias and reactivity. Next I discuss important validity threats with respect to interpretation: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity (Maxwell, 2005).
Researcher Bias

Researcher bias is one of the two critical validity threats relating to study design. First, I address researcher bias, meaning *how might my expectations, values, and experiences influence how I conduct the study and draw conclusions* (Maxwell, 2005). I addressed this validity threat by writing analytical memos (Maxwell, 2005) about my identity, experiences at each site, and reactions to participants, and by working with my dissertation partner (weekly), other graduate students (monthly), a writing coach (weekly), and my advisors (monthly) to review my methodological assumptions and selection of data that “stand out” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). While I can not claim to be wholly objective or indifferent as a researcher, I did do my best to address my own subjectivity and be mindful of my own assumptions in my writing and design by making my assumptions clear, so that others may judge to what extent researcher bias seems to affect data collection and analysis (Maxwell, 2005). Further, given that Drago-Severson was my advisor for this project which investigated educators’ experiences within her learning-oriented leadership model, I used my weekly meetings with my dissertation partner and writing coach during data analysis to help me examine issues of researcher bias that might stem from that relationship. Additionally, I worked with a doctoral seminar group led by my second reader, Maria Torres-Guzman, over the course of two semesters to help me surface my assumptions and biases that stemmed from my orientation to the field of educational leadership and my proximity to Drago-Severson’s work.

I also heeded Becker’s (1970) warning of researcher bias in terms of “the hierarchy of credibility” (Becker, 1970, p. 126) that comes with being at an upper
position in an organization with more information and an elevated vantage point, or the bias that comes from sympathy for the subordinates held in that organization whose voices are not valued in the same way as superiors. As a researcher, one must "satisfy the demands of our science by always making clear the limits of what we have studied, marking the boundaries beyond which our findings cannot be applied" (Becker, 1970, p. 133). Becker instructs the researcher to simply say: I studied this from that point of view. I have taken a side, and these are the "theoretical and technical resources [used] to avoid the distortions" (Becker, 1970, p. 134) that are inevitable. I hope to uphold Becker’s standard of understanding how the “hierarchy of credibility” influences the researcher’s reflexivity while collecting and analyzing data. I did this through writing analytic memos and in reflective weekly discussions with my dissertation partner.

**Reactivity**

Researcher reactivity—all visible and invisible characters I bring to the study and how they may influence the setting or participants—was a second validity threat I considered while designing my study (Maxwell, 2005). I addressed this again by writing analytic memos and through discussions with other researchers to help me make sense of what participants were choosing to share—and not share—with me during interviews. In my protocols, I also acknowledged my present and past experiences teaching English learners in public school settings and leading professional learning sessions with educators teaching English learners as at the start of interviews and gave participants a chance to raise questions or concerns regarding my past experiences or present role as researcher. I provided participants with clear descriptions of the study’s purpose and intended use of research data (IRB protocols), and I outlined confidentiality procedures
for data collected in interviews and reported in the dissertation. I also reminded participants that I was there seeking to learn from them as experts on their own experiences.

It is also important to note that because I was asking participants to describe their experiences in relation to their cultural and linguistic background, my own linguistic status of having English as a first language likely affected how participants chose to share information with me. Being a college-educated White woman speaking English as a native speaker brings up issues of power and linguistic privilege, which could have influenced how participants reacted to me. As I described above, I tried to address this by assuring participants that I was seeking to learn from them and viewed them as experts on their own experiences.

**Descriptive Validity**

I addressed descriptive validity threats—the accuracy of what I saw and heard—through the use of digital voice recorders and having interviews transcribed verbatim for accuracy (Maxwell, 2005). I listened to all interview recordings and checked the prepared transcript for accuracy after a professional transcriptionist completed transcribing each transcript.

**Interpretive Validity**

To address interpretative validity threats, throughout the study I asked myself: *how might I be wrong?* (Maxwell, 2005). During the data analysis phases, I cross-checked codes with other researchers and conducted member-checks to get feedback on my interpretation of participants’ words and cross-checked codes with other researchers to address the question of: *How might I be wrong with respect to interpreting the data?*
(Maxwell, 2005). I met weekly with my dissertation partner to engage in this work. We shared data by reviewing transcripts, checking codes, and considering alternative perspectives and interpretations of data.

**Theoretical Validity**

In terms of theoretical validity, I looked for discrepant data, potential outliers, and contrary findings or alternative explanations throughout the data analysis process (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, one participant’s reported experiences engaging in the pillars that contrasted with what the overwhelming majority of participants reported of their experiences engaging the pillars. I engaged in discussions with my advisor, dissertation partner, and writing coach to better understand why this participant’s experiences seemed to provide discrepant data. I probed to understand her experiences and asked her about this topic on multiple occasions. I made sense of her experiences as demonstrating that the pillars are not uniformly implemented or experienced but rather must be understood to be affected by unique social contexts. Additionally, collecting data with Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series methodology allowed me have an “intensive, long-term involvement” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 110) and to collect “rich” data that allowed me to see a larger picture of what was happening both in terms of individual participants and in terms of the context of the site itself (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, I was able to generalize within the settings and group of participants I studied. Maxwell (2005) refers to this as *internal generalizability*. While I did not develop findings that adhere to *external generalizability* (outside of the sites I studied), I do hope that other researchers might start similar projects and use the findings from my
study to inspire and shape their own studies of other settings, using a variety of methodological approaches.

**Chapter Summary**

In this multi-site qualitative cast study, I sought to examine how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model; and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. In this chapter, I discussed the rationale for my study site and participant selection. I also explained my data collection methods and the iterative process of my data analysis. I concluded describing how I attended to validity threats. In Chapter IV, I present contextual background on the two sites in this study to set the stage for my findings chapters (Chapters V, VI, VII).
Chapter IV

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF TWO SCHOOL SITES

In this qualitative interview study, I sought to understand how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s research inquiry into how leaders provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges in their work in schools by focusing on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explores the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with their most difficult challenges teaching English learners.

In this chapter, I describe the context of the two school sites where I conducted my research: Woodland Heights Elementary and Springford Academy (pseudonyms). I
selected these sites for my study because their school leaders’ implement the theory I was interested in studying: Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model, specifically the pillar practices (hereafter I will simply to the pillar practices as the “pillars”) that compose this research-based model.

Woodland Heights Elementary and Springford Academy were two of best examples of this learning-oriented leadership theory in action because: a) their school leaders understand and apply constructive-developmental theory and pillars that compose Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model in their leadership practice with adults in their schools; b) Drago-Severson has consulted and worked with leaders and their teachers at both sites in ongoing ways over one year (Woodland Heights) and over four years (Springford Academy). During these times she has collaborated with principals and teachers to support adult learning and development; and c) both sites have significant, ongoing district support for robust professional development.

I have organized this chapter into three sections. In the first section, I describe Woodland Heights by discussing the general school context and student demographics, followed by the school leadership context for professional learning as it related to implementing the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) and pillars. I then describe the aspects of the Glenville Public Schools district context that supported the principal’s implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model. Finally, I conclude my discussion of Woodland Heights by describing the English learner population and programs. In the second section, I describe Springford Academy by discussing the general school context and student demographics, followed by the school leadership context for professional learning as it related to implementing the
learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) and pillars. I then describe the aspects of the Springford Academy Charter district context that supported the head of school’s implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model. I conclude my discussion of Springford Academy by describing the English learner population and programs. In my final section, I summarize the chapter.

**Woodland Heights Elementary School**

In this section I describe the professional learning context for seven participants in my study who worked with English learners as specialists or classroom educators at Woodland Heights Elementary. I begin with general school and student information to highlight that Woodland Heights Elementary is situated in a well-resourced, suburban school district that serves a growing ethnically, racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse population of families. I also highlight that the district of Glenville Public Schools, Woodland Heights’s home district, has a large veteran faculty of educators district-wide. I then discuss the Woodland Heights leadership and district context for professional learning by highlighting principal Kate Villa’s role in transforming the school’s faculty and student outcomes through a focus on educator development, learning, and leadership. I note, too, the supportive context at the district level for professional learning and adult development. Finally, I describe the population of English learners in the district that attend Woodland Heights. I also discuss the monolingual Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program that provided English as a Second Language (ESL) and general education learning opportunities for English learners. As I noted in Chapter I, SEI is an instructional approach used to make academic
instruction in English comprehensible to ELL students through “sheltered” instruction in mainstream, or general education, classrooms.

**General School and Student Information**

Woodland Heights Elementary is one of six public elementary schools that serve the town of Glenville, a suburban town located in a major metropolitan area on the East Coast. Glenville Public School District was recently named the number one school district in the state. The most renowned newspaper in the state published a report in 2013 naming the district as the best school district among a highly competitive pool of school districts in the state. The Glenville Public School District serves approximately 6,500 students. The district runs six elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school. Woodland Heights serves approximately 500 elementary schools students, grades K-5, and employs approximately 80 educators. The school is located in a quiet residential neighborhood, surrounded on two sides by wooded land and school fields. Woodland Heights is also in close proximity to a major hospital, highway, and other town parks and schools.

During the 2011-2012 school year, I visited Woodland Heights several times to recruit participants. I presented an invitation to be involved in my study to staff at a full faculty meeting, met informally with the principal, Kate, to better understand the context for the pillars. Of the seven participants from Woodland Heights, six participants scheduled interviews before, during, and after the school day, and we spoke either in their classrooms or offices. I visited the school 17 times to conduct those interviews, spending some time waiting for interviews to start in the main office, the hallway near the main office, in classrooms, or in the hallways outside of classrooms. In addition, I had several
informal conversations with the principal on the way to interviews or afterward. I usually took brief notes of my experiences being in the building and also wrote memos after each interview, usually referencing what it felt like to be in the building. I did not use these notes and memos as data but rather to help me better understand the school community where the participants in my study worked.

From my experiences at Woodland Heights, I characterize the educators in the building as hard working, caring, professional, and committed to the school’s mission of “helping every child cross the finish line.” The majority of the participants in my study, like the staff at Woodland Heights, had taught for over 10 years. Every participant talked about the value of this demographic characteristic, saying that their colleagues were serious and committed to being long-term members of a positive, professional culture in the school and district. In my interviews with participants, I heard the pride and determination in the voices of educators as they discussed their individual and the staff’s collective commitment to successfully teaching the whole child and supporting academic success for every learner. Rebecca, a veteran educator and specialist at the school, said:

I’ve seen a lot of evolution in the 17 years I’ve been here. It’s always been a building that cares deeply, about staff caring about each other, staff caring about children, staff caring about the families…. People work really hard. They care deeply about the work they do with the kids, with the families, with their own professional growth, and people want to collaborate and learn and really figure out how do we get every child across the finish line in a multitude of ways. It’s a remarkable experience because people give lots of hours, lots of time, lots of thoughtfulness about how they’re going to make a difference in kids’ lives. It’s the reason I’m still here and again, it has evolved over the years.

Rebecca’s sentiments about the caring and commitment of the educators at Woodland Heights were characteristic of all seven participants from this site. They expressed their individual and collective pride in the professional cultural of the school.
Demographically, most educators at Woodland Heights Elementary are monolingual White women; a smaller group of staff members are men, non-White, and/or starting at the school with 3-5 years of teaching experience.

Participants also expressed pride in the diversity of the school community. Woodland Heights is a racially diverse community in terms of its students and families, and students and families represent approximately 30 language groups. During the 2011-2012 school year, the racial composition of the student body at Woodland Heights was 54% White, 32.7% Asian, 5.5% African-American or Black, 4.1% Latino, and 3.5% Multiracial or Other. Most participants referenced the busing program that brings students low-income and racially diverse students from urban neighborhoods into Glenville Public Schools. Woodland Heights serves a neighborhood in the district that includes public housing, and most participants discussed this neighborhood as bringing in more diverse families to Woodland Heights. Woodland Heights also receives some Title 1 funding for a small low-income student population. The participants in the study all spoke about their pride in being part of a school community that was not monolingual and monocultural and that provided an educational setting where children are successful academically. As in other elementary schools in the district, Woodland Heights students score well above the state averages on Mathematics and ELA achievement tests.

The population of English learners is well above the state average. At Woodland Heights Elementary nearly one quarter of the students (22.8%) have a home language other than English. This is above the state average of 16.7%. The state uses two methods for measuring the number of English learners: 1) a home language other than English and 2) ELL status (a student whose first language is not English and who is unable to perform
ordinary classroom work in English. The number of students labeled as ELL at Woodland Heights was 11.7%; the state average for this category was 7.3%.

In the time I spent in the building, Woodland Heights felt like an open, caring, well-organized, and safe place. Adults greeted children and adults alike with warmth and first names. Children passing in the hallways were accompanied adults, passing orderly or, as I noticed on several occasions, were engaged in data collection as part of math and science lessons. The walls and hallways were alive with student work. In nearly every room and hallway, natural light bathed the walls and floors. Grade-level classrooms were clustered together in the clean and tidy one-story Woodland Heights Elementary School building.

**Woodland Heights’ School Leadership Context for Professional Learning**

At the time of my study, Kate Villa was completing her fifth year as principal of Woodland Heights Elementary. According to Kate, prior to her tenure as principal, Woodland Heights had a negative reputation in the district as underperforming and educators were described as collegial. For example, Kate shared that when she arrived, in the context of professional learning communities, educators tended to engage professionally in conversations about discipline rather than practice. In the literature on professional learning communities, these conversations about student discipline may have been congenial or collegial, but in order to sustain adult and student learning the adult teams needed to also have conviction and competence to develop expertise, make collective commitments, take ownership over results, and engage in productive problem-solving (Platt, Tripp, Fraser, Warnock, & Curtis, 2008). After three to four years with Kate serving as principal, Kate shared that the description of educators in her school
changed to “intellectually engaged” and “eager to learn and take on roles” in addition to classroom teaching. These types of descriptors are more in line with professional learning communities that are collaborative and accountable having grown in terms of conviction and competence (Platt et al., 2008). In 2012, state achievement data showed that 89% of all fifth graders at Woodland Heights scored Proficient or Advanced in both Mathematics and ELA, far above the state averages. The state averages of students scoring a Level 3 (Proficient) or Level 4 (Advanced) in 2012 in 5th grade ELA was 61% and in 5th grade Mathematics was 57%.

Each participant in my study credited Kate’s leadership in these changes to the overall staff and student achievement. Participants described how Kate led the school to develop a strong focus on looking at data in the school to really understand where children were presently at and to inform future planning. Several participants cited Kate’s leadership and expertise with English learners and implementing Response to Intervention (RTI), a nationally recognized process for schools to support students struggling academically or behaviorally, as critical for all staff to focus on data to improve teaching for every child. One participant said of the positive, radical change inspired by Kate’s leadership:

The shift has been at grade level, that educators feel like we are responsible for all children at that grade level. So it’s no longer my students and your students. It’s ‘our’ students. Having been in this town and profession for 25 years, to me [it’s] a sea change.

This participant’s experience illustrates the powerful shift in culture among the adults in the building, mirroring Kate’s commentary about shifting the culture from collegial to more collaborative and accountable. Further, participants described their colleagues as educators who held themselves to high standards. They said that they worked in a
professional community of adults who worked hard, who were loving and caring, who collaborated well, and who, above all, worked and learned to “help every child cross the finish line.” The participants and Kate spoke of the high expectations to which Kate held educators to and the professional learning spaces, such as the RTI Team, she worked to create at Woodland Heights for all educators to learn and grow.

The imprint of Kate’s leadership came through in every interview I conducted with educators. Her mantra of *we are going to get every kid across the finish line, and it takes all of us* was threaded through every interaction I had with the educators in the study. Participants spoke poignantly about Kate’s leadership and the central role she played in supporting the entire staff at Woodland Heights to overcome a negative reputation in the district by working collaboratively to get all students across the finish line. A critical feature of Kate’s transformational leadership at Woodland Heights was her commitment to including developmentally oriented supports to educator professional learning, such as creating spaces for adults to take perspective, engage in reflective practice, and question underlying assumptions. Rebecca shared an example of how she experienced Kate’s leadership as transformational in terms of how she and others questioned and deepened their practice as educators:

> When Kate came, staff meetings became like professional development which was amazing because she would do this PowerPoint with pictures of her underwater diving and connect it to themes about mindsets and all sorts of professional development that would help us think deeper about our practice with students and within our PLCs and within the building. That framework of how she set up meetings, so that people were really delving deeper in the questions.

Rebecca’s example highlights the developmental intention that is central to Kate’s leadership in the building.
Another example participants shared of Kate’s leadership including developmentally oriented support came from a teacher who had been in the school for the first few years of his teaching career, Kalvin, who shared, “she also said that to the building as a whole, ‘You need to decide, kind of your words, you can decide what kind of relationship we can have together. And it will look different for each person.’” That type of building-level leadership through differentiating mentoring relations was one example of how participants spoke of how Kate was critical to their own personal growth and learning as educators. Rebecca also spoke about Kate’s leadership in the context of mentoring and modeling during team meetings, citing Kate for helping her and other educators understand more about how second language acquisition takes time and requires educators to not make assumptions about student disabilities because of lower English proficiency levels.

In terms of using the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), Kate began an ongoing discussion with Drago-Severson about how to include ways of knowing, how an adult makes meaning, and the pillars in her school transformation work as she entered the district in 2008 (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). Drago-Severson worked directly with educators at Kate’s school in lunchtime book talks, during PLC time, in teams, and in district-wide professional learning sessions from 2008 through 2012 (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). Kate very intentionally included the learning-oriented leadership model in her personal leadership approach to transforming Woodland Heights Elementary to help the adults in the building see the importance of
their own professional learning and growth as a catalyst for personal, professional, and organizational change on the behalf of students and families.

**Glenville Public School District’s Support for Professional Learning**

The district context of Glenville Public Schools supported Kate’s implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) in several important ways. Glenville Public Schools is a well-resourced district where the superintendent and assistant superintendents support and prioritize staff learning and development. District-level leaders articulate a vision for professional learning that is consistent with and supportive of adult development. One of the district’s core commitments in defining its mission is creating a “culture of reflection, conversation and commitment to continuous improvement,” very much in line with the pillars emphasis on reflective practice, collaboration, and collegial inquiry. One participant, Robert, said: “In our district, we have what I would consider to be the broadest, deepest, richest professional learning that I know of anywhere.” Like Robert, all seven participants from Woodland Heights emphasized how much they valued the district- and school-based professional learning. Participants marveled at the number and quality of professional learning opportunities they had within Glenville Public Schools. For example, the district publishes a professional learning course catalog three times annually, funds teacher-initiated projects for curriculum development, and employs both internal and external experts to lead job-embedded professional learning at the school and district levels. Glenville dedicates significant financial and intellectual resources that support implementing the learning-oriented leadership model that may not be present in other school districts.
English Learner Population and Programs

The English learner population within Glenville Public Schools was just under 6% of the total enrollment. Over 45 languages are represented in the district’s public schools. Demographically, large shifts have been underway in Glenville in the past decade. U.S. Census data revealed a 10% increase in Asian residents from 2000 to 2010 and a 10% decrease in White residents over the same time period. With the Chinese population nearly doubling and the Korean and Indian populations more than doubling, enrollment patterns also shifted in the schools. The district’s English language learner program grew 78% in the past five years. While academic proficiency in English generally takes five to seven years, Glenville Public School students, on average, are declassified as English language learners within three years when they demonstrate English proficiency as measured by state tests. District-wide, English learners either match or surpass their native English-speaking peers.

Woodland Heights Elementary School served 60 of the district’s 350 English learners (17% of the district’s total English learner population). Woodland Heights has had a longstanding history of serving the neediest of the district’s students as measured by proficiency in English and socioeconomic status due to the school’s proximity to low-income public housing. As in other district schools, Woodland Heights provides a monolingual Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program for its English learners. English learners learn in both general education classrooms and work with one of two ESL specialists at the school 4-5 days per week. Additionally, at Woodland Heights, the staff implement Response to Intervention (RTI) to help specialists and general education educators collaboratively develop individualized and system-wide responses to individual
student needs. Three of the seven participants from Woodland Heights in my study referenced the RTI collaborative inquiry team work as crucial to their personal approach and the school’s collective approach to supporting English learners, as well as other learners.

General education educators in my study reported having three to five English learners in their classrooms during the 2011-2012 school year. They also noted that another three to five students may not have been receiving ESL services or been subject to state English proficiency tests, but the primary languages spoken at home were not English. In our discussions, the participants often also included these students in their consideration of issues related to English learners. Participants also shared that while Indian families were a significant ethnic group within the school and the English learner population, the SEI program in the school served a multilingual population of students including multiple Asian languages, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. One participant noted that over 27 languages were represented at Woodland Heights, and all participants mentioned that the majority of families of English learners at the school were bilingual or multilingual.

In summary, in this section, I provided a description of the context in which seven participants in my study engaged in the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) by painting a portrait of the school and its students, the professional learning context constructed by the school principal and the school district, and the English learner population and SEI program. In the next section, I describe the context for my second school site, Springford Academy.
Springford Academy

In this section I describe the professional learning context for the four participants in my study who worked with English learners as specialists or classroom educators at Springford Academy. First I provide general school and student information to highlight that Springford Academy a) was situated in an urban charter school district spanning several adjacent cities, b) received national recognition for its successful outcomes with a diverse and low-income student population, and c) employed a cadre of passionate and dedicated young educators. I then discuss the school leadership and district context for professional learning at Springford Academy. In doing so, I highlight the head of school, Sol Harbour’s, role in transforming the school through a focus on educator leadership, collaborative inquiry, and high standards in service of student learning. Finally, I describe the large population of English learners at Springford Academy, the district’s active recruitment of English learners, the expansion of programming for English learners, and the monolingual Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program that provided English as a Second Language (ESL) and general education learning opportunities for English learners.

General School and Student Information

Springford Academy is a small charter school serving over 1,100 students, K-12, in an East Coast urban setting. Spread across multiple campuses and located within a several-mile radius, Springford Academy, a free and public institution, serves families in multiple cities. Railroad tracks and busy urban streets surround the Early Childhood campus (K-3). The Upper Elementary campus (4-6) is nestled in a small urban residential neighborhood adjacent to a major highway. I do not include detailed information about
the Upper School campuses in this discussion as my study focused on elementary school educators’ experiences. The Early Childhood campus serves approximately 350 students and employs 45 educators while the upper elementary campus serves approximately 300 students and employs 40 educators.

In the spring of 2012, I visited Springford Academy once to recruit participants. I participated in an all-day district-wide Collegial Inquiry Showcase and Fair. In that day, I spoke with several school and district leaders as well as many educators. Two of the four volunteer participants, one at each campus, chose to conduct our interviews in their offices, so I visited both campuses after school three times while conducting those interviews. Additionally, within my professional and personal networks, I am in contact with individuals who work or have worked at Springford Academy, and prior to conducting the study, I had visited Upper School campus several times. I did not meet with Sol Harbour or any of the campus principals beyond email communication and the one-day visit while I collecting data. Because of their time constraints, I did not ask any administrators to meet with me informally, as I did with Kate Villa at Woodland Heights. After the study concluded, I did speak more with Sol on the phone, which helped me to better understand the site context at Springford Academy.

In my interactions with educators at Springford Academy, I found a vibrant, hard-working, dedicated, and collaborative group of educators across all the campuses within the district. All educators are asked to take on leadership roles, even in their first years at Springford Academy, by mentoring other educators, facilitating grade-level and subject-level teams, and leading collaborative inquiry work and presenting learnings back to their peers. In general Springford Academy participants exuded an outpouring of passion and
energy for improving their instructional practice and supporting the growth of their colleagues. Educators I met at the Collaborative Inquiry Fair in addition to participants described themselves with a social justice orientation to creating classrooms where children representing racial minorities and children coming from families living in poverty could achieve.

The majority of educators at Springford Academy are young and highly educated with approximately 5% entering teaching through Teach for America. While a small group of educators on the staff had over 10 years of teaching experience, most staff began their work at Springford Academy at the beginning of their teaching careers and remained teaching there for 2-4 years. From surveying the assembled educators at the district-wide professional learning day, I noted that most educators at Springford Academy were White women in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, with a smaller group of educators being male, over 35, and/or non-White.

Teachers and other staff members tend to turnover regularly (approximately 20% turnover rate during 2011-2012 school year), citing personal reasons, seeking opportunities outside of Springford Academy, relocating, not being invited back, resigning, or seeking administrative leadership positions within the district. Most charter schools and urban districts struggle with high turnover rates, as compared to suburban schools (Stuit & Smith, 2012). In talking with participants, the topic of teacher turnover came up repeatedly. My impression was that the professional context for educators at Springford Academy seemed to be one that demanded educators to work hard and to work long hours on behalf of students. Several spoke about teacher burnout from the fast, demanding pace of the work at Springford Academy, and they lamented the reality of
many new teachers only staying for a few years at Springford Academy. One participant presented a different view of teacher turnover, citing the professional learning context to be so robust that she and others wanted to explore more leadership roles outside of the classroom. She expressed wishing that Springford Academy would expand, so that there would be more formal leadership roles available so that she could remain in the district while moving out of a classroom role.

Springford Academy was recognized as a high-performing charter school district in the area, with the Upper School (grades 7-12) recently earning a gold medal from *U.S. News and World Report*. It ranked in the top 500 high schools in the nation and in the top 7% of high schools in the state. In terms of state achievement tests, Springford Academy 5th grade students did score lower than state average; participants working with Kindergarten students explained that the majority of students enter in Kindergarten below grade level in academic subjects. The state averages of students scoring a Level 3 (Proficient) or Level 4 (Advanced) in 2012 in 5th grade ELA was 61% and in 5th grade Mathematics was 57% as compared to Springford Academy scores of 53% scoring 3 or 4 in ELA and 44% scoring a 3 or 4 in Mathematics. It is important to note that as a K-12 school, Springford students outperform the state average in achievement tests by grade 10.

The majority of the families at Springford are labeled as low-income, and almost half of the students do not speak English as their first language, well above the state averages in both of these areas. For the 2011-2012 school year, 59.8% of students were classified as low-income, compared to the state average of 35.2%. Students whose first language is not English was 47.1%, compared to the state average of 16.7%. English
learners have a second classification, ELL status, and for 2011-2012, this was 8.0%, compared to the state average of 7.3%. Springford Academy explicitly frames its mission as addressing the achievement and opportunity gap for these families by offering academic opportunities for students to succeed in college, to become responsible citizens, and to pursue lifelong learning. Many young, talented adults seeking to make a difference in diverse urban school environments seek out Springford Academy as a place for their growth and development as educators and educational leaders in the first years of their educational careers.

The student population at Springford academy is racially diverse with a large group of families originating in the Caribbean. In the 2011-2012 school year, across the entire district (grade K-12), the student population was 54.7% African-American or Black, 5.6% Asian, 21.3% Latino, 3.8% Multiracial or other, and 14.5% White. The educators in my study all discussed the personal importance of working in a school where they could serve a diverse population of students and families.

When I selected Springford Academy as a site for this study, I knew it to be a place intensely focused on personal and collective achievement. I have friends and colleagues who work or have worked at Springford Academy, and they describe the very high standards they hold themselves to in their work, working seven days a week and throughout the summer to deliver high quality teaching for their students. In the time I spent on site during the full day of professional learning in 2012, I sat in the audience in the morning session as leaders and educators alike shared in celebrating the achievements of their colleagues. A number of teachers received awards for the commitment and passion they displayed throughout their tenure at Springford Academy to serve students
and families as part of an annual tradition to recognize the dedication that is typical of Springford Academy educators. Throughout the day I observed educators’ passion for and dedication to improving their personal and school-wide performance to further the learning opportunities and academic achievement of the students at Springford Academy. Teams of teachers prepared intensive professional learning seminars to their colleagues in the morning. The spirit of collaboration and inquiry pervaded from morning through to the end of the afternoon. In my past experiences at Springford Academy sitting in on senior capstone presentations and observing classrooms, when students are present, a similar spirit of collegiality and positive achievement-oriented culture emanates from children and adults alike.

**Springford Academy’s School Leadership Context for Professional Learning**

At Springford Academy, Sol Harbour has been leading the multi-campus charter school since 2007. He also served in another administrative role at the Springford Academy for five years prior to taking the position of head of school. As head of school, Sol led the entire district. There were building-level principals at each of the campuses. For the purpose of my study, I discuss Sol’s involvement in the school leadership at the Early Childhood and Upper Elementary campuses because he is the school leader who has implemented Drago-Severson’s model of learning-oriented leadership. Three of the four participants described Sol’s leadership as transformational—inspiring large-scale positive change in individuals and in the organization—and positive for the entire school community because of his passion, his ability to set high standards, his inclusive vision for welcoming diverse families, and his attention to differentiating instruction to support English learners and students with disabilities. One veteran educator in my study, Nadine,
shared her perspective of Sol’s leadership and the motivation of the larger leadership team:

The driving force, I think always, always from an administrator’s standpoint with this current administration and a hundred percent of the people who are in an administrative positions right now, I would say is what is best for kids. And the mission of the school is clearly what guides and drives the decisions that are made. Success in college, responsible citizenship, lifelong love of learning. Those things. We all know it. We all strive for it.

It was clear from Nadine’s point of view that Sol’s leadership—“the current administration”—is the aligning, driving force behind the social justice mission of the organization.

Sol began his work with the learning-oriented leadership model and Drago-Severson’s approach to focusing on adult development in school leadership work in 2003 as a graduate student in an intensive course focusing on transformational leadership in schools (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). When Sol became head of school for the entire district in 2007, he invited Drago-Severson to give all-day, Saturday workshops to Springford Academy staff members (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). During the 2010-2011 school year, Drago-Severson designed a Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) for Springford Academy where educators from Springford and other schools in the area with official leadership roles applied to attend four one-and-a-half-day weekend sessions throughout the year focused on adult development, ways of knowing, and the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). The imprint of this work with Drago-Severson was clear in the central role of the pillar practice of collegial inquiry at Springford Academy. When I visited the district during their Collegial Inquiry Showcase and Fair in 2012, I was moved by the teaching team’s
professionalism and passion that came through in presenting their regular collegial inquiry work to improve teaching and learning in the service of student learning. Teachers, in addition to their normal teaching responsibilities, designed, planned, and delivered exceptionally high-quality professional learning sessions for their colleagues. Their openness to sharing their work with their colleagues, and the professionalism in the handouts, presentation, and learning activities highlighted the intellect, hard work, knowledge base, and exceptional pedagogy of Springford Academy educators.

The Collegial Inquiry Showcase and Fair is one example of how Sol integrates core aspects of Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model in his leadership at Springford Academy. In this example, he blended the pillars of collegial inquiry, teaming, and providing leadership roles by asking teams of teachers to lead professional learning sessions in the morning for the entire district and present to colleagues in the afternoon fair as a culminating event for their collegial inquiry team work conducted throughout the school year. In using the pillars in this way, Sol and his leadership team created spaces for educators at Springford Academy to take perspective on their work by presenting their collegial inquiry projects and by talking with other teams about their collegial inquiry work. Educators at the fair, and participants in my study, shared how valuable it was to see both the similarities and differences in the work different subject and grade-level teams were doing. The Show and Fair also had a built in reflective component built in, offering spaces for educators to reflect privately in writing, in teams, and as an entire district. These opportunities for taking perspective and engaging personally and with other adults in reflective practice are at the heart of Drago-Severson’s learning oriented leadership model and what the pillars are intended to foster.
The Teacher Leadership Academy is another example of integrating the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). Sol invited Drago-Severson to design an intensive professional learning series for Springford Academy teacher leaders as well as teacher leaders from nearby districts. In the first year of TLA, teacher leaders learned about adult development while experiencing the support of the pillars while simultaneously learning about supports of the pillars. For example, teacher leaders had the opportunities to assume leadership roles by facilitating group work; they engaged in reflective practice through journal writing and dialogue. The three participants in my study who participated in TLA spoke reverently about their deep learning and the ways that it helped them to grow and question their own leadership interests and capacities. Sara shared: “Leadership Academy is definitely a good space for that deeper thinking and learning. That’s a space where I’ve be able to be reflective about my practice and my goals over the past two years.” I talk more about teachers’ experiences in TLA in Chapters VI and VII, and it is a helpful example of how Sol leads Springford Academy with a developmental orientation to his leadership and an intentional implementation of Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model.

**Springford Academy Charter District’s Support for Professional Learning**

As a small charter school district, Springford Academy affords educators a rich, deep professional learning context that differs in important ways from other urban public school districts. For example, participants described having no “red tape” or bureaucracy to contend with when they had ideas to share about to improve teaching in learning or when they needed instructional resources, which contrasted with the bureaucracy educators experienced in a nearby urban school district. Like Glenville Public Schools,
Springford Academy district leaders also define the district’s values to include central concepts to Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model, such as a commitment to inquiry and continuous improvement and a commitment to collaboration and broader perspective taking. As the district’s head of school, Sol sets the tone for all the campuses at Springford Academy, and he very clearly articulates that leading with developmental intention is a central part of his leadership. Like Glenville, Springford Academy is directs financial and intellectual resources to support the implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model’s pillars at each campus.

**English Learner Population and Programs**

The English learner population in Springford Academy was 8 percent, or 92 students, for the 2011-2012 school year. Data on English learners were only available in the aggregate for the entire district. My study focused on the experiences of educators of English learners in grades K-6, approximately half of the population of students at Springford Academy. This population was made up of students identified by state and federal government English proficiency assessments. As noted earlier, the number students at Springford Academy whose home languages were not English is much, much higher. State report card data for Springford Academy report this percentage as 47.1% for the 2011-2012 school year. The 2011-2012 Annual Report for the district reports a much higher number of 60%. Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese were the home languages most common in the district. Participants in the study noted that Haitian Creole was the largest language group at the two elementary school campuses.

Programmatically, Springford Academy provided English learners with a monolingual Sheltered English Immersion model. During the 2011-2012 school year,
there was a big push district-wide to better support English learners by investing in state-mandated trainings for SEI and general education educators at Springford Academy. Courses were offered over the summer and educators were given a small stipend for the week they spent in the trainings. Participants discussed the value of these trainings given the large and expanding enrollment of English learners and the understaffing of English learner specialists. They spoke of the urgency surrounding the district’s progress in hiring two additional ESL educators, bringing the number of ESL educators across the district from 1 to 3. Participants also shared that the SEI model was continually evolving in response to each entering Kindergarten class since each group of students entered with a different English proficiency profile. For example, during the 2011-2012 school year, more students in Kindergarten were English learners but they entered with higher English proficiency levels, whereas in the 2012-2013 school year, the Kindergarten class entered with slightly fewer English learners but this group had significantly lower English proficiency levels.

Because Springford Academy is a charter school district, the schools take a different approach to English learner enrollment than nearby traditional public school districts. Springford Academy actively recruits English learners by translating Open House flyers and providing translators during Open Houses in Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese. Additionally, English learner recruitment efforts involve activating parents to reach out to non-English speaking families and publishing advertisements in local Spanish media organizations. These recruitment efforts are part of a larger strategic plan to include families with students with special needs, families eligible for free and reduced lunch, immigrant families, and families with children in danger of dropping out
and/or not meeting state achievement benchmarks. Traditional public schools generally are subject to enrollment patterns based on families who choose to live in the schools’ immediate neighborhoods and/or district-level placement policies based on political factors. It is worth noting here that Springford Academy, in accordance with a state mandate for all charter schools, explicitly seeks to increase its English learner population and to better serve them as seen in recent financial decisions to triple the number of ESL educators in the district during the year I conducted this study.

In summary, in this section I provided a description of the context where four participants in my study engaged in the pillars of learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) by painting a portrait of Springford Academy and its students more generally, the professional learning context constructed by the head of school, and the English learner population and SEI program.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described the two school sites that I selected based on their school leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), including the pillars. In the first section, I described the context of Woodland Heights Elementary School by first highlighting general school and student information. Woodland Heights Elementary was situated in a well-resourced, suburban school district; served an increasingly ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomically diverse population of families; and employed a cadre of professional, seasoned educators. I then discussed the school leadership and district context for professional learning and principal Kate Villa’s central role in transforming the school’s faculty and student outcomes through a focus on educator development, learning, and
leadership. I concluded this first section on Woodland Heights by describing the population of English learners that attended Woodland Heights and the monolingual Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program that provided English as a Second Language (ESL) and general education learning opportunities for English learners.

