CULTURALLY COMPETENT ELL TEACHERS: AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR EPISTEMOLOGICAL BELIEFS AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

By

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify areas of commonality, if any, among the practices, knowledge, and beliefs of successful teachers of English Language Learners’ (ELL) cultural competencies in northeast Alabama. The study’s participants were identified as exemplary educators of ELL students by their principal or another supervisor within their school or district.

The research illustrating the impact those teachers’ epistemological beliefs or their reflective practice’s had on student outcomes was used as a guide for this study. This study examined the epistemological beliefs and reflective practices of exemplary teachers of ELL students and was based on the assumptions that: (a) teacher epistemology is an important component of cultural competency, (b) teachers’ use of reflective practice is an important component of cultural competency, and (c) commonalities can be identified among teachers’ beliefs and practices related to educating ELL students. The final assumption was that if the identified effective teachers of ELL students had higher levels of epistemological beliefs and/or were more reflective, it would be beneficial to ask practitioners to engage in activities that transform their epistemologies and change their reflective capabilities.

The study procedures included gathering demographic information regarding experience and training, conducting an interview that pertained to the factors in Schommer’s Epistemological Survey and to Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment Survey (REMAS) that asked questions about how their
teachers’ practices were implemented and how these practices are enacted in the classroom. The researcher then transcribed and analyzed the interview data to identify connecting statements and common themes in the interviews.

This study described commonalities among exemplary teachers of ELL students. The participants were found to have sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs and were found to be reflective in their practices and beliefs. Additionally, the participants were found to use strategies that engaged their students through active participation and multiple modes of inquiry. The findings suggested that instructional leaders should develop the beliefs and skills concerning epistemology and reflective practice among their faculty to increase teacher capacity.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ELL English Language Learners
REMAS Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment Survey
SIOP Strategic Intervention Observation Protocol
WIDA World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment
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The completion of this dissertation has been a process of endurance. I’m not sure I truly realized the work involved when I began the journey. However, the journey has been a growing experience as a person, educator and leader. I learned a lot of things about myself through self-reflection and reflecting upon the ideas presented in class on the drive to and from class.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the population of English Language Learner (ELL) students rose by thirty-nine percent to 723,000 between the years of 1994-2000 and by more than “200 percent in . . . ELL populations from 1995-1996 to 2005-2006” (McNeil, 2006, para. 6). This equated to twenty-three percent of the United States’ population of ELL students. This increase mostly fell to an assembly of educators who may have been ill-prepared to handle the challenges and cultures these students brought with them (Gandara, 2005). Additionally, exemplary teachers’ beliefs, practices, traits, and preparation can be observed, described, and thus passed on to future educators in order to improve practices for teachers of ELL students.

Considerable research exists showing that teachers’ dispositions, beliefs about knowledge, and practices are monumental in concern for educating children, especially ELL students. Three areas of teacher disposition and practice recognized in such a manner are cultural competency, teacher epistemology, and the teachers reflective practice. There is considerable research on how a teacher’s level of cultural competency can impact student outcomes for better or worse (Gay, 2002). Teachers exhibit cultural competency through their encounters with a student as well as through the curriculum and strategies they employ to educate their students for a pluralistic society. Several professional development models have been designed and
implemented with the purpose of increasing the cultural competency of both pre-service and in-service teachers. These models have been focused through the use of graduate-level coursework and job-embedded professional development activities aimed at improving the education of ELL students (Delpit, 2003; Goodwin, 1997; Howard, 2003; King, 2004; LaRoux, 2002; Phuntsog, 2001; Smyth, 2005; Vandarakis, 2005).

Additionally, research supports the idea that teachers with higher epistemological belief systems have more sophisticated thought processes, which correlates with increased levels of success educating students, especially those that are ELL. These teachers have been shown to pass along higher epistemological beliefs to their students which impact life-long learning as well (Brownlee, 2001; Chan & Elliott, 2001; Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; McCombs, 2001; Perry, 1968; Perry, 1981; Peterson, 1998; Ryan, 1984; Schommer, 2004; Schraw & Olafson, 2002; Wyre, 2007). Furthermore, reflection is a pertinent topic in increasing teacher capacity. Reflection allows practitioners to analyze the impact that their instructional practices and beliefs have on their students. Additionally, they can reconceptualize those practices and improve upon them, thus increasing their capacity as teachers (Alger, 2006; Argyris, 1990; Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Blase & Blase, 2004; Dewey, 1933; Hirsch, 1996; Larrivee, 2000; Nolan, 1989; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Senge, 1990; Westberg, 2001).

The transformation of teacher practice and increasing teacher capacity has been, and will continue to be, a vital component of the discussion concerning what encompasses an effective instructor of ELL students. While school districts and state departments are proposing programs that are best for ELL students, the research supports culturally competent teaching practices as evidence for academic success regardless of the program being implemented (Bernhard, 2005; Echavarria, 2008; Perez, 2000; Short & Echevarria, 2004).
Culturally competent strategies and practices may include, but are not limited to, contextualizing, language objecting, modeling, discussion, joint productivity, coaching, pairing, etc . . . The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (2008) incorporates several strategies in teaching ELL students. The strategies espoused in the SIOP model are sheltered instruction; lesson preparation with language objectives and adaptation based on students’ abilities; building background knowledge; comprehensive input; teaching strategies that are metacognitive and cognitive; social/affective, verbal, nonverbal, and higher order questioning; interaction; practice/application; delivery; and review and assessment by utilizing techniques such as contextualizing, language objecting, modeling, discussion, joint productivity, coaching, pairing, etc . . . (Echavarria, 2008). Additionally, the teachers’ interactions among themselves and the ELL students are significant to consider. Through the educational process, the teacher relates or adds contributions to the material of various cultures, especially of those included in the classroom (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Asante1991; Clauson, 2002; Ganter, 1997; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002; Haberman, 1994; Nieto, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Young, 2000). Asante goes on to assert that, “The most productive method of teaching any student is to place his or her group within the center of the context of knowledge” (Asante, 1991, p. 43). Furthermore, Asante stated that,

Education, [in order to] to have integrity, must begin with the proposition that all humans have contributed to the world development and the flow of knowledge and information, and that most human achievements are the result of mutually interactive, international effort (Asante, pp. 44, 45).

This practice may be essential in motivating and empowering a student to succeed or take an active role in his or her education. Moreover, Asante advised us that when a student is
allowed to view history from his or her unique perspective as a cultural being, greater pride and vision are instilled in the student. He said that such practices renew students’ spirit and desire to improve their own lives. Jupp (2006) argued that accomplished teachers of ELL students “create a standard for excellence while respecting students’ diversity” (Jupp, p. 37).

In terms of epistemology, considerable research concluded that the teacher’s epistemological beliefs impact the range of activities he or she utilizes in the classroom (Schraw & Olafson, 2002). Since epistemological beliefs impact practice, they are found to have a profound impact upon the students’ learning experience and, ultimately, their personal epistemology (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; McCombs, 2001; Peterson, 1998 Schommer, 2004). Furthermore, Chan and Elliot identified correlations between teachers’ epistemological beliefs and how they taught and conducted their classes, how they managed their classroom environments through the learning exchange, and how they managed classroom discipline (Chan & Elliott, 2004).

Observing this impact, it seemed logical that we should explore ways to alter teacher epistemology to provide a higher standard of education. Research has shown that teacher epistemology can be transformed over time. However, we must note that it will be slow and may need fostering (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Howard et al., 2000; Perry, 1968; Schommer, 1990; Theis-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987).

Perry, a forefather of modern epistemological research, focused on increasing epistemological beliefs by interacting and challenging students one step ahead of their current belief system. This was meant to keep students on “the leading edge of growth” of their development. Baxter-Magolda, in agreement with Perry, encouraged interactions and questioning to increase students’ construction of meaning. Both Perry and Baxter-Magolda espoused the use
of peer collaboration and situating the individual as a constructor of knowledge as a means of heightening epistemology beliefs. Much of the research conducted by Perry, Baxter-Magolda, and Brownlee was conducted in the university setting and can therefore be utilized in promoting sophisticated views of epistemology among pre-service or in-service teachers (Baxter-Magolda, 1987; Brownlee, 2003; Perry, 1968).

Additionally, research has shown promise in increasing teachers’ epistemological beliefs through the use of mentor/mentee interactions (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Reimann & Sprinthall, 1993; Theis-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987). Arredondo and Rucinski documented changes in epistemological belief systems of teachers through the use of structured interactions via journal writings and interactions/discussions that opened up cognitively complex thinking (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998).

Reflection can be used as a tool to increase teacher capacity and overall effectiveness. Research showed that educators may use reflective practice as a means of increasing awareness of their professional performance as a way to strengthen, refine and improve their overall instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Westberg, 2001). Arredondo Rucinski stated that “reflective practice . . . has the potential to move individuals, and therefore whole school communities, toward real school reform through changes in the underlying beliefs and assumptions about knowledge and learning” (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005, p. 88).

Professional development models shown to increase reflective practice employed the use of group reflection and/or the use of journal entries. In journals, teachers were often asked to describe practices, the desired and actual outcomes, how he or she would reconceptualize his or her practice, and how his or her practice would impact their students. The cycle then began again
Reflection is also a valuable tool for ensuring culturally competent instruction in that a person can analyze how his or her personal narrative impacts his or her practices. Garcia supported reflection as a tool for increasing culturally competent teaching. Teachers should reflect upon their personal lives, backgrounds and lived experiences as well as those of their students and identify commonalities and discrepancies. By reflecting upon how these experiences have impacted their world views, they can become sensitive to the multiplicity of how lived experiences impact learning. Research has also shown the effectiveness of clinical observations and immersion in culturally diverse classrooms with culturally competent teachers and instructors (Garcia, 1997; Huber et al., 1997; Murrell & Diez, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Alabama’s public schools, as well as schools across the nation, were under pressure from state and federal mandates to improve academic achievement for ELL students. Since Alabama’s ELL population had increased by over 200 percent from the 1995-1996 scholastic school year to the 2005-2006 scholastic school year, it was important that educators attended to this issue quickly. Alabama was not the only state facing changing demographics. In fact, thirteen states saw similar growth during the same time frame (McNeil, 2009). Clair (2000) stated that teachers were not prepared to help diverse populations succeed in schools. Furthermore, “Policymakers had not yet taken all the steps necessary to improve education for ELL students” (McElroy, 2005, p. 8). In fact, in April 2009, this debate was taken to the United States Supreme Court where issues of funding and what should be considered adequate progress for ELL students was debated (Zehr, 2009).
Meanwhile, evidence supported the level of a teacher’s expertise as being a primary influence on student outcomes (Ferguson, 1999). Darling-Hammond argued that achievement differences between non-ELL and ELL students could be accounted for by high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Hanushek (2002) discovered that when students who have highly-effective teachers were compared to students who have non or less effective teachers, there could be as much as a grade level difference in performance on standardized tests.

By analyzing the cultural competency, their epistemological belief system, and the reflective practice of teachers who had been identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students, practices for developing and nurturing the skills, activities, and strategies of these teachers can be described. Historically, much of the research had been focused on how cultural competency impacts practices that make the curriculum meaningful and rich to ELL students (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Asante1991; Clauson, 2002; Ganter, 1997; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002; Haberman, 1994; Nieto, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Young, 2000). Additionally, much had been written on how epistemological beliefs can improve ELL students’ classroom performance (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Reimann & Sprinthall, 1993; Theis-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987). Reflective practices of teachers of ELL students had also been successful in allowing teachers to analyze the impact of their practices on all students (Alger, 2006; Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Blasé & Blasé 2004; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Hirsch, 1996; Nolan, 1989; Westberg, 2001).

Some researchers have stated that more exploration is needed concerning practices and beliefs of general education teachers who assist ELL students in achieving high standards (Pacheco, 2004). Much of the research conducted on epistemological beliefs has been focused on students’ beliefs as opposed to teachers’ beliefs and the impact those beliefs have had on
students’ learning (Perry, 1968). Therefore, as Schraw and Olafson (2002) observed, an increase in the study and analysis of teachers’ epistemological belief systems and the impact on students’ learning was needed. Garcia (2004) supported this and encouraged additional research on teacher epistemological beliefs and the impact on student performance. Furthermore, Boonyaprakob (2002) identified and suggested that many epistemological studies were limited to comparable populations and regions, thereby providing evidence of the need for research conducted in Northeastern Alabama.

In fact, one of the key issues in English Language Learners’ research was “How are teacher attitudes, theories, knowledge, and beliefs about . . . learning and development reflected in instructional practice? What were the best methods for developing heightened cultural awareness and sensitivity among teachers, and what impact did such awareness and sensitivity have on instruction and student learning?” (International Reading Association, 2007, p.15). The researchers continued to argue that there was a “pressing need for additional research that will provide information to inform . . . [teacher] practice” (International Reading Association, 2007, p.15).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to identify areas of commonality, if any, among the practices, knowledge, and beliefs of successful teachers of English Language Learners’ (ELL) cultural competencies. The analysis of these teachers’ cultural competencies included an examination of both their epistemological beliefs and their use of reflective practices: two non-inclusive components of cultural competency. Epistemological beliefs and reflective practices were important to study due to the impact they had on the development of the teachers’ cultural
understanding of a pluralistic society in rural Alabama, where a growing number of classrooms were being comprised of ELL students.

Conceptual Framework

There are amazingly effective teachers of ELL students in Northeast Alabama. The researcher suggested that effective ELL teachers are reflective about their teaching, and had certain beliefs about knowledge and learning. Further, research supported the idea that epistemological beliefs could be transformed with involvement in certain types of dialogue in mentor/mentee or supervisor/teacher relationships. The researcher hypothesized that there were commonalities among successful teachers of English Language Learners. Whether or not highly effective teachers of ELL students in Northeast Alabama had higher levels of epistemological beliefs, and whether highly effective teachers of ELL students were highly reflective about their practices had not been previously examined, although it was reasonable to think that highly effective ELL teachers hold these characteristics. If the identified effective teachers of ELL students had higher levels of epistemological beliefs and if they were more reflective, then it would be beneficial to ask practitioners to engage in activities that transform their epistemologies and change their reflective abilities.

While some research had been conducted in this field, there was a deficit of research on this specific topic. This was especially true in rural Alabama, where many teachers had only experienced homogeneous classrooms and schools. The researcher believed that by studying what successful ELL teachers believed, did, reflected on, and how they interacted with minority students, educators could help more teachers in rural Alabama to better prepare and to help ELL students to be successful.
Research Questions

1. What commonalities exist, if any, among beliefs, backgrounds and practices of successful teachers of English Language Learners?