In the second section of the chapter, I described the professional learning context for the four participants in my study at Springford Academy. I began by highlighting that Springford Academy was an urban charter school district that received national recognition for its successful outcomes with a diverse and low-income student population and its passionate and dedicated young faculty. I then discussed the professional learning context and head of school, Sol Harbour’s, role in transforming the school through a focus on educator leadership, collaborative inquiry, and high standards in service of student learning. I noted the district-wide support for professional learning. Finally, I described the large population of English learners at Springford Academy, the district’s active recruitment of English learners, the expansion of programming for English learners, and the monolingual SEI program for English learners. In Chapter V, I describe how participants described and understood the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work teaching English learners.
Chapter V

ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATORS TEACHING ENGLISH LEARNERS

In this qualitative interview study, I sought to understand how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillar practices as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s research inquiry into how principals and district leaders provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges they name as important in their work in schools by focusing on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explored the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with the adaptive challenges they experience in their work teaching English learners.

In Chapter IV, I presented contextual information about the two school sites, Woodland Heights Elementary School and Springford Academy Charter School, where the 11 participants in my research served as educators of English learners during the 2011-2012 academic year. In Chapter III, I provided background information about
educators participating in the study, and in Chapter IV, I focused on the contextual information regarding how school leaders at each site learned about and implemented the four pillar practices (hereafter I will simply to the pillar practices as the “pillars”) of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model, highlighting the district-level support and personal contact each site’s school leaders had with Drago-Severson. In Chapter IV, I also provided contextual information about each school: setting (suburban versus urban); student population characteristics, including general demographics with a specific focus on English learner demographics; and an orientation to English learner programming.

In the following three chapters, I present my findings from the study as guided by my research questions. In this chapter, I focus on participants’ reported experiences with the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work teaching English learners (hereafter I will refer to participants’ reported experiences as “experiences”). I include three types of adaptive challenges that the majority of participants discussed: a) cultural proficiency (11 of 11 participants), b) partnering with families (10/11), and c) programming for English learners (9/11). These core findings arose from my analysis and interpretation of the data from participants’ interviews. In Chapter VI, I will discuss core findings that arose from my analysis and interpretation of participants’ reflections on their experiences with the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. In Chapter VII, I will explore the core findings that arose from my analysis and interpretation of participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars as supportive of their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.
I organize this chapter into five sections. In the first section, I briefly present an overview of the core findings relating to adaptive challenges for educators of English learners in bulleted form. Then I present the findings on the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, followed by a third section on the adaptive challenge of partnering with families, and a fourth section on the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. In these three sections, I use interview data from participants to support my findings. Additionally, I bring in the lenses of the learning-oriented leadership model and sociocultural, sociopolitical, and multicultural theories to further my analysis and interpretation of participants’ experiences with the three adaptive challenges involving teaching English learners. In the last section, I summarize the chapter.

Core Findings

Experiences with Cultural Proficiency: An Adaptive Challenge

- All participants identified cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge and viewed the challenge as an opportunity for personal and/or organizational growth (in Chapter I, I defined cultural proficiency for individuals as a lifelong journey to affirm diversity and, as educators, to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” about their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of their students). The majority of participants (6/11) described how self-awareness of their personal backgrounds, beliefs, biases, and limits of knowledge, alongside opportunities to engage in perspective taking, allowed them to make sense of the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for personal growth. Participants also described the pillars, district-sponsored cultural
proficiency and multicultural education courses, and traveling abroad as important perspective-taking opportunities.

- The majority of participants (10/11) understood the challenge of cultural proficiency as one that centered on their classroom experiences of navigating cultural and linguistic difference. The majority (9/11) spoke about needing to gain more expertise and knowledge about the different cultural and linguistic groups of students in their classrooms. The participant with the greatest expertise in teaching English learners, Hillary, was an outlier among the other participants. She was able to delve deeper into questions about how to fundamentally shift her practice to better support English learners in her classroom as they navigated linguistic and cultural difference. Hillary was also able to see the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency on an organizational level and spoke in great detail about the incongruence between school discourse norms and culturally-embedded communication and learning styles expressed by her English learners.

Experiences with Partnering with Families: An Adaptive Challenge

- Ten participants identified partnering with families as an adaptive challenge. The majority of participants (7/10) viewed the challenge as an opportunity for personal and/or organizational growth in terms of cultural proficiency; two participants understood the challenge as an opportunity to be able to better articulate school expectations; and two did not elaborate on their experiences with this challenge enough to indicate an orientation. Participants articulated cultural competency and partnering with families as two distinct adaptive challenges in their work with English learners, yet participants’ experiences demonstrated some
important overlaps. Nadine and Sara experienced partnering with families as an adaptive challenge that promoted both personal and organizational growth by framing the challenge as one where they served as the bridge between home and school cultural divides. Other participants had a different framing for the challenge; they saw their role in navigating the adaptive challenge of partnering with families as advocating for the school’s educational expectations. I interpreted that professional learning context, experience abroad, and seeing oneself as a cultural bridge for families of English learners helped to explain the different understandings of the adaptive challenge of partnering with families.

**Experiences with Programming for English Learners: An Adaptive Challenge**

- Ten participants identified English learner programming as an adaptive challenge, and participants (10/10) viewed the challenge as an opportunity for personal growth. They described looking inwardly and asking what could they do to change and grow to better support their English learners in the face of multiple aspects of the challenge. Participants described multiple aspects of the challenge including: a) balancing schedules and time within pull-out and push-in models (6/10), b) needing to know more and not having the answers to be able to diagnose strength and growth areas for English learners (8/10), c) planning appropriate interventions for English learners (9/10), and d) responding to English learner population shifts (3/10)—all within the context of the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) model that requires educators to support English language acquisition in general education classrooms.
Experiences with Cultural Proficiency: An Adaptive Challenge

In this section, I first define cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge. Next, I describe two aspects of these participants’ experiences with cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge. The first aspect relates to the majority of participants (6/11) who described their own self-awareness and perspective taking as essential to seeing the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for growth and development. I then discuss the second aspect of participants’ experiences with cultural proficiency as they related to their classroom experiences of navigating cultural and linguistic difference.

Defining the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency

In Chapter I and Chapter II, I define cultural proficiency, relying heavily on Sonia Nieto’s (2004, 2009) work in sociocultural, sociopolitical, and multicultural education theories:

Cultural proficiency references a transformational movement intended to spur personal, collective, and institutional change to promote a sociocultural perspective in teaching and learning and to advance our society’s commitment to social justice and equal opportunity for all students. On an individual level, cultural proficiency is a lifelong journey to affirm diversity and, as educators, to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” about their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of their students.

Also, in Chapter II, I examine the connections between literature pertaining to adaptive challenges and sociocultural, sociopolitical, and multicultural education theories in an effort to demonstrate how working toward cultural proficiency is an adaptive challenge. Becoming culturally proficient requires educators to transform longstanding habits by challenging their deeply held beliefs pertaining to cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other differences. The act of asking, as Nieto states, “profoundly multicultural
questions” (2009, p. 215) about one’s own beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge lies at the heart of becoming culturally proficient. Doing so is predicated on the idea that educators and educational institutions can transform themselves for the explicit purpose of more equitably serving all students and families, especially English learners. The lifelong journey and challenge of becoming more culturally proficient is an opportunity for growth. The adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency work is an opportunity for educators to increase their internal capacities.

In analyzing this portion of the data, I chose to cluster the data according to themes that surfaced while answering the analytic questions (Seidman, 2006) that I developed to craft participant profiles as part of data reduction work (see Chapter III for full discussion). Because I organized this chapter around answering my first research question regarding how participants described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered in teaching English learners, I chose to present participants’ experiences in a way that fleshed out how I was understanding the experiences they understood as cultural proficiency. Their understanding of the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in their work with teaching English learners in many ways echoed what I found in the literature I reviewed in Chapter II. In the future, I hope to return to this rich data set and shift my analysis methodology to focus on how each participant experienced adaptive challenges in their work with English learners, which would also necessitate a shift in my conceptual framework to become more firmly grounded in sociocultural theory.

**Cultural Proficiency as Opportunity for Growth and Development**

Nine of the eleven teachers shared examples of how the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency supported their growth. Six of those participants spoke about how
self-awareness and perspective taking supported them to understand the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for their personal growth and development. By self-awareness, I am referring to participants’ awareness of their own backgrounds, their beliefs, their biases, and the limitation of their knowledge. By perspective taking, I refer to experiences these participants’ have to practice the skill of seeing someone else’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations. Several participants also spoke about having a growth mindset, which I understood in reference to Carol Dweck’s research to be a “belief that their qualities can be developed through nurture and their own persistent efforts (an incremental theory or growth mindset)” (Dweck, 2012, p. 614) as opposed to a belief that one’s core qualities are “fixed” by nature.

Table 6 shows that I examined each participant’s experiences with cultural proficiency in this section. I begin with an in-depth discussion of Vanessa’s experiences to highlight ways in which six of eleven participants made sense of self-awareness as a critical aspect of their efforts to grow to meet the challenge of cultural proficiency. I then look across all participants’ experiences with the adaptive challenge because it was the only adaptive challenge involving English learners that every participant discussed.
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<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
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<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
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<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Vanessa’s experiences with self-awareness and perspective taking as essential components of seeing cultural proficiency as an opportunity for growth and development. Vanessa, a veteran specialist at Woodland Heights, understood the need to expand her own cultural proficiency in terms of self-awareness. I begin with an in-depth
look at her experiences because she spoke at length about both self-awareness and perspective-taking as critical to her efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. While five others discussed self-awareness and perspective as important to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, Vanessa spoke in great detail about these experiences. Vanessa described being aware of the limitation of her own knowledge:

And I’m very aware that I have a limited view. I am aware that there’s so much that I’m not aware of. And we learn from the children, and we learn from the parents, and we learn from talking with each other. But I’m aware that there’s so much that I’m not fully knowledgeable of.

Vanessa was talking in particular about a collegial inquiry project focused on applying what she was learning in a university setting about culturally responsible pedagogy. This excerpt also highlights how Vanessa was pushing herself to learn to affirm diversity and to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217) about the limits of her knowledge as it relates to the identities of her students. Vanessa also shared a number of examples related to her experiences with the collegial inquiry project where she continued to pose similar questions about the limits of her own knowledge and about exploring how to learn to affirm multiple kinds of diversity in students. In one example of how Vanessa tried to learn more about the limits of her own knowledge of students’ cultures and languages, she discussed knowing little about Mexican and Mexican-American musical traditions when trying to support the learning of an English learner in a literacy project and how she needed the support of the other children to understand what the student was trying to communicate.
Later in the interview, she extended her discussion of being self-aware to acknowledging all the dimensions of the self and culture that she and others bring to teaching:

I just think, by nature of the human beast, we have, I just don’t think you cannot bring yourself to the table. The whole human quality, I think we, as humans, have our own fears, doubts and insecurities. Even though we can be competent, confident teachers, who we are on any given day is going to influence how we present what we know. It’s naïve to think that we don’t bring who we are to the table. The way we unpack things is based on our educational, spiritual, mental, physical upbringing, training, experiences, the whole schema theory. It’s based on who we are and what we know and how we perceive the world.

Vanessa shared much in this passage about teacher identity, as signaled by phrases such as: “bring yourself to the table,” and “it’s based on who we are;” for her identity as a teacher and her culture are interwoven. In a discussion about how cultural background may influence teaching, Vanessa passionately articulated the importance of being aware of the contours of her own culture: growing up in a religious context, in a blue-collar community, and in a family who valued education. She described her personal cultural background as representative of American mainstream culture, as opposed to the minority cultures some of her students represent.

Vanessa continued with her analysis of the importance of self-awareness. She described the importance of knowing her own limits in regard to understanding Black culture. When reflecting on the students in the school who participate in a busing program from a nearby city, she stated:

No matter how hard I try, I can’t be a Black inner city woman who knows what it’s like…. I need someone to teach me and give me what that could, should feel like because it’s not a given that I will know…. There are experiences that I never had [where I] I need someone to educate me to tell me, “You don’t say to such and such population [of students]. ‘Look me in the eye. I need you to look me in the eye’ because of cultural differences.” I need to be taught or I will not know that this is appropriate or inappropriate, advantageous or a disadvantage to the
child. And if I’m lucky, I keep growing, and if I’m lucky, I figure out the questions to ask in order to get the information.

At first, Vanessa described seeking out the expertise of a colleague, who would be the “someone” to teach her about some of the common experiences and language patterns in Black culture. She said: “There are experiences that I never had [where I] need someone to educate me and tell me” and she went on to give examples about cultural norms regarding eye contact and how to avoid common culturally inappropriate responses from White middle class educators to Black urban students. Vanessa sought the expertise and direct teacher from a colleague to advance her own cultural proficiency because she was able to take perspective on herself in a way that acknowledged the limits of her own knowledge and understanding. Seven other participants also shared examples of how their self-awareness of the limits of their knowledge of English learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds prompted them to talk with colleagues who had expertise in these areas. For these participants, a majority of the sample, there seemed to be an important relationship between self-awareness and perspective-taking in terms of how they oriented to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for their learning and development. This majority of participants understood the need to gain greater cultural proficiency as an opportunity for their own growth and development, and their awareness of and ability to take perspective on their own limitations seemed inexorably linked to this positive orientation to the adaptive challenge.

Vanessa’s example typifies this positive orientation to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency that all participants had across both sites. She added: “And if I’m lucky, I keep growing. And if I’m lucky, I figure out the questions to ask to get the information.” This example highlights the ways in which participants (6/11) described the
importance of self-awareness to understanding their assumptions, the limitations of
their knowledge, and the motivation to seek support in the forms of new knowledge in
order to move toward greater cultural proficiency. Because Vanessa described her
experiences with the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency with such vivid detail, I
used her experiences to illuminate the common ways that the majority of participants
understood the importance of developing their own self-awareness about the limits of
their knowledge, biases, and beliefs as related to their work teaching English learners.

Next, I look across the rest of the sample to

A cross-case analysis of participants’ experiences with cultural proficiency as

an opportunity for growth and development. Robert, a veteran specialist at Woodland
Heights, like Vanessa, was able to step back and take a similar perspective on the
adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency that comes with teaching English learners. He
said:

When I think about growth mindset, and its relationship to our students who are ELL, I think in terms of cultural proficiency. And thinking of cultural proficiency as being a continuum. That at one end of the continuum, you have people who are actively seeking ways to avoid cultural diversity or either subconsciously or consciously and deliberately undermining opportunities for growth. And at that far right end of that cultural proficiency curriculum, you have people who are so competent that they not only understand how they need to challenge themselves continuously, and as a White middle-aged male, I have to do that when I think about the honor and privilege that I have simply by being who I am by birth.

Robert shared that he understands the need to identify his own privileged background and
to reflect on it continuously in order to be culturally proficient—another example of
Neito’s scholarship pointing to the importance of educators asking these “profoundly
multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217). To do this, he must have some degree of
self-awareness of his own background, beliefs, biases, and limitations of his knowledge.
He understood cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge that provided important opportunities for continual growth for him and for others. He talked about the need to challenge oneself continuously, reflecting on the multiple lenses of race, age, and gender to better understand privilege and its relationship to an educator’s work teaching English learners—and all students—with what he called a “growth mindset.” He spoke of continually being pushed outside of his comfort zone:

I’m still very much a work in progress, and I’m glad that when we talk about cultural proficiency, it’s a continuum because no matter where you are on the continuum, you could be culturally competent in 2012, but things are going to change, and in 2014, you may no longer be culturally proficient. And maybe that’s what makes us so valuable is that there isn’t a comfort zone. If there were a comfort zone, I see it as being very static.

Robert’s discussion of his own movement toward greater cultural proficiency revealed his capacity to manage and appreciate the opportunities for growth that come from the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency.

Robert’s experiences also paralleled Vanessa’s in an important way. He understood going into experiences with English learners that they would be growth-enhancing opportunities for him. He shared:

I’ve tried to have my whole teaching career be operating from a growth mindset, and to me personally, if I have a student who’s coming from a place or a culture where English is not a primary language and they’re in my classroom, to me it’s a great opportunity. I say that sincerely. And what I do is as a classroom teacher, I capitalize on the fact that we have somebody who might have knowledge that we might not have as part of our classroom cultures. So it’s broadening our experiences, and to me it goes beyond just the language.

In our interview, Robert went on to talk about the importance of students’ diverse perspectives given their different cultures, ethnicities, and nations of origin. He emphasized how those classroom teaching and learning experiences helped him move toward greater cultural proficiency. Like Vanessa, he approached experiences with
English learners *already having* the perspective that they would be opportunities for his growth and development.

Nadine, a specialist and veteran educator at Springford Academy, was another participant who understood cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge that provided her meaningful opportunities for growth. She was one of three participants—Sofia and Rebecca from Woodland Heights were two others—who spoke about pivotal moments that transformed her perspective and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences relating to English learners. I understood these kinds of pivotal moments to reveal times when participants reported asking “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217). Nadine described one such pivotal moment in her work supporting Haitian and Haitian-American students and families: “And it just really, really sort of opened my eyes.” Nadine, in reference to a powerful conversation with parents of English learners, said simply, “[It] changed my whole mindset.” Nadine also spoke about an “ah-ha” moment she had while spending time on a mission in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

That was a how-could-I-even-have-asked-that-question-slap-on-the-side-of-the-head reality moment for me…. And in a way, it makes the challenges easier because that frustration of a pejorative mindset is completely removed.

Her reference to a “pejorative mindset” is something I explore later in the chapter when I discuss the adaptive challenge of partnering with families and how educators can easily make sense of their experiences with families by acting as if they as educators know better than families. In the example above, Nadine was referring to how she *and* other colleagues approached Haitian-American and Haitian families with a deficit mindset, faulting parenting styles that differed from their perceptions of what is good for children, such as stern parenting norms, unavailability due to long hours at work, and empty
calorie foods and beverages packed for children. In our interviews, we discussed the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency at length, and Nadine emphasized the importance of having these “ah-ha” moments where she could take perspective on the underlying beliefs that were interfering with her truly supporting English learners and their families. Nadine also understood that alongside the “ah-ha” moments, the long-term perspective-taking process that she experienced as part of the Springford Academy community supported her to challenge and transform her “pejorative mindset” to one that valued and affirmed her Haitian and Haitian-American English learners and their families. This kind of challenge that educators face (i.e., overcoming a deficit orientation to working with families of English learners) is also represented in the literatures of multicultural education and sociocultural theory (Banks et al, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Nieto, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2010a; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Nadine also shared more about her long-term perspective-taking as part of the Springford Academy community:

I have the benefit of so many years of life experience and so many years of experience in this setting that allow me to broaden that paradigm a little bit, but it didn’t happen all at once or even at the beginning. I mean I was probably five, or six, or seven or eight years into it before it really started to blossom. I’m always surprised at how it morphs and changes every day…. Even since our last interview, some pretty unusual situations have occurred that have broadened that experience to another level. It’s sort of like the amazing labyrinth game where you move one piece on the game board but it shifts everything. But how that sort of shifts everything that you do or all of your perceptions or ways that you relate to people or how you plan for going forward.

Nadine referred to her long-term experiences in the school community as opportunities to “broaden that paradigm a little bit.” She talked about how it took many years before “it really started to blossom,” referring to the broadening of her mind and her expanded understanding of culture and the proficiency required to better support families of English
learners. Nadine also described the “labyrinth” of her school community relationships and how her experiences of “some pretty unusual situations” recently broadened her perspective even further and changed the way she understood how to relate to others in the school community. Like Vanessa and Robert from Woodland Heights, Nadine understood cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge that provided important and meaningful opportunities for her own growth and development.

Hillary, a veteran classroom teacher at Springford Academy who was the only educator in the sample licensed to teach English learners, also understood cultural proficiency to be an adaptive challenge that presented her with an ongoing opportunity to grow. She said: “I kind of feel like because of cultural proficiency, there’s always so much more work to be done. It’s kind of like you’re damned if you do, and you’re damned if you don’t. Because even if you take a step forward, you’re still not there.” Hillary’s description included some of her frustration at not being able to master cultural proficiency because she had been teaching English learners for a number of years before coming to Springford Academy and completed a graduate degree which licensed her to teach English learners. She was aware of the capacities she had developed in regard to being culturally proficient as a teacher as well as her ongoing growth areas. She shared of her growth areas: “But I don’t know. I still think that I have a long ways to go in terms of… obviously the way that the children learn and people learn are shaped by cultural lenses, and I feel like I don’t really have a very good grasp on that.” Like Nadine, Robert, and Vanessa, Hillary was aware of the limits of her knowledge. At another point in the interview, she reflected on her privileged background and some of the ways in which that personal background shaped her understanding of cultural, racial, and linguistic
differences in her teaching experiences with English learners. This self-awareness and ability to take perspective on the limits of one’s own thinking seemed to allow Hillary and these other participants to consciously approach the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as a growth enhancing experience. I also understood it to be an example of Hillary seeking to affirm the diversity in her students by continually asking “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217). Hillary, like Nadine, Robert, and Vanessa, seemed eager to learn and grow from questioning the limits of their knowledge and viewed their efforts to gain greater cultural proficiency as an important part of their work with English learners.

Two participants from Woodland Heights, Rebecca and Kalvin, spoke to a different aspect of self-awareness and perspective taking in relation to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. They understood that their experiences growing up both inside and outside of mainstream cultures helped them to develop a self-awareness of the limits of their knowledge of different cultural and linguistic groups. Kalvin, a classroom teacher, described this self-awareness as a hesitancy to prejudge others. He shared:

I guess I see myself, my own hesitation in it. I can only speak for myself. But I attribute it to being aware of so many different influences or expectations or approaches depending on the culture that you’re in or navigate in more than one culture. Before I go to a cause [why a student is struggling] or something, I have to think; I know already that in one family, you do X, Y, and Z. In another, you do 1, 2 and 3.

In this example, Kalvin reflected on his internal thought process of engaging with English learners and how he needed to slow down and think through the kinds of cultural expectations that the student’s family may hold before he decides how to proceed with the student. Kalvin shared that his personal background growing up in a family and community where he needed to navigate multiple cultural and racial groups helped him
develop this self-awareness that supported his ability to take perspective on his assumptions and knowledge. This also seemed to be an opportunity that Kalvin had to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217) about his work with English learners.

Rebecca, a veteran specialist, talked about this same thought process as “meeting people where they are at”; she shared:

And again, I think with my earlier lens that people assuming things about me, or assuming things about bused students or about others, and just meeting people where they are at. I think that’s been a common theme for me that like, “Okay, so we know this student has been in the United States for a year and they are now learning English and let’s not assume there’s anything more or that they have a disability or they have something that’s–, other than they’re still learning, they’re still learning our language, they’re still learning what does this mean and what does this mean in the school setting or with my friends, and so really appreciating that that’s a very important thing to do.

Rebecca understood the important role of her personal background of having been prejudged herself growing up and of having been raised in a family that stood up for groups (e.g., “bused students”) in the community who battled prejudice. She described this background as setting her up to question her own assumptions and prejudices, such as the assumption that English learners are “at-risk” or disabled as learners. Both Rebecca and Kalvin also spoke of their relationship being mentored by Kate and how she played an important role in their ability to take perspective on how to better serve English learners and become more culturally proficient. In Chapter VI, I discuss the context of Kate’s mentoring efforts with Rebecca and Kalvin and the extent to which it supported them to better meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency.

Three other participants (Casey, Sofia, and Lauren) shared experiences where their work with English learners helped them to question and re-examine their deeply
held beliefs—also examples of participants working to affirm diversity and to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217). They, too, appeared to be growing and learning as a result of tackling the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. What distinguished them from Rebecca, Kalvin, Hillary, Nadine, Robert, and Vanessa was that they did not think of these experiences as growth enhancing. It seemed that in the act of reflecting on these experiences of the interviews, they seemed to describe and see these experiences with cultural proficiency as both an adaptive challenge and an opportunity to grow in response to addressing the challenge. All three also shared examples that highlighted that they were given a space or professional learning structure for grappling with the challenge of cultural proficiency. For Casey and Sofia, it was a district-offered course and for Lauren it was a collegial inquiry book club that provided the context for their learning and growth. For example, Casey, a newer classroom teacher at Woodland Heights, spoke about a required course for new teachers in the district—Skillful Teacher—and how she was beginning to use the lens of cultural proficiency to re-examine her practice with English learners:

   I was just in Skillful Teacher, but we did, the last few classes have focused on cultural proficiency. ‘What does it look like and what is cultural blindness, cultural destructiveness, incapacity, incompetence, re-competence? What does that mean and what does that look like? And what are some examples from your class of it?’ And all these things that we’ve been talking about have come up, and in my examples, and what I’m thinking about, and where does that [her responses to the adaptive challenge questions in our interviews] fall in the cultural continuum and where does my practice…?

Casey drifted off into thought as she asked this question about her practice. In the moment, she seemed to be connecting the challenges she experienced with English learners to the district-provided courses that focused on the topic of cultural proficiency. In Chapter VI, I explore this professional learning context—the district-offered course on
cultural proficiency—in terms of how Casey experienced it as a support to meeting the adaptive challenges in her work with English learners. In discussing the adaptive challenges she faced with several English learners in her classroom, she referenced her own perceived naiveté and limited knowledge of cultural difference given her experiences growing up in a rural and predominantly White community.

Throughout the interviews, she wrestled with conflicting notions of, on the one hand, wanting to create a classroom climate that is blind to differences in color and, on the other hand, acknowledging that to become more culturally proficient, she needed to move away from the notion of color blindness in the classroom. There was a tension in how Casey understood the theory of cultural proficiency and what she believed and practiced in her classroom. In our interviews, Casey was working to reconcile these competing values as she described the adaptive challenge of moving toward personal cultural competency:

I guess I would just say in terms of not, not perceiving color because then that’s a blindness, but like also not… not, how do I say it? Not perceiving that I have students in my class and students of different backgrounds, but also finding the climate where we are a whole classroom family, and we work as one. So that there’s all these differences, and there’s this inside and outside differences in us, and that’s what comes together to make a whole, everybody. It’s just how [it] works…I was just thinking about the perceiving color or not perceiving color and how not necessarily perceiving or seeing students of color… It’s like a blindness. Walking in and saying I don’t see color, well, that’s a bit of a blindness, too, coming from my perspective. Because we do have students of color with different backgrounds here, but I guess not perseverating on it and not having them be iso[lated]…

In this example, Casey expressed feeling stuck between her deeply held values of seeing past color by not “perseverating on it” and what she was learning about cultural proficiency in her professional development course. She articulated wanting to create a
classroom where she saw students for who they are, apart from color or other differences, in order to create a whole classroom community. This value was at odds with the demands of attaining greater cultural proficiency, which asks educators to affirm diversity, to engage in the “profoundly multicultural questions” that challenge one’s knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of one’s students. I interpreted the tension I saw in Casey’s discussion above as an instance where the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency was providing her with an opportunity for growth and development as she worked through trying to reconcile two competing values.

Sofia, a veteran classroom teacher at Woodland Heights, described struggling to say and do the right thing in talking with families and teaching students who come from different cultural backgrounds. Sofia described the important reflective work she has done to consider many perspectives when trying to decide how to best engage families of English learners and design learning tasks for their children.

Maybe I really feel good about my own skin, and how I’ve dealt with the culture of my grandparents, and how I know what I’m doing. I don’t think I know what I’m doing, but I know I can just reflect on that so much, and take it all apart and think of something new, and look at all angles. So that I can find another means to reach students or not be biased.

I saw in this example, Sofia was tackling cultural proficiency head on, and her self-awareness of the limits of her own experiences was tied directly to her intention to change herself and her ways of working with students to root out the potential biases in her teaching practice. In our interviews, she did not describe her work with English learners as an opportunity for her own growth and development, yet she shared examples where she was growing and changing and seeking to become more culturally proficient
as an educator. Sofia spoke about an opportunity in her school district for taking courses that support perspective-taking as a means of helping teachers grow to become more culturally proficient:

I’ve taken EMI, Empowering Multicultural Initiative. Taking that for two sessions. That was big. I could talk to you about that further, but I still have a lot of takeaways from that. They just put everything right out there. We all lined out in the field, and ‘Take a step forward if you’re White. Take another step forward if you’re a man.’ So she kept on talking about the invisible backpack. It was good. It was good to have. That could have been six years ago or more, and it still resonates with me.

Sofia said that this course was so important to her work with English learners that she said, “it still resonates with me.” She shared that it helped her to “really feel good about my own skin … so I can find other means to reach out to students or not be biased.”

Lauren, a specialist at Springford Academy with three years of teaching experience, also spoke about the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency work. In our interviews, she did not describe her work with English learners as an opportunity for growth and development, and in the examples she shared about the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, she shared an important example of how she grew to become more culturally proficient by engaging in perspective-taking with other educators. Lauren described a collegial inquiry book study group with a team of teachers. She discussed how they looked at the question of: “What do our personal experiences, like what biases do we bring to teaching?” as they thought together about how to plan professional learning experiences for their colleagues that would help them grow in their cultural proficiency:

We ended up diving so deep that one that they were talking about it, and we were like, ‘Well, we are all so different. It’s not just even about gender or background. It’s about personal experiences, too. So what do we bring to teaching? What do our personal experiences, like what biases do we bring to
teaching?’ Which then did mesh nicely with the cultural proficiency stuff that we’d been doing here.

Lauren’s remarks about her collegial inquiry experience highlight the value of perspective-taking work with her colleagues in relation to cultural proficiency work. Lauren was proud and excited as she explained how listening to others’ perspectives helped her to identify her biases and the ways in which they might compromise her teaching English learners. Lauren, Sofia, and Casey’s experiences were similar to Rebecca, Kalvin, Hillary, Nadine, Robert, and Vanessa’s experiences with the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in that they all described instances of being supported to grow in response to the challenge. What differed was that as they grew, Lauren, Sofia, and Casey did not describe being aware that the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency was providing them the opportunity to grow. They could see that the professional learning context (i.e., district course or collegial inquiry book club) was supporting their growth in terms of cultural proficiency. What differed was that they did not experience the adaptive challenge itself as an opportunity for growth and development.

The other two teachers in the study—two experienced classroom teachers: Sara from Springford Academy and Rachel from Woodland Heights—did not describe instances where they grew in response to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. Rachel shared classroom experiences where she invited students and families to give cultural presentations throughout the year to facilitate their perspective-taking and cultural appreciation. She described a grade-level practice of having families do classroom presentations about their home cultures throughout the year. She said: “there’s good learning there and it does let everybody see that we are coming from different
places.” Sara’s experiences with cultural proficiency were focused on school-level changes, such as addressing the symbolic curriculum in the school, such as the images on bulletin boards and in public spaces (Gay, 1995, 2002). I discuss Sara’s experiences in greater detail later in the chapter.

The preceding discussion of participants’ experiences of growth in response to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency highlighted several important trends in the data. A majority of participants (6/11) described how their awareness of their personal backgrounds, beliefs, biases, and limits of knowledge alongside opportunities to engage in perspective taking allowed them to experience the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for personal growth. Participants described the pillars (e.g., talking with others through collegial inquiry, teaming, being mentored, mentoring, assuming leadership roles), district-sponsored cultural proficiency and multicultural education courses, and traveling abroad as important perspective-taking opportunities. A smaller group of participants (3/11) described these perspective-taking opportunities as supporting their growth in terms of cultural proficiency, but in interviews conducted they did not view the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in and of itself as an opportunity for their personal growth and development. Next, I explore how participants’ understood the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in their day-to-day work with English learners in their classrooms.

Navigating Cultural and Linguistic Difference in the Classroom

The majority of participants’ (10/11) understood the challenge of cultural proficiency as one that centered on their classroom experiences navigating cultural and linguistic difference. In this section, I first highlight two participants’ experiences, one
from each site, that represented the majority of participants who spoke about navigating cultural and linguistic difference in the classroom: Sara and Sofia (see Table 7). I then discuss Hillary’s experiences in greater detail because she spoke about this aspect of the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in an in-depth way that was qualitatively different from other participants’ approach to talking about this aspect of the challenge.

Table 7

*Participants Selected to Illustrate How Participants’ Experiences Navigating Cultural and Linguistic Difference in the Classroom as an Adaptive Challenge*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
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<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
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The overwhelming majority (9/11) spoke about needing to gain more expertise and knowledge about the different cultural and linguistic groups of students in their classrooms. For example, Sara discussed the desire to learn more about Haitian language; she said: “Since coming to Springford Academy… I really wanted to learn more about the Haitian culture.” Sofia also shared an example of how she struggled with her student Mike’s inability to sit down and write in class. Mike was a Chinese-American English learner, and she wondered to what extent his home language and culture might be a factor. Sofia spoke about an article she read about how different cultural groups may
experience learning differently in the classroom. In our interviews about Mike and his writing, she expressed uncertainty and curiosity about where the limits of her own understanding of Chinese culture might be hindering her work with Mike. Sofia shared:

Definitely that article that Chinese people can’t write about themselves with tremendous difficulty. That was an eye-opening experience because you’d think everyone would be self-centered and then they’d be able to know about themselves. “This was my experience and I want everyone to know about it.” So that was a big deal for me.

In this excerpt, Sofia talked about how reading an article helped her address the challenge she faced with supporting Mike with his writing. These kinds of experiences were what these nine participants described when we spoke about their cultural proficiency struggles within the classroom context, and given that none of these participants had extensive training or licensure for teaching English learners, it makes sense that seeking more knowledge and training was at the heart of their work to become more culturally proficient within the classroom context.

Hillary was the only participant in the study licensed to teach English learners, having completed a master’s degree focused on teaching English learners. She was an outlier in the sample in that she spoke at length in our interviews about how she experienced the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in her classroom context while others shared brief examples only, like Sophia and Sara’s above. For instance, Hillary shared:

I’ve done a lot of reading and research. I have many years of experience working with English language learners. I still feel like I don’t really know fully what I’m doing, like I’m still kind of feel like I am making it up as I go along. Which I think is little bit reflective of the field as a whole. And a constant refrain that I would write in papers for grad school because I was like, ‘Oh. There’s a lot more research that is needed in this area.’ So I just make instructional decisions based on what I know, but I’m also kind of like, ‘I don’t know. Is this really the best thing? I don’t know. Maybe.’ I feel kind of like I don’t know if I’m making
the best decisions for my students. So I would say that’s the number one challenge.

Even with much expertise by way of training and experience teaching English learners, Hillary still said, “I’m making it up as I go along,” when it comes to instructional decisions and the nature of how culture shapes learning. She continued:

I feel like I have a long way to go in becoming a culturally proficient teacher. I’m not afraid of having conversations about culture and race with my students. It’s amazing the insights that my students have at the age of five and six. And you, know, I’m always reaching out to parents, asking for their expertise and guidance and asking them to come in and share their culture with our class and everything. But I don’t know. I still think that I have a long ways to go in terms of…obviously the way that the children learn and people learn are shaped by cultural lenses, and I feel like I don’t really have a very good grasp on that.

In this example, Hillary’s description of the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency is similar to Sofia and Sara’s examples above, even though she has had more English learner teaching experience and training.

I see an important difference, however, in how Hillary understood the challenge of cultural proficiency within her classroom context, as compared to the other participants. In trying to better meet the challenge of cultural proficiency, Hillary was questioning the very core of her instructional practices in a way that no other participant described. She focused on the topic of classroom discourse among a culturally and linguistically diverse community of learners—a topic not discussed in detail by any other participant. She said:

In structuring classroom conversations, I think discussions and contributing to conversations can definitely vary quite a bit along cultural lines, and I feel I don’t really have a clue. I’ve noticed that my Haitian students are sort of more…tend to…they kind of want to jump in and be more term-sharking, if you will. They sort of grab onto what a student is saying and add to it. It’s much more like…just go for it and jump in at any time. With my Ethiopian students, they sort of sit back and listen, and then after an appropriate moment of time has gone by, then
they’ll add to the conversation. This is just my observation. I mean, I have no clue if I’m being at all accurate, but that kind of thing [is what I’m struggling with].

In this passage, Hillary identified that she needed to develop an appropriate approach to structuring full-group discourse so that all students who bring differing culturally-embedded communication styles to the group can engage in the learning that comes of whole-class discourse. As stated in the preceding subsection, Hillary clearly oriented to this challenge with a growth mindset. She understood the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency to provide a meaningful and important area for her to develop her instructional practice to better support a diverse population of English learners in her classroom. I compare this example with Vanessa’s earlier example of asking a colleague for guidance in how to speak to Black students. Both participants saw this challenge as an opportunity for their growth and development, but there is an important distinction in what Hillary identified in the example above.

During the interviews, Hillary described her efforts to learn more about each cultural group and she needing to find or develop a new method for facilitating discourse among all students. She wanted to grow to be able to facilitate full-group discourse that was inclusive of the school’s culturally diverse learners. She also found the school’s approach to classroom discourse to be in conflict with her personal work to become more culturally proficient in facilitating classroom discourse:

I don’t like it. I mean, I do feel a lot of times like I’m shutting down students because we need to manage, because it needs to not be in total chaos on the rug. At the same time, I don’t know. It’s one voice at a time, like what makes us the best at communicating in the classroom? I don’t know. That’s a big area of frustration for me right now, actually. Because yeah, exactly I’m introducing them to the culture of school, and that…clearly the culture of school is going to need to change. I just think that if you want to…to be responsive to different communication styles and different learning styles, you know, some of which are
culturally prescribed, that there’s one voice at a time or whatever is not always…. It’s not the lone method of classroom conversation that I use, but I think its pretty old school practice. It’s still around, alive and well today. Is that really going to meet the needs of our culturally diverse learners?

In this passage, Hillary highlighted that the school’s cultural norms need to change in order to be responsive to the differing communication styles she is seeing as culturally prescribed. She referred to the school culture supporting a discourse norm of “one voice at a time.” She questioned how relevant that still is now in light of teachers’ struggles “to meet the needs of our culturally diverse learners.” Hillary described rejecting the organization’s current way of setting discourse norms (i.e., “one voice at a time”), and she described looking to find a new and more culturally appropriate approaches to full-group discourse.

I interpreted Hillary’s frustration with the school-wide discourse norm to come from a lone struggle to challenge the core of her own instructional practice without the support and expertise of educators and leaders at her school who shared her same understanding and training of the cultural proficiency demands of English learners. Hillary’s understanding was that she needed to adopt and/or create a new approach or methodology, in her classroom and in the school, to better support the diverse communication styles English learners. Hillary explained further:

And I do think that cultural proficiency is tied up in this as well. I think that having a culturally proficient classroom management approach and communicative approach around redirecting behavior or discipline or whatever. That’s definitely lacking in our school, and I think that…there are low expectations around student behavior on the part of the administration and also on the part a lot of teachers.

Hillary held two perspectives on the adaptive challenge she faced. On the one hand, she saw the work in her classroom with her English learners. On the other hand, she saw the
challenge nested within an organizational context (i.e., the school). Hillary understood that her work in cultural proficiency was hindered by the organizational context that she identified as needing to recognize and address collectively held low expectations for English learners. Hillary continued to explain her perspective on the school context of this adaptive challenge and the need for the entire faculty to be aware of the assumptions they hold about English learners:

I’m still seeing low expectations for kids at Springford Academy…. It comes from… a very loving, caring place like I love kids, I care about kids. It’s more kind of like, “Yes, this kid’s life is so hard or,” with the kindergarteners, “Well, she’s only five”… I think that sort of the concept of White rescue is a really, really big deal that people really need to think about and examine because if you’re approaching your teaching from a place of White rescue, obviously you’re not really going to be seeing that child’s strengths. You’re not going to be… playing to the child’s strengths and seeing the child clearly. You’re going to be seeing the child as a victim that you have to save and obviously… one cannot do their best instruction if that’s the mindset. So that’s part of it.

Hillary identified in this example that fellow educators at her school tended to see children as victims, calling it “White rescue.” At other points in our interviews, Hillary spoke about her own racial identity development and the intentional work she had done within the school context to grow out of a “White rescue” mindset that facilitates educators expressing care for students by holding them to lower standards. Hillary understood that in order for the entire organization to address this aspect of cultural proficiency, the entire faculty needed to be aware of the assumptions that they held and needed to be willing to challenge them.

Hillary was an outlier among the other participants in my study given her more extensive training and experience teaching English learners, and I interpreted that professional experience to account for Hillary’s more nuanced understanding of how the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency played out in her classroom, as compared to
other participants. She could see that she needed more knowledge and expertise related to the cultural and linguistic groups of English learners at Springford Academy to become more culturally proficient and she was also ready to see and confront the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency on an organizational level.

Section Summary

In this section, I described participants’ experiences with cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge. In the first subsection, I began by sharing that the majority of participants shared that self-awareness of their personal backgrounds, beliefs, biases, and limits of knowledge and opportunities to engage in perspective taking, allowed them to experience the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for personal growth. I also discussed that participants described the pillars, district-sponsored cultural proficiency and multicultural education courses, and traveling abroad as important perspective-taking opportunities. Next, I discussed how a smaller group of participants described these perspective-taking opportunities as supporting their growth in terms of cultural proficiency but did not view the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in and of itself as an opportunity for personal growth and development.

In the second subsection, I discussed that a majority of participants understood the challenge of cultural proficiency as one that centered on their classroom experiences navigating cultural and linguistic difference and that the overwhelming majority spoke about needing to gain more expertise and knowledge about the different cultural and linguistic groups of students in their classrooms. I shared that the participant with the greatest expertise in teaching English learners, Hillary, was an outlier among the other participants and that she spoke more extensively about needing to gain more expertise
and knowledge of different cultural and linguistic groups, particularly with supporting full-group discourse that honored culturally-embedded communication and learning styles expressed by her English learners. I concluded the subsection by stating that Hillary was also able to see the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency on an organizational level and spoke in great detail about the incongruence between school discourse norms and culturally-embedded communication and learning styles expressed by her English learners. In the next section, I address the second adaptive challenge that the majority of participants discussed: partnering with families.

**Partnering with Families: An Adaptive Challenge**

In this section, I first define the adaptive challenge of partnering with families of English learners. Next, I explore the differences in the sample with regard to how participants oriented to the challenge of partnering with families as an opportunity for growth and development. I describe how two participants, Nadine and Sara, experienced partnering with families as an adaptive challenge that promotes personal and organizational growth by framing the challenge as one where they served as the bridge between home and school cultural divides. They were the only participants who explicitly made sense of this adaptive challenge with this orientation, so I highlight their experiences, especially since this is a theme that also came up in my review of the literature (Calderón et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2010a). I then present examples from Lauren, Kalvin, and Casey’s experiences to explore a different framing for the challenge where they saw their role in navigating the adaptive challenge of partnering with families as advocating for the school’s educational expectations. The other participants who discussed the adaptive challenge of partnering
with families did not describe this challenge in as much detail, so I did not do an entire
cross-case analysis in this section of the chapter. I conclude by contrasting the
experiences of these two groups of participants to speculate that professional learning
context, experience abroad, and the capacity to see oneself as a cultural bridge for
families of English learners help to explain the different understandings of the adaptive
challenge of partnering with families.

**Defining the Adaptive Challenge of Partnering with Families**

Ten of eleven participants spoke about the adaptive challenge of partnering with
families of English learners. The challenge of partnering with families had some overlap
with the challenge of cultural proficiency. Being able to communicate effectively with
families in the midst of apparent divides in home-school cultures is an important aspect
of cultural proficiency (Brown University & PREL, 2005, p. 25) that requires educators
to also change their habits of working with families, such as making efforts to learn from
families about their family histories, parental educational experiences, their goals for
their children, and their preferred communication styles for interacting with the school.
School efforts to develop strong relationships and build partnerships with families of
English learners require educators to reexamine their habits and beliefs. As was the case
with my sample of educators, participants described feeling at times like their personal
educational philosophies as well as the school’s educational philosophy were at odds with
how families of English learners expressed their educational values. At both sites,
participants discussed how some families of English learners expressed educational
values that differed dramatically from those espoused by the school. For example, Casey
and Nadine shared vivid examples of how they understood more conservative educational
values espoused by Indian and Haitian families in their schools to differ greatly from
the largely progressive educational values held by educators at Woodland Heights and
Springford Academy. Each experienced the same type of challenge involving a re-
examination of beliefs differently, which resulted in different approaches to their
orientation to the adaptive challenge of partnering with families.

Partnering with Families as Opportunity for Growth and Development

With the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, the majority of participants
understood the challenge as an opportunity for their personal growth and development,
and one participant, Hillary, also understood the challenge as an opportunity for the entire
organization to grow to better meet the challenge of cultural proficiency. With the
challenge of partnering with families, only two participants, Nadine and Sara, understood
the challenge as an opportunity for growth and development. Like, Hillary with the
adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, Nadine understood partnering with families to
be both a personal and organization-wide challenge that offered opportunities for growth.
Also, as with the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, participants did describe
instances where they grew in response to the challenge of partnering with families of
English learners; the distinction between Nadine and Sara from the other eight
participants who spoke about this challenge is that they clearly articulated experiencing
the challenge as an opportunity for personal and organizational growth.

As I discuss the subsection below, Nadine understood the adaptive challenge of
building partnerships with families of English learners, in particular Haitian and Haitian-
American families, to be a catalyst for her own growth and development. Nadine shared
how eye-opening her experiences were traveling abroad and how those experiences
helped to drive tremendous growth in her approach to working with families of English learners, which I understood to be an example of Nadine learning to affirm diversity and to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” (Nieto, 2009, p. 217). In part, she also shared that having the opportunity to take a leadership role at a parent meeting and the support of the administrators attending the same meeting served as an important context to support her growth and the transformation of her perspective of this adaptive challenge.

Sara also spoke about the topic of bridging home-school cultural divides when discussing partnering with families, so I conclude the subsection below with her discussion of how the school could change to better serve English learners by addressing the discontinuities she observed between school and home cultures.

**Bridging home-school divides within individual and organizational contexts.**

Table 8 provides a summary of the participants whose experiences I describe in this section: Nadine and Sara.

### Table 8

*Participant Selected to Illustrate Participants’ Experiences with Bridging Home-School Divides within Individual and Organizational Contexts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In describing the adaptive challenges she encountered with Haitian and Haitian-American families at Springford Academy, Nadine discussed her experiences within two contexts: individual and organizational (school). When we first sat down to talk, Nadine said very seriously that she had thought deeply about the question of adaptive challenges involving English learners, and she began to talk about home-school divides within the organizational, or school, context:

It’s probably the biggest challenge of my professional life to date.... Typically, students who are learning English are children of recent immigrants, certainly first generation immigrants, people that come with a strong cultural identity and a strong cultural sort of impact on their family life, their parenting style, their approach to everything. And the students come to school and often our school culture is completely, is so different from their home culture. So we put the students in the challenging, if not difficult, sometimes even detrimental, position of straddling two cultures in the two main arenas of their life. When they’re younger, it can be confusing. It can be unsettling.

Above, Nadine shared her understanding of the strong cultural identity Haitian and Haitian-American families have. She described that English learners from this cultural group experienced radical divides between home and school cultures. She noted the potentially negative impact these differences had on English learners. Nadine spoke more about, from an individual context and a school context, how she understood the home-school cultural divide negatively impacting English learners:

In the past two years, we have had a large number of kindergarten students, mainly Haitian. I can think of a couple Hispanic students who spent a majority of their first year in kindergarten completely and utterly unglued because the culture at home is so violently, diametrically different than the culture at school.

When I asked Nadine to elaborate on what she meant by “utterly unglued” by the “violently, diametrically different” home and school cultures, she said:

And they did not know how to react. They didn’t know how to respond. I don’t think they felt safe, even because we are sort of a touchy, feely, “Let’s talk about it. Let’s figure it out.” And at home, the culture is when you love and care about
your children, you are stern and you are strict and to not be otherwise leaves
tem unprepared for difficult and sometimes dangerous life. And for a five- or
six-year old to figure out that code-switching, not to just do it but...they would
never figure it out. They’re not capable of figuring it out, and some of them are
not capable of really navigating it or existing in it. Then when you get to older
kids, and they become well assimilated here in the school, they still struggle with
the fact that in school, there’s second and third chances, and there’s, “You can
turn this around.” And at home, there is, “Boom! You don’t do it, and if you do,
I’m going to do thus and such.” There aren’t questions.

Nadine’s empathetic description of the disjunction that young children face when
navigating “diametrically different” home and school cultures maps directly onto
Hillary’s earlier discussion of her challenges to better understand culturally-embedded
communication styles of Haitian and Haitian-American children in her classroom. They
both seemed to have been able to take the challenges that cultural differences presented in
their work with English learners and their families as a catalyst for their own learning and
growth on behalf of the students and families they served. As discussed below, Nadine
experienced a radical shift in her thinking about working with the families of English
learners that enabled her to better meet the adaptive challenges of partnering with
families of English learners.

In our interviews, Nadine described the home-school cultural divide as the single
greatest adaptive challenge she faced in her work with English learners. She discussed
her personal and professional values of supporting families and children and keeping
children healthy and safe. She talked at length about how she struggled to build trusting,
supportive partnerships with families given the large cultural divide between the school
and home cultures of English learners. Nadine shared:

And then you hear…and then I in my role as a mandated reporter, when a kid
comes to me and says, “I didn’t behave in school yesterday, and my parents asked
me about it, and I told them, so they hit me with a belt.” So now, I’m in the really
difficult and unenviable position of reporting this. And the parents become unnerved, and they view the school with extreme distrust.

Nadine, like all educators in a school setting, are mandated reporters which means they have to report any suspected cases of abuse to state authorities to be investigated. Taking the professionally required action of reporting possible abuse cases has time and again pitted her and the school against her Haitian and Haitian-American families. She called it a “difficult and unenviable position,” and it was an important part of the adaptive aspects of this challenge of partnering with families across cultural difference. Nadine expressed feeling stuck between the competing values of professional obligations regarding safety and her role as an educator to build trusting partnerships with families. She spoke about the important role that teaming played in helping her navigate and move beyond these feelings of being stuck.

Nadine’s understanding of this adaptive challenge seemed to evolve from the length of time she has spent in the same role at Springford Academy and the opportunities she took to learn more about Haitian culture and language. She shared with me her experiences taking a Haitian language class offered at Springford Academy and a mission she participated in to visit Haiti and the Dominican Republic. She understood these kinds of experiences as pivotal in gaining a greater perspective on this adaptive challenge:

And yet when I finally had an opportunity to travel and see how some of these families had lived, it all made sense. It made me feel as though, how could I possibly have been so sheltered and so singular minded in my thoughts? I didn’t even know what I didn’t know.

Nadine expressed a new openness to seeing where students and parents were coming from by having experienced firsthand their home cultures in Haiti and the Dominican
Republic. Her phrase, “I didn’t even know what I didn’t know,” signaled a major shift in perspective that allowed her to see the challenge of partnering with families of English learners with greater clarity. Nadine described how she grew over time to understand and see the “diametrically different” home and school cultures. This insight seemed to help her make better sense of how to approach this challenge moving forward and it evolved over time—with experience and education.

As mentioned above, Nadine, like Hillary, also reflected on the larger organizational context as she described the adaptive challenge of partnering with families across cultural divides, and she was able to see beyond her individual experiences with families. Further, she could hold multiple perspectives at the same time while articulating her own stance as she described the organizational context of the challenge. She made this statement about her work with other educators at Springford Academy:

And sometimes now [after visiting Haiti] it’s frustrating because I find myself sort of as the mediator, where we will have teachers that come in, and they are full of energy and enthusiasm – and they haven’t got a clue as to how difficult some of these families’ lives have been. They will say things like, “I can’t believe they send in blue juice for snack.” And you want to say, “They send in something wet for their child to drink and that’s huge.” You can’t judge, but they don’t understand, and I was there once.

Nadine spoke with empathy for her fellow teachers even as she described her frustration with their limited perspectives and experiences with English learners. She said, “I was there once,” and she willingly played the role of “mediator” trying to bridge her colleagues’ limited views and the families’ needs and expectations. In the multicultural education literature, Nadine’s attempt to offer her colleagues a more contextualized interpretation of the parents’ actions would be understood as her capacity to work with families of English learners from their cultural frames of reference instead of holding
them accountable to European American cultural norms (Gay, 2002). Nadine added with empathy:

It does feel frustrating, and I have to be very careful in the way that I try to help them understand because it isn’t fair to approach them [colleagues] pejoratively either. They know what they know, and their life experiences is what they’ve experienced. It’s a delicate balancing act sometimes to try and help… You’ll see teachers that come from an Ivy League background that are struggling not to have access to their horses and their family summer places while working in this urban setting. They’ll find frustration in the tiny little things that they think should be a given with families and not realize that they haven’t got a clue how far these people have come to be able to do what they are doing right here and now, today, that you are upset about…. Sometimes I have to take on the role as the bad guy and say, “You know what, it’s just the way it is, we are going to have to make it through the day…. They [the child] are going to have to soldier on and so are you [the teacher].”

Nadine’s articulated powerfully her ability to see the larger organizational and individual challenges from multiple perspectives: her own perspective, the other teacher’s perspective, and the family’s perspective. It is that multiple layering of negotiation that is part of the adaptive nature of the challenge of bridging the home-school cultural divides.

Sara also spoke about how the school as a whole needed to more intentionally work to bridge the cultural divides between school and home culture for families of English learners. She spoke about how students’ home cultures were absent from the public spaces in the school:

[Because we focus more on instruction than things like bulletin boards…] When parents walk through the building and see that the same bulletin board has been up or is there less student work or there is not necessarily a lot of photos of our kids, which is really striking. We don’t have a lot of photos of kids in the building, that is one thing in terms of cultural space and pushing further and really making our kids and families be more on display. I think right now in the school community people walk through they don’t necessarily see images of themselves.

In her discussion, Sara described what is known as the “symbolic curriculum” (Gay, 1995, 2002) within multicultural education literature, and it references images, icons, and
other symbols displayed on school bulletin boards and in classrooms. Sara described the importance of students and families being able to see themselves represented in the symbolic curriculum of the school. Her orientation to this challenge is one of openness toward learning and growth. Sara’s orientation to the challenge is similar to Nadine’s previous discussions about the discontinuities she sees between home and school cultures. Sara shared:

I think that would be an area that I want to keep working on within the school and one of the things I would like to do in my Principal Residency Program this year is to really become more engaged with the parent committee and working with them in terms of the work that they do within the school and the way that they reach out to parents and try to take this next year to see what are the struggles, what is the way that they need support. I can think about that in terms of wanting to be a Principal or an AP. What structure needs to be in place, wherever I am, for parents and families to feel they have value in that?

Sara’s expressions echoed Sonia Nieto’s (2009) expectations for how educators can affirm the diversity of their students, by asking “profoundly multicultural questions” when she asked: “What structure needs to be in place, wherever I am, for parents and families to feel they have value in that [the school community]?” Both Sara and Nadine’s experiences with the adaptive challenge of partnering with families centered on the issue of bridging the cultural divides between English learners’ experiences with home and school cultures. I interpreted that because they both could frame the challenge of partnering with families as work where they positioned themselves in an active role as bridging home-school divides, they both experienced the adaptive challenge as an opportunity for personal and organizational growth. As I discus below, five participants framed the challenge of partnering with families in terms of the differences they perceived in educational expectations between families of their English learners and those expectations held by their schools.
Articulating the school’s educational expectations. Table 9 provides a summary of the participants I selected to focus on in this section. Lauren, Kalvin, and Casey’s experiences illustrate a framing for the adaptive challenge of partnering with families; they described their role in navigating the adaptive challenge of partnering with families as advocating for the school’s educational expectations.

Table 9

Participants Selected to Illustrate Participants’ Experiences with Advocating for the School’s Educational Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lauren—and four other participants—spoke about the challenge of partnering with families of English learners and focused on their struggles articulating the school’s educational expectations. Lauren described an experience trying to navigate differing educational expectations among families and the school by advocating the school’s educational expectations:

Also, we’ve been doing a lot as a full faculty on cultural proficiency, but it can be a challenge too, first of all communicating with parents if they’re not speaking English. And also, like you said, the expectation thing sometimes. We do school differently, so if parents say, “Oh, why aren’t they coming home with a notebook full of notes? Why haven’t they been taking notes so that they can study?”
“Actually, we created the notes together in class, and it’s on the graphic organizer and the graphic organizer is at school. Or, “and this isn’t just for the students. Your child didn’t do anything in class today, so that’s why the graphic organizer isn’t filled out, and that’s why now they can’t do the homework.” So things like that. I know that’s different. That wasn’t how it was when I was in school either. So that’s a different approach. And parent engagement, we’re trying to... Like tomorrow, we have a humanities breakfast, I really hope that a lot of people will come.

In the example above, Lauren spoke about making a phone call home where she needed to explain to the family member of an English learner that the student was not meeting expectations and that the school had a “different approach” to homework and classwork. When Lauren said, “we do school differently,” I interpreted her words to mean that some parents’ educational expectations differed from the schools’ and her work was to help the parents understand those different expectations. This approach differed from other participants who shared examples of challenges partnering with families. Kalvin, for instance, shared an example of working to affirm families’ expectations while simultaneously articulating the school’s expectations. In his example, the principal supported his team’s interactions with a family of an Indian-American English learner who wanted another Indian or Indian-American child placed in their son’s class. Kalvin shared:

With that difference of opinion, different philosophies initially kind of even, it wasn’t us saying, ‘Okay, it’s only going to be this, or we’re just going to give you what we want, but we didn’t go to the other end of the spectrum and say, ‘No never. It was, ‘Okay, we’ll try, and we hear you.’ So I think we listened and we changed it.

In this example, Kalvin described how the team needed to re-examine and ultimately bend its ways of placing students given the family’s articulation of their goals and preferred supports for their son. With the support of the principal, Kalvin’s example demonstrated how educators could make efforts to both articulate the school’s
expectations and inform, support, and adjust their habits and ways of working in an
effort to meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families of English learners.

Casey, also at Woodland Heights, shared an example where she was working on
her own and struggling to build a partnership with a family within the context of very
differing educational expectations between home and school. Casey sought out support
from her informal and formal mentors, including Rebecca, to help her navigate what she
described an internal struggle to both be open to the parent’s perspective and be true to
her own beliefs and educational philosophy. She shared:

So one of the students who moved from India this summer, her mom asked for a
conference with me on the second day of school. And so they came in and walked
in with a stack of books, composition books. And put it on the table. I put up a
defense front initially because I was thinking: “This is where we’re going with
this. This isn’t my philosophy in teaching and this is day two. And let me tell you
about my philosophy and kind of, let me tell you about American schools. Let me
tell you about Glenville schools and what we believe in, our mission.”

Casey described feeling defensive in this moment because her student’s mother
challenged her own deeply held assumptions and beliefs about teaching. She referenced
her personal teaching philosophy being threatened as well as her sense of the teaching
philosophy in American schools and in her school district. As she described in greater
detail, the “stack of books” was “like rote memorization.” This contrasted with a more
constructivist philosophy of education held by Casey.

I interpreted the conflict and tension Casey described above as her being
overwhelmed by the challenge of building partnerships with families of English learners
which required her to consider external influences while being true to her own deeply
held values. Casey experienced this parental relationship as one that required her to
explore her values and to talk with others about how to best articulate them with this
parent who appeared to hold different educational values. Casey talked about the process of trying to build a partnership with this parent:

So that definitely presented a bit of a challenge because I know that this mother, that it was expected that they want to see that cursive coming home every day. And they want to see that and they didn’t. We have a conference every month together because I know that it must be hard for her to adjust to what she’s seeing as a product, and we’re so much more process-oriented I feel like. So she can’t see the process in the classroom. She sees the product of what comes home. And when she’s not seeing those pages…. Because they [Indian parents] want to see some things at home like that. That’s important to them; it’s important to all parents, but for them in particular to see that we’re [the school] trying to get deeper thinking. We’re trying to get reading for learning and those kinds of things.

Casey understood her effort to build a partnership with the mother of this English learner from India as a year-long, intensive process in which she continually advocated the school’s position on its teaching and learning philosophy (“trying to get deeper thinking” and “reading for learning”). She understood the root of this challenge to be a difference in home and school values relating to education, and what she found to be most difficult for her was articulating and being true to her own beliefs. Casey described herself as learning and growing in the face of this challenge by working internally to articulate her deeply held beliefs to a parent who was challenging them. This was a different approach to the challenge of partnering with families than either Nadine or Sara because Casey first needed to first develop the confidence of advocating the school’s expectations before she could grow to then see the possibility of her serving as the bridge between school and home cultures for families. Sara and Nadine’s orientations to fully embracing the challenge of partnering with families of English learners as a growth opportunity to become more culturally proficient and serve as the bridge between home and school cultural divides were predicated on their capacities to and comfort with articulating their
schools’ educational expectations even while families articulated seemingly contradictory values and beliefs. With time and support, Casey could grow to be able to comfortably articulate the school’s educational values while also simultaneously affirming seemingly contradictory values articulated by parents.

**Section Summary**

In this section, I defined the adaptive challenge of partnering with families by extending the discussion of cultural competence. Participants articulated cultural competency and partnering with families as distinct adaptive challenges in their work with English learners, yet successful partnerships with families require educators to have the capacity for effective communication across cultural home-school divides, so my analysis in this section at times referred back to the literature of cultural competency. I contrasted two participants, Nadine and Sara, with the rest of the sample, highlighting their capacity to experience the adaptive challenge of partnering with families as an opportunity for personal and organizational growth. I speculated that their capacity for and comfort with simultaneously articulating the school’s educational expectations and affirming differing expectations articulated by families of English learners was in part due to their supportive professional learning context (i.e., teaming and mentoring relationships), in part due to experiences abroad, and in part due to their capacity to see themselves serving as cultural bridges for families of English learners. In the next section, I will explore the third adaptive challenge that a majority of participants discussed: English learner programming.
English Learner Programming: An Adaptive Challenge

I begin this section by defining the adaptive challenge of programming of English learners. Then I discuss the experiences that a majority of participants (6/11) had with the tension they experienced balancing time and schedules within the pull-out and push-in models of Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) at their schools. Next, I discuss participants’ growth orientation to their struggles of supporting English language acquisition in general education classrooms, specifically in regard to diagnosing English learner strengths and areas for growth, and planning appropriate interventions for English learners. Finally, I describe how participants approached the uncertainty of year-to-year shifts in the English learner population in their district, the impacts on programming for English learners, and the ways in which they viewed these struggles as opportunities for growth and development.

Defining the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming

The majority of participants (nine total—six from Woodland Heights, three from Springford Academy) shared their experiences grappling with the adaptive challenge of programming for English learners. Table 10 provides a summary of the participants’ experiences I discuss in defining the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. I chose these participants because they spoke in detail about this challenge.
Table 10

Participants Selected to Illustrate a Definition of English Learner Programming as an Adaptive Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educators at both sites have experienced a nation-wide trend of numbers of English learners dramatically increasing in U.S. schools over the past few decades. At the same time, the U.S. educational system has maintained the outdated view that English learners are the primary concern of specialists. Schools are not funded and teachers are not trained to accommodate the increased demand for expertise in teaching English learners. All educators in my study described needing the expertise of specialists certified to teach English learners, including expertise in second language acquisition and other language-related issues such as cultural proficiency. My study’s sample included six elementary classroom teachers and five elementary specialists. None of the participants were designated by title at their schools as the ELL specialist, but all participants spoke about working with the ELL specialists in their building. In my sample, one classroom teacher, Hillary, had completed a master’s program focused on English learners and was certified to teach ESL. One of the specialists, Vanessa, had completed a language and literacy certification program at a local university focused on supporting English learners but was
not certified in ESL. At the time of my study, Woodland Heights employed two ELL specialists, and Springford Academy employed several ELL specialists for grades K-3 and no ELL specialists for grades 4-6. This national context presented my participants with an adaptive challenge that they experienced in their classrooms with English learners, yet the locus of control for addressing the challenge was in the hands of federal, state, district, and school leaders. These leaders were enacting policy changes at federal, state, district, and school levels that impacted their day-to-day work with English learners.

Both Hillary and Robert described the changing policies for English learner programming at the state level. With the state under political pressure to amend and strengthen its policies regarding educating English learners, districts and schools have been asked to implement new policies that affect enrollment, programming, staffing, training, curriculum, and assessment of English learners. At the organizational level, schools have been asked to shift their priorities and habits to better serve English learners and to meet changing standards and expectations dictated by the state. Because the state mandate for change of English learner programming has shifted radically in response to political pressures (e.g., state mandate for bilingual education changed to a ban on bilingual education which later changed in response to federal pressure to re-evaluate and overhaul all existing programming for English learners), districts and schools have been forced into a reactive stance. Even today, educational leaders at the state, district, and school levels are uncertain about appropriate programming for English learners, appropriate training for educators, and the parameters for including English learners in high-stakes state testing.
Several participants acknowledged the uncertainty these policy changes created for educators. For instance, Hillary shared her uncertainty of the state-level policy: “And I know they’re about to do a huge re-structuring of the ELL program in the state, with all new tests, trainings, everything. So the whole landscape is going to change quite a bit.”

Hillary elaborated on how she understood the state policies affecting school-level programming for English learners at Springford Academy:

I don’t really know if...if we have the best model right now for supporting ELLs. I feel like we are somewhat underequipped…. Again, it’s just that feeling is like, “Oh, I guess we’ll try this, but we don’t know if it’s really going to work.” I would say that the changing models. I can’t pinpoint why they feel problematic for me. I feel like the state of education in terms of how we handle English language learners in this country also is problematic to me. I don’t know if it’s a school-specific question. Shouldn’t all challenges, shouldn’t that sort of require an adaptive fix? That’s really what you’re getting at, right?

Hillary described the uncertainty she felt about the “changing models” of programming for English learners. In our interviews, she spoke about how the context of re-structuring state-level English learner policies connected to a larger issue of the national mentality about English learners. Hillary described the nested levels of the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. The first level of challenge that she experienced was in her classroom making day-to-day instructional decisions, as discussed earlier in the chapter. A second level of challenge was at the school level with changing models of programming for English learners. Finally, she described a third set of challenges associated with changing state policies and the general uncertainty at the national level of how to best educate English learners.

Three other participants noted a fourth level of the challenge: district-level English learner programming. Two educators, Sara and Lauren, at Springford Academy
spoke about district-level staffing challenges related to filling ELL specialist roles at
the elementary school level. Sara shared:

    We did make a transition, too, where we brought the ELL teacher, who is at the
    lower school over to our campus this year. She unfortunately needed to take an
    early retirement because of some health issues, so her students were left kind of in
    the middle of the year right around February vacation. Them not having those
    same services provided at the same degree. Luckily, the teachers, because I’m at
    the collaborative inquiry meeting where my other team members are, were able to
    really discuss what they need, and the students who were being pulled in lieu of
    having Spanish, because the English is still not where it needs to be. They’re
    using the Achieve 3000 reading program [i.e., an individualized literacy
    curriculum purchased by the school].

Sara described how staffing decisions and events at the district level required her and her
team to scramble to provide instruction and interventions that would have been provided
by an ELL teacher with greater expertise. At Woodland Heights, Kalvin talked about
being in the position of “making lemonade.” He described that everyone worked with
“best intentions,” but that they were limited in their work to meet individual student
needs because of scheduling and staffing logistics decided at the district level. Kalvin
explained:

    But so as a result, and I’m just using Glenville [our school district], and this is I
    think can be in lots of other school communities and ideally with the right funding
    throughout the nation. That this is what’s going to guide our practices to address
    English ELL or special education. We’re not going to let the logistics kind of
    come up and really influence it. Because I do think that what we have in our
    school and a lot of schools are everyone doing their best intentions, like trying, I
    always say, making lemonade. Taking the lemons and truly making lemonade.
    My gosh! There are plates that are spinning, and we’ll find a way. But can it be
    done in a more effective and a more efficient way?

At the end of this quote, Kalvin asked, “but can it be done in a more effective and a more
efficient way?” He wondered how the district could better support the needs and
strengths of English learners in its scheduling and staffing considerations of English
learner programming. Distinct from other adaptive challenges discussed, participants
identified that four nested levels are important to understand in addressing the adaptive challenge of programming for English learners: classroom, school, district, and state. Participants differed, in terms of their individual perspectives, in how they understood this adaptive challenge of programming for English learners impacting their classroom work. These differences appeared to be site-specific only in the area of shifts in English learner populations because the educators at Springford Academy had recently encountered increases in the numbers of English learners entering their school each year. Of those differences that I understood as more person-specific, Kalvin, for example, was able to see it with the lemonade metaphor without spending much emotional energy consumed with the challenge while someone like Hillary felt emotionally consumed by the adaptive challenge of programming. In the next three subsections, I highlight how commonalities and differences in how participants understood the adaptive challenge of programming for English learners and in what ways they experienced the adaptive challenge of English learner programming as an opportunity for personal and organizational growth.

**A Posture of Resigned Flexibility toward the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Model**

The majority of participants (6/11) across both schools spoke about their challenges working within the SEI model of programming for English learners across both sites. Table 11 provides a summary of the participants whose experiences I highlight in this section. I chose to highlight these three participants’ experiences because they spoke at length about this challenge, and their experiences were representative of all six participants who spoke about their experiences in this way.
Table 1

Participants Selected to Illustrate Participants’ Experiences Having a Posture of Resigned Flexibility toward the SEI Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They described a tension in working within the context of pull-out and push-in SEI models, meaning that the ELL specialists provide “push-in” ESL services to English learners by working within the general education classroom alongside the classroom teacher or the ELL specialists provide “pull-out” services where English learners leave the classroom to receive ESL services. Exemplified by Kalvin’s lemonade metaphor, they seemed resigned to do the best they could within an imperfect model. Lauren’s point of view, as a specialist pulling out English learners and other students requiring extra attention to attain grade-level proficiency in reading English, illustrates the perspective common among this group of participants:

I know that there are students, most of the English language learners who are having trouble decoding, or they are having trouble at that…the nuts and bolts of reading a word or saying a word. And it seems that there’s no time to really get that done, so then if you do it on a pull-out setting, what are they missing when they’re being pulled out? And then if I were to pull-out students, it would be impossible kind of because there are twelve classes at this school, and so I’ve tried really hard. I’ve tried, but it’s been really impossible to get all the students who need the instruction that they need.
In this example, Lauren described the tension she and the general education teachers experienced managing demands on instructional time for English learners. She described her efforts to achieve a balance of providing the remedial instruction students required with the need for students to access the instruction in the classroom at the same time.

Similarly, Sofia added, from the perspective of a classroom teacher, that additional complications arose from the year-to-year changes to pull-out and push-in programming for English learners. Sofia commented on the prior year’s push-in model: “Last year, the ELL teacher came into the classroom, and I put her at a table. She walked in like, and I was like, ‘Okay, here’s your reading group.’” Sofia then explained how the model had shifted this year to a pull-out model:

And this year, she [the ELL teacher] doesn’t come in the classroom, and I’m not really sure of the politics of that, but Ariel was pulled out. She’s the only one in my classroom, every writing period from eleven to 11:45, four days a week. So when she comes back, she’ll have 15 minutes, and I’ll usually have something for her to do on her desk, and I’ll just point to it. But she’ll need and want a big talk about what we’re working on, so I just point to her desk and just get to her when I can, catching up with her or have another kid talk to her in her table. But she’ll only get 15 minutes. But we [the students in my classroom] do a lot of writing at other times, too, and that’s one of their reasons for pulling her out during writing.

Sofia described the rationale behind the pull-out scheduling. Her student, Ariel, was pulled out during a writing block because she had other opportunities to write throughout the curriculum, as she explained. I interpret Sofia’s comments about this topic, to reflect their need to be flexible and ready to adapt to a new way of supporting English learners each year. Five other participants felt similarly. With the pull-out model, classroom teachers at Woodland Heights (e.g., Kalvin and Casey) like Sofia highlighted their concern for English learners missing instructional time when pulled out or conversely the difficulties of having time to plan with ELL teachers when they are implementing a push-
in model. Both models seemed to have difficult trade-offs for teaching English learners that participants were resigned to accept.

Like Sofia, Kalvin talked about the tension he experienced planning for the needs of his English learners within the context of the pull-out programming for English learners during the 2011-2012 school year. He shared:

But I look at the children that are also ELL thinking, for a host of reasons because we do think about the whole child, I want them [my English learners] here during our literacy blocks or readers’ workshop, and I want them [my English learners] here for whatever else they’re missing if they’re pulled out. If they are pulled out, if they’re not pulled out during readers’ workshop, which is when I’m doing the guided reading, and they’re having the phonics, they’re going to be pulled out at math time, and there’s not one substitution for another.