2. What are the epistemological beliefs of successful Teachers of ELL students?

3. What are the perceptions of reflective practice among successful ELL teachers?

This research study was comprised of eighteen exemplary teachers of English Language Learners nominated by district principals and supervisors across the northeast region of Alabama. These eighteen participants identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students were interviewed in depth to identify and describe their teaching practices. They also responded to assessments of epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. These instruments provided background information about the characteristics of the participants. The participants’ scores were then compared to the previously collected data sets for interpretation (Schommer, 1989; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Garcia, 2004).

Study Design

Due to the sudden increase in the population of ELL students in northeast Alabama, it was important to understand what effective instructors believed, how they acted, and what their instruction looked like. Therefore, exemplary teachers of ELL students were identified and their participation requested for the study. The researcher developed an interview aimed at defining the practices of the participants identified as exemplary teachers of English Language Learners, by using the results of previously completed factor analyses developed by Schommer for her Epistemological Survey, and by Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch for their Reflective Ethical Moral Assessment Survey. In the interview, the participants were asked a set of broad questions, as suggested by Creswell (1998). They were then asked to describe how their beliefs were
transferred to practice, and what that practice looked like in action, to identify any tension between responses and described practices.

Following the participant interviews, the researcher transcribed the dialogue, carefully analyzing to determine any connecting statements that arose in the interview that might have lead to a greater understanding of teacher beliefs and practices. Next, the statements were divided into themes such as units of beliefs, units of practices, and units of professional development to further understand the beliefs, practices, and training of exemplary teachers of ELL students. The assumption was that if the identified effective teachers of ELL students were shown to have higher levels of epistemological beliefs, and if they were more reflective, future practitioners could be asked to engage in activities that might transform their epistemologies and change their reflective abilities.

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

The reader should consider the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to the northeast region of Alabama, where large quantities of English Language Learners have migrated.

2. This study focused on the commonalities among teacher practices, epistemological beliefs, reflective practices, and classroom behaviors of ELL teachers identified as exemplary by their supervising principals. These were all based on perceptions of the teachers and/or on perceptions of principals.

The following assumptions are made:

1. Teacher epistemology is an important component of cultural competency.

2. Teacher’s use of reflective practice is an important component of cultural competency.
3. All participants provided explicit and accurate responses to the interviews conducted by the researcher.

4. The inferences, findings, and deductions concluded in this study are based upon examination of data acquired from active and willing participants.

Definition of Key Terms

*Cultural Competency* - A set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together . . . to function effectively in transcultural interactions. In practice, cultural competence acknowledges and incorporates . . . the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, the need to be aware of the dynamics resulting from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs (Leavitt, 2002, p. 36).

*Epistemology* - the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge” (DeRose, 2005, para.1).

*Reflection* - A process of self-examination and self-evaluation that effective educators regularly engage in to improve their professional practices. Essentially, effective educators do four things: (1) They think carefully about what is taking place in a given situation. (2) They identify the options available. (3)They consider their own values as professionals and their comfort level in acting on those values. (4)They make conscious choices about how to act to make a difference (ASCD, 2009, retrieved from: http://webserver3.ascd.org/ossd/reflection.html).

*Espoused Theories* - Ideas or theories that we often use to explain what we believe (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005)
Theories-in-use – The ideas or theories that drive our behavior and practices on a daily basis (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005)

Summary

This chapter presents an overview and introduction of the study. Chapter Two reviews the related, pertinent literature. Chapter Three describes the methodology and data analysis that is used to conduct the study. Chapter Four presents the analysis of data. Chapter five is the conclusion, summary, and discussion of the findings. The pressure schools were facing to rapidly improve academic achievement for ELL students were at an all time high at the time research was conducted. In order to increase academic achievement, educators must spend time developing the most valuable existing asset, our teachers.

The studies cited in this project provide evidence of their efficacy in engaging teachers in practices that improve the quality of instruction for ELL students. Such studies include the relevance of culturally competent beliefs, strategies, and interactions (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Asante, 1991; Clauson, 2002; Ganter, 1997; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002; Haberman, 1994; Nieto, 2006; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Young, 2000). Many others espouse the teachers’ epistemological belief system as a predictor of teacher success with ELL students as a component of cultural competency (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; Howard et al., 2000; McCombs, 2001; Perry, 1968; Peterson, 1998 Schommer, 2004; Schommer, 1990). Meanwhile, reflective practice has been shown to increase teacher capacity and cultural competency (Alger, 2006; Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Hirsch, 1996; Nolan, 1989; Westberg, 2001). By analyzing the literature and practices of culturally competent teachers and
especially the components of epistemological beliefs and reflective practices, we can devise ways to develop effective teachers of ELL students.

This study examined exemplary teachers of ELL students. By being able to describe and exemplify strategies, beliefs, and understandings that successful ELL teachers use, we can improve our professional development efforts aimed at improving the efficacy of instructing ELL students. The researcher questioned, observed, described, and discovered similarities among strategies of successful teachers of ELL students in rural North Alabama, where the population of ELL students was growing rapidly, and crafted a way to distribute the findings to other educators.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed seminal research on the topics of teacher cultural competence and two key components of cultural competency, teacher epistemology and teacher reflection, and how these impact learning experiences for English Language Learners (ELL). This knowledge has had a critical impact in rural Alabama, where until recently, many teachers experienced only homogeneous classrooms and schools. This was evidenced by statistics published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, (NCES) which stated that the population of ELL students rose by thirty-nine percent to 723,000 between the years of 1994-2000. This equated to twenty-three percent of the United States’ population of ELL students. According to Gandara (2005), this increase mostly fell to an assembly of educators who were ill-prepared to handle the challenges and cultures these students brought with them.

The review of literature begins by defining teacher cultural competence and how it impacts learning, and then transitions into how it can be acquired during pre-service training as well as an in-service development activity, how cultural competency is displayed, and what impact cross cultural communication has on building learning communities and class or school climate. It is noteworthy that much of the cultural competency literature and methods for advancement are based upon the two components that are described in depth subsequently, which are teacher reflection and teacher epistemology. As mentioned, I defined and identified
the foundations of teacher epistemology. Additionally, I described how teacher epistemology impacts a teacher’s cultural competency, teacher practice, and student learning; how teachers usually develop higher levels of epistemological beliefs; and why this is important to ELL students as well as in the construction of teacher cultural competency. Subsequently, I described the process and literature of teacher reflection and how it impacted cultural competency, student learning for ELLs, and teacher capacity. Finally, I tied the essential, but non-inclusive, components of teacher cultural competence, teacher epistemology, and teacher reflection together to illustrate how these thoughts and processes deeply impact the learning experience for all students, specifically ELL.

Cultural Competency

The literature provides many definitions of Cultural Competence. For the purpose of clarification, I narrowed the focus to two definitions that provide a working description of cultural competence.

The Oregon Department of Education’s State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) defines cultural competency as:

A developmental process occurring at individual . . . levels that evolves and is sustained over time. Recognizing that individuals begin with specific lived experiences and biases, and that working to accept multiple world views is a difficult choice and task, cultural competence requires that individuals and organizations: (a) Have a defined set of values and principles, demonstrated behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively in a cross-cultural manner. (b) Demonstrate the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) engage in self-reflection, (3) facilitate effectively (manage) the dynamics of
difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and (5) adapt to the
diversity and the cultural contexts of the students, families, and communities they serve,
(6) support actions which foster equity of opportunity and services
(http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=656).

Meanwhile, Leavitt defined cultural competence as:

A set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together . . . to function effectively in
transcultural interactions. In practice, cultural competence acknowledges and
incorporates . . . the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, the
need to be aware of the dynamics resulting from cultural differences, the expansion of
cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs

Via analysis of these definitions of cultural competence, many similarities were found.
Therefore, a collective definition was established by stating that cultural competence is the
actions, attitudes, and principles that guide an individual’s ability to value the significance of his
or her culture as well as the ability to acknowledge multiple world views. Cultural competence is
gained through self reflection of relationships, actions, cultural differences, and the dynamics
that result from these. Cultural competence thereby assists in the acquisition and expansion of
cultural knowledge, resulting in adapting and sustaining initiatives that result in equal
opportunities for success (http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=656; Leavitt, 2002). From
these definitions we can observe two key components of cultural competency: teacher reflection
and teacher epistemological beliefs. Continuing the review of literature of cultural competency,
these components can be identified dominantly in the literature.
Teacher Cultural Competency impacts learning

“A key attribute of a teacher's effectiveness is efficacy in structuring social contexts through positive relationships” (McKinley, 2004). Qualitative and quantitative studies illustrate that, as teachers, our cultural competency impacts students’ lives inside and beyond the classroom. These relationships begin with how welcoming we are to them and their life experiences. Ganter recounts in his ethnography that “students know when teachers think less of them, and they retaliate by misbehaving and being disrespectful in the classroom. It is important to remember that all of us respond better when treated with dignity and respect” (Ganter, 1997, p. 45). Teachers’ attitudes and knowledge toward ELL and other diverse students ultimately impact their learning opportunities and their future outcomes. Teachers’ attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about student’s value and capabilities can aid or impede students’ opportunities (Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002).

Moreover, Orfield and Frankenberg (2006) described the state of current practices and research in culturally competent teaching and how it affects learning and social experiences for ELL students. Their studies on the field illustrate that,

Racially diverse classrooms improve student experiences: enhanced learning, higher academic achievement for minorities, higher educational and occupational aspirations, increased civic engagement, a greater desire to live, work, and go to school in multiracial settings, and positive, increased social interaction among members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Significantly, these benefits affect both white and minority students (p. 20).

However, being in a multicultural environment alone does not improve relations, experiences, or practices. The teacher’s level of cultural competency is ultimately what impacts ELL students’
learning in a positive manner. Gay (2002) identified that there are “correlations between culturally responsive teaching and the school achievement of students of color. The higher the one the greater the other on all measures including academic performance, social adjustment, school satisfaction, self-concept, and students’ feeling of confidence and adequacy” (p. 627). In agreement, Asante (1991) proposed that “the most productive method of teaching any student is to place his or her group within the center of the context of knowledge” (p.43). Nieto (2006) argued that the background and life experiences of students are something that an effective teacher should be able to use to promote growth in all students. Furthermore, Asante advised that when a student is allowed to view history from his or her unique perspective as a cultural being, greater pride and vision is instilled in the student. He argued that this will renew students’ spirit and purpose towards improving his or her own life.

Teachers identified with low levels of cultural competency frequently promote instruction that is detrimental to ELL students. Often, a teacher’s lack of cultural competency results in placement of ELL students in special needs classes. Artiles and Trent (1994) recognized a relationship between culture, lack of school success, and enrollment in special needs classes. They argued that stereotypes concerning the abilities of ethnic groups are sustained by these assignments and even perpetuated by the uneven appointment of minority students in special needs classes (Artiles & Trent, 1994).

Haberman (1994) described what are often considered “good teaching practices” by teachers who are not culturally competent. The teachers engage ELL students in assignments of: “giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers, and giving grades”
(Haberman, 1994, p. 291). According to him, this can be appealing to people who fear minorities and poor people, people who have low expectations of minorities, poor, and other disadvantaged people, and people who do not have a grasp of the full realm of pedagogical strategies available to use.

Young (2004) equated the idea of a culturally incompetent teacher to that of cultural imperialism. “To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it as the other” (p. 44). Moreover, “cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (p. 45). This idea is parallel to the assimilist agenda in which the dominant group attempts to remove the identity of a minority group, such as when Clausen (2002) stated that “the public educational system, at the opposite extreme from multiculturalism or bilingualism, was designed to produce amnesia as quickly as possible about one's former life in a different country, especially if one's forebears were not Protestant” (p.78).

Young (2000) argued that students not receiving a culturally competent education are being oppressed toward social reproduction. He said that, “oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power forces then, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (p.36). In other words, in modern times, “oppression is a structural concept that is systematically reproduced in major economic, political, [educational,] and cultural institutions” (p.37). Thus, oppression is often reproduced through societal norms. This literature illustrated the necessity for reform in teacher preparation, professional development, and practice.


*Developing Cultural Competency in Pre-service Teachers*

In developing cultural competency, I examined the two areas in which much of the research is focused. Initially, I focused on preparing pre-service teachers for educating ELL students. Next, I focused on professional development efforts for current practitioners. In analysis of both pre-service and in-service teachers, the development promoted the ideology that a culturally competent educator has, “an awareness of one’s own cultural limitations; an openness, respect and appreciation for cultural differences; regard for intercultural diversity as a source of learning opportunities; ability to use cultural resources in interventions; and an acknowledgement of the integrity and value of all cultures” (LaRoux, 2002, p. 42).

“Research all over the world indicates that initial teacher training, as far as multicultural and ELL education is concerned, is grossly inadequate, or in many instances, non-existent” (Le Roux, 2001, p. 47). According to Howard (2003), in order to meet the diverse needs of students, we must begin with preparing pre-service teachers to critically explore the importance that race, culture, and ethnicity plays in the schooling experience. Explicitly, teachers must be prepared to find innovative ways to relate pedagogical practices that are relevant and pertain to their social and cultural realities (p. 195). Pre-service teachers, when in the field, were finding a disparity between their life experiences, their training, and their heritage as compared to that of their students. This often resulted in their unsuspecting ineffectiveness and inability to relate to these students in a meaningful context. Therefore, researchers have argued that teacher training must mirror the realities of the classrooms that these teachers will be filling and prepare them to look inward and to critically evaluate ideas for educating diverse populations (Le Roux, 2001). Le Roux argued that teachers must have an arsenal of techniques to ensure that diverse [ELL] populations and multiple learning styles receive adequate instruction. “In a multicultural
classroom, cultural background diversity ensures diversity in learning preferences, perspectives and experiential levels” (Le Roux, 2001, p. 46).