As with Sofia, Kalvin explained the careful thinking that went into accommodating a pull-out model of programing for English learners. He shared the pros and cons of English learners working with specialists during literacy or mathematics blocks. He and Sofia both understood the challenge as being the instruction that English learners were “missing” when they are absent from the room. They experienced a tension in attempting to balance pull-out schedules, trying to balance instructional time and communication time demands placed on them by the SEI model. None of the teachers who described their struggles with working within either the pull-out or push-in models of SEI felt like they had the agency to better address the limits of the programming model, and I interpret teachers experiences and sense making of them to be both flexible and resigned to the reality of implementing an imperfect model.
Supporting English Language Acquisition in General Education Classrooms as Opportunity for Growth and Development

Nine participants across both school sites spoke about the challenges of working within the SEI model to support English language acquisition in general education classrooms. Table 12 provides a summary of the participants whose experiences I highlight in this section.

### Table 12

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Participants’ Orientation to Supporting English Language Acquisition in General Education Classrooms as an Opportunity for Growth and Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beyond the structural challenges (e.g., new state policies that affect enrollment, programming, staffing, training, curriculum, and assessment of English learners and national shortages of English learner specialists), the participants’ thinking and feeling about this, and as I described above associated with the pull-out and push-in models of SEI programming for English learners, participants spoke at length about the challenge of supporting English language acquisition in general education classrooms.
More specifically, these nine participants described struggling with the limits of their knowledge of second language acquisition. They expressed that they felt inadequately trained to be able to diagnose strength and growth areas for English learners with confidence. Similarly, eight participants also spoke about the difficulty of planning appropriate interventions for English learners because of their limited knowledge and training.

Each time a language, literacy, or communication problem persisted for an English learner, participants described struggling to define the problem, asking: “Is it an ELL issue or something else?” For instance, six participants spoke of their work to “tease out” second language acquisition issues from learning disabilities. Rachel, for example, said plainly: “I think the biggest challenge in here is separating out what’s a special education issue and what’s an English language learner issue.” Kalvin, Casey, and Robert also shared examples of their need to seek out help from colleagues with different levels of expertise to support their work diagnosing or teasing out second language acquisition factors from disability concerns. In discussing an English learner who had not progressed in the Mathematics curriculum, Robert shared:

One-on-one, I get a better sense of where it might be language, but my thinking at this point is that it’s more, almost an executive functioning type of thing where he’s having difficulty planning out what to do next and to understand what the steps in the process might be and being able to go back and see if it makes sense. To me, it’s one of those really vague areas where EF you might be able to readily identify a little more easily with students whose primary language is the language of instruction. But, it’s a challenge.

Robert highlighted his challenge with teasing out what might be an executive functioning disability versus a second language-related phenomenon. In our interviews, we discussed how helpful having a team of experts was in presenting this student case in the Child
Study Team at Woodland Heights, and in Chapter VI I discuss this in greater detail when I focus on the role a supportive professional learning context can play in supporting educators in better meeting adaptive challenges involving English learners.

Another member of the Child Study and Response to Intervention (RTI) Teams, Vanessa, described how valuable the expertise at the table was to their work with English learners:

We have a Child Study Team, so ELL comes to the table, speech and language comes to the table, General Ed, resource specialists. And so what is the whole community seeing? How do they know this child, and what are they observing? So it’s like looking at the whole child over time, with the whole Response to Intervention now, giving instruction over period of time, and how is the child responding to that intervention.

Vanessa, as previously mentioned, had more training with regard to English learners than the majority of her colleagues, and yet she still experienced the same struggle as her colleagues as she tried to diagnose the primary learning issues for her English learners.

Vanessa shared several examples that emphasized the questioning in which she and others engaged as they diagnosed student strengths and growth areas. She described the process of assessing an English learner and diagnosing where second language acquisition concerns ended and other concerns began with her colleagues as a “wonderful” opportunity for growth and collaboration. Vanessa elaborated:

So since we’ve met, I’ve met twice with one of the ELL specialists, and one child, she said, “Vanessa, I’ve had this child for many years, and this is above and beyond or more than just a second language phenomenon.” The retrieval of information, the memory, the ability to formulate even with an incredible vocabulary, being able to orally formulate thoughts is delayed based on her expectations. The other thing that she did is she came and she said, “We both know this child. We’ve both had this child for two years.” And she asked me to help rate the child’s oral fluency. There’s the flowchart. There’s a rubric. And so she said, “This is where I’m thinking, does this sound like the same child to you?” And we [the ELL specialist and I] went over the rulebook together. So that to me
is wonderful. That’s collaborative, looking at one child before she sent it in to the state.

In this excerpt, Vanessa described how she and an ELL specialist collaborated in a process that lasted several years in an effort to accurately diagnose a particular English learner’s learning challenges. While there was no quick fix or easy answer she or an expert could come up with to solve the problem, she approached the challenge with an orientation toward collaboration and growth.

I interpreted that her work with the RTI team and with her teaming experience with the ELL specialist allowed her to orient this way to the challenge. Robert and Vanessa differed in their perspectives from the majority of participants in that they seemed to orient to some of the adaptive challenges presented by the programming for English learners by understanding them as opportunities for collaboration and personal growth. Robert and Vanessa both spoke of their experiences teaming with ELL specialists in the building and serving on their school’s Child Study and RTI teams as supportive to their personal growth. They shared that these experience collaborating and sharing expertise in formal and informal teams allowed them to see the challenge of diagnosing English learners’ strengths and weaknesses as opportunities for their own growth.

Participants who did not have these same supports (i.e., Casey and Sofia) shared examples that highlighted their uncertainty about the appropriate interventions for English learners when trying to support their acquisition of English as a second language. Casey and Sofia shared examples of feeling stuck as they planned interventions to support their English learners. They did not know how to shift their priorities and habits
of working to support their English learners in progressing in the general education curriculum while supporting their acquisition of English.

For example, Sofia shared an intervention she tried with Mike, a Chinese-American English learner, who struggled with his writing and communication:

He [Mike] came up with “attention.” I should say “attention” to him, and he’ll drop his book. So I try to remember that or not go over to him, “Mike, what are you doing? Look at everybody else….” You never know the right approach. I try to make it visible to him, like internally visible. “Look around the room. What do you see everybody else doing? Why do you come to school? You could do that at home. These are the people you can learn from.”

Sofia highlighted her internal questioning as she talked about an intervention she hoped was helping Mike stay focused on tasks that challenged him, such as engaging with peers and academic writing. Her doubts were reflected in her comment—“saying, “You never know the right approach.”

Like Sofia, Casey’s doubts were also reflected in her concern about one of her high achieving English learners’ lack of progress in reading comprehension and critical thinking. Casey explained:

And that part, that comprehension. And so it’s interesting because I see with her in particular, I see those directly in her academics. She’ll do anything I ask her to do. I could ask her to write an essay for me, a long essay and she’ll do it. But she’ll try her best. But there are still those…where I’m trying to get deeper thinking from her. I’m trying to get responses from her that just show me she’s making inferences, and she’s putting together what she knows and what she’s reading and what she’s learning.

Casey described her own learning process when trying to help her student apply herself to “try her best” in the area of critical thinking. Casey struggled with this challenge all year. Our discussions focused on Casey’s attempts at interventions within her classroom and within the context of her grade-level team’s work to support a variety of interventions for all children in their grade. Sofia and Casey’s experiences highlight the kinds of
challenges classroom teachers described in their work teaching English learners within the SEI model that requires educators to support English language acquisition within general education classrooms.

It is important to note that none of the participants who spoke about the difficulty of supporting English learners with acquiring English as a second language within the context general education classrooms blamed students. They all took the perspective that as the educators they needed to grow, change, and learn more to better serve English learners. Vanessa and Robert described having a more supportive professional learning context than the other participants to better meet the challenges they encountered, yet all nine teachers who spoke about this aspect of the adaptive challenges of English learner programming all experienced the challenge as an opportunity for growth and development.

**Responding to English Learner Population Shifts as Opportunity for Growth and Development**

Three of the four participants from Springford Academy (Sarah, Hillary, and Lauren) discussed how their experiences with the year-to-year population shifts of English learners pushed them to grow personally while also prompting organization-wide change toward better recognition of the needs of English learners. Table 13 provides a summary of the cases presented in this section as
While participants at Woodland Heights also spoke about the growing diversity of English learners within their school and district, none of the seven participants from that site spoke in any great detail about English learner population shifts being an important aspect of how they understood and experienced the adaptive challenge of English learner programming.

On the other hand, changes in the population of English learners, according to participants at Springford Academy, had a dramatic effect on how they experienced this adaptive challenge. For instance, Lauren shared her perspective that program models for English learners were constantly in flux at Springford Academy. She said: “I know there are different models that could be used, and I know we’re throwing these models around now, and I know next year will be different.” Participants attributed this to the changing populations of English learners entering Kindergarten each year at Springford Academy. Similarly, Sara shared experiences she first had in the district before a large expansion of English learner enrollment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While participants at Woodland Heights also spoke about the growing diversity of English learners within their school and district, none of the seven participants from that site spoke in any great detail about English learner population shifts being an important aspect of how they understood and experienced the adaptive challenge of English learner programming.

On the other hand, changes in the population of English learners, according to participants at Springford Academy, had a dramatic effect on how they experienced this adaptive challenge. For instance, Lauren shared her perspective that program models for English learners were constantly in flux at Springford Academy. She said: “I know there are different models that could be used, and I know we’re throwing these models around now, and I know next year will be different.” Participants attributed this to the changing populations of English learners entering Kindergarten each year at Springford Academy. Similarly, Sara shared experiences she first had in the district before a large expansion of English learner enrollment:
During my first year I feel like ELL was not something that we talked about, just to be transparent. There are ELL kids that would come up in conversation but very rarely. I do think when I first started, because I don’t have exact numbers or hard data, that we didn’t have as large of a population, that a lot of kids because it was a fifth through eighth grade campus at that time, were passing the yearly state ELL tests, and they didn’t have to come and receive services. So they might have still been categorized as ELL, but because they weren’t receiving any direct services, we weren’t still considering them to need that focus.

Sara’s comments illuminated the complexity of the English learner population shifts in two important ways. First, she discussed the staff’s feeling that there were smaller numbers of English learners in the upper elementary school grades several years earlier. But later those numbers changed and the staff observed that with increased numbers, the needs of English learners had become a full-staff conversation. Second, Sara highlighted the differences in services received by students due to their “passing the yearly state ELL tests.” She noted that once English learners passed those tests, they were not eligible for services provided through English learner programming, and the staff no longer perceived the need to focus on these students’ individual needs and strengths. This explanation of the ongoing uncertainty of programming for English learners illuminated how the enrollment patterns of English learners overlay on the classroom, school, district, and state levels of the adaptive challenge discussed previously. It is also important to note that Sara experienced this challenge and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to expand her practice and knowledge to be able to better serve the increasing numbers of English learners in the school. She held the perspective that this aspect of the adaptive challenge provided an important context for facilitating personal growth and organizational change that would benefit English learners.
Hillary spoke at length about the changing models of programming for English learners at the early elementary grades; she connected these changes to the rise in numbers of English learners entering Kindergarten each year.

And I also think because obviously, this is going to be the trend at Springford Academy where there are more and more English language learners each year. One model that we are considering for next year is maybe having all of the ELLs, as many as we can fit, in one classroom and then having a co-teaching model with the ESL teacher. That would probably be just in kindergarten. I don’t know. There’s a lot of different things, a lot of different ideas that are being thrown around so nothing has really been set in stone…. The way that it’s structured, there’s about 12 English language learners and 10 non-ELLs…. I would imagine that with more coming in this year, it just depends on numbers and everything. We’ll see what happens.

Hillary’s position was one of wait and see. Even at the end of the school year, she and the other teachers did not feel any certainty about what the programming would look like for English learners in the fall. They had contemplated a new model that would involve co-teaching with general education and ESL specialist educators, and it was possible that in the fall they would be asked to implement that model. Hillary explained how that programming uncertainty presented her with negative emotions such as anxiety and fear when planning for the next year. She also shared that having to change the program the year before had pushed her to change and grow as a team leader to better articulate a grade-level vision for supporting all children to meet grade-level benchmarks by the end of the year. Hillary understood the previous year as a positive “experiment” in programming given shifts in the English learner population entering Kindergarten yet she still felt anxious about piloting yet another new approach in the coming year. She shared:

I’ve a little bit of anxiety as I end this school year and move into the next school year because we were actually doing sort of an experiment last year. But basically, the incoming cohort of kindergarteners is overall significantly less proficient in English than in the previous years. Even though…last year, we had a lot more incoming ELLs, and we had to have three SEI classrooms and this year
we only have to have two. The levels of proficiency are a lot more limited. Based on data. Based on a screening tool that we use. Students are classified as either a level 1, level 2 or level 3. And last year, I think we only had a couple of level 1’s. But this year, I think we have eight or ten. So what we’re doing, and again nothing is set in stone right now, but what we’re thinking is taking all level 1’s and putting them in my classroom, since I have the most experience of ELLs, and I have a lot of ESL courses under my belt.

Hillary understood the upcoming challenge of the 2012-2013 school year as one that required a new approach to English learner programming because of the unique and very low proficiency levels of students expected to Kindergarten—the lowest entering proficiency levels ever experienced at Springford Academy. Hillary was being asked to enter completely “new territory” each year in her work with English learners at Springford Academy because of the adaptive nature of the challenges presented to the school and district given the English learner population shifts. She held the perspective that she would change and grow with the changes that new populations of English learners would bring each year, but she experienced the need to adapt programmatically from year to year extremely difficult. Unlike Vanessa and Robert who spoke a length about how their teaming and collegial inquiry experiences helped them to experience the growth opportunities presented by the adaptive challenge of English learner programming, Hillary seemed to experience the challenge alone. She did not speak about a supportive context at the school or district level; rather she seemed to be taking on the challenge in isolation as the team leader and lone English learner expert on her grade-level team.

Section Summary

Participants experienced the adaptive challenge of English learner programming in qualitatively different ways than they experienced the adaptive challenges of cultural
proficiency and partnering with families of English learners. Participants understood that they had little agency to change programming for English learners because federal, state, district, and school leaders had greater control over addressing this adaptive challenge. For the six participants who spoke about their challenges with the push-in and pull-out models of SEI programming for English learners, they expressed a resigned flexibility, as exemplified in Kalvin’s metaphor of making lemonade with the program chosen and resources allocated for English learners. They spoke most about the tension they experienced balancing schedules and time within pull-out and push-in models. Despite this sense of a lack of agency, the nine participants who did discuss this adaptive challenge did experience it as an opportunity for personal growth and development. Participants described needing to know more and not having the answers to be able to address the struggles they brought up relating to supporting English language acquisition in general education classrooms and responding to English learner population shifts. Rather than seeing the student as the problem when they struggled to diagnose strength and growth areas for English learners or struggled to plan appropriate interventions for English learners, they looked inwardly, asking what could they do to change and grow to better support their English learners. In understanding Vanessa and Robert’s experiences at Woodland Heights and Hillary’s experiences at Springford Academy, it seemed important to highlight the role that the pillars could play in supporting educators with these challenges. I explore his topic in greater depth in Chapter VI.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I addressed my first research question by describing what I learned the findings thematically as an exploration of participants’ perspectives on the adaptive
challenges they encountered in their work with English learners. First, I presented core findings related to participants’ experiences with cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge. I discussed two patterns that emerged from the data: a) a majority of participants experienced the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for personal growth and development; and b) at the classroom level, the majority of participants experienced the challenge of cultural proficiency in terms navigating cultural and linguistic difference among students. I then presented core findings related to the adaptive challenge of partnering with families of English learners and found one key pattern in the data: how participants framed the challenge of partnering with families seemed closely related to the extent to which they experienced the adaptive challenge as an opportunity for growth and development. In the final section, I discussed participants’ experiences with the adaptive challenge of English learning programming. I noted two patterns that emerged from the data: a) a majority of participants understood the adaptive challenge of English learner programming as an opportunity for growth and development despite a large group of participants describing their lack of agency in addressing the core of the challenge that they identified as more structural in nature; and b) a majority of participants expressed feeling like they did not have enough training or knowledge to address the struggles they brought up relating to supporting English language acquisition in general education classrooms and responding to English learner population shifts. Across all three adaptive challenges, participants also discussed the degree to which professional learning contexts supported them to experience adaptive challenges as personal and organizational growth opportunities. In the next chapter I examine participants’ experiences with their professional learning contexts, specifically looking at
their experiences with the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and the extent to which they experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.
Chapter VI
ENGAGING IN THE PILLAR PRACTICES: HOLDING ENVIRONMENTS FOR GROWTH

In this qualitative interview study, I sought to understand how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood those experiences within the pillar practices as supportive to their efforts to meet their adaptive challenges. I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s research inquiry into how principals and district leaders provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges they name as important in their work in schools by focusing on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explores the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with the adaptive challenges they experience in their work teaching English learners.

In Chapter V, I presented findings related to my first research question: participants’ perspectives on the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work teaching English learners. The findings discussed in Chapter V related to three types of
adaptive challenges: cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and programming for English learners. Across all three adaptive challenges, participants discussed the degree to which professional learning contexts supported them to make sense of adaptive challenges as personal and organizational growth opportunities. In this chapter, I shift my focus to the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) and the ways in which participants’ experienced them as growth enhancing. In Chapter VII, I will explore the extent to which participants understood their experiences engaging in the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

In this chapter, I focus on participants’ descriptions and understandings of the pillars as holding environments. In using the term holding environment, I refer to Drago-Severson’s definition: “a context in which adults feel well held psychologically, supported and challenged developmentally, understood in terms of how they make sense of their work and the world, and accepted and honored for who they are” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48). Within constructive-developmental theory, a holding environment is understood as a specific context with high supports and challenges which serves three functions (1) to meet an individual at his or her developmental level, or way of knowing, and accept him or her for who he or she is, (2) to stretch an individual, when ready, toward a more complex way of knowing through encountering alternative perspectives, and (3) to provide an individual with a growth environment with continuity and stability as he or she grows to demonstrate his or her new way of understanding his or her experiences and the world (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 1982). For teachers
working in a school context, providing “developmentally appropriate supports and challenges” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57) through the pillars supports internal capacity building, or growth.

In this second analytic chapter, Chapter VI, I address my second research question by presenting findings in two areas: a) participants’ reported experiences of the pillars as growth-enhancing; and b) participants’ understanding of how district-level and building-level leaders intentionally build the infrastructure to support the learning and growth they experience through engaging in the pillars. In using the term growth-enhancing, I reference Drago-Severson’s term “growth-enhancing environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 3) to indicate school contexts where leaders have intentionally employed the pillar practices (hereafter I will simply refer to the pillar practices as the “pillars” and participants’ reported experiences as “experiences.”) of the learning-oriented leadership model to create contexts where adults feel well-held, in a developmental sense. In both areas of the findings, I explore what the features are of the holding environments that participants experienced through engaging in the pillars. I organize this chapter into four sections. In the first section, I briefly present a bulleted list of core findings relating to the two areas described above. Then I present the findings on participants’ experiences with each of these areas. In these two sections, I use interview data from participants to support the findings, and I also bring in the lenses of the learning-oriented leadership model and constructive-development theory to further my analysis and interpretation of participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars. In the last section, I summarize the chapter.
Core Findings

Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Growth-Enhancing Environments

- The majority of participants (9/11) understood their experiences engaging in the pillars as growth enhancing. The majority participants at Springford Academy (3/4) described their experiences with Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) as a growth-enhancing environment, which I define with Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) framework as a professional learning climate where adults feel well-held in a developmental sense. TLA is an intensive professional learning experience that involves all four pillars and was initially designed and led by Drago-Severson for 25 teacher-leaders from Springford Academy and five other local schools to learn about adult development, ways of knowing, and the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model and to develop action plans to use learnings in their practice with colleagues. TLA, according to participants and Drago-Severson (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, March 3, 2014) was a holding environment for Hillary, Lauren, and Sara, in addition to others who participated in this yearlong professional learning seminar. At Woodland Heights, two participants experienced their principal Kate as a mentor and orchestrator of multiple holding environments for their growth and development.
  - Across both sites, the majority of participants (8/11) understood their experiences engaging in collegial inquiry teams as growth-enhancing contexts. Participants’ (9/11) experiences with the pillars (e.g., TLA, mentoring, collegial inquiry teams) highlighted three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth: a) the support of
space to reflect on practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year (e.g., Casey from Woodland Heights) or multiple school years (Robert, Vanessa, Rebecca, and Kalvin from Woodland Heights and Nadine, Hillary, Sara, and Lauren from Springford Academy). Two participants at Woodland Heights who were mentored by Kate also described the support of modeling, framing, and affirmation as important features of the holding environments that the pillars provided for their growth and development.

Engaging in the Pillar Practices: District-Level and Building-Level Infrastructure

- All participants across both sites spoke about how district leaders provided an infrastructure for the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) that they experienced as holding environments for their growth and development, and nine participants spoke about how building leaders, i.e., principal or school head, also provided an important infrastructure for the pillars to be experienced as holding environments for growth. Viewed together, these participants’ experiences illuminate that both the district-level context and the building-level context served as holding environments, providing supports, challenge and continuity. In providing such an infrastructure, leaders set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve, and those expectations served as the challenge to prompt growth, they explained.
Participants also highlighted different ways in which the district context supported their growth through providing human and financial resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). They understood these supports to their growth and appreciated that leaders demonstrated care and respect for educators, which, in turn, engendered trust and supported their growth. The vision and sustained investments in supports to teacher growth and development served to stabilize the school and district contexts to provide the continuity of a holding environment for educator growth. These were all important aspects of the infrastructure district-level and building-level leaders provided.

**Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Growth-Enhancing Environments**

In this section, I discuss participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars and the ways in which they experienced them as growth enhancing. I use the term *growth enhancing* in reference to Drago-Severson’s term “growth-enhancing environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 3) to indicate school contexts where leaders have intentionally employed the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model to create contexts where adults feel well-held, in a developmental sense. The majority of participants (9/11) described and understood the pillars they engaged in as providing growth-enhancing environments.

More specifically, the majority participants at Springford Academy described their experiences with Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA), a blend of all four pillars in action (meaning that not only did they learn about them, but also TLA was designed to offer an opportunity for participants to experience them in real time [Drago-Severson,
2012), as a growth-enhancing environment. At Woodland Heights, two participants experienced Principal Kate as a mentor and orchestrator of multiple holding environments for their growth and development. Across both sites, the majority of participants (8/11) understood their experiences engaging in collegial inquiry teams as growth-enhancing contexts. By using the term *collegial inquiry* teams, I reference participants’ experiences with two interwoven pillars: teaming (a context for adults to examine and question their assumptions and engage in collaborative decision making) and engaging in collegial inquiry (a shared dialogue that multiple adults engage in over time to reflect on and discuss assumptions, convictions, and values). Participants’ experiences with the pillars (e.g., TLA, mentoring, collegial inquiry teams) three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth, as mentioned earlier, and as they explained: a) the support of space to reflect on practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; provided space to reflect on their practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year or multiple school years.

I begin this section by discussing TLA at Springford Academy. Two participants at Woodland Heights who were mentored by Kate also described the support of modeling, framing, and affirmation as important features of the holding environments that the pillars provided for their growth and development.
Experiencing Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) as a Growth-Enhancing Environment: Educators from Springford Academy

At Springford Academy, the majority of participants (3/4) participated in TLA, which involved participation in all four pillars. As mentioned earlier, they did not only learn about the pillars and how to implement them with developmental intentions (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012), but the intention was also to help them experience them in TLA (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, March 3, 2014). I include their experiences in this section of the chapter because they each described their experiences in TLA as growth enhancing. Table 14 provides a display of who I will be discussing in this section as examples to show how TLA provided a holding environment for their growth as teacher-leaders. Sara and Lauren participated in TLA during 2010-2011 (sessions lead by Drago-Severson) and 2011-2012 (sessions lead by Research for Better Teaching); Hillary participated only in the first year; and Nadine did not participate in TLA.

Table 14

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Experiences of Teacher Leadership Academy as a Growth-enhancing Environment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2010-2011 Drago-Severson designed TLA for Springford Academy to provide a space for teacher-leaders to experience a robust professional learning environment that integrated the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model. Educators from five schools, including Springford Academy participated (n=25). In TLA, educators from Springford and other public schools in the area with official leadership roles applied to attend four, one-and-a-half-day weekend sessions throughout the year focused on adult development, ways of knowing (i.e., how adults make meaning), and the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). In the first year of TLA, teacher leaders learned about adult development while simultaneously experiencing and learning about the pillars. For example, teacher leaders had opportunities to assume leadership roles by facilitating group work; they engaged in reflective practice through journal writing and dialogue; and they learned about the concept of a holding environment while also experiencing it through their professional learning experiences in TLA. In the second year of TLA, during the 2011-2012 school year when I conducted my study, educators learned about instructional leadership by focusing on providing feedback and coaching to teachers through a formal observation process (pre-observation, observation, post-observation) led by Research for Better Teacher (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, September 5, 2013). In the second year of TLA, all pillars were also embedded in their learning even though the focus shifted from adult development to making observations and providing feedback to teachers.

Earlier in the chapter, I reference Drago-Severson’s (2012) use of the term holding environment to mean a context where “adults feel well held psychologically”
(Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48). In Chapter II, I discussed the concept of holding environment in relationship to the constructive-developmental theory and the learning-oriented leadership theory and model in greater depth. For the purpose of understanding participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars and experiencing growth-enhancing contexts, I define the concept again in this chapter.

A holding environment has three important elements that can help adults to feel “well-held” and to experience a context as growth enhancing: 1) supports, 2) challenges, and 3) continuity. Drago-Severson (2013) uses this definition to explain these three aspects of a holding environment, informed by constructive-developmental theory and her learning-oriented leadership model:

A holding environment is a context or relationship that offers the gift of both high supports and challenges to support internal capacity building. Holding environments serve three functions: (1) meeting a person at his or her developmental level—where a person is without an urgent need to force them to change; (2) challenging adults, in a developmental sense (i.e., stretching by offering alternative perspectives)—when a person is ready to grow beyond his or her current level; and (3) providing continuity and stability. (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 269)

The experiences of the participants from Springford Academy that I present in this section illustrate their understanding of TLA as providing a context for their growth, or internal capacity building. In particular, as mentioned earlier, these participants discuss three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth: a) the support of space to reflect on their practice by naming teacher leadership challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by new information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) the continuous and sustained context for growth that TLA sessions provided, either over one school year or multiple school years.
I begin with Sara’s two years of experience within TLA because she describes a growth-enhancing context that includes all three elements of a holding environment, as defined by the literature—supports that meet her where she is, challenges that stretch and challenge her to grow, and the continuity of these supports and challenges over time. Her experiences, in combination with Lauren and Hillary’s, also highlight the three features described above (space to reflect, provision of information, and continuity) that participants across both sites described as facilitators of their growth. After discussing Sara’s experiences, I move onto Lauren’s two years of experience with TLA as a growth-enhancing context. I conclude the section with Hillary’s experiences of the first year of TLA and a subsequent year of coaching with Drago-Severson.

Sara. When I asked Sara to reflect on her professional learning experiences at Springford Academy that she believed helped her to learn and grow, she said right away:

The most stand out of all opportunities was… So Springford Academy has something called Teacher Leadership Academy, TLA. And that’s actually where I met Ellie Drago[-Severson]…. The big thing about the first year of that program was as I sat in Ellie’s classes, it gave me this feeling once again of like, even though I’m not sure of what leadership capacity I want, I know that I want more knowledge, and I do want to go back to school and get that next degree so that I can step into a principal role or a curriculum coaching role or something related to that. So I think Ellie was just really pivotal and getting those wheels turning again.

Sara appreciated and valued the opportunity to take perspective on her leadership ambitions and trajectory through the space that TLA afforded her. She experienced the context as supportive of her growth as a teacher-leader. She shared more about the supports she found most helpful for her growth as a teacher-leader: “So I think the fact that we have programs like Teacher Leadership Academy and where we can meet with each other. We can also meet with some teachers from other school districts, it really just
provides this good space to grow and feel challenged.” Sara reflected that the space for deep conversation and reflection with other teacher-leaders in TLA that was something she did not necessarily have time for in her daily work at Springford Academy. She found that space for conversation with her peers was supportive to the kinds of questions she was asking about her own leadership trajectory. In this aspect, and many others, she understood TLA as a growth-enhancing environment for her questions centering on leadership.

Sara’s experiences with TLA also highlight the element of continuity that is important in holding environments. Sara’s two years in TLA helped her to experience the pillars as growth enhancing. She explained:

And now because I’m in my second year of doing this program, I think the bigger takeaway this year is like, ‘How do you effectively supervise and evaluate a teacher? How do you give them feedback?’ Stuff that I was doing a year before, but definitely I’m doing it on a stronger lens due to that class with RBT [Research for Better Teaching] and due to the work I’ve been doing at my graduate school program…. Leadership Academy is definitely a good space for that deeper thinking and learning. That’s a space where I’ve been able to be reflective about my practice and my goals over the past two years.

Sara valued the continuous support that two years of TLA provided her. She was able to reflect and refine her leadership growth goals in the second year she participated in TLA. Sara understood that the space for “deep thinking” that she had through participating in TLA over two years promoted her efforts to grow as a leader. In the excerpt above, Sara also references her experiences in a graduate school program. She shared in an interview that the reflective space of TLA prompted her to seek further development as a leader by enrolling in an educational leadership graduate program at a nearby college. Sara also found that TLA helped her to name leadership goals for herself and grow towards those goals through the reflective spaces provided in TLA.
Sara also spoke about the specific content and curriculum in TLA, and how across both years the topics studied helped her to take new perspectives on the leadership work in which she was engaging at Springford Academy as a mentor of new teachers and as a team leader. She shared:

So, the first year I was a teacher at the Teacher Leadership Academy when Ellie was leading it…. When I first was introduced to this model, like the different theories behind how people work together, all the personality types, I had not thought of it at that point in terms of my team as well as my own self. It just made me step back and think about how I think that information affects me or how I elicit feedback. That was really helpful in year one. In this past year we have been working with another program. That has really provided a lot of connection and work related to being able to give feedback to teachers about quality instruction.

Sara reflected that by studying adult development, she was able to take a new perspective on her work leading a team at Springford Academy. Her reflections emphasize the importance of providing information and the way that it can prompt adults to take new perspectives. This excerpt also underscores the importance of the two years of TLA where she could deepen her learning with respect to her leadership goals of learning how to better perform her leadership responsibilities at Springford Academy. This continuity of the holding environment helped her to see her leadership capacity develop. She shared:

With Research for Better Teaching [during 2011-2012 school year] we would observe a video or observe a teacher together, and we would be able to discuss what area of practice are they doing well, where would you want to push them or ask them more questions to clarify things. Those are the conversations that I think help alleviate once you become somewhat of a more future leader capacity. You don’t necessarily always have time for those conversations, but I think the Friday and Saturday courses with Teacher Leadership Academy [TLA with Drago-Severson and Research for Better Teaching] open up a space to have those open discussions. [In TLA 2010-2011 and 2011-2012] we could talk to people who might be in a similar role as you at school, but not necessarily that you always have that hour to 40 minutes to have a really strong discussion with.

Again, she experienced that, across both years, the extended conversations with other teacher leaders supported her growth and learning.
In addition to experiencing TLA as a growth-enhancing context with supports and continuity to facilitate her growth as a teacher-leader, Sara also reflected on the challenges that spurred her growth. As she began to set goals for the development of her own leadership within the context of TLA, she was able to name where she was and where she wanted to challenge herself to grow. She first shared the reflection questions that challenged her to grow:

I think, I’m someone who wants to know that I’m going to step into a role and be perfect at it. And I’m a perfectionist. But the long story short of that is I think my next step over the summer… and over the fall is to really kind of re-evaluate what is my end goal? Do I want to step into an AP role? Or do I want to be a Special Ed director?

She continued her reflection by naming the explicit area of challenge for her as a leader:

The whole idea of delegation, so it gives me a lot more ability to say, ‘You’re the lead on this project, and you’ve got this piece of it and this.’ And I think that’s going to be a crucial role for whatever leadership I continue to do and whatever leadership I decide to take on in the future. I think it’s an area for me that doesn’t come as naturally, to delegate. I think I am someone who wants to take on everything and to do everything for the team. You start to realize that leaders don’t always have the answers. Most of the time, we don’t actually. And they know who to delegate and who to ask questions to for decisions to be made collaboratively.

Sara experienced delegation as a real challenge to her work as a team leader at Springford Academy. She shared that TLA provided her the space to name that challenge and reflect on how to think about growing to build greater internal capacity that would support her in better meeting her leadership goals. In reflecting on her growth over the two years of support provided by TLA she said:

In my position at Springford Academy over the past year because it gives me more… practice or skill… which I think is important for me to do. And I think in terms of thinking about my skill set, that it’s something that doesn’t come as naturally because I’ve always been since childhood, just been very much expected to have the answer or just get the answer. And when you’re delegating and when you’re working with teams, you start to realize so much more that it’s not about
me having the answer, it’s about making sure that I’ve asked all the right people, or that I’ve involved all the right people in the decision-making process that I can feel good about it at the end of the day.

Sara described a shift in her perspective and her expanded capacity as a team leader. She grew to take a new perspective on her own leadership by seeing the value of delegating and moving away from her deeply held beliefs that she needed to do everything perfectly and that leaders need to have all the answers.

Sara’s experiences with TLA illustrate the power of holding environments to help adults use the collaborative and reflective spaces of the pillars as opportunities for growth and learning. Sara described her new capacity to incorporate delegation in her role as team leader at Springford Academy:

And also there are decisions that I have to make without the rest of the team, but most of the time, I’m able to delegate and say, ‘You need to find a venue now, and you need to find a date and set all of that up and then we can talk about the logistics.’ Versus I used to do a lot more of, ‘I’m going to find the venue with you or for you.’ And I would take up a lot of slack for people, but when you delegate and give people a role like, ‘This is what you need to do by this date, and I’m going to check back in with you,’ people feel more interested in their projects and in their work. And it just seems like people are more excited about what they’re doing within the board.

This excerpt highlights the growth that Sara was able to see in herself as a leader, given the goal she identified in TLA of delegating more and helps to illuminate a specific way that TLA, as a holding environment, supported her growth as a teacher leader.

Sara shared one other example of her growth and new perspective on leadership. She described taking on more responsibilities as a graduate student and leader at Springford Academy while still maintaining her classroom teaching responsibilities. She shared:

Then I realized with everything I was doing for graduate school and other Springford Academy opportunities that I would have to delegate running our
homework lab for Special Ed students to someone else. So I asked one of our new teachers on our team if she would mind being the person in charge of that, and she really was excited for the role and excited that I thought she could handle a leadership capacity. So I think delegating is something that I’m worried about sometimes because I have less control, but I think if you delegate effectively, then you’re going to still have positive outcomes.

I interpret Sara’s experiences in TLA to be a clear and powerful example of how the pillars can help educators to feel well held (Drago-Severson, 2012a) by their professional learning contexts. Sara’s experiences illuminate how TLA served as a holding environment for Sara’s growth. Its key features included a) the supports of reflective space, identification of personal challenge areas, goal setting, and collaboration with other adults; b) the challenge provided by receiving new information about adult development and supervision that supported her in taking new perspectives on her work as a teacher leader; c) the continuous and sustained nature of the professional learning context that lasted several years. Next, I turn to Lauren’s experiences with TLA and her understanding of two years of TLA as pivotal to her development as a teacher-leader; like Sara, she found that the provision of new information played an important role in spurring her growth.

Lauren. Across both years of TLA, Lauren experienced a leadership growth arch that she understood as powerful to her expanded capacity to mentor new teachers and lead teams. She said that first:

Ellie’s research has really helped me a lot. [In considering different ways of knowing and how she has changed in offering feedback]. It isn’t like maybe that person—instead of me telling them something else they should do—maybe they just needed a pat on the back right now. And so I’ve learned a lot and put that into practice. That was in TLA.

Lauren’s comments came in a discussion of how learning about adult development and in particular ways of knowing helped her to take a new perspective on how she related to
other adults. In the excerpt above, she revealed how before TLA, she thought only about giving feedback the way she would want to hear it, and after understanding more about ways of knowing, she shifted her approach to giving feedback to teachers in a way that was more mindful of how they might be making meaning.