In 2001, Phuntsog examined teachers’ beliefs concerning how to best prepare pre-service teachers for educating diverse populations. The study highlighted a model with four areas of recommendation: (1) Providing pre-service teaching experiences in diverse settings. This allows for the observation of culturally competent practices by teachers in the field, while also allowing the pre-service teacher guided practice implementing the recommended strategies. (2) Requiring courses concerning the importance that culturally relevant practices have on learning for all students. The inclusion of multicultural literature, case studies, ethnographies, and training and practices of cultural groups in the pre-service curriculum assists in preparation for actual experiences. (3) Engaging students in culturally competent teaching practices that illustrate the lived experiences of ELL populations. This model allowed for the development of student portfolios outlining culturally competent practices that can be interjected into the curriculum. Also, the experience should provide exposure to workshops and guest speakers that present strategies and knowledge that helped teachers develop culturally competent practices. And, (4) Increasing awareness of literature that represented different life experiences and points of view. By increasing pre-service teachers’ access to literature, Phuntsog argued, teachers can increase their awareness and give them a resource for educating culturally diverse students (2001).

Goodwin (1997) proposed a model for teacher education programs to prepare teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. Goodwin’s six phases of culturally competent teacher education were (1) Looking at ourselves: autobiography and personal history. In this phase, the pre-service teacher is encouraged to take an inward look at himself or herself and his or her development as a cultural being and how it has impacted his or her beliefs and knowledge. (2) Connection
through content: intellectual multiculturalism. This is the phase where the pre-service teacher is introduced to multicultural literature and culturally competent practices. (3) Confronting new realities: learning through disequilibrium. Here, the pre-service teacher is introduced to concepts and materials aimed at causing him or her to question his or her own understandings. (4) Reflection and reassessment: This phase causes the learner to evaluate and reconstruct beliefs of learning and conceptualize his or her thoughts of educational equality. (5) Reconstruction: thinking and behaving differently. In this phase, the learner reconstructs his or her thoughts on culturally competent practices and begins to think and behave in a manner that is culturally sound. (6) Autobiography: completing the cycle. This last stage is merely the return to the first stage where the cycle is reborn (Goodwin, 1997, p. 18, 19).

*Developing Cultural Competency in In-service Teachers*

To develop cultural competency through professional development activities, it was imperative to examine the research on best practices for building teacher capacity. Delpit argued that to effectively educate students, educators must begin by educating themselves on who our children were, what their passions were, and what their legacies were (Delpit, 2003, p. 20). This required a specific and direct program aimed at advancing the schooling taking place within our building and specific classrooms. Delpit proposed considering “who” the child was and not “what” the child was. This is a child-centered approach, but not in the way we often envision, when studying child-centered approaches. In her explanation, Delpit (2003) argued that teachers considered numerous aspects of the child, such as his or her background and enthusiasm, and personally taught that individual student. These strategies were increasingly important for the ELL student. This is relatable to Smyth’s (2005) third standard for critical inquiry in which the student has some ownership in his or her curriculum. Not to say that the students determine the
curriculum, but we must work alongside students to make the curriculum meaningful so that they can see the relevance of learning the material. Vandarakis (2005) took aim at this idea by stating, “For professional development to be beneficial, it needs to reflect the questions and issues facing teachers in specific schools and neighborhoods. Professional development needs to be dynamic and site specific, not generic or all encompassing” (p. 398).

Additionally, King (2004) advised four conditions for promoting effective teacher learning. First, professional development and teacher learning should focus on student outcomes in the specific environment in which the teacher teaches. Second, teachers should have sustained practices with the development opportunities such as experimentation, conferences, and feedback about the development strategies beyond the initial workshop. Third, teachers need professional collaborations within and outside their school as well as access to experts in the field. Fourth, teachers need influence over their professional development goals and activities in order for them to see the relevance of the workshop.

Peer coaching is one tool that can assist in the promotion and retention of culturally relevant professional development aimed at increasing ELL achievement. Blasé and Blasé (2004) argued that professional development aimed at increasing teacher capacity has been shown to be more effective if there is peer coaching at the school level after the teacher has received training at a workshop or other professional development activity. They also cited research stating five ways in which coaching has contributed to the transfer of methods from espoused to our newly learned theories in use. First, coached teachers generally practiced the new strategies more frequently. Second, coached teachers used the strategies more appropriately than untrained teachers; thereby, the strategy was more effective. Third, teachers improved their long-term retention of the strategy through the coaching process. Fourth, the coached teachers were more
likely to pass the strategy on to their students after the training. Last, coached teachers demonstrated greater cognition about the uses and functions of the newly-learned strategy.

Echavarria (2008) provided The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model as a framework for increasing culturally competent strategies used to educate ELL students. The strategies espoused in the SIOP model were sheltered instruction which integrates content and language instruction; lesson preparation with language objectives and adaptation based on students’ abilities; building background knowledge; comprehensive input; teaching strategies that are metacognitive and cognitive; social/affective, verbal, nonverbal, and higher order questioning; interaction; practice/application; delivery; review and assessment by utilizing techniques such as contextualizing, language objecting, modeling, discussion, joint productivity, coaching, and pairing (Echavarria, 2008). It is important to note that Short and Echevarria pointed out that sheltered instruction (SI) did not replace the curriculum or texts that are in place, but took from and complemented methods advised for both ELL and mainstream students (Short & Echevarria, 2004). For example, The SIOP strategies were not a specific script of how to teach ELL students. Rather, they were an assortment of culturally competent strategies that the teacher, at his or her discretion, could use across content areas to engage the ELL student in hands-on, small-group activities that promoted the use and growth of oral and academic language.

The SIOP model was constructed by the following principles founded on the basis that ELL students’ acquisition of language was encouraged through meaningful practice and use. (1) The teachers engaged students in the regular curriculum through modified language and content objectives aimed at the individual student’s level. (2) The teachers utilized a wide assortment of tools for comprehensible input such as graphic organizers, charts, vocabulary preview, cooperative learning, and peer tutoring. (3) The model promoted high levels of teacher-student
interaction and engagement within the text, promoting discussion and critical thinking skills. Teachers were encouraged to guide students to construct meaning from the text and participate in class discussions. (4) SIOP encouraged a comfortable environment where the teacher was knowledgeable concerning students’ needs, backgrounds, and cultural identity. The teacher built upon this knowledge and used culturally responsive techniques to build a non-threatening environment for the exchange of ideas. (5) Teachers provided multiple avenues for students to demonstrate proficiency of skills. These avenues included, but were not limited to, hands on, pictorial reports, oral reports, written reports, quizzes, and observations. (6) Teachers were encouraged to use outside sources such as trade materials, computers, audio-visual and real life materials that assisted in providing meaningful learning experiences. (7) The model provided flexibility in that learners from different cultures and at varying abilities could participate within the learning environment at their language acquisition level (Echevarria, 2008). Furthermore, the model guided teachers through thirty features that were aimed at increasing conversational and academic language acquisition.

As presented by Echavarria (2003; 2008), teachers must find strategies to assist ELL students in mastering content as well as in acquiring a new language. Perez (2000) argued for adapting the language experience approach for ELL students. He argued for a three-step approach aimed at making content and language relevant to these students. The first step involved examining students’ schema and relating the text to their personal experiences, knowledge, and background. The second step involved making a record of their experiences by transcribing them into written language. The final step called for reflection upon the written assignment (Perez, 2000).
Bernhard, Diaz, and Allgood (2005) provided another framework for increasing the use of culturally competent strategies. Bernhard, Diaz, and Allgood studied the impact of culturally competent teacher in-service professional development versus that of a culturally competent graduate program. The results were important because many states were initiating continuing studies programs designed after college curriculum and coursework. Bernhard’s study found that the coursework conducted in graduate school was more meaningful because it allowed the practitioner to “judge the merits of proposed educational reforms and to clarify their own pedagogy” (Bernhard, 2005, p. 269). Teachers were allowed certain selection within their readings, as opposed to mandated reform material. Secondly, the study found that “The ability to cite research reports enabled graduates to be heard by colleagues and to depoliticize discussions regarding curricular reforms” (Bernhard, 2005, p. 270). Teachers with access to current, relevant research were found to be better suited to engage in dialogue with peers and supervisors about the merit of practices being performed in their classrooms. The third finding was that teachers who were engaged in the graduate programs together had formed a collegial community of support and encouragement in their job. Additionally, years later, Bernhard found the learning community still relied on each other for “expert” knowledge (2005). After completion of in-service and graduate coursework, teachers were surveyed about the efficacy of each program, with ninety-five percent of those completing the graduate program responding, that the cultural competency courses were very useful in the classroom, versus thirty-five percent for the in-service group.

Cultural Competency in the Classroom

On the topic of culturally competent teaching and curriculum, Gay proposed that the primary focus of culturally responsive pedagogy was
to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy. Knowledge in the form of curriculum content is central to this empowerment. To be effective, this knowledge must be accessible to students and connected to their lives and experiences outside of school (Gay, 2002, p. 111).

Gay (2002) argued that knowledge had no power unless it was situated within the interest, aspirations, desires, wants, and purposes of students.

Furthermore, a teacher’s cultural competency is displayed in the relationships forged as well as the strategies, practices, and beliefs a teacher possesses. Howard stated that, when asked about what makes for a comfortable learning atmosphere, students responded that it was the relationship they had with the teacher and feelings of compassion and care (Howard, 2001, p. 137). Howard (2001) continued with the idea that caring was manifested through emotional displays for student’s success, respect, nurturing the learner, and the manner in which the teacher addressed the students. Howard advocated the use of personal anecdotes, engaging students in relevant materials and stories, and modifying interaction styles to those that met students’ needs. This philosophy required practitioners to rethink their traditional thoughts on their practices and their ideas of proper pedagogy.

McKinley (2004) described how culturally competent teachers laid the groundwork for their instruction by first attending to the connections “between instruction and social context, power relations and knowledge creation with variations to the environment that promoted collaborative democratic classrooms” (p. 222). McKinley argued for the importance of building a caring and compassionate relationship whereby students felt they were a valuable part of the class. Furthermore, she said, we must first build, “caring and respectful relationships with
students, varying the features of their classroom environment to meet student needs and foster familial and communal climates” (p. 222).

McKinley (2004) identified forty-two strategies that culturally competent expert teachers utilized in their instruction once the preliminary relationships were built. The strategies were broken into two major categories, (1) curriculum and instructional design variables, and (2) teacher-student interactions or social. These strategies were consistent with research that suggested that effective teachers utilize a wide array of strategies based on individual student needs (Echavarria, 2008; Marzano, 2003).

Within McKinley’s (2004) category, curriculum and instructional design variables, there were two subcategories: (1) curriculum and instructional design variables, and (2) classroom implementation instruction variables. Within the first subcategory, curriculum and instructional design variables, McKinley urged the instructional program to be (a) aligned to curriculum and authentic assessment, and the program to be (b) carefully planned and provide clearly structured lesson content. In the second subcategory, classroom implementation instruction variables, McKinley urged teachers to (a) include multicultural approaches to learning, (b) engage in interdisciplinary lessons, (c) display cultural competency, (d) use frequent student-teacher interactions, (e) utilize cultural congruence in instruction, (f) employ cooperative grouping, (g) provide procedures for processing and transferring new content, and (h) set and maintain clear expectations for content mastery.

In terms of McKinley’s second category, teacher student interactions: social, she established three subcategories: (1) social variables, (2) classroom management variables, and (3) classroom climate variables. Within social variables McKinley included issues such as (a) fairness, (b) low favoritism, (c) caring, and (d) low friction. Within the second subcategory, classroom management
variables, she included (a) student engagement, (b) low apathy, and (c) student discipline strategies. The third subcategory, classroom discipline variables, included (a) cohesiveness, (b) environment, and (c) assessment. McKinley urged that teachers should be mindful to use these strategies in an effective manner correlating with culturally competent research, such as scaffolding, collaborative efforts, variances to the environment, and assessment mode (McKinley, 2004; Echavarria, 2008).

Reeves (2000) provided a study on effective classroom practices for ELL students in “The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study”. This case study detailed the success of more than 130,000 students in 228 buildings. The common threads among these schools were that (1) More than 90 percent of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, (2) More than 90 percent of the students were from ethnic minorities (English Language Learners), and (3) More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently-conducted tests of academic achievement.

Reeves investigated the associations between instructional strategies and academic achievement in certain poverty-stricken schools with high minority and ELL populations. He identified instructional similarities within these schools. This information, if used wisely, could assist educators in narrowing the achievement gap between the upper class and the lower class (Reeves, 2000).

Reeves (2000) found five instructional similarities among these schools. Each school exhibited the following: (1) A focus on academic achievement, which means that extracurricular activities took a second seat to all academic activities with charts and trophies displaying the achievements; (2) Clear curriculum choices, in which students were given the curriculum they need to be successful such as increased reading, writing, and math. The curriculum was also co-developed with the faculty and students to ensure culturally relevant teaching was taking place,
thereby making students stakeholders in their education. (3) Frequent and multiple assessments of student progress as well as multiple opportunities for improvement. By using multiple modes of assessment, ELL students may have felt more comfortable exhibiting mastery of skills and knowledge. (4) An increased emphasis on nonfiction writing, so that students could write factual information as well as step-by-step directions or orders, and (5) Collaborative scoring of student work in which the students’ writing was scored through a writing rubric with external scoring.

The 90/90/90 schools had a clear focus on achievement. Charts of student progress were displayed throughout the school to create a sense that achievement and hard work would be rewarded. Each school made clear curriculum choices determining to focus more time toward language arts and math, as opposed to science and social studies. Students were frequently assessed on their individual progress toward their personal goals they had assisted in setting, allowing each student to clearly see his or her individual improvement. Considering their (and most schools) student scores were typically higher on creative writing, these schools focused more on informative writing with a uniform grading rubric which was used by all of the teachers. Additionally, there was collaborative grading of student work. This meant that the teachers and occasionally the principal would collectively grade papers and determine efficiency of a student (Reeves, 2000).

Reeves (2000) acknowledged that these successes could be replicated. Milwaukee Public Schools, WI, tracked schools in which they replicated the study and found seven schools identified as becoming a 90/90/90 school. The most recent reports showed that thirteen schools had met the criteria. Additionally, in Norfolk, VA, public schools had had success following this model with one hundred percent of their district’s schools having met annual benchmarks. These examples were far reaching to other urbanized areas as well, such as Wayne Township in
Indianapolis, IN, Riverview Gardens and Hazelwood School Districts in St. Louis, MO, and Los Angeles County, and Orange County, CA. This was evident of the far-reaching impact the 90/90/90 schools model had across regional boundaries.