Lauren also found that continuing TLA’s focus on adult development in the first year and shifting into the Research for Better Teaching work focused on supervision helped extend the learning she did in the first year of TLA. She shared: “I guess the big take-aways for me… In thinking about how to actually write-up an observation… In thinking about the matching I was talking about, like the communicating to people, that each teacher might need something different.” Lauren experienced the continuity of two years of TLA as supportive to her growth in the area of communication and giving feedback to support other teachers’ learning, particularly with respect to the information provided in each year of TLA.

In her interviews with me, Lauren articulated that studying the theory of ways of knowing—how adults make meaning—as powerful and meaningful for her leadership work. She shared:

Ellie’s work, like I said, was really… I think it made such an impact on me because it’s one of those things that I had thought about. So a lot of learning that I’ve done or taken part in has been about things that I’ve thought about, like my brain’s gone there, but I couldn’t exactly formulate it all. And so then taking that course with Ellie was like, ‘Okay. Alright. It’s all coming together now. This makes total sense to me.’… Adults must learn a different ways. I wonder what those ways are. And thinking, reflecting on myself as an adult learner, thinking, ‘I often don’t need a pat on the back. I often don’t need… So what is it that I do need?’ So I thought about that. So then taking the course was like, ‘Okay. Great.’

Lauren’s description of her learning and growth in TLA was similar to Sara’s experiences in that they both found the content of TLA and the space to reflect on the course content
to be powerful and meaningful for their growth as leaders. In that growth-enhancing context, Lauren described simultaneously reflecting on what she needed for support and how she might differentiate her support, or communication style, to help others learn and grow. She was experiencing a holding environment and simultaneously reflecting on how to create a holding environment for others as part of her responsibility as a team leader and mentor. She said of both years of TLA: “So everything I’ve done here has been so helpful, has been awesome. I learned so much.”

**Hillary.** Like Lauren and Sara, Hillary understood her experiences in TLA as powerful and meaningful in her work as a teacher leader. She understood TLA as a transformational experience, sharing: “I should also speak about Teacher Leadership Academy because that has really been a huge, huge, huge transformational experience as well. I feel very lucky that I’ve had that opportunity to participate.” Hillary’s experiences with TLA were slightly different from Lauren and Sara’s. She participated in the first year of TLA led by Drago-Severson, but because of other demands on her time, she did not participate in the second year of TLA. Instead she took an opportunity to continue her learning in TLA by having Drago-Severson as a coach. In describing Hillary’s experiences, I focus on how she understood TLA as a transformational experience facilitating her growth as a teacher-leader. In my analysis of Hillary’s growth experiences with TLA, I also point out where her coaching relationship with Drago-Severson provided the continuity of the holding environment created during the first year of TLA. In her interviews, Hillary spoke at length about the ways in which she grew, which I include in this section because they speak to the transformation (i.e., growth) that she experienced in her capacity as a teacher leader. In presenting Hillary’s experiences, I also
pay close attention to the features of the holding environment that supported this transformation, the first feature being the provision of new information about how adults learn.

Hillary’s learning and growth as a teacher leader centered on two areas: a) deepening her ability to collaborate with other educators in the context of her team leader role and b) giving honest feedback to support the learning and growth of those she mentored. Hillary described learning about adult development theory as transformational because of the new perspective it gave her on collaboration and leadership. She shared of her experiences in TLA:

And then this past year, I learned a lot about ways to give a centered feedback on instruction and sort of what to really look for as an observer. Like with Ellie’s class [TLA seminar] on adult development … when the light bulb went on about how powerful collaboration is, and in that year [2010-2011], I had a really challenging team… It was interesting… going through the work with Teacher Leadership Academy [TLA during 2010-2011] and just realizing what a real gift collaboration, when it’s effective truly, is. So I would actually say that this past year [2011-2012] I really kept a lot of Ellie’s work in my mind as I was going through my first full year as team leader. It was a very, very effective experience and exercise in leadership and collaboration.

In her coaching with Drago-Severson and work in TLA with her, she also focused on these two areas. She shared:

That was a lot of what my leadership work with Ellie was about. It was sort of about receiving feedback and ways to do that effectively and ways to set up conversations around feedback effectively. And then also just ways to resolve conflict among team members because that was a big focus of mine that year [2010-2011]. Then of course, you know, the stages of adult development and thinking about, ‘Okay, so if I have this total socializing knower on my team, you know, what does that person need? You know, what does this self-authoring knower need?’

In this example, Hillary is applying what she learned about ways of knowing, or how adults make meaning, to her work as a mentor and team leader. She found that being
supported to learn about adult development in TLA helped her to understand how to
grow herself as a leader.

Hillary’s discussion of her own growth in the context of TLA and coaching with
Drago-Severson highlighted where she felt appropriately challenged to grow as a leader.
In addition to new information providing a challenge and reorientation of perspective,
TLA also offered participants the dual support and challenge of the space to name areas
for leadership growth. Hillary explained that giving critical feedback to new teachers felt
difficult for her, and that with the supportive context of TLA and coaching, she was able
to challenge herself to also give critical feedback in her mentoring relationships with new
teachers. She explained:

But it also made me realize that I need to also get better with giving honest
feedback when someone who’s struggling because I think a lot of times I was
like, ‘Yay! You’re doing great,’ because I wanted her to feel good. And, you
know, that kind of positive encouragement is really important especially that she
was making improvements. But at the same time I think I was a little afraid of just
saying, ‘Look, we got some serious, serious issues that we really need to nip in
the bud.’ So I guess it’s striking that balance that’s a big challenge.

Beyond her experiences with giving feedback, Hillary also spoke of the challenge of
changing her orientation to being a team leader for her grade-level inquiry team. After
learning about adult developmental theory in TLA and feeling supported to set growth
goals for herself, she decided that she needed to grow as a leader to be more open and
inclusive in her leadership approach. She shared:

The thing that I’m working on really, really hard is… I do feel like I’m a little
more heavy-handed in terms of being directive and my leadership approach. I
don’t know. This year, I’m hoping, I’m really sort of working on making sure all
voices are heard. And I think that’s really going to be my big goal when I’m
facilitating the meeting, just really making sure like, you know, paying attention
to, you know, who’s had a chance to speak, who hasn’t, you know, facilitating
people who speak a lot and holding the team accountable for the norms, you
know, for our agreed upon set of norms. So that’s all just to say that I really think
that I have a long way to go in terms of improving my leadership practice, and that’s actually very exciting to me. So it’s really been able to help me realize that I do, that I have this growing edge in leadership.

Using the adult development theory she learned in TLA, Hillary understood that she had a growing edge in her leadership capacity. She said of herself: “The other thing, too, that I learned from all this is that I can really be a control freak, and being a big control freak is not a very good way to grow. So I’ve been working on releasing that.” Hillary’s experiences, like Lauren and Sara’s experiences, highlight how they experienced the pillars as growth-enhancing contexts for their development as leaders.

**Summary.** In this section, I discussed how participants made sense of the three central elements of holding environment—supports, challenges, and continuity. In looking across these participants’ experiences with TLA, I explored how Hillary, Lauren, and Sara experienced TLA as a holding environment that supported their growth and leadership development. They made sense of their experiences engaging in the pillars in ways that illuminated that they experienced the pillars as robust holding environments that provided opportunities for growth and development. Next, I discuss two participants’ experiences with their principal Kate, whom they felt served as mentor and orchestrator of growth-enhancing environments at Woodland Heights.

**Experiencing the Principal as Mentor and Orchestrator of Growth-Enhancing Environments: Educators from Woodland Heights**

At Woodland Heights, two participants, Rebecca and Kalvin, spoke in rich detail about their experiences being mentored by their principal Kate and the deep learning and growth they experienced as beneficiaries of her efforts. They described the importance of having Kate as their mentor, and how they were learning and growing as a result of her
care. Their descriptions of their experiences painted a picture of how their building leader, principal Kate, was an orchestrator of their holding environments. As mentor, she provided the supports, challenges, and continuity of a holding environment for them, and at the same time, Kate created a variety of holding environments to support their growth. In this section, I explore Rebecca and Kalvin’s experiences in detail to illuminate how Kate served as an orchestrator of personalized holding environments.

Table 15 provides demographic information for Rebecca and Kalvin to help establish a context for their experiences engaging in the pillars. No participants from Springford Academy are included in this section because they did not describe their principals or other building-level leaders as creating and orchestrating growth-enhancing environments. I understood this to be the case because the building-level leaders did not lead with developmental intention the way Kate did at Woodland Heights. Sol Harbour was the district leader at Springford Academy who lead with developmental intention, so educators at that site did not have building-level leaders who implement the learning-oriented leadership the same intention that Kate did as principal at Woodland Heights.

Table 15

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Experiences with the Principal as Orchestrator of Growth-enhancing Environments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rebecca. Rebecca described a rich set of experiences learning and growing because of the ways in which she experienced Kate as a mentor. She also spoke about the ways in which she engaged in other pillars—assuming leadership roles, teaming, and collegial inquiry—all within the context of Kate’s encouragement and guidance. While Kate’s voice is absent from this description of Rebecca’s experiences, in my analysis of the data, I understand Kate’s actions to create a holding environment for Rebecca to be present alongside Rebecca’s experiences.

Rebecca spoke at length about her growth as a leader. She understood herself to be an educator who always took on different leadership roles at Woodland Heights. She explained:

Part of it may just be the way I’ve always done my work, but each year, it evolves based on what the building needs and what the principal needs because my role has always been to be part of the leadership team and be supportive and really think about how I can support whatever’s needed in the building. And so I think that’s been an important piece for me in terms of thinking about that.

When Kate took on the job of principal at Woodland Heights, Rebecca already had a long history of assuming leadership roles in the building. Rebecca understood that while she did exercise leadership capacity at Woodland Heights prior to Kate’s arrival, she also experienced Kate’s mentoring to have expanded her capacities to lead. She shared:

I came in with eyes wide open and that was the expectation [assuming leadership roles]. And so it wasn’t going to be a choice – “Will I step up—?” And it’s always been in a more informal way because I’m not technically an administrator although I’m part of the leadership team, so it’s an informal leadership role. And I’ve come to learn over the years that my style had always been kind of leading beside other people and that I’m learning now to say, “It’s okay if I lead,” because I’ve been asked to do that and it’s something that the school needs and so it’s okay to do that, whereas, for a long time, I kind of led beside, beside, beside other people.
Rebecca talked about being able to take a new perspective on her leadership in her relationship with Kate. She talked about seeing that she was always asked to lead “beside” others rather than assume leadership roles and responsibilities on her own. One example of how Kate’s mentorship provided the challenges of a holding environment for Rebecca was the encouragement she provided to Rebecca to work toward her principal license. From Rebecca’s perspective, Kate’s approach differed from other building leaders’ approaches, which had acknowledged Rebecca’s capacity to take on leadership responsibilities but had not encouraged her step out of her comfort zone and begin exercise leadership in front of the team.

In addition to taking a new perspective on herself as a leader and working within the context of an administrative internship supported by Kate’s mentoring, Rebecca also shared that she grew to learn new skills in terms of supervision of teachers. She said:

The biggest piece for me because in my role, I have often functioned in a leadership position because of how large our building is was to really understand more the administrative lens from a supervision and evaluation perspective…. It was interesting to see the process for evaluation and supervision as an educator and think about what do you look at and how do you sit with someone at pre-ob and then observation and a post-observation and what that looks like and what you’re looking for. So that was a really big piece for me because it was one of the things I haven’t really been a part of in terms of leadership. I’ve done many other pieces, but I haven’t been necessarily part of that.

In addition to seeing her leadership capacity differently in terms of trying to grow beyond leading beside others, Rebecca understood her leadership capacity to grow in terms of instructional leadership as she learned the new skill of teacher supervision. Rebecca’s experience provides another example of how the provision of information within a holding environment helped participants to shift their perspectives.
In considering Rebecca’s other experiences engaging in the pillars of collegial inquiry and teaming, I understood Kate to be playing an important role orchestrating those experiences to be growth enhancing for Rebecca. For example, Rebecca spoke at length about her growth as an educator of English learners through working closely with Kate in the context of school-wide collegial inquiry teams. One important aspect of Kate’s influence on Rebecca’s growth through the pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry was her expertise in supporting English learners. Rebecca shared Kate’s expertise and its support of her work on the Child Study team:

I think in terms of the English language learners, and again it’s been so nice having Kate as the principal because she has such an in-depth understanding….

When I think about Child Study, that piece about where you have a student that comes, and they’re struggling, and really just kind of pausing and saying ‘If this is an ELL student, we really need to think about, in terms of immersion in the language, and really thinking of what are the needs that we need to meet in terms of supporting them, so they get academic language, and they continue to grow and that we don’t jump to that, oh, what should we be looking at in terms of next steps. But, okay. They’ve been here one year. They’ve been here three years. Okay, they haven’t been here five to seven years. And it’s in terms of being immersed in English.’

Rebecca described the value of Kate’s expertise in terms of her own learning and understanding as an educator of English learners. She then elaborated on how having Kate sit on the Child Study team with that kind of expertise has changed not only what she knows but also how she approaches her work on the team in Kate’s absence and how she has shifted her day-to-day practice with English learners. She said:

Kate has taught me a lot about that, and in my earlier years, I understood at lot less. So I would say in the last five years, and especially since she has sat on Child Study. And if she’s not there, I hear myself saying her words about: ‘Let’s really think about this. This student has been in the country for a year and a half. So even though you’re worried they’re struggling, let’s think about what that means for them as an English language learner, and what can we be doing to build their language and build their academic capacity in terms of the language and not go to that place of--oh, is there something wrong?--but just thinking they’re still
being immersed in the language and so what can we do to facilitate that for them?’ So that’s been a big piece in terms of my lens of really understanding that more because I think in our desire often to do what’s right, sometimes you have to kind of back up, and say what’s right is to really think about what do they need to keep building that capacity in English and not making any other assumptions other than that. So that’s been a big piece for me that I have really learned and learned to kind of think about with the team and when I’m facilitating the meetings, just kind of saying, ‘Let’s just really think about this.’

Rebecca’s example of Kate’s influence on her growth is powerful because the new information and modeling of how to use that new information to enhance interventions for English learners provided a challenge for Rebecca. That challenge provided a context for her growth because it shifted her perspective in her work with English learners. Rebecca described hearing Kate’s voice in her head even when Kate was not present at meetings, influencing her own leadership in the team. Rebecca also described understanding her lens to have changed and to have grown to be able to better question her assumptions about English learners, and in her role as a member of the team. Rebecca also noted the five-year arch of her growth, which relates to the continuity aspect of a holding environment. Having Kate as a mentor for five years provided a sustained and continuous context for her growth, which in this case was focused on supporting English learners. In making sense of Rebecca’s experiences on the Child Study team, I understand Kate’s clear influence on the positive ways in which Rebecca saw this teaming and collegial inquiry experience as a context for supporting her growth. By sitting on the team and modeling for everyone, Rebecca was able to internalize Kate’s knowledge and guidance and to take on a similar role in facilitating the growth of others on the team in her “Let’s just really think about this” approach to helping the team surface their underlying assumptions about English learners. Kate’s presence, whether physical or
psychological, played a critical role in the holding environment Rebecca experienced in her work on the Child Study team. Kate offered the challenge of information, or expertise, in working with English learners to Rebecca, whether or not she was present. She also offered support for Rebecca’s growth by modeling how to think differently about English learners by being part of the collegial inquiry team.

I also understand Rebecca’s experiences to reveal Kate’s intention to create a robust and interwoven set of growth-enhancing contexts for Rebecca, a context that included all four pillars simultaneously. In her role as mentor, Kate provided challenge, in a developmental sense, for Rebecca’s leadership growth when she encouraged her to work toward her principal’s license. She simultaneously provided a developmental challenge to Rebecca through the provision of information and expertise in the area of English learners in her role on the Child Study team, which prompted Rebecca to take a new perspective on how she worked with English learners. Rebecca also experienced the holding environments of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring in a continuous manner, under five years’ of Kate’s leadership.

**Kalvin.** For Kalvin, his experiences with Kate as a mentor began with her work as a professor at a local university during his teacher preparation program. Kalvin shared: “I came here [Woodland Heights and Glenville Public Schools] because Kate, as you know, she was our Reading Language Arts professor, and so the last three years, I’ve been here....” Kalvin’s choice speaks to how much he valued the holding environment Kate provided for his growth. He shared:

[I chose] Glenville and specifically the school with Kate where she was my Reading Language Arts Professor. Something in the course where she shared it out. Early in the year, she said she has, I forgot the word she used. Not a track but kind of a growth period, or she shows or sees it within a graph, kind of, how
teachers evolve and that it’s going to be there. And I remember, this was not even what I was thinking about working in her district or in her school but just feeling like a sense of calm with that and also feeling that that definitely made sense and that that’s a reasonable expectation. So yes someone is going to set goals for me and have goals to support me as I go through those goals, but that it’s going to be within these reasonable stages. ‘Okay you’re a new teacher so it’s going to look like, X, Y or Z. You’re more experienced and now here you can be doing this or that.’

Kalvin understood Kate’s action of providing a different perspective, one aspect of the holding environment that she provided, on the arc of a teaching career as extremely powerful both in her role as professor before joining the staff, and then later in his role as faculty member at Woodland Heights. Kate’s framing was critical for Kalvin to move past his nervousness as a new teacher and experience a calm once he was able take on a new perspective on how he might expect to grow as a teacher over time. Kalvin’s example illustrates how Kate’s framing of teacher development was supportive to Kalvin in enabling him to take a different perspective on his personal development as a teacher and teacher-leader.

In his interviews, Kalvin reflected on how he had been growing to become a more “independent or self-sustaining teacher,” and how he experienced engaging in the pillars as supporting this growth. He talked about the give and take among colleagues and Kate’s encouragement for him to take on leadership challenges as helping him to be more empowered in the professional learning environments with his colleagues. He stated that he thought that teachers need a purposeful curriculum, just like the children in their classrooms, to grow into professionals with balanced home and work lives and to be able to meet all the classroom demands of teaching. He said:

Professionally, I do think we can grow stronger if we’re focusing as opposed to always thinking about how do you do that as a teacher of general education. It’s why I need to develop and be efficient in my math, my literacy, even my science,
my social studies, the ELL component…. I don’t want to burn out, and I love what I do. And I’ve been finding a better balance and feeling better about that balance but it’s within gradual increments and it’s so critical, I think.

Kalvin understood Kate’s investment in him and the support he felt across the pillars as critical to supporting his work as a teacher because it affirmed his efforts and talents and helped him to feel valued and competent. When I asked him what he had learned through engaging in the pillars, he said he had grown through his professional learning community (PLC) team experiences, through Kate’s mentoring, and through taking on leadership roles. He stated that he had learned to be more open to sharing (giving and receiving feedback), to trust his colleagues, and to take risks. Kalvin said:

So I guess those are the big things that I’ve learned. They’re not these kind of concrete or tangible or lower-level things. It’s interesting. So it’s like, in that respect, it brings some of these back more to that ability to either be, for lack of better words, independent or self-sustaining, in the sense that still collaborating, but being able to hopefully run a highly efficient classroom and effective classroom design.

Kalvin’s self-reflections illustrated deep learning and growth through the pillars. Kalvin spoke at length about his journey to become more “independent or self-sustaining,” and he understood Kate’s affirmations, encouragement, and belief in him to be important aspects of how his professional learning context supported his growth. I elaborate on Kalvin’s experiences within his PLC team and being mentored by Kate later in the chapter. Here it is important to note that by examining Kalvin and Rebecca’s experiences with Kate as their mentor, it appeared as though Kate had crafted a series of professional learning environments that were holding environments for Kalvin’s growth. The continuity they experienced in their relationship with Kate as their mentor; the supports of modeling, framing, and affirmation; and the challenge of encouraging new leadership roles and capacities were key features of the holding environments Kate provided to
Kalvin and Rebecca as their mentor and orchestrator of growth-enhancing environments. Next, I turn to participants’ experiences with collegial inquiry teams as growth-enhancing environments.

**Experiencing Collegial Inquiry Teams as Growth-Enhancing Environments**

Across both sites, a majority of participants (8/11) understood their experience engaging in collegial inquiry teams as growth enhancing. Vanessa, Robert, and Rebecca understood their experiences with the Response to Intervention (RTI) and Child Study teams at Woodland Heights to be growth enhancing. I begin with their experiences before moving into a discussion of how Nadine, Hillary, Sara, Lauren, Casey, and Kalvin understood their experiences on collaborative inquiry teams and PLC teams as growth enhancing.

**RTI and Child Study Teams.** Table 16 displays the participants whose experiences I selected for this section to illustrate the ways that participants made sense of their experiences with RTI and Child Study teams as growth-promoting contexts.
Table 16

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Experiences with RTI and Child Study Teams as Growth-enhancing Environments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert, Vanessa, and Rebecca all discussed experiences engaging in collegial inquiry teams such as RTI and Child Study teams as growth-enhancing experiences, especially for their work teaching English learners. For instance, in Chapter V, Robert spoke of the collaboration between himself and other educators at Woodland Heights working on the Child Study and RTI teams in the context of adaptive challenges he faced with English learners. In one example, he shared that engaging in collegial inquiry was critical to supporting his work with diagnosing an English learner’s strengths and growth areas because the student was “not making progress in Math the way that a team of us expected that he would.” Robert elaborated on how the experience in the RTI team helped him to generate new approaches and understandings of how to best work with this student:

But what we were trying to figure out as we were looking at his Math work and looking at some of his problem solving, was: Is he not understanding the question that’s being asked or is there something else to this that we’re not seeing? Is there a number sense issue? Is there a conceptual issue that he’s not understanding? So we tried to remedy that in a few different ways.
With a team of experts at the table (all specialists at the school), continually talking and thinking together, they experienced multiple aspects of holding environment—the provision of a space for reflection, the provision of information, collaboration, and the continuity of participating on the team over time. Robert, Vanessa, and Rebecca all understood their collegial inquiry team work to be powerful because the holding environment helped them to grow to better support all learners in the school community.

Robert’s experiences below were representative of Vanessa and Rebecca’s as well:

With the RTI work, because we do progress monitoring all the time, you either know right away whether it’s working or not. And it’s powerful, but it also makes you as a teacher re-think a lot of what you’re doing and has been a great journey this year, actually. So it’s really good. That this is what people will be doing which is part of their practice which is sharing this practice, questioning our own practice, and seeking answers through colleagues or through other resources to meet the needs of students in ways that we might not have thought about if we were isolated in our own classrooms without that interaction…. I don’t know what the right word is, but essentially the practicalities have been put into place [the idea of the infrastructure], so that teachers can do the work.

Also, Robert, Vanessa, and Rebecca all emphasized the importance of having English learner experts at the table in collegial inquiry meetings. This provision of information, or expertise, provided important opportunities for new perspectives. Rebecca spoke of the importance of Kate’s expertise in her own learning, and Robert and Vanessa shared many instances where the ELL specialists in the building played a crucial role in making the pillars valuable spaces for their learning to better meet the needs of English learners.

Robert, like Rebecca, also experienced the pillars of collegial inquiry and teaming to support his growth in terms of leadership capacity. He served in a leadership capacity on one of the school’s collegial inquiry teams, and he reflected on how he had noticed his own growth in terms of leadership. He shared:
If there’s conflict in a meeting that I might be facilitating, I know I’m always looking to see how we can get to consensus, not to avoid the conflict but to figure out a way where it’s going to work, so that we can all leave feeling that something’s been accomplished. And I think part of it comes from being a middle child in a very active family. And negotiation was a big part of it, but I never liked the idea of being in an argument with my siblings and feeling like we didn’t like each other at the end of the day. In some ways, it is probably the strength I have as a leader, is also a real challenge and a deficit in other ways. Because I’ve learned over the last few years that in leadership, you’re not going to have everybody leave the meeting feeling great everyday. I still find it a challenge because I want people to be happy and satisfied and fulfilled professionally. And when it doesn’t go that way, I feel it deeply and want to try to make it right, but I also know that we can’t always do that. I’m still working on that.

Robert saw that his natural tendency was to keep the peace as a leader or facilitator, reflecting that he used to feel that he was a successful team leader if everyone left the meeting feeling good. He talked about working on that aspect of his leadership to not feel like everything always has to go well. He understood the continuous and sustained context of taking a leadership role on a collegial inquiry team as providing many opportunities to support his evolving perspective on his own leadership.

Robert, Vanessa, and Rebecca also understood their work in collegial inquiry teams to be part of an important school transformation process. Robert shared this in relation to the RTI team’s work focusing on data, which echoed Vanessa and Rebecca’s sentiments as well:

I think there has been a really strong focus and a good focus on looking at data in our school to really understand where children are at the present time and to inform future planning. Well, I think we’ve always done that, there’s a different collaborative model that I think that has emerged wherein in some ways, teachers in our schools were very much islands of excellence in their own classroom doing wonderful things with students and really helping them to stretch and to grow. The shift has been at grade level, that the teachers feel like we’re responsible for all children at that grade level. So it’s no longer my students or your students, it’s ‘our’ students. Having been in this town and the profession for 25 years, to me a sea change.
Robert understood Woodland Heights to have a different collaborative model where the educators in the building shifted from being “islands of excellence” to feeling collectively accountable for shared students.

Vanessa saw a similar sea change in how educators at Woodland Heights had been transformed by a collaborative process and vision. I understood Robert and Vanessa’s experiences to be linked to their work engaging in the pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry. Vanessa shared more of her experiences on the RTI team that were similar to Robert and Rebecca’s experiences:

In light of the RTI piece… there has been a breakdown of department domains, that the boundaries were so thick, and so now we’re collaborating more. And that’s helpful. And it’s impressive. So the literacy people are training all people. This is how we collect this data, so people are getting ‘like’ language. We’re getting concepts that are across the curriculum, across the domains. And so it’s very impressive to me. When we collect this data, you see the media specialist; the ELL teachers are in there; the speech-language pathologists are in there; the resource specialists are in there; the literacy specialists, and within a period of days, we screen the entire school. But we come together to be trained in how to collect this data. And then we’re working together meeting every child in the building—talk about a united front! I’ve been in the field 30 years. The speech pathologist was here, and she didn’t talk to the literacy specialist. The literacy and language person didn’t talk to the speech and language person. I see those walls coming down, and the goal is that these children belong to everyone.

Vanessa’s metaphor of the walls coming down between departments depicted the same theme Robert explored with his metaphor of the school moving away from “islands of excellence.” Rebecca shared another set of experiences on this same theme of school-wide growth and transformation. She said:

It’s been a great experience, and it’s one of those things when I first started at Woodland Heights 17 years ago was a school nobody wanted to work at. I came in and like, ‘Oh, you’re at Woodland Heights.’ I’m like, ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Well, their scores aren’t great.’ There was a lot of negativity. It has in the last few years become, in the last three or four years, you can’t buy a house here. They’re outbidding each other to stay in this district. It’s amazing, and it’s a place where people want to be, where there’s collaboration with parents, with staff, with
kids. And it’s grown into this tremendous place where people are doing RTI and doing different things and thinking about projects and really enhancing education, looking at the whole child and really thinking about what’s the data and how are we deriving interventions and what are we looking at. It’s been a really cool journey to get to this place.

The details of the picture Rebecca painted of the transformed school include an emphasis on collaboration and inquiry work through RTI and using data to inform practice. She understood this school change process as a journey where the faculty had arrived at this thriving place where professional adult learning and student learning were occurring hand in hand.

Later in the chapter, I discuss how participants described the ways in which district-level and building-level leaders created school-wide and district-wide contexts for growth, which is important for contextualizing Rebecca’s discussion of the transformation she described above. I include the excerpt here to highlight the connection between the personal growth and organizational growth participants experienced through their experiences with RTI and Child Study collegial inquiry teams. Next, I continue to explore the holding environments participants experienced within the pillars of collegial inquiry and teaming by exploring how participants experienced collaborative inquiry teams and PLC teams at both sites as growth-enhancing contexts.

**Collaborative Inquiry and PLC (Professional Learning Community) Teams**

While there were a large majority of participants (8/11) who experienced their collaborative inquiry and PLC (Professional Learning Community) teams as growth-enhancing environments, I focus on four participants’ experiences because of space limitations in this chapter. I present Nadine, Hillary, Casey, and Kalvin’s experiences with collegial inquiry teams to illustrate the ways in which they understood these pillars
to be growth enhancing (see Table 17). At Springford Academy, teacher teams organized by grade level, subject, or specialty were called collaborative inquiry teams. At Woodland Heights, grade-level teams were called PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). All of these teams are examples of collegial inquiry teams.

Table 17

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Experiences with Collaborative Inquiry and PLC Teams as Growth-enhancing Environments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10</td>
<td>45-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>years</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nadine.** Nadine understood her professional learning experiences at Springford Academy to be growth enhancing. She spoke of being included in the collegial inquiry teamwork for the first time during the 2011-2012 school year. She explained that as a specialist she had not originally been part of the formal collegial inquiry teamwork, and
participating in those pillars was a growth-enhancing experience complete with high challenge and high support. She described the challenge of the engaging in the collegial inquiry work as part of Springford Academy’s annual Collegial Inquiry Showcase and Fair where educators presented their collegial inquiry team work conducted throughout the school year in a culminating event:

It’s not stagnant place. Things change. And change causes stress, but one of my favorite instructors used to say, ‘Without stress, there is no growth.’ And sometimes, I have to remind myself. I actually initially with the data fair, I kept thinking to myself ‘Dear God in heaven, when am I going to figure this part out?’ Yes. I was really stressed out. However, once it was said and done, to share and give people an insight into what you’re doing and what you’re seeing and what you’re addressing in your professional capacity that they might not otherwise have. And they can take that knowledge away and use it for it’s face value, or they can use it to inform how they proceed in there own practice, or to inform how they proceed within the culture, so it was valuable, and I’m glad that we did it.

In this excerpt, Nadine understood participating in the collaborative inquiry data fair as both stressful and rewarding, demonstrating the high degree of challenge that was present for her as she engaged in the collegial inquiry teamwork. Along with the high degree of challenge, Nadine also described the high degree of support:

[We] got together with our supervisor who is incredibly supportive. She’s very organized. She’s one of my favorite bosses of all time. So we went to her, and we said, ‘We are totally struggling and stressed because the guidelines for this were very clear, and they will be very specific and they are very applicable to teaching. Not to nursing. And we don’t know how to apply what they’re looking for in the same way that it’s listed here.’ She sort of helped us reframe that and refocus it. But, she really helped us, and she basically said, ‘It’s not optional so figure it out.’ She didn’t turn her back on us when she said that. She said, ‘It’s not optional, and we have to figure it out. Let’s do this.’ So we did and it worked.

I understood Nadine’s experiences to illustrate a professional learning context where she felt both supported and challenged to grow toward new competencies. In her specialist role, she had not used a data inquiry framework for understanding and presenting her
work with students at Springford Academy. Having the opportunity to engage in the same data inquiry work as the classroom teachers at the school was very challenging, but with her supervisor’s support, she was proud of her work and her ability to contribute to the school-wide conversation on improving student achievement. Nadine experienced this collegial inquiry teaming as a holding environment for her growth, providing the challenges and supports throughout the year to enable her to participate in the culminating event of the data fair.

**Hillary, Lauren, and Sara.** Hillary, Lauren, and Sara also understood their collegial inquiry teaming experiences as growth enhancing. For the sake of space, I just use Hillary’s experiences to highlight the holding environment that participants experienced within grade-level collaborative inquiry teams. Hillary spoke of her grade-level collaborative inquiry team’s accomplishments where they saw significant gains in student achievement scores after their yearlong collegial inquiry project focused on revamping the curriculum and raising team-wide expectations of students. She shared: “There was a high level of collaboration, and we accomplished a lot of incredible things.” Hillary described that engaging in the pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry helped everyone incorporate new strategies for teaching and allowed the group to shift their approaches collectively to better address the needs of students. Like Nadine, Hillary understood her experiences working within her collaborative inquiry team to include support and challenge. She described how the administration worked to support her as she led her team through their collaborative inquiry work:

I really had to work with my administration last year to really forge a strong vision of what our grade should be because there really wasn’t one, and everyone was all over the place and really doing their own thing, and it had really detrimental outcomes for the kids over the past few years. So we really worked
together to create a strong vision for the grade, and I felt really respected and valued during that whole process. I really do think that our school relies a lot on the voice of the teachers and on the voice of the teacher leaders to inform their decisions. And that’s fantastic. I’ve never been in an environment like that before.

Hillary recognized that the growth she and her team experienced was due in large part to the support she had as their leader within the challenging context of setting a coherent and strong vision for her grade-level team.

**Casey and Kalvin.** At Woodland Heights, Casey and Kalvin participated on the same grade-level team, and they described it as a holding environment for their growth and development. Casey spoke at length about their PLC team and her appreciation for being placed on grade-level PLC team that was so productive and that had the ability to work together to solve grade-level challenges. She shared:

I’m very fortunate because the team that we have is extremely productive and extremely thought provoking and just full of so much expertise across a whole span of areas of expertise in education. So I think that I’ve also been told that our team is unique in that way because they’re very much like, ‘Let’s be really productive. Let’s figure this out, and let’s problem-solve.’ It’s a fortunate team to come into.

Casey and Kalvin both explained that being on a team that was able to engage in collective problem solving was supportive to their learning and growth. They both spoke about having a very challenging group of students in the grade during the 2011-2012 school year, and that they experienced their PLC team as a context to engage in the kind of problem solving that supported their growth in the face of increased challenges in the classroom. Casey explained:

So when we come together, we were talking yesterday, we really name a problem and try figure out how we’re going to fix it. It’s not just we’re naming a problem, and we’re stuck on it and we’re going to keep naming it all year long. It’s really, ‘What can we do for these students? And how are we going to do it? And did you try this? Okay, I’m going to try this, and it didn’t really work. You’re going to try this.’ Just thinking ahead and really thinking about how we
can service the students, and let’s try plan A, B and C and did they work? If not, what’s D going to look like?

In our interviews, Casey spoke about the challenges of being new to the district and the great support she felt having such varied expertise on her PLC team and the collaborative spirit the team brought to problem-solving on behalf of all students in the grade.

Casey understood that this collegial inquiry work was providing her and her colleagues with a space to support students outside of the classroom context. They faced the challenges together, created collective supports for one another, and maintained the holding environment over the course of the school year. For example, the team looked across the entire grade to identify patterns in student achievement data, and they pulled students from all the classrooms into groups based on their needs. One classroom might have had two “high” learners but across the grade, there were eight who could be pulled during Rest and Read time to get more tailored instruction. Casey understood that she could not have supported students in this way on her own. She said:

“We’re hoping that we’re really finding students who aren’t getting interventions inside the classroom or outside the classroom who could really use a little more support. We kind of started it as our PLC with a feeling that this would really be a great collaborative thing that would really benefit those needy learners, either needy on the low spectrum or needy on the high spectrum.

In Casey’s example of how her PLC team worked together to understand and plan interventions for their common students, I understood that she saw her PLC team as a space that supported her growth through collaborative work to implement new strategies that would better serve their students.

Kalvin shared experiences that were similar to Casey’s when discussing his PLC team. He described the same enhanced ability to serve students and the personal growth
he experienced as a result of his work engaging in the pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry on his PLC team. He shared:

   It has affected us as teachers. With this unique group of children, with so many behavioral needs, Special Education needs, this combination, we’ve done some more creative planning for our curriculum. It hasn’t been so insular each classroom, but it’s been across the grade. So we pulled our four or five highest learners and Casey and was working with them once a week. The four or five children that had a common behavioral challenge, myself and Rebecca were working with them Wednesday afternoons for a chunk. The lowest kids with the literacy have been working in the hallway two times a week. And that’s been different. We’ve had to do that on necessity, but it just has been a different way of thinking.

Both Kalvin and Casey experienced their work on their PLC teams as providing different ways of working and different ways of thinking about supporting students in individual classrooms and across the grade. They understood that meeting adaptive challenges in their grade demanded that they do and think differently, and they saw their PLC team as growing that capacity of individual team members and the group in their collaborative work together. Kalvin shared:

   And I guess that’s going back to building the capacity, maintaining it, and utilizing it. But because there’s been a large capacity in our group, I would say it allows me to take these different skills and subsets and use it in my own practice efficiently and effectively with my students. And not just September and get re-charged again, but it’s something that it’s constantly building upon.

Kalvin and Casey’s experiences illustrate how a team engaging in collegial inquiry can truly create holding environments for each other during a school year. Their experiences also highlight the importance of continuity over the course of the school year, and how this collaboration supported them in their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge presented by this group of learners.

   Both Casey and Kalvin also understood that their PLC team might not have been the norm in the school. Almost everyone from Woodland Heights in the study (5/7)
mentioned how special the team was, how truly collaborative and accountable they were in developing shared expertise, making collective commitments, taking ownership over results, and engaging in productive problem-solving (Platt et al., 2008).

The other two classroom teachers in my study at Woodland Heights did not describe their PLC teams in this way. Rachel said very little about her experiences on her PLC team, and Sofia spoke of the difficulty the team had following protocols and allowing everyone’s voices to be heard. Sofia explained:

At the beginning of the year, Kate suggested sticking to the protocol so whatever. When I am leading, I try to do that, and I try to stick with the time and send out an agenda and things like that, but I notice sometimes that when it’s not done, I don’t get to hear from everybody. I don’t get to be heard, myself, too, so that’s been a little bit frustrating. In a recent meeting, I was leader, and I sent out the agenda and the minutes, and I made space for each person to talk, things like that. But people kept interrupting her, and I wanted to go to her and say I’m really sorry. But I wasn’t interrupting her, so that’s just a little bit hard.

Sofia’s experiences are important to consider alongside Kalvin and Casey’s in that each team is not exactly in the same place, and the pillars cannot simply be uniformly instituted for educators. Robert also made this point in reflecting on his understanding of the broader view of how PLCs operate as growth-enhancing spaces for educators. He said:

Well, everybody’s at different places on the journey. To be fair, when we talk about professional learning communities that are established at a grade level by virtue of the fact that you’re teaching at the same grade level their group dynamics would mean that some people, some groups might move along at a different pace or with different needs, but by-and-large at this school, I really do think that people feel that when we get together as a PLC, the focus of the work is not about planning field trips, it’s not about who’s going to take the yearbook committee this year.

It is important to recognize that in presenting the cases where participants experienced PLC teams and collaborative inquiry teams as growth enhancing contexts,
not everyone in the sample shared those experiences. I speculate that those two participants who did not describe their experiences engaging in the pillars as holding environments for growth had less contact with Kate as a mentor and did not happen to be on collaborative and accountable (Platt et. al., 2008) collegial inquiry teams.

Section Summary

In this section, I explored participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars, and I began by presenting the finding that a majority of participants (9/11) experienced the pillars as growth-enhancing environments. I explored Sara, Lauren, and Hillary’s experiences with TLA at Springford Academy. I then discussed Rebecca and Kalvin’s experiences at Woodland Heights with Kate serving as mentor and orchestrator of multiple holding environments. I concluded the section by examining participants’ experiences with collegial inquiry teams at both sites and the ways in which they understood those pillars to provide growth-enhancing contexts. Over the course of this section, I noted three important features of the holding environments that promoted participants’ growth: a) the support of space to reflect on practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; provided space to reflect on their practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year or multiple school years. I also noted additional supports experienced by Rebecca and Kalvin who were mentored by Kate: modeling, framing, and affirmation. Next, I explore how
participants’ understood district-level and building-level leaders’ role in establishing the infrastructure for the growth-enhancing environments of the pillars.

Engaging in the Pillars: District-Level and Building-Level Infrastructure

All participants described the role that district-level and/or building-level leaders played in creating an infrastructure that established the pillars as growth-enhancing environments. In terms of participants’ understandings of the role district leaders played in creating a district-wide infrastructure that supported their growth, they described a district-wide holding environment including supports, challenges, and continuity. Even for those two participants (Rachel and Sofia from Woodland Heights) who did not describe their experiences engaging in the pillars within the context of their buildings as growth enhancing, they did view specific courses offered by the district as growth enhancing. Participants (9/11) also described their building leaders’ efforts to create the supports, challenges, and continuity of holding environments.

In Chapter IV, I discussed the different roles that Sol Harbour, as district leader, and Kate Villa, as principal, play in their districts and in the school sites I chose for my study. I chose Woodland Heights and the two elementary school campuses of Springford Academy for my study because they both served K-5 populations but more importantly because both Sol and Kate use the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a).

Both Kate and Sol understand and apply constructive-developmental theory and the pillars to their leadership practice, have invited Drago-Severson to consult with them, other leaders in their schools, and teachers to support adult learning and development, and have significant and ongoing district support for robust professional learning.
While both Sol and Kate share the same commitment to this leadership approach, they hold different positions and have different commitments. Kate is the principal of one elementary school with approximately 45 educators and approximately 500 students. Sol had served in a similar position as Upper School principal before assuming the district-wide position of Head of School at Springford Academy. In his district position, Sol leads approximately 100 adults who educate approximately 1150 students district-wide—more than double the number of educators and students at Woodland Heights. In considering the data presented in this section, it is important to keep these positional leadership differences in mind because of the differences in how the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) and pillars can be employed in support of educators’ internal capacity building from these two different positions.

In the first subsection below, I present participants’ descriptions and understandings of the infrastructure created by district leaders, and then I discuss participants’ descriptions and understandings of the infrastructure created by building leaders in a second subsection.

**The Role of District Leaders in Creating District-Wide Holding Environments**

All of the participants at Springford Academy and all of the participants at Woodland Heights spoke about the different aspects of the growth-enhancing environments they experienced at a district-wide level. At Springford Academy, Nadine’s experiences captured the essence of how Sol, as the district leader, constructed a district-wide holding environment, including challenges, supports, and continuity. I begin with her experiences, and then I include Sara and Hillary’s experiences. I conclude by
discussing five participants’ experiences from Glenville Public Schools (Woodland Heights). Table 18 provides a summary of the cases presented in this section as examples to show the role of district leaders in creating district-wide holding environments.

Table 18

*Participants Selected to Illustrate Experiences with the Role of District-level Leaders in Creating District-wide Holding Environments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
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<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
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<td>Sara</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
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<td>Casey</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rebecca</td>
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<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nadine spoke at length about Sol’s personal role as the charter district leader to create a shared vision and mission for the entire faculty and organization. She said that his vision and high standards were realized through the administrative team’s leadership,
and she said he had created a purpose and context for the entire faculty to learn and
grow on behalf of students. Nadine explained:

The driving force, I think always, always from an administrator’s standpoint
with this current administration and a hundred percent of the people who are in an
administrative positions right now, I would say is what is best for kids. And the
mission of the school is clearly what guides and drives the decisions that are
made. Success in college, responsible citizenship, lifelong love of learning. Those
things. We all know it. We all strive for it. We all keep it in that forefront of our
mind when approaching our jobs and our overall connection to the school. It’s
important. That, I think, builds a strong infrastructure.

Nadine shared this description of Springford Academy’s district leadership when I asked
her to tell me about the school context. Her sentiments underscore the importance of a
clear vision and holding all educators to high standards in relation to building a “strong
infrastructure” for the professional learning and development of faculty that will lead to
better student achievement. The high standards held by the district leader for every
educator in the district provided a context of challenge, and the commitment to
professional learning and development provided the supportive context in which
educators could meet that challenge.

Nadine also pointed to the power that an individual district leader can play in
creating a professional context that educators experience as supportive of their growth to
meet the challenge of providing an excellent education to all students. Nadine had
worked at Springford Academy since its first years as a charter school, and she described
a dramatic change that came with Sol Harbour:

Since Sol came, it has all changed. It’s gotten better and better each year, and I
think the kids are offered an excellent education…. There’s so much attention
paid to students with learning differences and differentiated instruction and being
very careful to assess and meet the special needs population needs, the English
language learners, to become a welcoming place for families and for all cultures.
And it’s ever-growing, ever-moving, ever-changing, heading in bigger, better,
wider horizons.
Nadine characterized Sol’s leadership to be at once pushing for continual growth and change and at the same time providing the continuity and “stabilizing force” that made the organization strong. She explained:

> There was no infrastructure here at all. It changed with every administrator, with every change of… It changed every time. Somebody new came in, and it felt like they were throwing the baby out with the bath water repeatedly. That’s not the case anymore. Sol has been a really strong stabilizing force.

Nadine’s description of Sol’s district leadership illuminated the important role district leadership played in educators’ experiences of the pillars. Nadine’s experiences are specific to the district context of Springford Academy and Sol’s leadership, but they also highlight how participants across both sites understood their district-level leaders as playing important roles in creating growth-enhancing professional learning environments.

Sara also spoke about respect for how district leadership, namely Sol, created opportunities that supported her growth and development. For educators at Springford Academy, the phrase “teacher voice” came up frequently in reference to what they felt supported their growth and learning. Sara and Hillary both shared numerous examples of how they valued the administration listening to them and creating spaces for teachers to develop their voices and their leadership. Sara explained:

> It’s like I hear a lot of stories from other urban school districts. And I’m like, ‘What? Is that really happening? Is that really for real?’ It makes you realize how fortunate you are to be at a school that is listening to teacher’s ideas, working with teachers on some of their major issues.

Participants at both sites, like Sara, made this kind of comparison to other school districts when they spoke about their professional learning experiences; they felt respected, and they felt like they could trust that district leadership would listen to their ideas and value their input and preferences. Drago-Severson (2012) names trust and respect as core
elements of creating learning environments that promote leadership development in educators. Across the sample and at both sites, participants spoke about the district context of having these two elements. Drago-Severson (2012) also included care as another core element of creating spaces for educators to grow, and two participants from Springford Academy shared personal examples where Sol, even as a district leader, cared for their well-being and success as human beings and as educators. Hillary shared an example about Sol playing a mentoring role in her development and helping her to work through an inflamed conflict within her grade-level team, and Sara described an instance where she sought Sol’s guidance, calling him over a vacation week to get help making a big career decision about potentially taking on a new leadership position. The ways in which participants spoke about Sol by name and chose to share examples that highlighted his trust, respect, and care illuminated the important role district leadership played in their understanding of and experiences with the pillars. Participants understood these experiences as supports to their growth, and I understood these experiences as an important part of the continuity of the district-wide holding environment intentionally created through Sol’s leadership.

Speaking about Glenville Public Schools, the school district for Woodland Heights, Kalvin spoke about his chose to work in Glenville Public Schools. He understood that Glenville was a district that leveraged by human and financial resources for professional learning. He shared:

[There were] people that pulled me into their office and said, ‘What are you thinking about doing?’ And I was offered the job in a different district and not that, that district is the extreme, but I mean it’s a little more urban than Glenville. But I told them straight to their face, ‘No. This is what I need. I need a much more well-resourced and supported district and school, especially first-year out.’ And if I will go into those places, but I want to go there and be effective….
Kalvin added that he needed to be in a district that would provide mentoring and support for his professional learning. Kalvin valued and understood the district’s ability to provide supportive and well-resourced professional learning context and discussed this value in relation to his experiences with the pillars.

Rachel offered a more longitudinal perspective on the district’s priorities and capacities to offer collaborative, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities that supported educators’ learning and growth district-wide. She spoke about an evolution toward collegial inquiry with teachers’ collaborative work at the center of their professional learning:

I think when we had professional development when I first came to the district, it was more of something that was done to us. Somebody came in, presented some kind of high standard of something, and said, ‘Try it.’ And we’ve had better presenters than that. They weren’t ‘My way or the highway,’ for the most part. And now we’ve moved more I think, some of the more internal first of all. The building or the district, meaning that the presenter came from inside. Some of them involve the PLC or the collaborative working units instead of going and hearing a big guru tell you something. Maybe you develop a rubric and score student work or something and you learn a lot from that. And then that benefits the students.

Rebecca shared a similar understanding of the district’s evolution toward a more collaborative, teacher-centered inquiry approach to professional learning for educators in the district.

So I think still being in that culture, which very much Glenville has become where there is professional development and encouragement for really digging deeper and understanding best teaching practices and how we collaborate and how we look at our PLC work and how all of those pieces come together to help students to be successful. So I would say just continuing and making sure we just have that space to do that which Glenville seems very committed to at this point.

Robert picked up on this point of district priorities as well, pointing out that at the top of the organization, he noticed a sustained commitment to valuing this kind of professional
learning, and the ways in which that sustained commitment over time builds trust between the district and educators. He said:

And when we talk about trust. That’s one thing that can really disengage trust from teachers if you have one priority and then one person in one role changes, and then all of a sudden all of the priorities change. And I think this system has tried very hard to avoid that. Especially in the last couple of years. So it’s good.

Robert made an important point here that Nadine also discussed in reference to Sol Harbour and Springford Academy. They both highlighted the importance of district continuity in terms of supporting the district-wide vision of collaborative, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities grounded in inquiry work as the driving force of improving instruction and student achievement.

Rebecca also emphasized the financial aspect of the district’s commitment to support these professional learning opportunities for educators. She shared examples of the district providing financial support for educators to attend conferences and to apply for funds to engage in meaningful professional learning opportunities to support their professional growth and learning:

In my early years here, there wasn’t a lot of professional development. I mean, you might go to outside conferences, but it wasn’t a real organized program within the district. So you would be supported if you signed up, you might not get funding for it, but you’d certainly be supported and having a day to go to something. Now, it feels like it’s very much everyone is supported in exploring professional development. You can apply for funds. There’s things that are offered where you go, and you don’t have to get funds because they’re in-house now. And just having that ability to really enrich yourself professionally and just really know more about how to teach your students.

Other participants also referenced the importance of district-level financial resources for their learning and development.

Looked at collectively, participants’ experiences illuminate the district-level vision and leadership that laid the foundation for establishing the pillars as growth-
enhancing professional learning contexts. The district context can itself be understood as a holding environment. Nadine and Kalvin’s experiences highlight the way in which district leaders set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve, and those expectations served as the challenge to prompt growth. Nadine, Robert, Rachel, and Rebecca also understood the importance of district leader vision in creating a stabilizing force, or holding environment continuity, to create and maintain the infrastructure and conditions for growth that translate to supporting student achievement and learning. Sara, Hillary, Rachel, Rebecca, Casey, and Kalvin all highlighted different ways in which the district context supported their growth through providing human and financial resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). They understood these supports to their growth and appreciated that district leaders demonstrated care and respect for educators that, in turn, engendered trust and supported their growth. Next, I explore participants’ experiences with building leaders’ efforts to create school-wide holding environments for growth.

**The Role of Building Leaders in Creating School-Wide Holding Environments**

A majority of participants (8/11) described the role that their building leaders played in creating school-wide growth-enhancing environments. I selected five of those cases to explore in this section because they were the five participants who spoke most about the role their building leaders played in relation to the establishment of the pillars. Table 19 provides a summary of the cases presented in this section as examples to show the role of building leaders in creating school-wide holding environments.
Participants understood the importance of trust, respect, and care at the building level as well as at the district level. Three participants from Woodland Heights spoke about the importance of these elements in their experiences engaging in the pillars. Kalvin spoke about the importance of the building leader at Woodland Heights demonstrating high levels of trust, support, respect, and care when supporting educators to meet very high expectations for teaching and learning. All participants at both sites referred to the high expectations to which they were held within their school buildings and the supports that were provided to enable them to meet those expectations. Kalvin shared:

And it’s complete, full support from our principal. But not just our principal. It’s all the curriculum heads that really do; they come and give information and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Woodland Heights</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Springford Academy</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>45-60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
again they have the high expectations but I mean, gosh, I have always had every single material I needed. And there really are often times I have those materials before I even think about them. And it’s never been really a gotcha game. I just the other day was telling someone else how, ‘This is my professional year… and I’ll have the math specialist observing, the head of math K-5 that observed me. Kate observed me a couple times. She does literacy.’ But it’s not a gotcha thing. It really is, it’s more like we know we like you, and this is how we want to continue to work with you.

Kalvin’s insistence that supervision is not a “gotcha thing” was a theme that ran through his interview transcripts. He emphasized how Kate and other school leaders were able to build trust among the faculty by showing respect for their work ethic, intelligence, and their drive to improve. Kalvin understood that supervision was part of his mentoring experiences, and he articulated that he understood that Kate genuinely cared about his growth and development. He spoke of building leaders providing all the resources needed and being able to frame observations so that Kalvin understood that building level leaders were carrying them out with care and respect for his practice, which allowed him to have a sense of trust.

Kalvin and Rebecca also shared examples of how they experienced Kate, as the building leader and as their mentor, as having a personalized vision for their growth and development. Earlier in the chapter, I described how Rebecca understood Kate’s guidance and mentoring to provide a context for her growth as a leader. Rebecca elaborated:

I think I’ve been very fortunate to have others mentor me. Kate has most definitely been the most significant person, has really encouraged me to apply for the administrative certification program and really saw in me that ability to move to that next step of getting certified, of doing the internship, of really taking on understanding education in a new and different way that would enrich my work with students, my work with teachers, being in the building because it would add another level of knowledge for me to have, which I think is great.
It is Kate in her role as building leader and mentor who Rebecca saw as offering her an important opportunity to be both challenged and supported through their mentoring and leadership work. Rebecca also shared an insight regarding how Kate’s approach to mentoring and providing leadership roles differed from other building leaders. Rebecca said:

And principals before me, from the first principal I had said, ‘You really should get certified.’ And I kind of went, ‘Oh that’s really nice.’ I think that the difference with Kate is that she said to me, ‘I really see in you leadership. You lead so many things. You’ve been here for so long.’ And really mentoring me and talking with me about what that might look like and why it would enrich my practice and why it was really important to think about. So she has been… I would say my mentor. Other people have encouraged me, other people have talked with me about teaching and about ways that I could kind of add to my knowledge base of education. However, I would say she really has been my mentor, and it’s been huge because it was something that I kept thinking about that I hadn’t done. She was really like, ‘You can do this and let’s think about how, and let’s figure out what it would look like.’

Rebecca had always, as she said, worked in leadership roles at Woodland Heights. It was Kate who helped to shift the context of that leadership work for Rebecca so that it would be more meaningful and further expand her capacities as a leader and educator. Kate held the vision that Rebecca could do this. Rebecca elaborated on this point further:

So that’s been very supportive and wonderful and did give me a whole new lens on education which I think has been really meaningful. I feel like just continuing what we’re doing because we have opportunities to sit together and talk about best practice, and we have opportunities to ask to go to professional development, and we have ways to keep building our knowledge base.

Under Kate’s leadership, Rebecca and Kalvin described benefiting from tailor-made experience of the pillars that helped them to continually learn and grow as leaders and educators.

Earlier in the chapter, I described how five of seven participants at Woodland Heights and all participants at Springford Academy experienced their work engaging in
the pillars of teaming and collegial inquiry as growth enhancing and as supporting their abilities to meet the adaptive challenges associated with teaching ELL students. Robert, Vanessa, and Rebecca shared examples of how participating on Child Study and RTI teams at Woodland Heights supported them to think differently and generate new approaches and understandings of how to best work with English learners, among other student subpopulations. Rebecca emphasized the critical roles Kate played to create the culture of the teams and to provide expertise for supporting teachers in their work with English learners. They also saw the RTI team as part of the transformation process orchestrated by Kate that shifted school culture to be more collaborative and accountable and in Robert’s words to break down “islands of excellence” to stretching educators to “feel like we’re responsible for all children.” These three participants shared the view that Kate’s leadership approach and vision facilitated a transformation in faculty practices and student achievement through authentic collaboration among the educators in the building.

**Section Summary**

All participants spoke about how the district leaders provided an infrastructure for the pillars to be experienced as growth enhancing, and nine participants spoke about how building leaders also provided an important infrastructure for the pillars to be experienced as holding environments for growth. Viewed together, participants’ experiences illuminate that both the district-level context and building-level context served as holding environments, providing supports, challenge and continuity. Leaders set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve, and those expectations served as the challenge to prompt growth. Participants highlighted different ways in which the district context supported their growth through providing human and financial
resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). Educators understood these supports to their growth and appreciated that leaders demonstrated care and respect for them, which in turn engendered trust and further supported their growth. The vision and sustained investments in supports to teacher growth and development served to stabilize the school and district contexts to provide the continuity of a holding environment for educator growth. Participants also experienced continuity through their successes with students and seeing the supports to their growth being translated into student achievement and learning. In the next chapter, I present how participants understood their experiences engaging in the pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how the majority of participants experienced the pillars as growth-enhancing environments. I began by exploring the finding that a majority of participants at Springford Academy described their experiences with Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA) as a growth-enhancing environment. I then described how two participants at Woodland Heights, Rebecca and Kalvin, experienced Kate as a mentor and orchestrator of multiple holding environments for their growth and development. I then looked across both sites to explore the finding that a majority of participants understood their experiences engaging in collegial inquiry teams as growth-enhancing contexts. Participants’ experiences with the pillars (e.g., TLA, mentoring, collegial inquiry teams) highlighted three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth: a) the support of space to reflect on practice by naming
challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year or multiple school years. In the context of being mentored by Kate at Woodland Heights, Rebecca and Kalvin also described the support of modeling, framing, and affirmation as important features of the holding environments that the pillars provided for their growth and development.

In the last section of the chapter I also explored the finding that all participants spoke about how district-level leaders provided an infrastructure for the pillars that they experienced as holding environments for their growth and development. I discussed how nine participants spoke about how building-level leaders also provided an important infrastructure for the pillars to be experienced as holding environments for growth. Viewed together, I understood participants’ experiences to illuminate that both the district-level context and the building-level context served as holding environments, providing supports, challenge and continuity. Leaders set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve, and those expectations served as the challenge to prompt growth. Participants highlighted different ways in which the district context supported their growth through providing human and financial resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). They understood these supports to their growth and appreciated that leaders demonstrated care and respect for educators, which in turn engendered trust and supported their growth. The vision and sustained investments in supports to teacher growth and development served to stabilize the school and district contexts to provide the continuity of a holding
environment for educator growth. In Chapter VII, I explore the extent to which the participants experienced the pillars as supportive to the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.
Chapter VII
ENGAGING IN THE PILLAR PRACTICES: SUPPORTING EDUCATORS TO ADDRESS THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY, PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES, AND ENGLISH LEARNER PROGRAMMING

In this qualitative interview study, I sought to understand how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners, how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a), and in what ways, if any, educators described and understood their experiences with the pillar practices as supportive of their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges they named. I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s research inquiry into how leaders provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges in their work in schools by focusing on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explored the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with their most difficult challenges teaching English learners.
In this chapter, I synthesize findings from Chapters V and VI to answer my third research question about the extent to which participants reported experienced engaging in the pillar practices (hereafter I will simply refer to the pillar practices as the “pillars” and participants’ reported experiences as “experiences”). As supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. In Chapter VI, I explored participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars as growth-enhancing contexts, or holding environments. I understood participants’ experiences to illuminate that both the district-level context and the building-level context served as holding environments, providing supports, challenge and continuity.

Participants’ experiences highlighted three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth within the pillars: a) the support of a time and space in which they had the opportunity to reflect on their practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year or multiple school years. In the context of being mentored by their principal Kate at Woodland Heights, two participants also described the support of modeling, framing, and affirmation as important features of the holding environments that the pillars provided for their growth and development. Taken together with findings I presented in Chapter V that illuminated how all participants experienced one or more of the adaptive challenges they named (i.e., cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming) as opportunities for their growth and development, I
understand the pillars to have created an holding environment for participants that supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Specifically, in this chapter, I explore how the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) supported participants to address personal challenge areas that related to their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. For two participants, I also explore how the pillars supported them to identify their growing edges and begin to grow to meet them I understand the concept of *growing edge* as it is used by Drago-Severson (2004b, 2009, 2012a) and Kegan (1982, 1994) to suggest the edges of a person’s thinking or sense making; in this space individuals can begin to see the limits of their thinking, knowledge, and capacities and grow at those edges. As I present in my findings in this chapter, participants’ experiences illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars (including the district-level and building-level infrastructure discussed in Chapter VI) supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Based on 10/11 participants’ experiences, key features of holding environment included: a) provision of information and access to expertise (8/10); b) time and space for reflective discussion and/or collaborative problem solving (9/10); and c) opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives (7/10). Other aspects of holding environment, mentioned by only one or two participants, included: affirmation, modeling, opportunities to initiate school-improvement projects,
time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement. I also briefly present supports other than the pillars that participants understood as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

I organize this chapter into three sections. In the first section, I briefly present an overview of the core findings in abbreviated form. Then in the second section, I explore findings relating to how participants identified their growing edges in relation to the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming and the features of the holding environment provided by the pillars that they experienced as supportive of their efforts to understand and move beyond the limits of their growing edges. I use interview data from participants to support the findings, and I also bring in the lenses of sociocultural and multicultural theories (Nieto, 2004, 2009; Gay 1995, 2002) constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), and the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) to further my analysis and interpretation of participants’ experiences. In the last section, I summarize the chapter.

Core Findings

Experiencing the Pillar Practices as Supportive to Educators’ Efforts to Address the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learner Programming

• The majority of participants (7/11) across both sites discussed how the pillars of practices of teaming, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in terms of personal
challenge areas. These personal challenge areas included: addressing issues of color blindness in the classroom, personal movement on a cultural proficiency continuum, moving their schools on a cultural competency continuum, being responsive to culturally-embedded learning and communication styles, and identifying biases that impact teaching and learning. One participant, Kalvin at Woodland Heights, also discussed how engaging in the pillars supported him to identify his growing edge in a development sense—the limits of his thinking, knowledge, and internal capacities—and supported his efforts to grow to stretch those limits. The majority of participants’ experiences (7/11) also illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency: a) provision of information and access to expertise (5/6); b) time and space for reflective discussion (3/6); c) opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives (3/6); and d) affirmation (1/6).

• The majority of participants (6/11) discussed how engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported them with personal challenge areas that included: articulating school expectations, communicating via cultural and linguistic differences, and moving their schools along the cultural competency continuum. One participant, Casey at Woodland Heights, also discussed how engaging in the pillars supported her to identify her growing edge in a development sense—the limits of her thinking, knowledge, and internal capacities—and supported her efforts to grow to stretch those limits. Additionally, participants’ experiences illuminated how several key features of
the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families: a) time and space for reflective discussion (4/6), b) opportunities to consider to others’ perspectives and offer alternative perspectives (4/6), c) provision of information and access to expertise (3/6), and d) opportunities to initiate school-improvement projects (1/6).

- The majority of participants (7/11) discussed how engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming within the context of the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) model at their schools. Specifically, participants discussed how engaging in the pillars supported them to address personal challenge areas that included: balancing pull-out and push-in schedules, diagnosing strength and growth areas for English learners, planning appropriate interventions for English learners, and responding to English learner population shifts. Participants’ experiences also illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming: a) provision of information and access to expertise (5/7), b) time and space for collaborative problem-solving (5/7), c) opportunities to pose questions and consider others’ perspectives (3/7), d) affirmation (2/7), and e) time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement (1/7).

- All participants spoke of one or more supports to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in addition to the pillars. The majority of participants (10/11) understood that aspects of their personal background, apart
from their work at Springford Academy or Woodland Heights, supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, including experience with diverse populations (6/11), educator’s family background (6/11), and experience abroad (5/11). Three participants—one at Woodland Heights and two at Springford Academy—understood their experiences with graduate school coursework to support their efforts to meet these adaptive challenges as well. The majority of participants (9/11) also understood district courses or trainings focused on the topic of cultural proficiency to support their efforts to address these three challenges. I conclude that district-provided courses, graduate coursework, and personal background—in addition participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars—played important roles in their efforts to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Experiencing the Pillar Practices as Supportive to Educators’ Efforts to Address the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learner Programming

As I noted in Chapter II, I use the term “pillars” to refer to the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring that are part of Drago-Severson’s (2004b, 2009, 2012a) learning-oriented leadership model. I begin this section by focusing on participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars, exploring the ways in which engaging in the pillars supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. I then consider the adaptive challenge of partnering with families and the extent to which the pillars supported participants’ efforts to address that
challenge. Next I look at the adaptive challenge of English learner programming and how participants experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address that challenge. I conclude by briefly considering other supports participants understood as supportive to their efforts to address these three adaptive challenges.

**Experiencing the Pillar Practices as Supportive to Educators’ Efforts to Address the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency**

The majority of participants (n=11) at each site experienced the pillars of teaming, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. I present the data for all participants regarding the extent to which their experiences engaging in the pillars supported their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in Table 20 below. I include what participants understood as their personal challenge areas in relation to this adaptive challenge. For one participant, Kalvin at Woodland Heights, working to meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency was also an opportunity for him to address his own growing edges, in a developmental sense. I noted this in Table 20. For participants who understood the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, I also listed the pillars they named and the features of the holding environment they experienced by engaging in these pillars.
Table 20

*Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency (n=11)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Casey      | Classroom Teacher | Addressing color/color blindness in classroom | Teaming/Collegial Inquiry (PLC team) | 1. Time and space for reflective discussion  
2. Opportunities to pose questions |
| Robert     | Specialist      | Personal movement on cultural proficiency continuum  
Moving school on cultural competency continuum | None Identified                    | --                                                                               |
| Sofia      | Classroom Teacher | Personal movement on cultural proficiency continuum | Teaming (with peers)                 | 1. Provision of information  
2. Access to expertise |
| Vanessa    | Specialist      | Culturally-embedded learning and communication styles | Teaming (with peers)                 | 1. Provision of information  
2. Access to expertise |
| Rebecca¹   | Specialist      | --                                            | None Identified                      | --                                                                               |
| Rachel¹    | Classroom Teacher | --                                            | None Identified                      | --                                                                               |

¹ Participant did not speak about the challenge of partnering with families in enough detail for me to know how she/he oriented to the challenge.
Table 20 (Continued)

Participants' Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency (n = 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Areas</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Kalvin | Classroom Teacher | Culturally-embedded learning and communication styles                                     | Mentoring (with ELL expert/principal)          | 1. Time and space for reflective discussion  
2. Provision of information  
3. Access to expertise |
|        |                 | Moving school on cultural competency continuum (also growing edge in developmental sense) | Mentoring (with ELL expert/principal)          | 1. Time and space for reflective discussion  
2. Affirmation  
3. Opportunities to offer alternative perspectives |
Table 20 (Continued)

Participants' Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of Cultural Proficiency (n=11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Areas</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nadine  | Specialist | Culturally-embedded learning and communication styles          | Teaming (with peers)                | 1. Provision of information  
                                                      | Moving school on cultural competency continuum          | 2. Access to expertise                                  |
| Hillary | Classroom  | Culturally-embedded learning and communication styles          | Teaming (with peers)                | 1. Provision of information  
                                                      | Teacher    | Moving school on cultural competency continuum          | 2. Access to expertise                                  |
| Sara    | Classroom  | --                                                             | None Identified                     | 1. Provision of information  
                                                      | Teacher    | --                                                         | 2. Access to expertise                                  |
| Lauren  | Classroom  | Identifying biases that impact teaching and learning          | Teaming/Collegial Inquiry (book group)| 1. Time and space for reflective discussion  
                                                      | Teacher    | --                                                         | 2. Opportunities pose questions  
                                                      |                                                      | 3. Opportunities to consider others’ perspectives      |

Springford Academy (Springford Charter District)
In this section, I first consider the experiences of the seven participants who experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency and then speculate about the four participants who did not discuss the pillars in this way. The majority of participants understood their experiences with the pillar of teaming as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. Lauren and Casey both understood collegial inquiry teams as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. In Chapter V, Lauren discussed how a collegial inquiry teaming experience that involved a book club served as an important opportunity for perspective taking. Casey discussed how being part of her grade-level PLC, or collegial inquiry, team provided her with important opportunities to discuss issues of color blindness, culture, and visibility in the classroom, which map directly onto the challenge of cultural proficiency. Casey experienced these conversations as supportive to her ability to see and question her own assumptions regarding color. Casey shared:

Something that I’ve heard a lot is like, “Do you see me?” … We talked about a student in particular this year and his behavior and him feeling a bit isolated in the classroom in terms of his race. And that kind of behavior is “Do you see me?” behavior. “Can you identify with me?” … It’s been kind of been a hot topic [in our PLC] in the ways the different teachers feel… and should he be in this classroom because the behavior? He was kind of acting out, and is there a reason? And is it because he… The question came up, “How many students of color do you have?” Many. I mean, “How many Black children students do you have?” Well, one. So that question kind of came up… They might not be Black, but I have other students with color. When you walk in the room, who do you pick out of everyone?

Casey’s example of surfacing questions that challenge assumptions about race and identity that adults make about diverse populations of students illustrated how her collegial inquiry team provided an important space for her to have a reflective discussion
about her own personal challenges which in turn supported her efforts to grow in terms of cultural proficiency.

In Chapter V, I presented Casey’s experiences wrestling with conflicting notions of wanting to create a classroom climate that is blind to differences in color and at the same time acknowledging that to become more culturally proficient, she needed to move away from the notion of color blindness in the classroom. I highlighted a tension in how Casey understood the theory of cultural proficiency and what she believed and practiced in her classroom. Collegial inquiry teaming provided Casey with a space to reflect on her questions of color blindness, visibility, teaching, and learning through a collective asking and answering of questions regarding team members’ assumptions about race and teaching. Casey understood the issues of color, visibility, and color blindness to be central to how she understood the adaptive challenges of both cultural proficiency and partnering with families.

Lauren’s experiences of the pillars of collegial inquiry teaming as supportive to her efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency also reflected the importance of having a space for reflective discussion on issues concerning teaching diverse students. In Chapter V, I presented Lauren’s experiences posing questions and considering others’ perspectives in the context of a collegial inquiry book club team helped her to address her growing edge—identifying her biases and the ways in which they might compromise her teaching English learners, I understand Lauren’s experiences with the book club, engaging in collegial inquiry and teaming, as supportive to her efforts to grow in terms of cultural proficiency because they provided the time and space to have reflective discussion, pose questions, and consider alternative perspectives that helped her
to unearth underlying assumptions regarding her own biases and potential implications for teaching diverse learners, including English learners.

In Chapter V, I also presented Vanessa’s experiences teaming with a colleague as a way to help her examine her own assumptions and behaviors when working with diverse populations of students. Vanessa spoke about how seeking and receiving new information from a Black colleague about how to approach Black students in more culturally appropriate ways supported her efforts to engage with students in more culturally appropriate ways. Sofia, Hillary, and Nadine also discussed instances where collaborating with peers in teams who were non-White contributed to their ability to receive new information that helped to shift their perspectives about how to best serve English learners.

For example, in Chapter V, Hillary discussed the support of asking a Haitian-American colleague about how to shift her approach to behavior management with Haitian and Haitian-American children to be more culturally appropriate. In contrast to Lauren and Casey’s experiences which highlighted the role the pillars played in creating space for perspective taking, these four participants’ experiences highlighted the important role that providing information or expertise regarding the culturally-embedded communication and learning styles of diverse populations of learners played in their experiences with teaming.

Regarding engaging in the pillar of mentoring, Kalvin at Woodland Heights shared experiences relating to his efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. Kate, as principal and mentor, provided supports to Kalvin in the form of a space to reflect on questions relating to better understanding the background and
culturally embedded expectations of English learners and their families. Kalvin explained:

I had a family… I don’t know how new they were. They were originally from India. It was last year. They weren’t officially, he wasn’t a child who received ELL services, but they spoke a dialect from India at home. I know culturally… And Kate would talk to me about this for a while. We had a couple of good conversations. There were statements about, ‘He’s the only Indian child in this classroom’ and what that means.

Kalvin also explained how Kate provided expertise and information that supported his growth toward greater cultural proficiency. He shared:

And last year, I think there was a large infusion of families that were English language learners who spoke multiple languages. Kate even said in one meeting right before the fall conferences. She said, ‘Just a reminder to everyone, we have a large group of families that are speaking other languages and so…’ And she talked things. It was about five minutes saying things like speaking slowly, making sure for understanding, allowing them to or asking them or whatever. I thought it was a nice refresher for everyone because we all get caught up. For me, that’s the biggest challenge of being respectful and aware when there’s so many different dynamics. And I again, I feel like I’m someone who is definitely culturally aware. But where there is something, just like these little things, that I need to probe, but I don’t and I didn’t want to offend that family at all. Nor feel like they felt obligated to do x, y or z.

Kalvin’s experiences demonstrate that his relationship with Kate as mentor and building leader supported his efforts to move toward greater cultural proficiency with respect to his work with English learners.