While these strategies are useful, the resources for culturally competent material were often scarce. Textbooks were responsible for seventy to ninety-five percent of all classroom instruction, increasing from kindergarten to secondary school. Additionally, most of these textbooks were dominated by European-American publishers, thereby subject to their experiences, ideology, ethnicity, and contributions. This deficit of culturally-competent textbooks called for the use of literary and trade books as well as mass media sources such as television, newspapers, and magazines. Students were also encouraged to conduct guided and independent research on culturally diverse subject matter. These assignments included oral histories, library research, interviews, site studies, community studies, and organized cultural exchange visits. (Gay, 2002)

**Cross-Cultural Communication**

“No education can take place without interpersonal communication” (LeRoux, 2002, p. 37). According to LeRoux (2002), effective communication is essential to school success. Likewise, poor communication can be detrimental to success, resulting in conflicts and disappointment. With communication, both verbal and non-verbal, being so pivotal to students success, it is argued, with merit, that “effective educators are effective communicators and thus culturally competent in cross-cultural encounters” (p. 37).

A good portion of Valdes’ (1996) ethnography, “Con Respeto”, was spent on the children’s education and how we can improve cross-cultural communication to better connect these ELL families with the school. Valdes followed ten Hispanic women dealing with raising a
family, schooling, working, and surviving in a new world. Her book illustrated the assumptions that teachers and parents have concerning their values and priorities and others’ values and priorities that could be improved through communication. The schools expected parents to be familiar with schooling and how it worked. The teachers expected parents to compliment the teachers’ role at home and continue what they were doing at school. “It did not occur to school personnel that parents might not know the appropriate ways to communicate with the teachers, that they might feel embarrassed about writing notes filled with errors, and that they might not even understand how to interpret their children's report cards” (p. 167).

Meanwhile, the parents perceived themselves as active in their child’s education, since most believed that their main priority in preparing their child for school was ensuring he or she was well behaved. The parents did not see themselves as partners in the curriculum and reinforcing the lessons taught at school. An example of this was when many of the families’ children were not able to recite the alphabet at the start of school; teachers viewed it as a lack of parental concern for their child’s education. However, due to a lack of formal education on the part of the parents, they had not anticipated what would be deemed important preparatory information, such as the alphabet. Especially, since, in the parents’ experience of schooling, the letter naming function of the alphabet was not considered to be of extreme importance.

Because of studies such as these case studies, LeRoux presented several strategies and ideas aimed at increasing and improving cross-cultural communication between the school and ELL families. LaRoux noted that it was important to realize that even within the same culture, there were multiple variables that arise, such as socio-economic status, religion, sex, and worldview of who we are and what role we play in society. This being said, LaRoux provided ten overarching strategies for effective cross-cultural communication: “(1) Respect individuals
from other cultures; (2) Make continued and sincere attempts to empathetically understand the world from other’s point of view; (3) Be open to new learning; (4) Be flexible; (5) Have a healthy sense of humor; (6) Tolerate ambiguity well; (7) Be sensitive to one’s own prejudices; (8) Approach others with a desire and an openness to learn; (9) Be genuinely interested in others; and (10) See differences not in terms of inferiority but as learning opportunities” (LaRoux, 2002, p. 42).

Without diminishing the role of verbal communication, LaRoux (2002) demonstrated the impact that culturally competent non-verbal communication can have. We can communicate through multiple modalities, such as eye contact, facial expressions, proxemics (proximity to each other in conversation), dress, kinesics (body language), paralanguage (grunts, noises), and gestures. In each culture, various meanings can be attached to these non-verbal cues. While we can not learn every culture’s nuances, LaRoux argued, we can strive to respect and respond in an appropriate manner that is conducive to open and continuous communication (Gay, 2002).

Borba (2009), a former teacher and principal, found that lines of communication opened through greeting parents warmly when they came to school or when she met them in the community. The school provided a translator to increase oral communications as well as through written correspondence. Additionally, a phone system was purchased that allowed messages to be delivered home in multiple languages so that the parents of ELL students could stay informed concerning their child’s schooling.

Poverty has traditionally led to reduced communication and exclusionary practices in schools. “The children of parents who are financially secure do better in school than the children of those who are not financially secure . . . Poverty and exclusion are also related to what people do. The nature of their work determines their economic position and the degree to which they are
able to participate in the life of their community” (Ryan, 2006, p. 28, 29). Various ethnic groups were often excluded from the curriculum as well as involvement in the decision-making process. Furthermore, their “knowledge, language, and community experiences were not included in the curriculum, pedagogy, and leadership activities of the school” (Ryan, 2006, p. 28, 29). This exclusion may lead to the individual’s feeling void of anything to contribute.

In response to parents of ELL students feeling bankrupt of any contributions, Igoa (1995) placed an emphasis on teachers valuing the ELL’s home culture. By valuing the home culture, the teacher provided a level of worth to what the students brought with them. Igoa stated that the parents and students were contributing to the educational experience, and assisting in building self-assurance that they were a valuable part of the learning community. When parents and students felt appreciated for what they brought to the classroom, lines of communication were opened.

Furthermore, Ryan (2006) promoted some thoughts that assisted in competent cross-cultural communication. He suggested that educators: “Think about leadership, include participants, advocate for inclusion, educate participants, develop critical consciousness, promote dialogue, emphasize student learning and classroom practice, adopt decision-making and policymaking practices, and incorporate whole-school approaches” (p. 97). It was imperative that these inclusive and culturally competent practices be meaningful and present real opportunities for change. Additionally, the participants needed to have a real and strong desire to participate in the activities.

Key Components of Cultural Competency

Both a teacher’s epistemological belief system and his or her use of reflective practices, while not inclusive, are key components of a teacher’s cultural competence. The classroom
teacher’s sophistication level of epistemological beliefs “influence[s] their conception about learning, and consequently, their preference for a certain way of teaching in terms of approaches and classroom management” (Chan & Elliott, 2001, p. 228). This understanding of the complexity of the nature, scope, and sequence in which knowledge is acquired results in a better understanding of how to transfer information and improve students’ thinking and learning. Additionally, the research is fairly clear that a person with a sophisticated level of epistemological beliefs was more apt to fully understand the text and establish clear, coherent relationships between the text and relational material and situations (Perry, 1968; Perry, 1981; Ryan, 1984). This being the case, the teacher’s epistemological beliefs, which have been shown to impact students’ epistemology beliefs, should assist in increasing comprehension and application of concepts and text (Ryan, 1984; Schommer, 2002). Furthermore, the use of reflective practice is a key component of a teacher’s cultural competency. The teacher’s use of reflection can be utilized as a method to increase his or her cultural competency, capacity, and overall effectiveness. Garcia (1997) described that reflection could be used to evaluate how the teacher’s lived experiences have impacted his or her worldviews. By reflecting in this manner, the teacher could become receptive to the wealth of how lived experiences impact learning. Furthermore, research showed that educators should use reflective practice as a means of increasing awareness of their professional performance as a way to strengthen, refine, and improve their overall instruction. This use of reflection allows the practitioner to evaluate the impact of his or her practices, reconceptualize new practices, implement the new practices and then begin the cycle anew (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Westberg, 2001). Furthermore, Howard (2003) suggested teachers use reflection as a means to analyze how their positional worldviews affect their students. According to Howard,
this reflection should include careful inspection of how race, culture, and class impact student learning and their understanding of the world (p.198). Therefore, the continuance of this chapter delved in-depth into two key elements of a teacher’s cultural competence and how that teacher can build and support its development.

Epistemology

DeRose (2005) stated that epistemology is “the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge” (para.1). In a broader sense, psychologists typically agree that epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge, the nature of learning, the certainty of knowledge, the source of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, the sequence of knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge (DeRose, 2005; Jehng et al., 1993; Schommer & Duell, 2001; Schommer, 2004).

Foundation of Epistemology

The modern study of epistemology had its roots at Harvard University under the guidance of Perry. Perry studied the longitudinal differences of incoming freshmen’s beliefs concerning knowledge and the changes in those beliefs over the course of their degree programs. Perry identified nine phases of development over the course of the study. Phases one, two, and three consisted of right/wrong beliefs; phases four, five, and six consisted of generalized relativity and beginning to understand the diversity of the human outlook; phases seven, eight, and nine resulted in commitment to the person’s growth and experiences (Schommer, 2004). Schommer (1990) quoted Perry on each of the nine phases of development.

Position 1; The student sees the world in polar terms of we-right-good vs. other-wrong-bad. Right Answers for everything exist in the Absolute, known to Authority whose role
is to mediate (teach) then. Knowledge and goodness are perceived as quantitative accretions of discrete rightnesses to be collected by hard work and obedience . . .

Position 2; The student perceives diversity of opinion, and uncertainty, and accounts for then as unwarranted confusion in poorly qualified authorities or as mere exercises set by authority 'so we can learn to find the answer ourselves'.

Position 3: The student accepts diversity and uncertainty as legitimate but still temporary in areas where Authority 'hasn't found the Answer yet'. He supposes Authority grades him in these areas on 'good expression' but remains puzzled as to standards.

Position 4; (a) The student perceives legitimate uncertainty (and therefore diversity of opinion) to be extensive and raises it to the status of an unstructured epistemological realm of its own in which 'anyone has a right to his own opinion', a realm which he sets over against Authority's realm where right-wrong still prevails, or (b) the student discovers qualitative contextual relativistic reasoning as a special case of 'what They want' within Authority's realm.

Position 5; The student perceives all knowledge and values (including authority's) as contextual and relativistic and subordinates dualist right-wrong functions to the status of a special case, in context.

Position 6; The student apprehends the necessity of orienting himself in a relativistic world through scarce form of personal commitment (as distinct from unquestioned or unconsidered commitment to simple belief in certainty.

Position 7; The student makes an initial commitment in some area.
Position 8; The student experiences the implications of commitment, and explores the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility.

Position 9; The student experiences the affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and realized commitment as an ongoing, unfolding, activity through which he expresses his lifestyle (Schommer, 1990, p.8-10).

Perry’s research, according to Schommer, has had a far-reaching impact on future studies such as King and Kitchener (1994), who continued studying students’ beliefs of knowledge. They concluded that students began their studies with the idea that knowledge was certain. As time passed, facts became more ambiguous and difficult to discern in certain circumstances. However, the students maintained that the knowledge will eventually be uncovered and return to certain as their initial thoughts espoused. Moreover, Perry provided the groundwork for much of the field of epistemology through research in gender studies as well as teacher epistemology and how it impacted their practices and student learning (Schommer, 2004).

Teacher Epistemology and Teacher Practices

Historically, the field of epistemology has been focused on student epistemology. This guided Schraw and Olafson (2002) to explore research on teacher epistemology and its impact on student learning. The research concluded that the teacher’s epistemological beliefs assisted in the generation of his or her activities, practices, and guided classroom planning. These beliefs, while subtle and changing, were apt to have authority over how teachers taught, how students learned, and the types of activities students were engaged in, thus directly affecting the students’ learning experience and personal epistemology (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; McCombs, 2001; Peterson, 1998; Schommer, 2004). Chan and Elliot (2001) stated that “teachers’ epistemological beliefs . . . influenced their conception about learning, and consequently, their
preference for a certain way of teaching in terms of approaches and classroom management” (p. 228). Additionally, while teachers’ epistemologies drove practices, the exercises that were mediated within the classroom had an intense impact on student learning opportunities (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; Peterson, 1988; Schommer, 2004).

Teacher Epistemology and Student Learning

Research has suggested that teachers with more relativistic epistemological beliefs were more likely to be effective teachers (Brownlee, 2001, p. 288). Wyre established “a relationship (between teacher epistemology and student outcomes) and suggested that adding metacognitive enrichment into certain classrooms directly influenced, if not caused, the maturation of personal epistemologies. This relationship was seen not only in positive outcomes, but in negative ones as well” (Wyre, 2007, p. 109). Wyre added that teachers with high levels of epistemological beliefs engaged in metacognitive enrichment or critical thinking exercises that increased their students’ epistemological maturity. Wyre (2007) concluded that, “A more mature personal epistemology meant not just increasing a student’s possible test scores, but demonstrably increasing a student’s ability to comprehend and apply new knowledge” (p. 109).

Ryan (1984) drew upon Perry’s epistemological research that concluded that students often fell between a continuum of fact-oriented and context-oriented. Ryan noted that fact-oriented students would fall into the category of knowledge while the context-oriented group would be placed in applications and comprehension, a higher level of epistemological beliefs. His research showed that, “one's epistemological beliefs . . . dictate(s) one's choice of comprehension standards, and that these epistemological standards, in turn, may control the effectiveness of one's text-processing efforts” (p. 248). The research was fairly clear that a sophisticated level of epistemological beliefs or, in Perry’s case, a context-oriented individual,
was more apt to fully understand the text and establish clear, coherent relationships between the text and relational material and situations (Perry, 1968; Perry, 1981). This being the case, the teacher’s epistemological beliefs had an immense impact on his or her students’ epistemology beliefs, which had been shown to increase comprehension and application of concepts and text (Schommer, 2002; Ryan, 1984). This was especially pertinent to teachers with higher-order cognition and epistemological beliefs, since research evidenced that when confronted with challenges that are multi-faceted, (students’) epistemological beliefs tended to change, thus teachers imparted the higher-level beliefs to their students (Schommer, 2002).

*Developing Teacher Epistemology*

As previously stated, teachers’ epistemological beliefs impact the instruction and learning opportunities provided for students (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; Schommer, 2004). Therefore, we should explore ways to alter teacher epistemology to provide a higher standard of education. Research has shown that teacher epistemology can be transformed over time (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Howard et al., 2000; Perry, 1968). However, this change of ideas and beliefs about knowledge is slow and may need nurturing (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Perry, 1968; Schommer, 1990).

Historically, the research of Perry focused on increasing epistemological beliefs by interacting and challenging students one step ahead of their current belief system. This was meant to keep students on “the leading edge of growth” of their development. Perry (1968) studied how epistemology could be improved through the interactions of professors and peers through collegiate level courses. Baxter-Magolda (1987), in agreement with Perry, encouraged interactions and questioning to increase students’ construction of meaning; he introduced peer collaboration and situated the individual as a constructor of knowledge.
Brownlee (2003) examined, through a series of interviews, the epistemological beliefs of students enrolled in graduate studies at the university level. The eleven students of which she reported findings reflected upon the content of their educational psychology courses. Additionally, they wrote journal reflections connecting themselves, their beliefs, and practices to theory. Participants were interviewed three times, once at the onset of the study, once at the conclusion of the yearlong coursework, and once three years into their teaching career. The results from the interviews showed that seven of the eleven increased their epistemological score between the first and third interview. It was worth noting, however, that eight participants increased their epistemological beliefs between the first and second interview. One participant whose scores decreased cited school requirements that were passed on as a possible reason for the decline.