Kalvin also shared experiences being mentored by Kate where she encouraged him to grow to meet another one of his growing edges—moving the school on cultural proficiency continuum. Kate encouraged Kalvin to take risks, assume leadership roles, and affirmed his expertise in their mentoring relationship. Kalvin shared: “throughout our conversations all these years… [Kate] has encouraged me to take risks.” He also shared that in their conversations together, they reflected on what it would mean for him to grow
to take more risks, and Kate affirmed his expertise by turning to him as an expert:

“And there’ve been times where she’s asked me when we were looking at some racial, cultural things, and she asked me of my opinion about it.” These supports, Kalvin understood, enabled him to grow over the three years he was teaching at Woodland Heights. He shared this example to make the point of how he was working to stretch the limits of his growing edge regarding his capacity to take a leadership role in moving the school to be more culturally proficient. He shared:

[Lunchroom conversation among teachers] ‘Did you see him? He had tattoos on his neck.’ And ‘oh, gosh. That explains so much’—and they went down this whole path. … ‘Well, that makes so much sense actually. Why would she think she would make any progress? Do you see the way the father with tattoos on his neck and I think he had like a sports jersey on’—but they were going completely off of conjecture. And if on my first year, I would have sat there, I would quietly gone to Kate and said not with names and all but ‘Can you help me in dealing with this topic? I’m just curious. Like you as a white Latino-American person, can you help me?’… But this, I just interrupted and not playing dumb but I said, ‘Gosh. That’s so interesting how people think different things… I think of tattoos on the neck of the military.’ ‘What do you mean?’… I said, ‘I think being in the military is amazing and important and I appreciate that they’re protecting our country. I don’t think the power… We should have an impact footprint all over the world but there is some rule for military in our country but I could never have the courage to do it, to be on the line, standing and fighting. But I’m very appreciative about the saving and protecting that they need to do. And same with tattoos on the neck. I can never get a tattoo on my neck but I think it’s really hot and effective.’… I think I also interjected and I said, ‘I have cousins that have tattoos on their neck and they take care of their kids.’ Because I do and they do.

Kalvin’s experiences help to illuminate how the pillar of mentoring, through the provision of space and time for reflective discussion and affirmation, supported him to take a stand with his colleagues and offer alternative perspectives to support their movement on the cultural proficiency continuum. I interpreted Kalvin’s experiences to reflect how a principal who a) implements the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) and b) has an English learner expertise can work
directly with an educator to support him or her to stretch to meet their personal
growing edges, with respect to his or her efforts to meet adaptive challenges involving
English learners.

Four participants did not name any pillars as supportive to their efforts to meet the
adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. Rachel, Rebecca, and Sara all spoke briefly
about cultural proficiency when compared to other participants. I interpreted that the
adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency was not an urgent challenge for them based on
the limited time they focused on this challenge during interviews. Robert, on the other
hand, spoke at length about cultural proficiency, but he did not describe the pillars as
playing a role in his efforts to grow in terms of cultural proficiency. Robert did describe
district-offered courses on multicultural education as supportive to his efforts to grow in
terms of cultural proficiency, and I speculate that he had supports outside of the pillars to
facilitate his growth in this area. I am unsure why these participants did not name the
pillars as supportive of their efforts to address this adaptive challenge. My interviews
may not have represented the entirety of participants’ thinking and experiences given that
they occur at one moment in time; also, there may have been interpersonal dynamics at
play or other reasons. Because of privacy and confidentiality issues, I chose not to
speculate extensively about this aspect of the data.

In this section, I explored how participants experienced engaging in the pillars as
supportive to meet personal challenges relating to the adaptive challenge of cultural
proficiency, including: addressing issues of color blindness in the classroom, personal
movement on a cultural proficiency continuum, moving their schools on a cultural
competency continuum, being responsive to culturally-embedded learning and
communication styles, and identifying biases that impact teaching and learning. The key features of the holding environment for their growth that seven participants discussed included: a) provision of information and access to expertise; b) time and space for reflective discussion; c) opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives; and d) affirmation. I also discussed one participant’s experiences with the pillar of mentoring as supporting him to identify his growing edges—or limits their limits of his thinking, knowledge, and capacities—and supported his efforts to grow to stretch those limits. Next I explore how the majority of participants experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of partnering with families.

**Experiencing the Pillar Practices as Supportive to Educators’ Efforts to Address the Adaptive Challenge of Partnering with Families**

The majority of participants at both sites experienced the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of partnering with families. I present the data for all participants regarding the extent to which their experiences engaging in the pillars supported their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families in Table 21. I include what participants understood as their personal challenge areas in relation to this adaptive challenge. For one participant, Casey at Woodland Heights, working to meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families was also an opportunity for her to address her own growing edges, in a developmental sense. I noted this in Table 21. For participants who understood the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the
adaptive challenge of partnering with families, I also listed the pillars they named and the features of the holding environment they experienced by engaging in these pillars.

Casey, Vanessa, and Nadine all understood teaming as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of partnering with families. In Chapter V, I presented Casey’s experiences teaming with multiple colleagues as she worked to build a partnership with one of her English learner’s families. She described her work with her mentor and multiple specialists, including Rebecca, to be supportive to her efforts with that family because they offered her the space to consider multiple perspectives on how she might proceed with the family. Similarly, Vanessa and Nadine shared experiences where they valued reflective discussions with teams of colleagues because those experiences provided the space that teaming allowed them to process their experiences and consider alternative perspectives.

Casey understood mentoring as supportive to their efforts to meet the challenge. As mentioned above, Casey’s mentor offered space for Casey to process her difficult experiences with a parent whose educational values seemed to differ radically from the school’s and her own. Casey’s personal challenge area of communicating across cultural and linguistic differences as an area that teaming allowed Casey to explore and better understand. She found the reflective discussions and opportunities to consider others’ perspectives valuable through working through her ongoing struggles partnering with families of English learners in her classroom.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woodland Heights (Glenville Public School District)</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Area(s)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Supporting Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Articulating school school expectations (also growing edge in developmental sense)</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Mentoring &amp; Teaming (with peers)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for reflective discussion 2. Opportunities to consider others' perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating via cultural and linguistic differences</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1. Provision of information perspectives 2. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Communicating via cultural and linguistic differences</td>
<td>1. Time and space for reflective discussion 2. Opportunities to consider others' perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Teaching (with ELL expert)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca(^2)</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Provision of information perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel(^2)</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) Participant did not speak about the challenge of partnering with families in enough detail for me to know how she oriented to the challenge.
Table 21 (Continued)

*Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of Partnering with Families (n=10)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Areas</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Communicating via cultural and linguistic differences</td>
<td>Mentoring (with ELL expert/principal)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for reflective discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Moving school on cultural competency continuum</td>
<td>Mentoring (with ELL expert/principal)</td>
<td>2. Provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Time and space for reflective discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Opportunities to offer alternative perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 (Continued)

Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of Partnering with Families \((n=10)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Communicating via cultural and linguistic differences</td>
<td>Assuming Leadership Role (parent meeting)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for reflective discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving school on cultural competency continuum</td>
<td>Teaming</td>
<td>2. Opportunities to consider others’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary²</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>1. Opportunities to offer alternative perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Moving school on cultural competency continuum</td>
<td>Assuming Leadership Role (administrative internship)</td>
<td>2. Opportunities to consider others’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Articulating school expectations</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regard to Casey’s efforts to articulate school expectations to families of English learners, I understood this personal challenge area to also be a growing edge in a developmental sense because Casey described her own growth occurring over the course of the year, within the context of the holding environment that the pillars provided. I interpreted her ongoing conversations with her mentor and her teaming work with the math and literacy specialists as providing an important continuous support in the form of reflective discussions. In Chapters V and VI, I presented Casey’s descriptions of the value she placed in having the space and time to talk and think through her meetings with an Indian-American parent of one of her English learners. She discussed how hearing alternative perspectives that encouraged her to follow her inner voice and better articulate the school’s expectations in terms of learning were supportive to her developing the ability to share those expectations with parents. Casey described how over time, these pillars supported her to see her own growing edge in this area and to stretch and grow herself in this area to better meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families of English learners.

While Casey experienced teaming and mentoring as supportive to her growth in relation to partnering with families of English learners, Kalvin’s experiences with the pillars as supportive to his efforts to partner with families focused on the pillar of mentoring. Kalvin discussed his growth in the area of communicating via cultural and linguistic and cultural differences and the area of working to move the school forward on the cultural competency continuum. Kalvin discussed his experiences being mentored by Kate to offer a similar support in the space she provided for him to make sense of his struggles with partnering with families of English learners. As I discuss earlier in the
chapter, Kate also provided information that Kalvin understood to be supportive of his work to better understand the background and culturally embedded expectations of English learners and their families. The affirmation and space that Kate offered for reflective discussion also supportive Kalvin’s growth in terms of supporting his colleagues’ growth in terms of cultural proficiency, as noted earlier in the chapter.

Sara and Nadine understood assuming leadership roles as supportive to their efforts to meet the challenge of partnering with families. As discussed in Chapter V, Sara’s administrative internship at Springford Academy gave her the opportunity to consider projects that would help families feel more welcomed at school, including working to change physical spaces in the buildings to include more images of students, families, and cultural groups represented at the school. Sara experienced this opportunity as a support to her growth area of working to move the school forward in terms of its organization-wide cultural proficiency. I also discussed in Chapter V Nadine’s experiences taking on a leadership role at a parent meeting, and the pivotal role it played in creating the space for her to consider family members of English learners’ perspectives and have her perspective heard as well. Nadine understood that engaging in this pillar provided valuable opportunities to engage in reflective discussion, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives. Doing this with family members and Springford Academy staff supported her to grow in terms of her capacity to communicate via cultural and linguistic differences and in terms of moving the school along the cultural competency continuum.

Sofia, Rebecca, Rachel, Hillary, and Lauren all discussed the challenges they faced in partnering with families, but they did not name any pillars as supportive to their
efforts to meet the adaptive challenge. Neither Rebecca or Rachel spoke in enough detail about the challenge of partnering with families for me to know how they oriented to the challenge, and neither spoke of any supports in addition to the pillars. While Sofia, Hillary, and Lauren did identify other supports—as I discuss later in the chapter—they, too, did not name the pillars as supporting their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of partnering with families. For similar reasons as described in the preceding section, I am unsure as to why these participants did not name the pillars as supportive of their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of partnering with families.

In this section, I explored how participants experienced engaging in the pillars as supportive to their efforts to grow to stretch those limits. Those growing edges included: articulating school expectations, communicating via cultural and linguistic differences, and moving their schools along the cultural competency continuum. In addition, I illuminated several key features of the holding environments that six participants experienced through engaging in the pillars that supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families. Those key features included: a) time and space for reflective discussion, b) opportunities to consider to others’ perspectives and offer alternative perspectives, c) provision of information and access to expertise, and d) opportunities to initiate school-improvement projects. I also discussed one participant’s experiences with the pillars of teaming and mentoring as supporting her to identify her growing edges—or limits their limits of his thinking, knowledge, and capacities—and supported her efforts to grow to stretch those limits. Next I explore how participants experienced the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming.
Experiencing the Pillar Practices as Supportive to Educators’ Efforts to Address the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming

The majority of participants (7/10) experienced the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming within the context of the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) model at their schools. I present participants’ perspectives regarding the extent to which their experiences engaging in the pillars supported their efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming in Table 22 below. I include what participants understood as their personal challenge areas in relation to this adaptive challenge. For participants who understood the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming, I also listed the pillars they named and the features of the holding environment they experienced by engaging in these pillars.
Table 22

Participants' Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming (n = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Balancing pull-out/push-in schedules and time</td>
<td>Teaming (with ELL expert)</td>
<td>1. Opportunities to pose questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Balancing pull-out/push-in schedules and time</td>
<td>Collegial Inquiry &amp; Teaming (with peers &amp; ELL experts)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for collaborative problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Opportunities to consider others’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Opportunities to pose questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Balancing pull-out/push-in schedules and time</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>4. Provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 22 (Continued)

*Participants' Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming (n=10)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Challenge Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td>Collegial Inquiry &amp; Teaming (with peers &amp; ELL experts)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for collaborative problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Opportunities to consider others’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td>All pillars (with peers &amp; ELL experts)</td>
<td>3. Opportunities to pose questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>5. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Woodland Heights (Glenville Public School District)
Table 22 (Continued)

Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming ($n=10$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Growth Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Balancing pull-out/push-in schedules and time</td>
<td>Mentoring &amp; Teaming (with ELL experts)</td>
<td>1. Opportunities to pose questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Access to expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Affirmation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Woodland Heights (Glenville Public School District)
Table 22 (Continued)

*Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenge of English Learner Programming (n=10)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Growth Area(s)</th>
<th>Supportive Pillar Practices</th>
<th>Features of Holding Environment Experienced by Engaging in Pillar Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Responding to English learner population shifts</td>
<td>Assuming Leadership Role (team leader)</td>
<td>1. Time and space for collaborative problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td>Collegial Inquiry (with peers)</td>
<td>2. Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Time and space for collaborative problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responding to English learner population shifts</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Diagnosing strength/growth areas for English learners</td>
<td>None Identified</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning appropriate interventions for English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responding to English learner population shifts</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The majority of participants who spoke about the adaptive challenge of English learner programming revealed that they experienced multiple challenge areas in terms of their capacity to meet this challenge. For example, Casey, Robert, Sofia, and Kalvin at Woodland Heights all spoke about needing to grow in terms of how they balance their pull-out and push-in schedules for ESL services for their English learners; additionally, they spoke about needing to grow in terms of their skill to diagnose the strength and growth areas of English learners and their skill to plan appropriate interventions for English learners. At Springford Academy, Sara and Lauren also discussed three challenge areas in relation to this challenge: responding to English learner population shifts, diagnosing the strength and growth areas of English learners, and to planning appropriate interventions for English learners. In this section, I begin by exploring how the pillars supported seven participants to grow in these areas and then move on to speculate why the other four participants did not describe the pillars as supportive to their efforts to grow in these areas.

Casey, Robert, Kalvin, Vanessa, and Rebecca—all from Woodland Heights—understood teaming as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. In Chapter V, I discussed Casey, Robert, and Kalvin’s experiences needing to seek out help from colleagues, both peers and English learner experts, to support their work diagnosing or teasing out second language acquisition factors from student disability concerns within the context of the pull-out and push-in models of Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) at their schools. Robert shared another example that illustrates how teaming supported his efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming:
For my two colleagues in that ESL role at our school, I feel very strongly I go to either one, and I would get a straightforward answer with good advice, that’s practical, that is not going to make me feel like I don’t know what I’m talking about with regards to ELL. But I think they also sometimes challenge me to think a little bit differently about what I’m doing.

In describing how teaming supports his efforts to tease out and understand the potential intersections of second language acquisition and disability concerns, Robert spoke about the importance of the expertise and collaborative problem-solving approach that English learner specialists brought to their work teaming with him. He also shared:

They certainly are specialists compared to what I know, so I draw on their expertise to try to advise me. Are there ways that I can change my instruction that might lead Student A to a better understanding that I’m not thinking about? And they’ve been really helpful in that regard.

In Chapter V, these sentiments were also echoed by Vanessa’s examples of teaming with the English learner specialists at Woodland Heights. Both Robert and Vanessa understood their expertise and collaborative, open approach to posing questions and solving problems supportive of their efforts to take new perspectives on their approaches to diagnosing the needs and strengths of English learners.

In Chapters V and VI, Vanessa, Rebecca, and Robert also spoke of collegial inquiry teaming experiences that supported their efforts to diagnose the needs and strengths of English learners. Again, they understood the expertise that English learner specialists offered to be supportive of their work with English learners within the context of the SEI model at their school. Additionally, in Chapters V and VI, Vanessa, Rebecca, and Robert’s excerpts highlighted how the process of engaging in collegial inquiry on a team also supported their work with English learners. Robert explained:

And I’m not saying in general. All I’m saying is if you bring a child to child study who is an English language learner, how can you really accurately tease out whether it’s the language itself or whether it’s something that we need to be
looking at more carefully through maybe processing. That to me has always been a challenge, and I’m not quite sure. I rely on my colleagues actually to help me figure that out.

It was the collective best thinking of the group that supported his growth to better serve English learners within the context of the adaptive challenge presented by English learner programming.

Sara was a fourth participant who also described collegial inquiry work within her collaborative inquiry team at Springford Academy as supporting her efforts to address the challenge of English learner programming in terms of the increasing numbers of English learners at the school. In Chapter V, Sara’s excerpts highlighted her appreciation for the school leadership putting the achievement of English learners on her collegial inquiry team’s agenda during the 2011-2012 school year. By focusing the team’s efforts on this topic and asking all teams to use their data analysis protocols to examine student work and student data to improve instruction for English learners, Sara began to work with her team to better respond the influx of English learners at the school. Additionally, with the support of the time and space for her team to collaboratively problem-solve, she experienced herself growing in terms of planning appropriate instruction for English learners and diagnosing strength and growth areas for English learners.

In Chapters V and VI, I highlighted experiences of Hillary from Springford Academy and Rebecca from Woodland Heights that focused on the ways in which they were supported to assume leadership roles also supported their efforts to address the challenge of English learner programming. Hillary, as grade team leader, spoke about the affirmation and support she received from the school’s administration. Hillary shared:

I felt really respected and valued during that whole process. I really do think that our school relies a lot on the voice of the teachers and on the voice of the
teacher leaders to inform their decisions. And that’s fantastic. I’ve never been
in an environment like that before.

The school administration offered affirmation and a context for collaborative problem
solving to support Hillary’s work as team leader and address the challenges of responding
to the changing populations of English learners that were coming to Springford Academy
each year. Rebecca also expressed a similar sentiment in her work with Kate who
supported her efforts assuming varied leadership roles, especially by offering information
and expertise regarding English learners.

There were three participants who did not name any pillars as supportive to their
efforts to meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. Sofia and Rachel
at Woodland Heights and Lauren at Springford Academy did not discuss any experiences
with the pillars that supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English
learner programming. I speculate that their experiences of the pillars did not include the
same elements of holding environment that other participants named, such as access to
English learner experts and collegial inquiry teams that did not engage in collaborative
problem-solving. I have chosen not to speculate extensively about why these participants
did not report experiencing the pillar practices as supportive to their efforts to address this
adaptive challenge due to issues of privacy and confidentiality. While analyzing data, I
kept in mind that my interviews captured a moment in time in each participant’s
experiences and perspectives and may not represent the entirety of their thinking and
experiences. Also there may have been interpersonal dynamics at play or other reasons
why participants did not report experiencing the pillars as supportive for addressing this
challenge. I am unsure of they these participants said little or nothing about how the
pillars supported their work to address adaptive challenges.
In this section, I explored how participants experienced engaging in the pillars as supportive to their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. Participants named multiple personal challenge areas, which included: balancing pull-out and push-in schedules, diagnosing strength and growth areas for English learners, planning appropriate interventions for English learners, and responding to English learner population shifts. In addition, I illuminated several key features of the holding environments that participants experienced through engaging in the pillars that supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming. Those key features included: a) provision of information and access to expertise, b) time and space for collaborative problem-solving, c) opportunities to pose questions and consider others’ perspectives, d) affirmation, and e) time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement. Next I briefly consider some of the other supports that participants named in addition to the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Other Supports for Addressing the Adaptive Challenges of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learning Programming

All participants (n=11) spoke of one or more supports to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in addition to the pillars. District-provided courses, graduate coursework, and personal background—in addition participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars—all seem to play important roles in participants’ efforts to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. Table 23 provides a summary of these.
These findings suggest that also considering participants’ lived experience, in addition to their experiences engaging in the pillar practices, in future research is important for more fully understanding how the pillars as well as other experiences might serve to support educators in their efforts to address the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners.
Table 23

Other Supports for Addressing the Adaptive Challenges of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learning Programming (*n* = 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Background</th>
<th>Graduate School Coursework</th>
<th>District-Provided Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Skillful Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Experience Abroad</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Family Background</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Family Background</td>
<td>Language and Literacy Graduate Program</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Experience with Diverse Populations, Family Background</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Experience Abroad</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI), English Learner Trainings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalvin</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Experience with Diverse Populations, Family Background</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>English Learner Trainings; Family Background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23 (Continued)

*Other Supports for Addressing the Adaptive Challenges of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learning Programming (n=11)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Personal Background</th>
<th>Graduate School Coursework</th>
<th>District-Provided Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Experience Abroad, Experience with Diverse Populations</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Cultural Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Experience Abroad, Experience with Diverse Populations</td>
<td>Language and Literacy Graduate Program, ESL Certification</td>
<td>Cultural Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Experience with Diverse Populations, Family Background</td>
<td>Education Leadership Graduate Program</td>
<td>Cultural Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Experience Abroad, Experience with Diverse Populations, Family Background</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Cultural Proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Six participants—Rebecca, Kalvin, Nadine, Hillary, Lauren, Sara—all spoke about their experiences working with diverse populations outside of Springford Academy or Woodland Heights, either in their teacher training programs or in past work experience. They related these experiences to their efforts to become more culturally proficient and create partnerships with families. These participants also understood their family background as an important support to their efforts to address the challenge of cultural proficiency. Kalvin and Rebecca, for example, both described growing up in and out of mainstream cultures as part of how they now approached their work with English learners and their families in terms of cultural proficiency. Kalvin described his experience growing up in a family with multiple cultures as supportive to his efforts to not prejudge students and families and meet them where they are. Rebecca also reflected on her background growing up and its impact on her openness to English learners and other diverse populations in the school. She shared:

The thing about it is that we’ve always had many languages spoken here, and many students coming in from different countries, different cultures. So to me, it’s always been the way the school is…. [My parents] were very clear from as long as I can remember that everybody is important, everybody is to be celebrated and that you don’t judge people. You just don’t do that. I think it was just my parents’ core values that everybody is to be appreciated and welcomed and that you don’t look at someone by the color of their skin or their religion or their sexual orientation, and you embrace people, you get to know them, and you appreciate them. And so, that, in terms of culture and race and just my lens, from very, very young, that’s how I saw it and was very vocal about it as a young child, as an adolescent. My whole life, I’ve been very, very vocal about discrimination and …that it’s not okay.

Over the course of her interviews, Rebecca reflected back on how these family values influence her approach to English learners and the ways in which she orients to the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as providing opportunities for personal growth.
Nadine, Hillary, Lauren, Robert, and Rachel also understood their experiences traveling abroad as important opportunities for perspective taking which supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency. In Chapter V, I presented Nadine’s experiences traveling to Haiti and the ways in which those experiences abroad provided a pivotal moment that transformed her perspective and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences relating to English learners. Hillary, Lauren, Robert, and Rachel also noted that their experiences living abroad helped them to take perspective and develop an awareness of their personal backgrounds, beliefs, biases, and the limits of their knowledge in ways that supported their growth in terms of cultural proficiency partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Hillary, Sara, and Vanessa also indicated that their experiences with graduate coursework, and for Hillary her ESL certification, supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. Nine participants described district-offered courses as supportive to their efforts to grow in terms of these adaptive challenges. For example, in Chapter V, I presented Sofia’s experience with an Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI) course offered by the district. She spoke about the metaphor of the “invisible backpack” and they ways it resonated with her and helped her to take perspective on herself and on her work with diverse populations of children and adults. Sofia spoke about how the experiences in the course fueled a growth trajectory for her towards greater cultural proficiency.

Robert also spoke of the positively transforming experience of the district-offered EMI course. He said: “So I guess for me it goes back to some of the training I had years
ago in EMI and Jeff Howards' efficacy work. So for me those were life-changing, life-affirming activities, and I’ve tried to incorporate as much into my teaching.” In considering Robert’s experiences with the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency that I presented in Chapter V, I understand the EMI course offered by the district to have directly translated into Robert seeing work with English learners as growth-enhancing experiences.

Casey spoke about the mandatory Skillful Teacher course offered by the district for teachers new to the district but not new to teaching. As I presented in Chapter V, Casey experienced the parts of the course that focused on cultural proficiency as supportive of her efforts to address the challenge of cultural proficiency. The theories to which she was exposed during the course helped her to re-examine her work with diverse populations of students and families by offering her alternative perspectives and new information. Rachel discussed briefly the support of ELL trainings offered by the district where the district expert in English learners provided the training and helped to answer her specific questions from an expert’s perspective because of the access to expertise and opportunity to pose questions. At Springford Academy, all four participants referenced the district-wide cultural proficiency sessions provided during the 2011-2012 school year. All four participants appreciated the space to consider issues of cultural proficiency with colleagues, and Sara found some of the information presented in the trainings supportive to her efforts to address the symbolic curriculum (Gay, 1995, 2002) at her school (e.g., how the hallways could better represent the students’ and families’ cultural and linguistic heritage). Overall, they appreciated the time and space for reflective discussion on the topic.
Section Summary

In this section, I presented participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars and the extent to which they found those experiences supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. I also provided a brief discussion of other supports participants named in their efforts to address these adaptive challenges.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I synthesized findings from Chapters V and VI to answer my third research question about the extent to which participants experienced engaging in the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. I explored how the pillars supported participants to address these adaptive challenges. I discussed how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars that participants understood as supportive to their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges: a) provision of information and access to expertise; b) time and space for reflective discussion and/or collaborative problem-solving; and c) opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives. Additionally, other aspects of holding environment, mentioned by only one or two participants, included: affirmation, modeling, opportunities to initiate school-improvement projects, time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement. I also explored how the pillars supported two participants to identify their growing edges, in a developmental sense, to stretch themselves to better meet adaptive challenges involving English learners. I concluded by noting where supports other than
the pillars were also supportive of participants’ efforts to meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.
Chapter VIII

IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I begin by reviewing the research purpose, research questions, and core findings. I then discuss implications of my work for practice, policy, and research. I then discuss my study’s limitations and provide a discussion of directions for future research. In concluding the chapter and dissertation, I offer final thoughts.

Purpose and Research Questions

In this qualitative multi-site interview study, I sought to understand how educators who serve in schools whose school leaders (i.e., a principal and head-of-school) implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) described and understood the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners; how they described and understood their experiences engaging in the pillar practices (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, mentoring) of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a); and in what ways, if any, these educators described and understood their engagement in the pillar practices as supportive in their efforts to meet the adaptive challenges they encounter day-to-day.

Put simply, I sought to extend Drago-Severson’s (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013) research inquiry into how principals, superintendents, and teachers provide robust professional learning contexts that help educators, who teach English language learners,
build their internal capacities to better meet the adaptive challenges that they name as important in their work in schools by focusing on educators’ experiences with a historically underserved population of students: English learners. My study explored the intersection of Drago-Severson’s model of professional learning contexts that serve as a catalyst for adults’ growth and my interest in learning how to better support educators with the adaptive challenges they experience in their work teaching English learners.

As you may recall, the research questions that guided my research follow:

1. How do 11 educators serving in elementary schools whose school leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) describe and understand the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?

2. How do participants describe and understand their experiences engaging in the pillar practices of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring?

3. In what ways, if any, do participants describe and understand engaging in the pillar practices as supportive of their efforts to address the adaptive challenges they encounter teaching English learners?

**Summary of Findings**

What follows is an overview of my findings as I discussed in chapters.

First, I briefly summarize the core findings discussed in Chapter V in relation to participants’ reported experiences with adaptive challenges relating to English learners (hereafter I will simply refer to participants’ reported experiences as “experiences”).

These follow.
Experiences with Cultural Proficiency: An Adaptive Challenge

- All participants identified cultural proficiency as an adaptive challenge and viewed the challenge as an opportunity for personal and/or organizational growth (in Chapter I, I defined cultural proficiency for individuals as a lifelong journey to affirm diversity and, as educators, to ask “profoundly multicultural questions” about their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs relating to the abilities and identities of their students). The majority of participants (6/11) described how self-awareness of their personal backgrounds, beliefs, biases, and limits of knowledge, alongside opportunities to engage in perspective taking, allowed them to make sense of the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency as an opportunity for personal growth. Participants also described the pillar practices (hereafter I will simply to the pillar practices as the “pillars”), district-sponsored cultural proficiency and multicultural education courses, and traveling abroad as important perspective-taking opportunities.

- The majority of participants (10/11) understood the challenge of cultural proficiency as one that centered on their classroom experiences of navigating cultural and linguistic difference. The majority (9/11) spoke about needing to gain more expertise and knowledge about the different cultural and linguistic groups of students in their classrooms. The participant with the greatest expertise in teaching English learners, Hillary, was an outlier among the other participants. She was able to delve deeper into questions about how to fundamentally shift her practice to better support English learners in her classroom as they navigated linguistic and cultural difference. Hillary was also able to see the adaptive
challenge of cultural proficiency on an organizational level and she spoke in
great detail about the incongruence between school discourse norms and
culturally embedded communication and learning styles expressed by her English
learners.

**Experiences with Partnering with Families: An Adaptive Challenge**

- Ten (10/10) participants identified partnering with families as an adaptive
  challenge. The majority of participants (7/10) viewed the challenge as an
  opportunity for personal and/or organizational growth in terms of cultural
  proficiency; two participants understood the challenge as an opportunity to be
  able to better articulate school expectations; and two did not elaborate on their
  experiences with this challenge enough to indicate an orientation. Participants
  articulated cultural competency and partnering with families as two distinct
  adaptive challenges in their work with English learners, yet participants’
  experiences demonstrated some important overlaps. Nadine and Sara experienced
  partnering with families as an adaptive challenge that promoted both personal and
  organizational growth by framing the challenge as one where they served as the
  bridge between home and school cultural divides. Other participants had a
  different framing for the challenge; they saw their role in navigating the adaptive
  challenge of partnering with families as advocating for the school’s educational
  expectations. Professional learning context, experience abroad, and the capacity to
  see oneself as a cultural bridge for families of English learners help to explain the
  different understandings of the adaptive challenge of partnering with families
seemed to be important factors in understanding the differences in how participants understood this adaptive challenge.

**Experiences with Programming for English Learners: An Adaptive Challenge**

- Ten of eleven participants identified English learner programming as an adaptive challenge, and participants (10/10) viewed the challenge as an opportunity for personal growth. They described looking inwardly and asking what could they do to change and grow to better support their English learners in the face of multiple aspects of the challenge. Participants described multiple aspects of the challenge including: a) balancing schedules and time within pull-out and push-in models (6/10), b) needing to know more about second language acquisition c) diagnosing strength and growth areas for English learners (8/10), c) planning appropriate interventions for English learners (9/10), and d) responding to English learner population shifts (3/10)—all within the context of the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) model that requires educators to support English language acquisition in general education classrooms.

Next I provide a brief summary of the core findings discussed in Chapter VI in relation to participants’ experiences with the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) as holding environments for growth.

**Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Growth-Enhancing Environments**

- The majority of participants (9/11) experienced the pillars as growth-enhancing environments. The majority of participants at Springford Academy (3/4)
described their experiences with *Teacher Leadership Academy* (TLA) as a growth-enhancing environment. TLA is an intensive professional learning experience that involves all four pillars and was initially designed and led by Drago-Severson for 25 teacher-leaders from Springford Academy and five other local schools to learn about adult development, ways of knowing, and the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model *and* to develop action plans to use learnings in their practice with colleagues. TLA, according to participants and Drago-Severson (E. Drago-Severson, personal communication, March 3, 2014) was a holding environment for Hillary, Lauren, and Sara, in addition to others who participated in this yearlong professional learning seminar. At Woodland Heights, two participants experienced Kate as a mentor and an orchestrator of multiple holding environments for their growth and development.

- Across both sites, the majority of participants (8/11) understood their experiences engaging in collegial inquiry teams as growth-enhancing contexts. Participants’ (9/11) experiences with the pillars (e.g., TLA, mentoring, collegial inquiry teams) highlighted three important features of the holding environments that promoted their growth: a) the support of space to reflect on their practice by naming challenge areas, setting goals, and collaborating with others to meet those goals; b) the challenge provided by receiving information that allowed participants to take new perspectives on the challenges in their work; and c) a continuous and sustained context for growth, either over one school year (e.g., Casey from Woodland Heights) or multiple school years (Robert, Vanessa, Rebecca,
and Kalvin from Woodland Heights and Nadine, Hillary, Sara, and Lauren from Springford Academy). Two participants at Woodland Heights who were mentored by Kate also described the support of modeling, framing, and affirmation as important features of the holding environments that the pillars provided for their growth and development.

Engaging in the Pillar Practices: District-Level and Building-Level Infrastructure

- All participants across both sites spoke about how district leaders provided an infrastructure for the pillars (i.e., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring) that they experienced as holding environments for their growth and development, and nine participants spoke about how building leaders, i.e., principal or school head, also provided an important infrastructure for the pillars to be experienced as holding environments for growth. Viewed together, these participants’ experiences illuminate that both the district-level context and the building-level context served as holding environments, providing supports, challenge and continuity. In providing such an infrastructure, leaders set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve, and those expectations served as the challenge to prompt growth, they explained.

Participants also highlighted different ways in which the district context supported their growth through providing human and financial resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). They understood these supports to their growth and appreciated that leaders demonstrated care and respect for educators, which, in turn, engendered trust and supported their growth. The vision and sustained investments in supports to
teacher growth and development served to stabilize the school and district contexts to provide the continuity of a holding environment for educator growth. These were all important aspects of the infrastructure district-level and building-level leaders provided.

Next I provide a brief summary of the core findings discussed in Chapter VII in relation to participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars as supportive of their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

**Participants’ Experiences Engaging in the Pillar Practices: Addressing the Adaptive Challenges of Cultural Proficiency, Partnering with Families, and English Learner Programming**

- The majority of participants (7/11) across both sites discussed how the pillars of practices of teaming, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in terms of personal challenge areas. These personal challenge areas included: addressing issues of color blindness in the classroom, personal movement on a cultural competency continuum, moving their schools on a cultural competency continuum, being responsive to culturally-embedded learning and communication styles, and identifying biases that impact teaching and learning. One participant, Kalvin at Woodland Heights, also discussed how engaging in the pillars supported him to identify his growing edge in a development sense— the limits of his thinking, knowledge, and internal capacities—and supported his efforts to grow to stretch
those limits. The majority of participants’ experiences (7/11) also illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency: a) provision of information and access to expertise (5/6); b) time and space for reflective discussion (3/6); c) opportunities to pose questions, consider others’ perspectives, and offer alternative perspectives (3/6); and d) affirmation (1/6).

- The majority of participants (6/11) discussed how engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported them with personal challenge areas that included: articulating school expectations, communicating via cultural and linguistic differences, and moving their schools along the cultural competency continuum. One participant, Casey at Woodland Heights, also discussed how engaging in the pillars supported her to identify her growing edge in a development sense—the limits of her thinking, knowledge, and internal capacities—and supported her efforts to grow to stretch those limits. Additionally, participants’ experiences illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of partnering with families: a) time and space for reflective discussion (4/6), b) opportunities to consider to others’ perspectives and offer alternative perspectives (4/6), c) provision of information and access to expertise (3/6), and d) opportunities to initiate school-improvement projects (1/6).
- The majority of participants (7/11) discussed how engaging in the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and/or mentoring supported
their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of English learner programming within the context of the Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) model at their schools. Specifically, participants discussed how engaging in the pillars supported them to address personal challenge areas that included: balancing pull-out and push-in schedules, diagnosing strength and growth areas for English learners, planning appropriate interventions for English learners, and responding to English learner population shifts. Participants’ experiences also illuminated how several key features of the holding environments provided by the pillars supported their efforts to better meet the adaptive challenge of English learner programming: a) provision of information and access to expertise (5/7), b) time and space for collaborative problem-solving (5/7), c) opportunities to pose questions and consider others’ perspectives (3/7), d) affirmation (2/7), and e) time and space to focus on English learners’ achievement (1/7).

- All participants spoke of one or more supports to their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency in addition to the pillars. The majority of participants (10/11) understood that aspects of their personal background, apart from their work at Springford Academy or Woodland Heights, supported their efforts to address the adaptive challenge of cultural proficiency, including experience with diverse populations (6/11), educator’s family background (6/11), and experience abroad (5/11). Three participants—one at Woodland Heights and two at Springford Academy—understood their experiences with graduate school coursework to support their efforts to meet these adaptive challenges as well. The majority of participants (9/11) also understood district courses or trainings
focused on the topic of cultural proficiency to support their efforts to address these three challenges. I conclude that district-provided courses, graduate coursework, and personal background—in addition participants’ experiences engaging in the pillars—played important roles in their efforts to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section, I discuss the implications for practice, policy, and research. I first discuss implications for schools and then discuss implications for school districts. I conclude the section with recommendations for principals, superintendents, policymakers.

Implications for Schools

My study’s findings suggested two major implications for schools: a) building-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners and b) educators with expertise relating to English learners can be critical actors in the professional learning of all educators in a school. I discuss each implication and then make recommendations for schools and for research to support schools with supporting educators teaching English learners to address the adaptive challenges they encounter in their day-to-day work.

Building-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners. When educators think about working with diverse populations of students, especially English learners,
they often see that work as challenging. In providing educators opportunities to engage with the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring, building-level leaders, i.e., principals and heads of school, offer educators the opportunity to reframe their experiences with English learners. Findings from my study suggest that the pillars—along with other factors such as personal background, graduate program coursework, and district-offered coursework—can support educators to see their work with English learners as enriching and growth-promoting rather than problematic.

By overlaying participants’ experiences with the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming and participants’ experiences with the pillars, it was clear that building-level leaders had created a holding environment for growth and development that enabled educators to embrace their work with English learners.

My findings also suggest that building-level leaders can play a critical role in creating the infrastructure for the pillars to serve as holding environments for the growth and development of educators, providing challenge, supports, and continuity. Setting high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve can serve as a developmental challenge to facilitate educators’ growth. Building-level leaders can create supports by securing human and financial resources and creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). These leadership practices can demonstrate leaders’ care and respect for educators, which, in turn, can engender trust and support educators’ growth. Leaders’ vision and sustained investments in supports to teacher growth and development can serve to stabilize the school contexts to provide the continuity of a holding environment for educator growth.
Educators with expertise relating to English learners can be critical actors in the professional learning of all educators in a school. Participants’ experiences highlighted that the provision of information and access to expertise relating to English learners (e.g., second language acquisition, knowledge of the different cultural and linguistic groups of students, etc.) was pivotal to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. Furthermore, participants’ experiences engaging in collegial inquiry and teaming with English learner specialists in their buildings highlighted the important role those specialists play in schools—beyond supporting English learners within SEI programs. Building-level leaders can support educators’ efforts to address these adaptive challenges by supporting English learner specialists to assume a variety of leadership roles within schools and districts, thereby expanding the reach and positive influence of their expertise. Furthermore, building-level hiring practices can also support educators’ efforts to address these challenges by prioritizing educator applicants with cultural and linguistic expertise, ESL certification, and experience abroad.

Similarly, findings suggest that principals themselves can play an important role in providing expertise regarding English learners. Participants’ experiences highlighted the pivotal role that a building-level leader can play in helping educators to grow to better meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming when they can provide information and expertise to educators in their buildings. While engaging in the pillars went a long way in supporting participants in my study to make sense of the adaptive challenges they encountered teaching English learners as opportunities for their growth, engaging in the pillars with
their principal or colleagues who had expertise with English learners was also very important for their growth. It is critically important that schools have more adults with expertise regarding English learners to help facilitate the growth of all educators in the building, in addition to their primary role of providing direct service to students.

**Implications for School Districts**

My study’s findings suggested two major implications for school districts: a) district-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners, and b) districts can support educators and principals to gain expertise relating to English learners. I discuss each implication and then make recommendations for school districts and for research to support school districts with supporting building-level leaders and educators teaching English learners to address adaptive challenges involving English learners.

**District-level leaders’ implementation of the learning-oriented leadership model can support educators in their work with diverse learners.** Just as building-level leaders played an important role in establishing the infrastructure to support the pillars, my findings suggest that district-level leaders can also play a pivotal role in supporting educators to approach working with diverse populations of students, especially English learners, with a growth and development orientation. Like principals, district leaders can also set high expectations for educators to support all children to achieve and create supports by securing human and financial resources and by creating meaningful, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars). Further district-level leaders’ vision and sustained investments in supports for teacher growth and development provide the continuity of a holding environment that is critical for educator
growth. Furthermore, school districts that offer district leader and principal preparation programs supported should consider offering aspiring district leaders and principals coursework that focuses on adult development, professional learning, and leadership theory (i.e., Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model). Including coursework that exposes principals to Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model would provide aspiring principals with a critically important lens for understanding school transformation. Coursework centered on the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) could help principals see the critical role they can play in creating the infrastructure for the pillars to serve as holding environments for the growth and development of educators.

**Districts can support educators and principals to gain expertise relating to English learners.** My findings suggested that high quality courses and trainings offered at the district level positively impacted educators and helped them to better address the adaptive challenges they encountered in teaching English learners. Prioritizing professional learning opportunities for educators on this topic can provide meaningful spaces that encourage educators to make sense of the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency and partnering with families as opportunities for personal and organizational growth and development. Furthermore, given the adaptive challenge that SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) programming creates for educators in their work with English learners, district leaders should consider supporting educators’ efforts to serve English learners by garnering more financial resources and expand the capacities in terms of human resources to offer better training for educators not yet certified to teach English learners. My findings suggest that engaging in the pillars with colleagues who had
expertise with English learners was very important for their growth and work to meet
the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English
learner programming. District leaders should consider ways to develop more educators in
their schools with expertise regarding English learners to help facilitate the growth of all
educators in the building.

Districts can also support greater expertise relating to English learners for
principals. For example, principal preparation programs sponsored by school districts can
play a greater role in supporting the achievement of English learners by prioritizing the
selection of candidates with expertise in working with English learners and by
redesigning coursework and internship experiences to provide aspiring principals with
opportunities to develop expertise in this area. Participants’ experiences highlighted the
pivotal role that a building-level leader can play in helping educators to grow to better
meet the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and
English learner programming when they can provide information and expertise to
educators in their buildings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications I presented in this chapter, I make two
recommendations for principals, superintendents, and policymakers. First, I recommend
that principals, superintendents, and policymakers employ the learning-oriented
leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) to support educators in their
work with diverse learners, specifically English learners. Principals should seek
professional learning opportunities that allow them to experience the holding
environment of the pillars while simultaneously learning about adult developmental
theory and how to apply it to supporting the internal capacity building of educators (i.e., Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model). These learning experiences could be through university course offerings focused on the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) or experiences such as a “principal version” of the Teacher Leadership Academy that educators from Springford Academy experienced. At the district level, superintendents should support principals to have these learning experiences by providing the financial, logistic, and human resources to make this learning possible. Policymakers should validate the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) as a core component of principal preparation, supporting state departments of education, universities, and district-run principal preparation programs to include this critical component of principal preparation.

Second, I recommend that principals, superintendents, and policymakers provide the financial and human resources to support educators and principals in gaining greater expertise relating to English learners. The literature I reviewed for my study and my research findings and implications highlight the need for educational leaders (i.e., principals, superintendents, and policymakers) to dedicate greater financial and human resources to providing improved access to expertise and training relating to English learners (e.g., second language acquisition, knowledge of the different cultural and linguistic groups of students, etc.). Principals should allocate greater portions of their professional development spending to provide educators teaching English learners in their building expanded access to training and expertise relating to English learners. This professional learning includes: regular opportunities for on-site collaborative, teacher-centered professional learning opportunities (i.e., the pillars) that include English learner
specialists; opportunities to attend high quality trainings and other professional learning sessions outside of the school focused on second language acquisition, knowledge of the different cultural and linguistic groups of students, and other topics related to teaching English learners. Principals should also re-envision the work of English learner specialists in their buildings to both provide direct services to students and to play a meaningful and substantial role in the professional learning of other educators in the building through coaching, mentoring, collegial inquiry, teaming, and leadership work. Superintendents and policymakers can support these school-based efforts by allocating more financial resources to schools for in terms of funding for professional learning relating to developing expertise in teaching English learners and for the staffing of more English learner specialists in each school building, thereby allowing English learner specialists to both service English learners and take a leadership role in the professional learning and growth of their colleagues who also teach English learners.

**Study Limitations**

There are several limitations to my study that are important to consider. I selected sites that represented two of the best examples of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a) in order to better understand how the pillars might support educators, who teach English language learners, to address the adaptive challenges they encountered in their work. Woodland Heights Elementary and Springford Academy (pseudonyms) were two of best examples of this learning-oriented leadership theory in action because: a) their school leaders understand and apply constructive-developmental theory and pillars that compose Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model in their leadership practice with adults in their schools; b) Drago-
Severson has consulted and worked with leaders and their teachers at both sites in ongoing ways over one year (Woodland Heights) and over four years (Springford Academy) and during these times she has collaborated with principals and teachers to support adult learning and development; and c) both sites have significant, ongoing district support for robust professional development. School contexts that do not employ the pillars of teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring to provide teachers with holding environments, or appropriate supports and challenges to support adult growth and development may not have the same capacities to support teacher growth, development, and leadership in response to adaptive challenges involving English learners. Thus, the extent to which findings from my study can be generalized is limited.

Furthermore, my sample was limited to 11 participants, and the linguistic and racial diversity of my sample was limited (only one bilingual participant, no participants whose first language was not English, and only one non-White participant), which further reduced the generalizability of my findings. Finally, I chose to focus on only the three adaptive challenges most widely discussed by participants, so my findings did not address other adaptive challenges participants experienced in their work with English learners (e.g., Common Core Standards).

**Future Studies**

It has been a decade since Drago-Severson published her first book presenting the learning-oriented leadership model, and a larger-scale study of nationally-representative sites whose building-level leaders and/or district-level leaders employ Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model should be conducted because many school leaders are
now trying to employ the model. My interview study provides an in-depth look at two sites, and a larger-scale study of the Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model would provide a more comprehensive picture of how educators experience the pillars. It was beyond the scope of this study to include formal interviews with school leaders, and a larger-scale study could also include both more sites and expand the inquiry to both educator and school leader experiences with adaptive challenges involving English learners, the pillars, and the extent to which the pillars support educators’ efforts to address those adaptive challenges. A larger study would also allow for a larger and more diverse sample of participants which would enable researchers to follow up on the questions raised regarding the role of personal background, graduate program coursework, and district-offered coursework in supporting educators’ efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming.

Administering subject-object interviews (a measure from constructive-developmental theory of how adults make meaning) in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews in future studies would also enable researchers to investigate how developmental diversity may impact educator’s efforts to address the adaptive challenges in their work with English learners and the ways in which they make sense of how the pillars provide holding environments for their growth. My sample was too small to warrant the administering of subject-object interviews. A study that included a larger sample of participants that represented greater diversity in terms of cultural, linguistic, racial background and drawing from more school sites that represented a diverse range of programs for English learners (e.g., bilingual and English-only) would enable a research
team to more fully consider other aspects of participants’ meaning making systems. I wonder what relationships or patterns would emerge between participants’ ways of knowing, their definitions of adaptive challenges, and their experiences of the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address those adaptive challenges.

In concluding this study, I do wonder about how future research might help to illuminate more clearly how my dissertation both extends and challenges the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). As I suggest in my implications and recommendations, my study does extend Drago-Severson’s research by illuminating how a group of educators at two schools whose leaders implement the learning-oriented leadership model experience the benefits of a holding environment through engaging in the pillars to grow in some ways to address the adaptive challenges they encounter in their work teaching English learners. My study also raises questions about how educational leaders may need to consider more deeply the implications for choosing a leadership and professional learning model that does not directly address issues of cultural, language, and diversity—outside of developmental diversity. I was not able to draw any conclusions about why a portion of my participants did not mentor the pillars as supportive to their efforts to address the adaptive challenges of cultural proficiency, partnering with families, and English learner programming. I also noted that all participants spontaneously brought up other lived experiences and professional learning experiences outside of the pillar practices as supportive of their efforts to meet those adaptive challenges. Future studies could explore these discrepant data I presented in my findings.
Further, as I briefly noted in Chapters I and II, there is an interesting tension and synergy between the constructive-developmental theory that underpins Drago-Severson’s learning-oriented leadership model and the literatures of multicultural education, sociocultural theory, and bilingual education as they relate to creating opportunities for transformational learning within professional learning environments in schools. I left this question largely unexplored in my study because of the way I initially designed my study and research questions. I constructed my research questions to focus on participants’ experiences engaging in the pillar practices. I wanted to learn more about how participants understood the adaptive challenges in their day-to-day work teaching English learners, so I brought aspects of sociocultural theory into my literature and analysis, but future studies could pose similar inquiries that use grounded theory or ethnography to focus on participants’ experiences more broadly instead of my focus on their experiences engaging in the pillars of the learning-oriented leadership model (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012a). This kind of project would also be enhanced by employing a research team with diverse backgrounds in terms of culture, language, race, etc. I worked to address issues of reactivity with my participants given my position of privilege vis-à-vis race and language, and having a more diverse team conducting such a study could further diminish potential validity threats.

I chose to focus on studying sites where educators were well supported within their district and building contexts to engage in the pillars, but an important future study including school sites that do not have such robust support should also be conducted. Learning more about how school leaders and educators experience the pillars and the adaptive challenges they face with English learners in these contexts could provide
valuable insights for leaders hoping to create holding environments for growth and development inside of districts that do not provide intentional supports and resources for adult development. Such a study could include a sample of district-level and building-level leaders who have taken a course in adult development with Drago-Severson and who work in school districts that do not provide adequate financial or human resources to provide a robust infrastructure for the pillars.

Another potential study could involve overlaying the concept from adult development of “growing edge”—how an adult comes to see the limits of their thinking and begins to grow beyond those edges—with a more sociocultural lens to consider how adaptive challenges involving English learners, or more generally diverse learners, push at the edges of educators’ beings. By choosing to incorporate the concept of adaptive challenge in this inquiry, my study pointed to an interesting area for further research related to how individuals—rather than organizations or societies—experience and understand adaptive challenges. In many ways the adaptive challenge of English learner programming that participants identified is a classic example of a societal or organizational adaptive challenge that forces individuals and leaders to re-examine their values, assumptions, and ways of working to address the challenge differently than it has been addressed in the past. On the other hand, the adaptive challenge that participants named of cultural proficiency is one that really challenges adults to push at the edges of their very being. Exploring this phenomenon of how educators make sense of and grow to better meet this type of adaptive challenge in their work with diverse learners could have important implications for how we understand adaptive challenges and the
professional learning environments that have the potential to offer transformational learning experiences to support adults’ growth to better meet those challenges.

**Final Thoughts**

In concluding this study, I am struck by how hopeful I feel. School leaders have an awesome power to change how adults understand and relate to their work with English learners and other student populations who have historically been underserved in American schools. I am thinking in particular of the power that comes with knowledge of adult development and with the belief that inviting adults to discover the contours of their “growing edges” and offering them the supports and challenges over time to grow beyond those edges will truly transform schools. Lived experience along with so many skills, beliefs, and attitudes go into making great school leaders, but the capacity and vision to lead with developmental intention offers schools and districts tremendous potential to transform themselves to ensure the learning and achievement of all learners.
REFERENCES


National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA). (2011). *Number of Limited English Proficient students reported by states in the Consolidated State Performance Reports, School Year 2008-2009*. Washington, DC: NCELA.


## APPENDIX A

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 2012-March 2012</td>
<td>IRB Approval Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2012-April 2012</td>
<td>Site observations and document analysis. Presentations to staff asking for participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2012-August 2012</td>
<td>Participants identified and interviews conducted as participants are identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2012-April 2012</td>
<td>Interview one conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2012-May 2012</td>
<td>Interview two conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2012-June 2012</td>
<td>Interview three conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2012-June 2012</td>
<td>Researcher writes field notes and analytic memos after observations, document analysis sessions, review of demographic indexes, and interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2012-July 2012</td>
<td>Interviews are transcribed by hired transcriptionist. Researcher reads interviews for accuracy, and data reduction strategies applied before sending to participants for member-check and before uploading to HYPER Research data analysis software.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2012-July 2012</td>
<td>Researcher codes each case using open coding and theoretical codes as represented in preliminary coding list (Appendix F). Preliminary coding list revised as necessary. Researcher cross-checks codes with graduate study group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2012-August 2012</td>
<td>Researcher writes case descriptions and in-depth narrative summaries for each case. Researcher writes analytic memos as necessary and data matrices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012-October 2012</td>
<td>Researcher conducts cross-case data analysis: data matrices and visual displays for analysis within each site and within the entire sample according to analytic framework (conceptual framework) and emerging themes. Revises conceptual framework and writes analytic memos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>Researcher drafts findings chapters. Researcher writes summary analytic memos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2012</td>
<td>Researcher drafts analyses chapters including implications, conclusions, and recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Researcher completes draft of entire dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Editor reviews document and researcher completes edits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013-March 2013</td>
<td>External review of draft (advisors, peers), feedback, and revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Final editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Submission to committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>Present initial findings at AERA conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Task</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2013-May 2013</td>
<td>Complete suggested revisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator:
Sarah Benis Scheier-Dolberg

Research Title:
Teachers of English Learners and Their Experiences within the Learning-Oriented Leadership Model

Research Description:
You are invited to participate in research study for my Doctoral Dissertation work at Teachers College, Columbia University. The focus of my research is to learn from you. I am very interested in learning how you define and experience challenges in your work that are adaptive problems (problems for which there are no easy or ready-made answers). I am also interested in learning about your experiences with the pillar practices of the learning-oriented leadership model (i.e., teaming, mentoring, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry) and how, if at all, they may help you better meet those adaptive challenges in your teaching. Finally, I am interested in learning about your experiences with the potential influences of cultural background on your work with English learners and the pillar practices.

This study is necessary because little is known about the experience of teachers of English learners who are now facing extraordinary and complex challenges in their professional contexts. Your participation in my study will help me to better understand the challenges teachers of English learners face in their professional lives and how they grow to meet those challenges within the learning-oriented leadership model.

Participation involves three one-hour, in-depth interviews within a four-month period. With your permission, I will record the interview digitally. Transcriptions will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the my home office to ensure that only I will have access to these items; digital audio files will be kept on my password-protected computer. I, Sarah Benis Scheier-Dolberg, will conduct the research, and the interviews will take place at the location of your choosing.

Risks and Benefits:
There is minimal risk involved participating in this study. All identifying data will be removed, so it is unlikely that his data could be used to prejudice others against participants. As the researcher, I will ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. The risk assumed shall be the same as ordinary risk assumed having conversations about professional work. There is no penalty or consequence for not
participating in this study. There are some benefits associated with this study, including a complimentary professional consultation on technology from the researcher, Sarah Benis Scheier-Dolberg, and the contribution of knowledge to the field of professional development and learning spaces for teachers of English learners.

**Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality:**
You will not be personally identified in any report or publication resulting from this research. The school will be given a pseudonym as well. Any data shared for the purposes of coding and confirmability will be coded with a pseudonym as well. No names will appear on any of the digital audio records. All digital audio records will be labeled by number and will be stored on a password-protected computer.

All documents in digital and paper form will be kept by me on a password-protected computer or in a locked cabinet in my home office to which only I will have access. Records will not be maintained once the dissertation process is complete. All forms of personal identification will be erased and eliminated. I will maintain the data in locked cabinets in the coded form only for any post-dissertation research.

**Time Involvement:**
The research process, which should span four months, will take a total of approximately 3-5 hours of your time in the form of three one-hour interviews.

**Compensation:**
I appreciate your voluntary participation in this study, as it will be adding to the body of knowledge on the topic of professional development and learning spaces for teachers of English learners, particularly from the perspective of teachers. No payment is implied or provided for your voluntary participation other than a complimentary technology consultation offered to all participants by me, Sarah Benis Scheier-Dolberg.

**How The Results Will Be Used:**
I will use the results of the study for my doctoral dissertation. In addition, I may present what you share with me at conferences and meetings, publish in journals or articles, or use the information for educational purposes. In these venues you will not be identified as a research participant.

**Participant’s Rights:**
- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.

- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.

- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion.

- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been
developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.

- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (617) 834-3501. Her faculty advisor, Ellie Drago-Severson, at Teachers College, Columbia University, and can be reached at (212) 678-4163.

- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.

- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

- If digital audio taping is part of this research:
  I (__) consent to be audio taped.
  I (__) do NOT consent to being audio taped.

- The written, audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and members of the research team.

Participant's Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Name: ___________________________
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol 1

Name of Interviewee: __________________________
Date: __________________________
Duration of Interview: __________________________

Section I: Context

1. Appreciation
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate you taking the time today.

2. Overview of Study’s Purpose and Goals
I want to tell you about the purposes and goals of the study, as well as the purpose of this first interview. My hope for this research is to learn more about your experiences as a teacher of English learners. During our conversation today, I will ask you questions to help me understand the challenges you face in your professional context. I am very interested in learning how you define and experience challenges in your work that are adaptive problems (problems for which there are no east or ready-made answers). In my work as a teacher of English learners in Massachusetts and my work as a coach and mentor teacher in Massachusetts and New York City, I have observed just how complex and difficult the challenges that teachers of English learners face each day in their work as teachers in urban schools. I have designed this study to investigate a model of leadership, the learning-oriented leadership model, that your principal uses to help support teachers grow to better meet the complex challenges in their work. Every person has a different way of thinking about things, and I want to understand how you think about things. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. We will follow up the interview with a second interview next month on the topic of your experiences with the professional learning spaces in your school for learning, including teaming, mentoring, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry. I will ask you about your experiences with those professional learning spaces and how, if at all, they have helped you to better meet the challenges of engaging English learners. In the third and final interview the following month, we will focus on your reflections on your own cultural background and how, if at all, that might influence your teaching decisions and relationships with students and colleagues. In each interview after this first session, you will also have an opportunity to review the preview interview transcript and help me to ensure that I have understood your perspective accurately.

3. Confidentiality
As a researcher, I will write about what you tell me. When writing about your experience, I will not use your real name nor the school’s name or the neighborhood in which the school is located. Everything you say will be kept private. I will never identify to anyone the names of any of the people who are helping me learn about teacher growth and learning unless a participant has given me his or her permission. I may quote things that
you say in anything I write, but I will never use your name. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

4. Taping
To make sure that I can listen to you well and so that I can review what you have said, I will be digitally recording our conversation. I want you to know that no one other than the professional transcriber or me will have access to the tape. I will never identify who said what to me to anyone, and this includes everyone at your school and within the school district where you work. The material will be transcribed, but no one will see the transcript except for me. I will send you a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

5. Questions
Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have any questions at any time during our conversation, or if you do not understand something I have said, please let me know.

Section II: Warm Up

We will begin with some warm-up questions about your background as a teacher. In case it is helpful for you, I will start by sharing some information about my own background as a teacher.

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at your current school?
3. How many English learners do you currently teach?
4. How many years have you been teaching English learners?
5. How do you self-identify in terms of race and ethnicity?
6. What language(s) do you speak at home?
7. What other languages have you learned?
8. Can you tell me how old you are?

Section III: Adaptive Teaching Challenges

9. Having been a teacher, I know the rewards of teaching. I also know that as teachers that we all face tremendous challenges in our work. It seems that recently those challenges have increased for teachers. Could you tell me about the challenges you face in your work as a teacher?
Probes: In the classroom? Most import ones? Can you please explain? Examples?
In your work with other adults in the school or school community? Most import ones? Can you please explain? Examples?

10. If someone were to ask you about the challenges you face as a teacher who supports the learning and achievement of English learners at your school, what would you name? What are the biggest ones? Of those challenges you face, what are the challenges for which there are not easy answers or ready-made solutions?
   Probes: Were you trained for these?
   What helped you? What would have helped you?
   Think of things where there are no trainings or professional development sessions available to help you tackle these challenges?
   Think of problems where there are no known solutions.

11. Let’s focus on the hardest challenge you have named so far. Which one is it? Could you describe that experience for me?

12. Suppose I wanted to make a list of these kinds of challenges that you have faced as a teacher of English learners, what would you suggest I put on the list?
   Probes: Such as?
   Could you give me an example?
   Can you tell me more about that?

Section V: Wrap-Up

13. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything you need to know about me, my work, or why I want to learn from you? Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have talked about so far?

Thinking ahead to our next interview session, what time, day, and venue would be best for your schedule? (We will plan to meet approximately a month from today’s date.)

Between now and our next interview, I will have your interview transcribed, read it for accuracy while listening to the audio recording, and then send the transcript to you via email for review. At the start of our next interview, we spend the first 10 minutes discussing the transcript to make sure it is accurate, and I will share a few of my learnings from the transcript with you for us to discuss before moving to the second topic of this study: your experiences with the pillar practices of mentoring, teaming, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry.

Thank you for your time and your thinking.
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol 2

Name of Interviewee: ____________________________
Date: ______________________________
Duration of Interview: ______________________________

Section I: Context

1. Appreciation
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study and for taking the time today to talk with me.

2. Overview of Interview 2
We will start today by reviewing the transcript of our last interview, the one I emailed to you. I have a copy here for you to look at as well if it is helpful for you to have while we talk. First, I will ask you to verify that the transcript is accurate. You are welcome to make any edits to the document that you feel will better convey your experiences. In this first then minutes of the interview as we review the transcript, I will also share a few of my learnings from the transcript with you for us to discuss. After ten minutes, because your interview time is limited, we will then move onto focus on the second topic of this study: your experiences with the pillar practices of mentoring, teaming, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry. I also want to remind you of something I said in the first interview, every person has a different way of thinking about things, and I want to understand how you think about things. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

3. Confidentiality, Taping, and Questions
For this interview I will maintain the same procedures for confidentiality and taping used during our first interview. Is this okay?

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have any questions at any time during our conversation, or if you do not understand something I have said, please let me know.

Section II: Warm Up and Follow Up Questions for Interview 1
Review transcript and share researcher’s learnings from Interview 1 along with any follow up questions from researcher or participant.

Section III: Professional Learning Spaces (Pillar Practices)

Teaming
1. Let’s begin with one of the pillar practices: teaming. Please tell me about your experiences with teaming at your school.
   Probes: Such as? Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?

2. Staying with your experiences with teaming. What kinds of learning, if any, have you experienced through some of the teaming experiences we have discussed?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

3. Reflecting on some of the challenges we discussed in the first interview, do you see any connections between your experiences with teaming and your being better able to meet these challenges?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

**Mentoring**

4. Next, let’s move to mentoring. Please tell me about your experiences with mentoring at your school.
   Probes: Such as? Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?

5. Staying with your experiences with mentoring. What kinds of learning, if any, have you experienced through some of the mentoring experiences we have discussed?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

6. Reflecting on some of the challenges we discussed in the first interview, do you see any connections between your experiences with mentoring and your being better able to meet these challenges?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

**Assuming Leadership Roles**

7. Next, let’s move to assuming leadership roles. Please tell me about your experiences with assuming leadership roles at your school.
   Probes: Such as? Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
8. Staying with your experiences with assuming leadership roles. What kinds of learning, if any, have you experienced through some of the assuming leadership roles experiences we have discussed?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

9. Reflecting on some of the challenges we discussed in the first interview, do you see any connections between your experiences with assuming leadership roles and your being better able to meet these challenges?
   Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
   What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

Collegial Inquiry

10. Finally, let’s discuss collegial inquiry. Please tell me about your experiences with collegial inquiry at your school.
    Probes: Such as? Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?

11. Staying with your experiences with collegial inquiry. What kinds of learning, if any, have you experienced through some of the collegial inquiry experiences we have discussed?
    Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
    What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

12. Reflecting on some of the challenges we discussed in the first interview, do you see any connections between your experiences with collegial inquiry and your being better able to meet these challenges?
    Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?
    What experiences stand out as the most pivotal for your learning?

Section V: Wrap-Up

13. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have talked about so far?

Thinking ahead to our final interview session, what time, day, and venue would be best for your schedule? (We will plan to meet approximately a month from today’s date.)

Between now and our next interview as before, I will have your interview transcribed, read it for accuracy while listening to the audio recording, and then send the transcript to you via email for review. At the start of our next interview, we spend the first 10 minutes
discussing the transcript to make sure it is accurate, and I will share a few of my learnings from the transcript with you for us to discuss before moving to the final topic of this study: your reflections on your own cultural background and how, if at all, that might influence your teaching decisions and relationships with students and colleagues.

Thank you for your time and your thinking.
APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol 3

Name of Interviewee: ______________________________
Date: ______________________________
Duration of Interview: ______________________________

Section I: Context

1. Appreciation
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study and for taking the time today to talk with me for all three of these interviews.

2. Overview of Interview 3
We will start today by reviewing the transcript of our second interview, the one I emailed to you. I have a copy here for you to look at as well if it is helpful for you to have while we talk. First, I will ask you to verify that the transcript is accurate. You are welcome to make any edits to the document that you feel will better convey your experiences. In this first then minutes of the interview as we review the transcript, I will also share a few of my learnings from the transcript with you for us to discuss. After ten minutes, because your interview time is limited, we will then move onto focus on the second topic of this study: your reflections on your own cultural background and how, if at all, that might influence your teaching decisions and relationships with students and colleagues. I also want to remind you of something I said in the first interviews, every person has a different way of thinking about things, and I want to understand how you think about things. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

3. Confidentiality, Taping, and Questions
For this interview I will maintain the same procedures for confidentiality and taping used during our first interview. Is this okay?

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have any questions at any time during our conversation, or if you do not understand something I have said, please let me know.

Section II: Warm Up and Follow Up Questions for Interview 2
Review transcript and share researcher’s learnings from Interview 2 along with any follow up questions from researcher or participant.

Section III: Cultural Background, Instructional Decision Making, Relationships, and the Pillar Practices
1. In our first interview, I asked you some warm up questions about your teaching background as well as your cultural background. Today I wanted to begin by asking one more question about your cultural background connected to social-economic status. I ask this question because in my experiences as a White woman raised in a rural town with English as my first language, I found that my experiences growing up in a family from a lower middle-class background allowed me to better understand the experiences of my students and families as I began working as a teacher. I see experiences with class as an important influence on how teachers work in urban schools, particularly with students living at or below the poverty line. Would you be willing to share with me information about your class background?

2. How would you describe your cultural background?
   Probes: language, ethnicity/race, education, other
   Can you tell me about where you grew up and went to school?

3. In what ways, if at all, do you see your cultural background affecting your work as a teacher of English learners?
   Probes: Specific examples?
   Consider: instructional decisions, relationships with students and families, relationships with colleagues

4. Are there any instances that come to mind where your culture and/or the culture of your students or families played a major role in your work as a teacher?
   Probes: Specific examples?
   Consider: instructional decisions, relationships with students and families, relationships with colleagues

5. What do you think about the potential role teachers’ cultural backgrounds might play in influencing teachers’ experiences engaging in professional development activities in the school (such as teaming, mentoring, assuming leadership roles, and collegial inquiry)? What have been your experiences with your own cultural background and how it does or does not influence your experiences teaming, mentoring, assuming leadership roles, or collegial inquiry?
   Probes: Such as? Could you give me an example? Can you tell me more about that?

Section V: Wrap-Up

6. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything you need to know? Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have talked about so far?

This is our final interview session. In the next two months, I will be transcribing your third interview, reading it for accuracy while listening to the audio recording, and then sending the transcript to you via email for review. May I follow up over email or phone?
after sending the transcript to make sure it is accurate and to share a few of my learnings from the transcript?

What is a good time, date, and venue for us to schedule your technology consultation, my very small token of appreciation for your time and all that you have shared?

Thank you for your time and your thinking.
APPENDIX F

Preliminary Coding Scheme

RQ #1 ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

Label 1: Diagnosing Learning Issues
Definition:
Teacher is trying to diagnose specific learning issues she or he needs to address with each individual child and/or appropriate interventions; may be sited in RTI context (Dorn & Henderson, 2010; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008; Ysseldyke, Burns, Scholin, & Parker, 2010). Teacher is seeking to differentiate between common learning challenges and language learning challenges using informal or formal (RTI or data-analysis protocol) processes.
Description:
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Differentiating between disability/special education concerns or developmental concerns AND language learning concerns; RTI; data-analysis

Label 2: Family Communication
Definition:
Teacher is trying to engage families of English learners (Hiatt-Michael, 2007) and/or build meaningful relationships (Ferguson, 2007) in the context of cultural, linguistic, and/or community discontinuities (Nieto, 2010); teacher expresses need for more or different resources to support family outreach (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007).
Description:
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Talking to or working with parents

Label 3: Teacher Collaboration
Definition:
Teacher is dealing with other teachers, specifically bilingual teachers able to teach in more than one language who may be full teachers, aides, or other support personnel (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); teachers do not have time for collaboration during school day because of limited resources.
(Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); coteaching models present challenges for teachers including: sharing ideas, classroom resources, skills, physical space; identification of teacher roles and responsibilities, decision-making processes, and common view of executing coteaching model(s) (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Roache et al., 2003); description of micropolitical processes including conflict stances, border politics, ideology, and organizational change and learning (Achinstein, 2002); teachers working to collaborate as distributed leadership experience (Gates & Robinson, 2009)

**Description:**
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.

**Indicators:**
Closing achievement gap, catching up to peers, focus on achievement, parity with native English speaking peers, more advantaged peers, need for more and different resources to teach English learners

**Label 4: Low Expectations**

**Definition:**
Teacher is trying to help students close achievement gap with native English speaking peers and/or more economically-advantaged peers that includes more and/or different resources (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007)

**Description:**
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.

**Indicators:**
Closing achievement gap, catching up to peers, focus on achievement, parity with native English speaking peers, more advantaged peers, need for more and different resources to teach English learners

**Label 5: Curriculum**

**Definition:**
Teacher is trying to support biliteracy through developing and/or using a bilingual curriculum (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); teacher is trying to support noncognitive goals such as navigating US culture (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); teachers need appropriate instructional materials (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007),

**Description:**
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Native language use/support; bilingual curriculum development or use; need for more resources

Label 6: Assessments
Definition:
Teacher is trying to help student attain and maintain basic proficiency in English language arts for reclassification to FLEP or general education status (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); new assessments measuring academic content and not solely command of English are being developed in alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards (Linquanti, 2011); teachers describe adopting or creating a range of formative and summative assessment strategies for demonstrating task mastery (Banks et al., 2001)
Description:
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Meeting state or district proficiency standards

Label 7: Student Characteristics
Definition:
Teacher describes changes that must be made depending on student characteristics such as: family background, number of years in the U.S., student age and grade level, native language proficiency, initial English proficiency (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); teacher describes difficulties in the social and/or cultural contexts of teaching and learning and/or use of culturally responsive activities, resources, and strategies for instruction (Banks et al., 2001)
Description:
Code addresses RQ 1 in that is provides an example of an adaptive challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Programming lacks enough and/or right resources; additional time (longer school day/year)

Label 8: Programming
Definition:
Teacher expresses the need for more or different resources to support instruction including longer day and/or school year, computers, libraries spanning multiple grades and languages, communication strategies for
reaching families (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007); teachers describe
need for flexible programming and appropriate staffing based on student
characteristics (Gándara & Rumberger, 2007);
Description:
Code addresses RQ 1 in that it provides an example of an adaptive
challenge specific to teaching English learners because it relates to a
complex challenge originating in teaching the English language in a
general education or language program K12 context.
Indicators:
Programming lacks enough and/or right resources; additional time (longer
school day/year)

RQ #2 PILLAR PRACTICES

Label 1: Teaming
Label 2: Mentoring or Coaching
Label 3: Assuming Leadership Roles
Label 4: Collegial Inquiry
Label 5: Supports to Learning

RQ #3 CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Label 1: Cultural Competencies
Label 2: Race/Ethnicity
Label 3: Language
Label 4: Socio-economic Status
Label 5: Educational Background
Label 6: Instructional Decision Making
Label 7: Relationships with Students
Label 8: Relationships with Colleagues
APPENDIX G

Coding List

Adaptive Challenges

AC1 educator cultural competence
AC2a navigating difference in classroom
AC2b navigating classroom discourse
AC3 partnering with families
AC4 appropriate academic interventions for ELs
AC5 disentangling SLA and learning processes
AC6 programming for ELs
AC7 applying EL label
AC8 changing curriculum
AC9 low expectations
AC10 shared responsibility for ELs
ACNPP non PP support for teachers

Pillar Practices

PP1T teaming
PP2ALR assuming leadership roles
PP3CI collegial inquiry
PP4M/C mentoring/coaching
PPSL school leader influence
PPD district influence
PPGL growth learning
PPHE holding environment
PPE Ellie

Emergent Themes

ET1 experience with diverse populations
ET2 collaboration
ET3 staff and building culture
ET4 feedback
ET5 share ideas
ET6 teacher turnover
ET7 home community diversity
ET8 PLC team
ET9 RTI/child study team
ET10 trust
ET11 federal state EL policy
ET12 teaching experience
ET13 race
Other

DD discrepant data
MU metaphors used
GEM gem quotes