Much research had been conducted on the use of mentor/mentee interaction as a means to increase teacher efficacy and epistemology (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Reimann & Theis-Sprinthall, 1993; Theis-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987). Arredondo and Rucinski (1998) advanced the research and developed an approach of altering epistemological beliefs through the use of structured interactions via conferences and journal writings. The major goal of the research was to assess cognitive changes in the mentees and mentors as a result of the interactions between them. The researchers used Schommer’s Epistemological questionnaire to assess changes in beliefs about knowledge and learning. The research was conducted over the course of a semester in which graduate-level students were paired with a mentee and worked to engage in directive-supporting/challenging interactions. The supporting/challenging interactions were evaluated to determine changes in epistemological beliefs over the course of the study as well as the changes occurring over a longer period of time. The mentors were trained by Arredondo to conduct
interviews and discussions that should open up cognitively complex thinking. Through the study, Arredondo and Rucinski (1998) identified considerable differences between pre and post intervention epistemological mean scores for six of the twelve subset scores for mentors and for seven of the twelve subset scores for mentees. Journal results reported more dramatic changes among mentors, evidence of movement toward upper stages of reflective judgment, higher levels of moral reasoning, increased trust, critical examination of professional work, reduced cynicism, and increased professionalism (p. 301).

Though this research, educational leaders were provided a theoretical model for advancing the epistemological belief systems for school faculty, thereby, improving standards of practice.

*Teacher Epistemology’s importance to ELL students*

Teachers, in order to effectively educate ELL students, must understand how these students learn. The process of learning varies among cultural groups and is influenced by their socialization. These categories of learning styles should be used, not to label students, but to assist them in reaching their potential. In addition, it is critical to evaluate the level of ethnic affiliation, social class, parent education, and the students’ previous educational experience and exposure (Echavarria, 2008; Gay, 2002).

Garcia, 2004, Hashweh, 1996, Hofer, 2001 and Schommer, 2004, illustrated how teacher epistemology impacts teacher practice. They suggested that by understanding epistemology and how students developed theories on knowledge and learning, educators can better relate to and understand the epistemological beliefs of ELL students. Gottlieb (2007) affirmed that “different cultures learn, through participation in practices particular to their respective communities, [thus developing ideas concerning] . . . knowledge claims in different ways” (p. 8).
Youn (2000) determined that epistemological differences of cross cultural (ELL) students were focused primarily on epistemological beliefs of students in the United States and Korea. A high degree of variance was identified among the two populations. “The findings of this study suggest that the US minority, or the international students with non-Western backgrounds (ELL students), may have had a view of knowledge and approaches to learning that were different from those of the US mainstream students and teachers. The expectations about teacher-student interactions may also have differed between the two groups” (p.103) This may have created a misalignment in beliefs about knowledge that could result in frustration and uncertainty. Tasaki (2001) suggested that,

It is important for educators to be aware that these [Epistemological] beliefs [of ELL students] may be as reasonable as those valued in Western cultures and [it is important] to respect cultural differences. By knowing that beliefs appreciated in Western cultures are not universally accepted concepts, educators can increase awareness of different patterns of epistemological beliefs. . . Such an effort will diminish the misunderstanding of the learning behaviors exhibited by (ELL) students (p. 85).

The understanding of students’ epistemological belief systems is in alignment with culturally competent research aimed at accommodating and improving the learning experience for all students (McKinley, 2004; Ganter, 1997; Gay, 2002; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Nieto, 2006; Haberman, 1994).

Teacher Reflection

Dewey was an early pioneer of the modern theories on reflective practice (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005). He stated that reflective thought was the “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that
support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 6). Dewey concluded that without thought, no experience has meaning (Dewey, 1916).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) defined reflection as;

A process of self-examination and self-evaluation that effective educators regularly engage in to improve their professional practices. Essentially, effective educators do four things: (1) They think carefully about what is taking place in a given situation. (2) They identify the options available. (3) They consider their own values as professionals and their comfort level in acting on those values. (4) They make conscious choices about how to act to make a difference (ASCD, 2009, retrieved from: http://webserver3.ascd.org/ossd/reflection.html).

These definitions call for critical and conscious decision making concerning the practices implemented within classrooms (Dewey, 1916; Dewey, 1933; ASCD, 2009). Thereby, educators should use reflective practice as a means of increasing their awareness of their professional performance as a way to strengthen, refine and improve their overall instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987).

Westberg (2001) stated that when students or practitioners, “merely rush from one experience to another without reflecting on what they are doing or what they’ve done, there is a risk that they will fail to learn from their experiences” (p. 314). This reflection, conducted alone or with skillful educators, assisted in building upon known knowledge and integrating what is known with what is experienced (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Arredondo Rucinski & Bauch, 2006; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Westberg, 2001).
Importance of Reflective Practice

Arredondo Rucinski (2005) concluded that “reflective practice . . . had the potential to move individuals and therefore whole school communities toward real school reform through changes in the underlying beliefs and assumptions about knowledge and learning” (p. 88). Reflection allows practitioners to “identify and build on existing knowledge, identify their biases and assumptions, integrate new understandings, and formulate generalizations that will enable them to make positive changes in what they do in future situations” (Westberg, 2001, p. 313). Scholars have argued that reflection is a critically indispensable tool for the exemplary teacher (Alger, 2006; Blasé, 2004). Dewey (1933) said that “reflective thought . . . alone is truly educative in value” (p. 2). Recent research has also illustrated how “Reflective practice is . . . a powerful way of developing understanding of new and often abstract theories and ideas” by anchoring those ideas in examples and connecting them to actual experiences (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005, p. 86).

Teaching is a strenuous and multifarious task since the teacher’s knowledge is inevitably contextual to the classrooms’ interactions and routines in exploration of knowledge. To be effective, teachers need to reflect upon their practices by reconceptualizing their experiences in unique and original ways, developing abilities allowing for alternative problem-solving skills and thinking patterns, and assessing actions to create new understandings of practice (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Ultimately, reflection is a tool to assist teachers in making sense of their thoughts, behaviors, and classroom contexts (Nolan, 1989). Larrivee (2000) advised that effective teaching is considerably more than having an arsenal of strategies and resources. Teachers must be able to allocate and conceptualize those resources to particular settings, abilities, and contexts. Without careful examination and alignment of practices, teaching styles, beliefs, and the student
population, teaching is reduced to simplistic strategies. Furthermore, “reflective practitioners, both novice and seasoned professionals . . . attend to ordinary everyday experiences in a manner which informs practice” (Watson & Wilcox, 2000, p. 57).

Arredondo Rucinski (2005) identified a powerful use of reflection in transforming espoused theories into theories in use. Her research concluded that teachers operate under their individual cognitive beliefs, assumptions, and action theories and supported what Argyris (1990) first stated. Senge (1990) later reiterated and supported Argyris’ ideas that our theories-in-action are often untested and come from random observations, generalizations, assumptions, and experiences, rendering them unrelated with our espoused theories. Teacher ideologies are not apt to change with school reform efforts, thus explaining some of the constancy of schools that had been the result after decades of teacher-faced reform. Reflection literature illustrated that these core beliefs surfaced in the face of newly-learned strategies, or reformation, such as in the discussion of espoused theories versus theories-in-use. Additionally, the research showed that reflective practice was useful in transforming espoused theories into theories-in-use. Espoused theories were, often times, what teachers used to confer ideologies of what they believed.

Frequently, these espoused theories came from learning new content. However, Arredondo Rucinski (2005) stated that learning new content was often superseded in action by our theories-in-use. These theories-in-use were ingrained in us from our experiences, mentors, and guardians. Her research explained that theories-in-use were difficult to transform because we had not properly examined them and that reflective practice was one way to examine and identify discrepancies and to change. Therefore, Arredondo Rucinski (2005) drew upon Dewey’s (1916) explanation of the experimental learning cycle in which (1) The learner attempted to evaluate an experience. Something happened that initiated thoughts on a conflicting or worrisome event. (2)
The learner next observed and analyzed the experience. The learner observed what happened, and how and why it may be explained. Then, the learner analyzed what research or information he or she knew about the observation and how he or she could increase knowledge concerning the phenomena. (3) Thirdly, the learner reconceptualized his or her practice in light of the new information. This reconceptualization was based on new data, research, and thinking. (4) Next, the learner experimented with his or her reconceptualized practice by collecting data and evaluating the experience. At this point, the experiential learning cycle could begin anew (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005).

Larrivee (2000) identified three stages of transforming practice through the use of reflection. Larrivee’s first stage of reflection began by questioning, challenging, and evaluating beliefs and practices and determining if they were achieving desired results. Additionally, the practitioner must have had a desire to improve classroom strategies and increase his or her capacity. In the second stage, there were inner conflict, chaos, and uncertainty concerning our practices. Here, we began questioning ourselves and our practices. The third phase was the perpetual shift in which we reconciled and made discoveries concerning personal practice and turned reflective practice into new practice, thus transforming practices.

Facilitating Reflective Practices

Reflective teaching, at its heart, is a series of thoughts that includes reflecting upon learned practices, proper pedagogical development, and the environmental and experiential understanding of the setting in which our practice takes place. These reflections can take place in many modes as an individual or as a group (Alger, 2006).

Reflection is often a group or shared learning experience relying upon shared expertise (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Hirsch, 1996; Nolan, 1989). Hirsch (1996) pointed out that, “when a
community of people, regardless of area, gather their talents to work interdependently toward a specific goal, the accomplishment will be far greater than a single entity acting alone” (para.3).

Costa and Garmston (1994) presented a model for which teachers and supervisors can collaborate in a reflective group discussion by (1) recollecting classroom experiences, (2) comparing actual outcome to the preferred outcome, (3) making deductions that explain the variances, (4) making correlations between teacher behavior and outcomes, (5) evaluate the efficacy and suitability of strategies employed, (6) reflect upon thought processes, (7) conceptualize alternative strategies, and (8) understand and control learning.

Blase and Blase (2004) provided a framework that supervisors could use to foster reflective practices among their faculty. The initial concept employed was the use of modeling. By allowing teachers to observe alternative and expert lesson delivery, teachers’ thoughts were stimulated concerning how they could approach instruction differently. Secondly, the practice of classroom observations was used. This was similar to modeling, but peers and colleagues were used as opposed to a supervisor. Thirdly, Blase and Blase recommended opening up dialogue with teachers and supervisors through the use of formal conferences using questioning facilitated by supervisors to engage the practitioner in thinking deeply about his or her practices. Next, the use of suggestions encouraged reflection and improved practice. When reflection was well thought-out and informed, it fostered a safe environment for learning and experimentation with sound practices. Finally, praise was an important part of the reflective coaching cycle. It encouraged reflective informed practices and behaviors in search of improved strategies.

Arredondo Rucinski (2005) stated that reflective groups “review actions – both routine and non-routine; reflect and inquire about their own and others’ assumptions, beliefs and theories; construct meaning; [and] ask how they might reframe the problem or situation – thus
considering others’ perspectives” (p. 85). Additionally, group feedback on our performances and reflections are viable in that they allow practitioners to evaluate their current practices as well as assisting future decisions regarding lessons and strategies. Arredondo and Rucinski’s (1998) research on supporting and challenging interactions has been found to increase teachers’ reflective practices. Arredondo and Rucinski used journals as well as reflective conversations that were supportive yet challenged the practitioners’ practices and assumptions. After participating in these reflective journals and conversations, participants were found to move to upper stages of reflective judgment, reasoning, and moral decision making. The experimental learning cycle, as previously described, presented by Arredondo Rucinski (2005) and adapted from Dewey (1916), is a useful tool for group reflection and transforming teacher practice.

Westberg (2001) illustrated how once practitioners are familiar and comfortable with reflective practice they could extend their practices from post experience to during experience.

Students can learn to reflect not only after experiences but also during experiences. When reflecting during experience, they function on two levels: they are engaged in the tasks at hand, such as eliciting information or giving . . . and they are observing, questioning, and assessing the tasks in which they are engaged, making continuous adjustments in what they do according to what they discern about the process. Among other benefits, this reflection can help them be aware of what’s working or not working in the process in which they’re engaged, enabling them, perhaps, to make needed on-the-spot changes in what they’re doing (Westberg, 2001, p. 314, 315).

Reflective skill assisted the teacher in developing self-respect in regards to identifying his or her own strengths, weakness, and to critiquing his or her work.
Culturally Competent Reflective Practice

Howard (2003) promoted reflection as a way to address societal and emotional issues, especially race and ethnicity. He suggested teachers use reflection as a means to analyze how their positional worldviews affected their students. According to Howard, this reflection should include careful inspection of how race, culture, and class impacted student learning and their understanding of the world. Howard provided a series of questions teachers should consider when reflecting upon culturally competent practices.

1. How frequently and what types of interactions did I have with individuals from racial backgrounds different from my own growing up?  
2. Who were the primary persons that helped to shape my perspectives of individuals from different racial groups? How were their opinions formed?  
3. Have I ever harbored prejudiced thoughts towards people from different racial backgrounds?  
4. If I do harbor prejudiced thoughts, what effects do such thoughts have on students who come from those backgrounds?  
5. Do I create negative profiles of individuals who come from different racial backgrounds? (p.198).

Additionally, Howard (2003) proposed three additional questions to reflect upon how a teacher’s practices aligned with culturally competent practices. He suggested a teacher ask, “Who am I? What do I believe? Does who I am and what I believe have ramifications for the students I teach?” (p.199).

Arredondo Rucinski (2005) illustrated how reflective practice could be used to analyze how our actions influence others by providing an advantage to a particular group of students. She suggested we use the reflective process to think about the likely results of actions and decisions, and to ask about who will be advantaged or disadvantaged by the results, as a powerful way to
examine leadership behaviors and decisions from these ethical and moral perspectives (p. 86).

Additionally, Garcia (1997) supported reflection as a tool for increasing culturally competent teaching. Garcia urged teachers to reflect upon their personal narrative as a means to construct a culturally competent curriculum. Since knowledge is constructed mentally through social exchanges within lived experiences, this required teachers to reflect upon their personal lives, backgrounds and lived experiences as well as those of their students and to identify commonalities and discrepancies. By reflecting upon how these experiences had impacted their worldviews, they could become sensitive to the multiplicity of how lived experiences impact learning.

Huber et al. (1997) called for reflection on personal-life components to address how knowledge was extracted from life experiences. Huber et al. proposed that culturally competent teaching and reflection came from immersion in a supervised clinical experience that included diverse populations, such as ELL; multi-cultural experiences; and observation of culturally competent practices and interactions. These field experiences, as well as critical reflection upon personal life experiences and how it impacts learning, assisted in developing cultural competence.

Murrell & Diez (1997) argued that conceptualization, a key component of reflection, allowed the teacher to frame his or her understandings of content-based knowledge and to integrate that knowledge with multiple perspectives and learning styles. This framework had to be sensitive to various backgrounds, learning styles, preferences, and had to include culturally inclusive experiences (to reach the ELL student). Through this conceptualization of practices and
student needs, the teacher could promote socially inviting, democratic learning that was well organized and developmentally appropriate.

Summary

The review of literature supported the idea that teaching in a culturally competent manner was beneficial to all students. Teachers who were culturally competent in both reflective practice and epistemological beliefs provided culturally competent instruction that had positive influences on the education of all students and not just those who were ELL (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Haberman, 1994). Culturally competent instruction constructed meaningful learning experiences for the ELL student since he or she was able to draw upon lived experiences to relate to his or her current educational content (Asante, 1991; Huber, 1997; Nieto, 2006). Furthermore, McKinley (2004) and Ganter (2004) argued that culturally competent teaching allowed the students to feel appreciated and welcomed for the contributions they and their cultural experiences brought to the classroom. Ganter, 1997, Gay, 2000, Gay, 2002, and McKinley, 2004 all argued that teachers’ attitudes and actions had an impact on students learning. These researchers supported the idea that the student understood the attitudes, expectations, and behaviors concerning the value his or her teacher placed on him or her and his or her culture. This valuation was capable of producing positive or negative results.

Research supported developing culturally competent teachers through pre-service and in-service professional development. Pre-service models argued that the pre-service teacher should experience teaching in a diverse classroom during his or her practicum or internship. Additionally, research argued, pre-service curriculum should focus on encouraging students to value the importance of a child’s diversity, providing culturally competent literature, and engaging the pre-service teacher in culturally competent strategies, which were identified as
enriching the learning experience for all students (Delpit, 2003; Goodwin, 1997; Howard, 2003; King, 2004; LaRoux, 2002; Phuntsog, 2001; Smyth, 2005; Vandarakis, 2005).

The epistemology research was a key element in evaluating a culturally competent teacher in that how teachers understand the acquisition of knowledge impacts the practices and strategies they implement within their classrooms. These practices could result in positive or negative learning outcomes for all students, especially ELL students (Schraw & Olafson, 2002). Ultimately, the teachers’ epistemology impacted the students’ personal epistemologies, which affected how students view the acquisition of knowledge (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; McCombs, 2001; Peterson, 1998 Schommer, 2004).

Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998, Reimann and Theis-Sprinthall, 1993, and Theis-Sprinthall and Sprinthall, 1987 all identified ways that teacher epistemology could be transformed over time. Arredondo & Rucinski (1998) identified the use of mentor/mentee or supervisor/teacher interactions by engaging in directive-supporting/challenging interactions as a valuable tool for transforming epistemological beliefs. Arredondo and Rucinski (1998) found considerable differences between the pre and post epistemological scores of graduate-level students who had been enrolled in a semester-long program in which graduate-level students were paired with a mentee to work on directive-supporting/challenging interactions, providing a theoretical framework for increasing epistemological scores of practitioners.

As mentioned, the teacher’s use of reflection could be utilized as a method to increase his or her cultural competency, capacity, and overall effectiveness. Garcia (1997) stated that reflection could be used to appraise how the teacher’s lived experiences had impacted his or her worldviews. By reflecting in this manner, the teacher could become sensitive to the multiplicity of how lived experiences impact learning. Furthermore, research showed that educators should
use reflective practice as a means of increasing awareness of their professional performances as a way to strengthen, refine, and improve their overall practices. An important element of reflection was that it allowed for the teacher to evaluate the practices occurring in his or her classroom, assess the results of those practices, and then reconceptualize or develop strategies aimed at improving the instruction in his or her particular setting, context, and to the abilities of his or her students (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Westberg, 2001).
CHAPTER THREE 
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 

Introduction 

Exemplary teachers of ELL students have been understudied (Pacheco, 2004). This research focused on teachers identified as being exemplary educators of ELL students and their culturally competent practices, their epistemological belief systems and their use of reflective practices. These areas were identified as being prevalent in effective teaching of ELL students, and therefore were worthy of being examined (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Nieto, 1989; Schommer, 2006). The examination of effective teachers of ELL students’ epistemological belief systems and reflective practices should add to the current research and literature in the field of cultural competency. 

The review of literature identified that teaching in a culturally competent manner or classroom was comprised, in part, by teachers’ epistemological beliefs and their use of reflective practices. Additionally, teaching in a culturally competent manner was beneficial to all students. Teachers who provide culturally competent instruction had positive influences on the education of all students and not just those that were English Language Learners (Haberman, 1994; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006). Culturally competent instruction constructed meaningful learning experiences for the ELL student since he or she was able to draw upon lived experiences to relate to his or her current educational content (Asante, 1991; Huber, 1997; Nieto, 2006) Furthermore, McKinley (2004) and Ganter (2004) argued that culturally competent teaching allowed the
students to feel appreciated and welcomed for the contributions they and their cultural experiences brought to the classroom. This was pertinent because teachers’ attitudes and knowledge toward ELL and other diverse students ultimately impacted students’ learning opportunities and their future outcomes. Teachers’ attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ value and capabilities could aid or impede students’ opportunities (Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002).

Research described models and strategies to increase teachers’ epistemology and reflective practices, thus increasing the cultural competence of teachers of ELL students. These models were framed in pre-service and in-service programs and professional development aimed at improving the education of ELL students. Many of these pre-service models supported the pre-service teacher experiencing diverse settings, valuing the importance of a child’s diversity, providing culturally competent literature, and engaging in culturally competent strategies. Additionally, the research proposed that all teachers examine their personal narratives and examine their own beliefs and how their life experiences impacted their educational practices and instructional styles. Furthermore, according to several authors, teachers should make connections between their lived experiences and the curricular content, reflect upon their practices, and reconstruct them accordingly (Delpit, 2003; Goodwin, 1997; Howard, 2003; King, 2004; LaRoux, 2002; Phuntsog, 2001; Smyth, 2005; Vardarakis, 2005).

The epistemology research showed that higher levels of epistemological beliefs are correlated with improved outcomes for ELL students. The research concluded that the teacher’s epistemological beliefs impacted the strategies utilized within the classroom (Schraw & Olafson, 2002). Epistemological beliefs impacted practice and they were found to have a profound impact upon the students’ learning experience. Ultimately, they impacted students’ personal
epistemologies (Garcia, 2004; Hashweh, 1996; Hofer, 2001; McCombs, 2001; Peterson, 1998; Schommer, 2004).

Observing this impact, researchers identified ways that teacher epistemology can be transformed over time. A portion of the epistemological transformation research was conducted on the use of mentor/mentee interaction as a means to increase teacher efficacy and epistemology (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Reimann & Theis-Sprinthall, 1993; Theis-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987). Arredondo & Rucinski (1998) found considerable differences between the pre and post epistemological scores of graduate-level students that had been enrolled in a semester-long program in which graduate-level students were paired with a mentee to work on directive-supporting/challenging interactions, providing a theoretical framework for increasing epistemological belief scores of practitioners.

Additionally, research has illustrated how reflective practice improved teaching practices and assisted in the development of culturally competent practices. Reflection has been used as a tool to increase teacher capacity and overall effectiveness. Research has shown that educators should use reflective practice as a means of increasing awareness of their professional performance as a way to strengthen, refine and improve their overall instruction (Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1987; Westberg, 2001).

Problem and Purposes Overview

Alabama’s public schools and schools across the nation are under pressure from state and federal mandates to improve academic achievement for ELL students. Alabama’s ELL population has increased by more than 200 percent from the 1995-1996 scholastic school year to the 2005-2006 scholastic school year. Thus, it is increasingly important that ELL students be effectively educated. Alabama is not the only state facing changing demographics. In fact, 13
states saw similar growth during the same time-frame (McNeil, 2009). Clair (2000) stated that teachers were not prepared to help diverse populations succeed in schools. Furthermore, “Policymakers had not yet taken all the steps necessary to improve education for ELL students” (McElroy, 2005, p. 8). In fact, in April 2009, this debate was taken to the United States Supreme Court where issues of funding and what should be considered adequate progress for ELL students was debated (Zehr, 2009).

There are, however, amazingly effective teachers of ELL students in Northeast Alabama. In this study, eighteen exemplary teachers were identified and studied. The researcher hypothesized that effective ELL teachers were reflective about their teaching and had certain beliefs about knowledge and learning. Further, research supported the idea that epistemological beliefs could be transformed with involvement in certain types of dialogue in mentor/mentee or supervisor/teacher relationships. The researcher questioned whether there were commonalities among successful teachers of English Language Learners, whether highly effective teachers of ELL students in Northeast Alabama had higher levels of epistemological beliefs, and whether highly effective teachers of ELL students were highly reflective about their practices.

This research was important in that if the identified effective teachers of ELL students had higher levels of epistemological beliefs, and if they were more reflective, future practitioners could be asked to engage in activities that transform their epistemologies and change their reflective abilities. This was believed to be important to the development of in-service teachers.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:

1. What commonalities exist, if any, among beliefs, backgrounds and practices of successful teachers of English Language Learners?
2. What are the epistemological beliefs of successful Teachers of ELL students?

3. What are the perceived reflective practices of successful ELL teachers?

Population and Sample

Participants in this research study consisted of eighteen exemplary teachers of English Language Learners. Specifically, I asked district principals and supervisors to nominate exemplary ELL teachers. From those nominated, I invited a sample of eighteen teachers from rural schools spread across the northeast region of Alabama to participate in in-depth interviews.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

These eighteen participants identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students were interviewed in depth to identify beliefs and describe teaching practices. The questioning was aimed at gathering a better understanding of the participants’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. A small amount of demographic information was obtained including assessments of participants’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. While sample size was insufficient to complete a confirmatory factor analysis the results (means) were compared to previously studied samples of teachers. Participants were able to view an abstract of the study and a brief synopsis of epistemological beliefs as well as reflective practice in order to gain background information for the interview questions. The participants were assured that there were no correct answers to the interview questions and that the interview was merely an opportunity to voice their beliefs concerning knowledge and how they use reflection to guide their practices. Furthermore, the researcher allowed the participants to identify pseudonyms for the study’s publication to ensure privacy and anonymity beyond the researcher. Data were collected from the in-depth interviews. Initially, the Schommer epistemological questionnaire and the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment surveys (REMAS)
were analyzed categorically as the factor analyses indicated to derive the line of questioning to be administered. The factors in the surveys provided constructs used in the interview questions. The researcher then developed comprehensive questions that pertained to each of the factors in each assessment, as well as questioning pertaining to how the practices were implemented, and how they were enacted in the classroom.

**Researcher Interview**

The researcher developed an interview aimed at defining the practices of the participants identified as exemplary teachers of English language Learners and to explore any tensions between the data sets from the Schommer Epistemological Survey and the Reflective Ethical Moral Assessment Survey. In the interview the participants were asked a series of questions, as suggested by Creswell (1998). Follow up questions were also used for clarification as needed. Participants were then asked to describe how their beliefs transfer to practice and what that practice looks like in action. The researcher interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

**Schommer’s Epistemological Survey**

The factor analysis conducted by Schommer was used to develop questions for the participant interviews. Schommer’s Epistemological Questionnaire had been deemed successful in determining epistemological beliefs and has been used in numerous studies since the 1980s when first developed (Schommer, 1989; Schommer, 2001; Schommer, 2002; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Garcia, 2004). In support of the survey’s reliability, the test-retest reliability was reported at 0.70, (Schommer et al., 1997) and the inter-item reliabilities for individual items within each factor ranged from 0.63 to 0.85 (Schommer, 1993).
According to Schommer, this survey assessed beliefs on,

(a) the stability of knowledge—ranging from never changing to always changing, (b) the structure of knowledge—ranging from isolated bits to interrelated concepts, (c) the speed of learning—ranging from quick, all or none to gradual, and (d) the ability to learn—ranging from fixed at birth to improving with experience and over time (Schommer-Aikins & Duell, p. 425).

Questions were developed that aim at each of the factors. This was consistent with the research on epistemologies, but the interview probed the understanding and the reasoning associated with each factor. As mentioned, “these included beliefs about the certainty, the source, the justification, the acquisition, and the structure of knowledge” (Schommer & Duell, 2001, p. 419). The interview instrument is located in Appendix C. Schommer’s previously determined factor structure was comprised of the following factors: Factor 1 (Ability to Learn is Innate), Factor 2 (Knowledge is Discrete and Unambiguous), Factor 3 (Learning is Quick or Not at All), and Factor 4 (Knowledge is Certain). Survey questions loaded on Factor 1 included items: 8, 47, 55, 57, 4, 15, 25, 28, 62 with reverse scoring for items: 4, 15, 25, 28; Factor 2 items included: 11, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 33, 56, 58, 59 with reverse scoring for items: 22, 23, 56; Factor 3 included items: 1, 10, 30, 39, 50, 60, 20, 24, 52, with reverse scoring for items: 30, 60; and Factor 4 included items: 2, 12, 21, 34, 48, 61 with reverse scoring for items: 2, 48, 61. Some items were reverse scored. Please note that on the survey ratings 1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree. To calculate reversed items, the researcher simply recoded scoring as 5 =1, 4 =2, 3 =3, 2 =4, and 1=5. While only used to derive a line of questioning and not officially administered, Schommer’s Epistemological Survey can be found in Appendix A.
Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment Survey

Arredondo Rucinski’s and Bauch’s Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment Survey (REMAS) was used in the study to gather background information on the ELL teachers about their typical reflective practices. This assisted in determining how participants perceived their use of reflection to guide their interactions with students and practices used in the class. The survey results helped the researcher understand how teachers interpreted their actions and behaviors and how these actions affected their students.

According to Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch, four factors were identified in this survey. These were Ethical Moral Dimensions (ETHMORDM), Reflective Dimensions (REFLDMS), Defensive Behaviors (DEFENBEH), and Ethical Priorities (ETHPRIOR). The ETHMORDM factor included items: 18, 25, 17, 26, 27, 16, 28, 19, 24, 20, and 22; the REFLDMS factor included items: 6, 1, 2, 8, 5, 3, 4, 10, 9, and 7; the DEFENBEH factor included items: 14, 13, 11, 15, and 12; and the ETHPRIOR factor included items: 33, 34, and 32. The items contained in the DEFENBEH factor were reverse scored, i.e., a score of “6” would be reversed to a “1”, etc.

Furthermore, The Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment survey’s “Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients indicated moderately strong internal consistency for the overall scale (Cronbach’s α = 0.72) and very strong for the ETHMORDM (Ethical Moral Decision making) (Cronbach’s α = 0.91) and the REFLDMS (reflective dimensions) (Cronbach’s α = 0.89); the DEFENBEH (defensive behavior) (Cronbach’s α= 0.71) and the ETHPRIOR (ethical priorities) (Cronbach’s α = 0.72)” (Arredondo Rucinski & Bauch, p. 501). Additionally, Morgan (2004) suggested that reliability greater than .70 was satisfactory to the overall quality of the instrument. The Reflective Ethical Moral Assessment Survey was constructed from the concepts and principles found in a review of the reflective practice research. While sufficient participants for a
confirmatory factor analysis were not included in this study, the results of the administration of the surveys were compared to previous confirmatory factor analysis results (Garcia, 2004, Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch, 2005) and were used to inform and develop the descriptions of effective ELL teachers interviews in this research. The Reflective Ethical Moral Assessment Survey can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis section was comprised of the data the researcher gathered via background knowledge generated by Schommer’s epistemological survey, the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment survey, and through the researcher-conducted interviews. By utilizing the accepted quality of the survey instruments, and the interpretations from previous confirmatory factor analysis combined with the depth of a qualitative study, a clearer understanding of what epistemological beliefs and reflective practices effective educators of ELL students exhibited.

Epistemological Beliefs and Reflective Practice Interview

The interview data were recorded as Creswell (1998) recommended, using an electronic recording device as well as an interview protocol and recording form to take descriptive notes of the behaviors and body language of the participants. Participant interviews were analyzed to determine any connecting statements that arose in the interviews. Next, the statements were divided into themes such as units of beliefs, practices, and professional development. Units of beliefs were characterized by the beliefs the teacher had concerning ELL students, the students’ background, heritage, etc . . . Teacher practices entailed the activities, strategies, and skills the teacher utilized to relay content information to the ELL student. The Professional Development theme included pre-service teaching training as well as involvement in professional learning
communities, graduate school, and any other program aimed at increasing teacher capacity. Finally, the researcher reflected upon the references and developed intuited meaning from the interviews that explicated experiences and ideology and helped describe epistemological beliefs, practices, and the background of the participants.

Summary

Chapter three described and illustrated the methods, procedures, and data analyses applied to identify the beliefs and practices of exemplary teachers of ELL students. This study used both Schommer’s epistemological Survey and the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch Reflective Ethical Moral Assessment survey to develop the interview protocol aimed at a deeper understanding of the impact teachers’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practice have on their cultural competency and practices in a diverse classroom. Table three identifies the research design and matrix. Chapter Four presents the data collected in the study and the analysis of data received from the participants.

Table 1: Research Design and Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Types of data collected</th>
<th>Analysis Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What commonalities exist, if any, among successful teachers of English Language Learners?</td>
<td>Interviews, Schommer’s Epistemological Survey, Arredondo Rucinski &amp; Bauch’s REMAS Survey</td>
<td>Theme identification and categorization, Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the epistemological belief scores of successful teachers of English Language Learners?</td>
<td>Schommer’s Epistemological Survey</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the reflective Practice scores of successful teachers of English Language Learners?</td>
<td>Arredondo Rucinski &amp; Bauch’s REMAS Survey</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study was designed to examine what commonalities existed, if any, among the practices, knowledge, and beliefs of successful teachers of English Language Learners. An analysis of eighteen teachers’ cultural competencies included an examination of both their epistemological beliefs and their use of reflective practices: two non-inclusive components of cultural competency. In Chapters I-III of this dissertation, background information and a review of the literature was provided on cultural competency, epistemological beliefs, reflective practices and a description of the research methods used in the study. Chapter IV outlines the data collection process along with the data analysis and presents the findings from the research study.

Research illustrated that educators culturally competent in reflective practice and demonstrating sophisticated epistemological beliefs, provide culturally competent instruction that has positive influences on the education of all students and not just those who are ELL, thus maximizing their instructional time (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2006; Haberman, 1994). The researcher-developed interview was devised based on the factor analyses of two surveys reputable instruments, Schommer’s epistemological questionnaire and Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment surveys (REMAS). The interviews were
transcribed and coded in order to identify commonalities within teachers’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practices among those identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students.
### Study Participants

#### Table 2: Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest Degree Obtained</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>Additional Training</th>
<th>Epist. Score **</th>
<th>REMAS Score***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Gomez</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Masters + 30 credit hours</td>
<td>Instructional Specialist</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>WIDA SIOP</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Witt</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Masters + 30 credit hours</td>
<td>Reading, English, ELL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>WIDA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana Smith</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Elementary Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Edward</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Elementary Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy Brant</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Bachelors + 3 semester hours</td>
<td>Title I Teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>MHS</td>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Hill</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>SIOP</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
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<td>Karla Works</td>
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<td>Elementary Teacher</td>
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<td>ARI WIDA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>SIOP</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilma Orr</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>ARI WIDA</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Dabbs</td>
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<td>High School Math</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>EXP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nikki Blevins</td>
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<td>High School Zoology</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>SIOP</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina Hayes</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>ELL Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ARI SIOP</td>
<td>MLN</td>
<td>EMERG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delilah Clark</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Bachelors + 3 semester hours</td>
<td>ELL / Migrant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ARI SIOP</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Jett</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Masters</td>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick Bell</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bachelors + 3 semester hours</td>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paula Mitchell</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>ELL/Spanish</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>HS</td>
<td>ESJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda Simms</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>ELL/Reading</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>ARI WIDA</td>
<td>H.S.</td>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lynn Gomez

Lynn was unique to this study in that she was once an ELL student who began school as a non-English speaking student. Additionally, she was retained in the first grade, due to her lack of English. At the time of the interview, Lynn was approximately forty years old and had almost twenty years of experience in education. She had a master’s degree plus thirty additional course hours toward her doctorate degree. Her background was in communication disorders, teaching to special populations, and her position at the time was an instructional specialist. She also had had additional training with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium and Strategic Intervention Observation Protocol (SIOP) model.

Judy Witt

Judy was the daughter of German immigrants and believed that observing her parents’ struggles and how they were still dependant upon her in some aspects of their lives gave her the desire to teach in a multicultural classroom, and to help ELL students obtain a high-quality education and the desire to encourage them to continue their education beyond high school. At the time of the interview, Judy was in her mid-fifties with thirty years of teaching experience. She had completed coursework for her doctorate but did not have plans to complete her dissertation. Her undergraduate training was in language arts with graduate degrees in reading and technology. Her additional training included many professional development programs from the WIDA consortium.
At the time of the interview, Judy taught diverse populations in a computer lab environment where students developed thematic units in a collaborative environment. In her classroom, students were initially screened to determine strengths and weaknesses. From these data, Mrs. Witt designed an individualized program for each student and used student strengths when planning for the collaborative learning projects.

Dana Smith

At the time of the interview, Dana was approximately thirty-five years old with fifteen years of teaching experience. Both her undergraduate and master’s degrees were in elementary education. She had completed training in the Alabama Reading Initiative and participated in professional development programs through the initiative.

Specifically, Dana taught a self-contained fourth grade classroom. She believed that being self-contained allowed for the building of positive relationships among her students. In her classroom, I noticed she used tiered instruction to differentiate the materials in order to meet each student’s individual needs. Additionally, I noticed charts, graphs, pictures, word walls, student projects, and many other authentic forms of assessment.

Tiffany Edward

At the time of the interview, Tiffany was in her late twenties with seven years experience. She had a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in educational administration. She taught in an Alabama Reading Initiative school and had plans of furthering her professional development by enrolling in an Educational Specialist program in the fall semester.
Tiffany taught sixth-grade math and reading. In her classroom, I noticed manipulatives set out at various work stations as well as butcher paper with formulas, charts, vocabulary words and graphic organizers on the walls. I also noticed student art and work displayed prominently.

*Mandy Brant*

At the time of the interview, Mandy was in her late fifties and had ten years of experience. She was a non-traditional student when she completed her Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education. She said that due to her age she did not plan to pursue a graduate degree. Mandy taught ELL students in a pull-out environment. When she began teaching, she taught in a traditional classroom, but her passion led her to take this position when it came open. The principal deliberately mentioned to me on several occasions what a “fantastic job” she did with the ELL population at her school.

While interviewing Mandy, I noticed pictures that incorporated many locations, heritages, and customs across the globe. Additionally, I noticed a word wall and many children’s books that included fairy tales from other countries.

*Frank Hill*

At the time of the interview, Frank was in his thirtieth year teaching and was in his mid-fifties. He had a Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree in health education. Additionally, he taught at a SIOP (Strategic Intervention and Observation Protocol) Initiative trained school through the Alabama State Department of Education. At the time, they were in their third year of the SIOP initiative implementation.

*Karla Works*

At the time of the interview, Karla was in her early thirties and had eleven years of teaching experience. Her Bachelor’s Degree was in Early Childhood Education and her Master’s
Degree was in English as a Second Language (ESL). She taught in a school that was in its second year as a WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) initiative school.

Karla taught a self-contained fourth grade classroom. While in her class, I was greeted with a word wall and an abundance of student-created projects with illustrations, writings, pictures, graphic organizers, and language and learning objectives displayed clearly on the board.

Britt Boggs

When the interview was conducted, Britt was thirty years old with six years of teaching experience. He had a Bachelor’s Degree in Secondary Science Education and had completed one course toward his Master’s Degree. Britt taught at a school that had undergone SIOP initiative training aimed to provide high quality strategies for teaching ELL students.

Britt’s classroom had several documents from history displayed on the wall as well as timelines of history, poster boards of how Congress works, posters containing the branches of government, and pictures of past presidents and the current president. He taught U.S. Government and U.S. History.

Wilma Orr

When interviewed, Wilma was in her early thirties and had approximately ten years of teaching experience. Her Bachelor’s Degree was in Elementary Education and her Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration. She had completed training in the Alabama Reading Initiative and had taught at a WIDA Initiative trained school.

Wilma liked to incorporate real-life events and objects into her classroom. She had pictures of trips that the students had taken as well as pictures of people and objects she had brought to her classroom and a word wall. During a study on excavating land, she had a
construction crew led by a close friend bring in heavy machinery used to clear land to make the
lesson more authentic.

Rachel Dabbs

At the time of the interview, Rachel held a Master’s Degree in computer science and had
a fifth-year degree in math education. She was in her late forties with seven years of experience
as a teacher. The school at which she taught was in its second year of implementation as a SIOP
initiative school.

Rachel taught math to grades 9-12. In her classroom, I noticed she was utilizing tiered
instruction to differentiate her instruction as well as hands-on activities and manipulatives. Many
examples of student-developed work were displayed prominently in the classroom. Additionally,
Mrs. Dabbs had encouraged the students to make their project personal to them. In one such
project, the students made their own rocket to launch, that incorporated lessons they had learned
over several weeks. Displayed on the rockets, many students had incorporated their families’
customs, heritage, and language in the design. The rockets were to be launched for students to
experience the projection, angle, and plane lessons in a real-life manner. Additionally, a word
wall was a prominent feature in her classroom.

Nikki Blevins

When interviewed, Nikki was in her early thirties with eight years of teaching experience.
Her Bachelor’s degree was in Zoology, and her Master’s Degree was in Secondary Education
Science. She was the lead science teacher and a member of the school leadership team.
Additionally, she taught at a SIOP initiative school in its third year of implementation.

Nikki taught Zoology, Biology, and Physics to students in the 10th-12th grade. Her class
was attached to a lab where, she explained, she tried to incorporate labs with the lessons as much
as possible. She mentioned she brings as much as she can so students are able to see, touch, and smell the things being learned about. Additionally, I noticed she had an ELMO, which is a document projector that utilizes a video camera and projection lens to portray visual images, textbook pages, and graphic organizers that are not translucent.

**Gina Hayes**

Gina was in her mid-fifties with thirteen years of teaching experience at the time of the interview. She had a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Education and a Master’s Degree in English as a Second Language. She had undergone training in the Alabama Reading Initiative, Compass Learning, and WIDA standards, and she taught at a SIOP initiative school. Gina taught language acquisition to ELL students in grades K-5 in a pull-out setting.

**Delilah Clark**

When interviewed, Delilah was in her mid-twenties with six years of teaching experience. Her Bachelor’s Degree was in Elementary Education. She had completed training in the Alabama Reading Initiative and continued to participate in professional development programs through the initiative. Additionally, her school was a WIDA consortium initiative school.

Delilah taught language acquisition to ELL students in a pull-out setting. Additionally, her title was migrant and home-school liaison, where she communicated with parents labeled as migrant workers as well as more permanent parents. She made it clear that she believed compassion and caring was a large part of her job and that she believed that exhibiting these behaviors had allowed her to have a big impact on her students and their families.

**Sue Jett**

When she was interviewed, Sue was in her late thirties with approximately thirteen years of teaching experience. Both her undergraduate and Master’s Degree were in elementary
education. She reported that her professional development activities were quite diverse due to her day being split teaching ELL at both an elementary school and a high school.

In Sue’s classroom, I noticed an abundance of technology she was using to teach. She was using a promethean board to project visual aids, graphic organizers, materials, assignments, and to solicit responses. She used this to keep student engagement high. Additionally, I noticed many projects displayed that she said were used as a form of authentic assessment.

Nick Bell

When the interview was conducted, Nick was twenty-nine years old with four years of teaching experience. He had a Bachelor’s Degree in elementary education. He had undergone training in the Alabama Reading Initiative, Compass Learning, and WIDA standards, and he taught at a SIOP initiative school.

Nick taught ELL to students in grade K-5 in a pull-out and push-in setting. He pulled students out of regular classrooms, who were in need of language acquisition, and he went into classrooms that had ELL students in need of additional support. Additionally, this model provided support and additional resources to the teacher in developing skills and strategies aimed at effectively teaching ELL students. In his classroom, I noticed several children’s books and chapter books that incorporated a multicultural theme. In addition, word walls and pictures illustrated how items from various cultures were integrated into lessons.

Paula Mitchell

At the time of her interview, Paula was in her late thirties with approximately fifteen years of teaching experience. She had a Bachelor’s Degree in International Trade in Spanish and a Master’s Degree in Foreign Language Education. She was the leader of the school’s SIOP
initiative leadership team. Additionally, a portion of her formal education took place in another country where she was not a native speaker.

Paula taught Spanish I, II, and III alongside ELL. Much of her ELL teaching took place in a cooperative teaching environment in English and Science classes. Her classroom walls were covered in student-made posters celebrating cultures and countries across the globe. She had a mural that was translated into several languages. She used her students in the translation and artwork.

Rhonda Simms

When the interview was conducted, Rhonda was in her early thirties with eight years of teaching experience. Her Bachelor’s Degree was in Early Childhood Education, while her Master’s Degree was in Elementary Education. She had completed training in the Alabama Reading Initiative and taught at a WIDA consortium trained school.

Specifically, Rhonda taught reading to ELL students who were identified as in need of strategic intervention. In her classroom, I noticed that she tiered instruction for the students based on prior knowledge, experience, and skill set. Her classroom had a large library and word walls.

Barbara Jones

At the time of her interview, Barbara was in her mid-fifties with thirteen years of teaching experience. Her Bachelor’s Degree was in Elementary Education, while her Master’s Degree was in English as a Second Language. She had completed training in the Alabama Reading Initiative and continued to participate in professional development programs through the initiative.

Barbara taught ELL students in a pull-out/push-in model. She suggested that this model allowed her time to work with language acquisition while pulling students in to her class, yet
provided support in the core subjects through collaborative teaching with the other classroom teacher. In her classroom, I observed her word walls words in English, Spanish, and various other languages the students spoke. Additionally, I noticed multiple charts, graphs, pictures, student projects, and other authentic forms of assessment.

Data Collection

Eighteen participants identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students were interviewed to gather an understanding of the participants’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. A small amount of demographic information was obtained to gain an understanding of experience and training. Participants were given an abstract of the study, a brief synopsis of epistemological beliefs, and information about reflective practices, in order for them to have some background information for the interview questions. The participants were assured that there were no correct answers to the interview and that this was an opportunity to voice their beliefs concerning knowledge and how they use reflection to guide their practices. Furthermore, the researcher allowed participants to identify themselves by pseudonyms for the study to ensure privacy and anonymity beyond the researcher. The Schommer epistemological questionnaire and the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment surveys (REMAS) were analyzed categorically for constructs identified by the factor analyses dictates to derive the line of questioning to be administered. The researcher developed comprehensive interview questions that pertained to the constructs comprising the factors within each instrument, and questions about how teacher practices were implemented, and how they were enacted in the classroom as appropriate.
Data Analysis

Participant interviews were transcribed, and then analyzed to determine connecting and common statements across the interviews. Next, the statements were divided into themes such as units of beliefs, practices, and professional development. Units of beliefs were characterized by the beliefs the teacher has concerning ELL students, beliefs about knowledge, the students’ background, heritage, etc. . . . Teacher practices entailed the activities, strategies, reflective practices, and skills the teacher utilized to relay content information to the ELL student. The Professional Development theme included undergraduate teaching training as well as involvement in professional learning communities, graduate school, and any other professional development program aimed at increasing teacher capacity. Finally, the researcher reflected upon the references and the data and developed intuitied meaning from the interviews that explicated experiences and ideology and described epistemological beliefs, practices, and the backgrounds of the participants.

Epistemological Belief Findings

The factor analysis of Schommer’s epistemological questionnaire was used to develop the line of questioning the researcher used in the interview to evaluate the participants’ epistemological beliefs. Schommer’s questionnaire assesses beliefs on,

(a) the stability of knowledge- ranging from never changing to always changing, (b) the structure of knowledge-ranging from isolated bits to interrelated concepts, (c) the speed of learning- ranging from quick, all or none to gradual, and (d) the ability to learn-ranging from fixed at birth to improving with experience and over time (Schommer-Aikins & Duell, p. 425).
Through coding and analysis, the researcher determined the overall epistemological belief system for the participants. This belief system and correlative comments are illustrated in Table 3.
Table 3: Participants’ Epistemological Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“In order to learn, you’ve got to have questions, you’ve got to ask questions, you’ve got to go through a thinking process to get to that knowledge, so I think, you know, in the beginning, it may be murky, but that’s where your thought process comes through. You have to think through it to get to the end.” [Dana Smith]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think we should allow for discussion and explore within [the material]. I believe that we should discuss among ourselves and we should explore to see what might be changing along the way, and there can be changes, and kids can even help us come up with new ideas that we didn’t think about before.” [Barbara Blevins]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Learning is always evolving. We learn depending on our surroundings: the people around us, the things we come into contact with everyday, the things we do.” [Wilma Orr]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I’d say that a student’s ability is mostly evolving, but perhaps fixed to a very small extent. Anyone can learn, but it is going to take a lot more work with some than others.” [Mandy Brant]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I think of students ability to learn as a little bit of both.” [Judy Witt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes I just give the students facts, but other times I let them explore. It depends on the subject.” [Karla Works]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Level of Naivety</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“In Science, I’d pretty much say those things are certain.” [Gina Hayes]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through coding and analysis, the researcher determined the overall epistemological belief system for each participant. Next, the researcher analyzed each participant’s response to the questions comprising each of the four factors derived from Schommer’s research. The researcher found a variance between participants’ overall epistemological rating and their ratings under various factors. Overall, of the study’s eighteen participants: eleven participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 4.1-5.0, one participant was identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 3.1-4.0, five participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 2.1-3.0, and only one was considered to have a moderate level of naivety within their epistemological belief with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.0.
**Factor I: Ability to Learn is Innate**

Table 4: Participants’ Epistemological Beliefs in Terms of Ability to Learn is Innate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Effort and desire to learn for an individual pretty much decides if you’re a successful learner, this effort to learn aids the student in using resources, materials, and other modes to support their success.” [Paula Mitchell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes they [the students] don’t have a lot of control [over their learning] because they don’t know how to control and know that they can do that. I think that’s part of what we need to do is show them you can be this other student, you can do better, and you can be a successful learner.” [Judy Witt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I believe that the brain will plateau at some point, but that would be much later in life and not impact school-aged students.” [Lynn Gomez]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“There are some things that can keep them from learning, but there is a whole lot that is left up to the student.” [Sue Jett]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I believe that a student has a certain IQ, but referring to our special ed, they learn something every day it may be a life skill or something but they learn everyday.” [Tiffany Edward]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Factor I, of the study’s eighteen participants: nine participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs, five participants were identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological beliefs, and four participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological belief.
Most participants stated that they believed that the students’ ability to learn is evolving and that they are not “stuck” where they are or destined to remain average for the remainder of their life if they are currently labeled as an average student. In fact, one teacher described in a post interview conversation how she did not “blossom” into what she considered a good learner until her junior year of college. Additionally, she held this hope for many of her current students and felt that she must maintain hope, show compassion, and provide the best learning strategies possible to help engage the learner.

Through the interviews, I was met by belief statements such as Wilma’s. She began by stating, “Learning is always evolving. We learn depending on our surroundings: the people around us, the things we come into contact with everyday, the things we do.”

Lynn also believed that students’ abilities are evolving, but sometimes we “have to [help them] find their way”. She supported that this can be done through teaching in various modalities to reach their learning style.

Karla took it to an intrinsic level and espoused that as a teacher we have to encourage and build the students’ self-confidence so they understand they are capable of being a successful student. She went on to add that as the student’s self-confidence is built through learning, the student will become more active in the learning process and become a more capable student.

Additionally, participants adamantly believed that the student has a great amount, if not the greatest amount, of input concerning his/her ability to learn. Several participants professed that a student’s willingness to participate in the learning process and his/her consistent will and effort to try and interpret the material in a meaningful way was the key factor in determining his/her success.
I received many strong responses supporting this ideology. Paula exclaimed that, “Effort and desire to learn for an individual pretty much decides if you’re a successful learner.” She also went on to add that the effort and desire to learn aids the student in using resources, materials, and other modes to support their success.

Lynn added that she believes the students hold, “the main hand on that . . . [it depends on] how much we [the teacher and student] try and how many new strategies and interventions we are able to apply.”

Continually throughout this factor, I was met with words such as, “effort,” “desire,” and “motivation.” However, Judy added an interesting piece when she stated that, “Sometimes they [the students] don’t have a lot of control [over their learning] because they don’t know how to control and know that they can do that. I think that’s part of what we need to do is show them you can be this other student, you can do better, and you can be a successful learner.” She went on to mention ways that the teacher can assist students who are struggling by providing strategic teaching and assisting them in developing their study skills, their organizational skills, and other skill sets that assist them in improving their learning.
### Table 5: Participants’ Epistemological Beliefs in Knowledge is Discrete and Unambiguous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“You like to think you have enough knowledge and are certain and clear enough that you can pass it [knowledge] on, and after over thirty years of teaching, I’d like to think I have enough knowledge, but there are still plenty of times, [I think] NO, no its not [clear], I wish there was more, there’s murkiness, I wish I could figure it out.” [Judy Witt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There are always ways you can look at something different.” [Sue Jett]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I think you need both for sure. I do my best to teach the facts on things, but if you don’t allow them to go in there and make their own interpretations and try some things on their own, I think you kind of smother them if you don’t let them get some things their own way.” [Wilma Orr]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I think some things are going to be absolute and are not going to change, but then again there are other things that will change from time to time. There are a lot of different things out there.” [Frank Hill]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I think you should try to teach the students as much facts as you can but yet give them also a chance to come up with their own theories and ways to explain or answer questions and problems.” [Rhonda Simms]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Level of Naivety</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It really depends on the student whether knowledge is murky or clear. Some students just process the information much clearer.” [Nick Bell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Facts have to come first.” [Judy Witt]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the Factor Knowledge is Discrete and Unambiguous, of the study’s eighteen participants: nine participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 4.1-5.0, three participants were identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 3.1-4.0, five participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 2.1-3.0, and one was found to have a naïve epistemological belief system with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.0.

As illustrated by the belief systems, most participants responded that knowledge is quite ambiguous at times. Dana Smith suggested that, “in order to learn, you’ve got to have questions, you’ve got to ask questions, you’ve got to go through a thinking process to get to that knowledge, so I think, you know, in the beginning, it may be murky, but that’s where your thought process comes through. You have to think through it to get to the end, so it’s clear at the end, so I think it’s murky along the way until the end.” This illustrates the time and thought that goes into truly studying and analyzing key concepts and themes of our learning.

Judy described her own thoughts concerning concrete knowledge in her practice as a teacher. She added, “You like to think you have enough knowledge and are certain and clear enough that you can pass it [knowledge] on, and after over thirty years of teaching, I’d like to think I have enough knowledge, but there are still plenty of times, [I think] NO, no its not [clear], I wish there was more, there’s murkiness, I wish I could figure it out.”

Beyond that to the student level, Sue added, “There are always ways you can look at something different.” She added that each student “learns differently and especially with an ELL student, you’re not going to be able to [teach the same]. You have to give them schema and
background knowledge” and then allow them to explore the materials to make their own understandings while guiding their learning.

Furthermore, several participants described how much of the knowledge we have today was not held true in the past, thus increasing the ambiguity of some forms of knowledge. Examples were taken from science, where Pluto, once considered a planet, is no longer considered a planet due to new evidence. Another example is the constant battle in food and nutritional science over the health benefits and risks of eating eggs. Nikki added that while there were once only five kingdoms of living things, science now recognizes six. The participants used these examples as reasons they encouraged student research, exploration, and placing a portion of the burden of learning on them, so that they become life-long learners and interpreters of information and not only consumers of what is espoused by a teacher as presenter of knowledge.
**Factor III: Learning is Quick or Not at All**

Table 6: Participants’ Epistemological Beliefs in Learning is Quick or Not at All

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“The more you read, the better you read. The harder you work and study, [the more you can move to advanced learning.” [Paula Mitchell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The only way you’re going to get better is to practice, and if a football coach goes out with his team and they practice none all throughout the week, they’re not going to do well; they’re not going to perform. Academics are the same thing. We have to practice daily.” [Dana Smith]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Showing the student that we do care; a lot of times we get kids that have never had a stable environment. Some of our ELL kids move around a lot such as some of our military, and it’s difficult because they get to know somebody, and you keep going, and then they get to know somebody, and they lose them because they have to move, and they build relationships that they’ve never been able to keep, so I think that persistence has a lot to do with, ‘Okay, I must really mean something to her because she’s still around me.” [Lynn Gomez]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“A student that tries hard, will more than likely do better.” [Tiffany Edward]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“They can continue to grow somewhat with additional work and practice.” [Karla Works]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Level of Naivety</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“There can be physical disabilities that make it very hard.” [Mandy Brant]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t think their ability is fixed, but at a certain point they may not be able to go any further.” [Frank Hill]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Factor III, Learning is Quick or Not at all, of the study’s eighteen participants: twelve participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 4.1-5.0, two participants were identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 3.1-4.0, two participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 2.1-3.0, and two were found to have a moderate to naïve epistemological belief system with mean scores ranging from 1.0-2.0.

In general, the participants were of the belief that with effort and persistence, learning would take place for a student. Additionally, it is worth noting that many participants believed that the continuous effort and hard work resulted in increased learning and ability for a student. This is illustrated by Paula: “The more you read, the better you read. The harder you work and study, [the more you can move to advanced learning]…You know, math: two plus two: [once] you know that, then you move on to multiplication.”

Dana Smith supported her stance by comparing academics to sports, “The only way you’re going to get better is to practice, and if a football coach goes out with his team and they practice none all throughout the week, they’re not going to do well; they’re not going to perform. Academics are the same thing [sic]. We have to practice daily, you have to read daily. You have to experience all these different kinds of things to learn new things. Before you can do it, you have to practice and you have to put your time into it to make it better.”

Additionally, some participants stated that persistence and effort, when combined with strategic teaching using best practices as defined for educating ELL students, assisted students in becoming successful learners. One participant suggested that, “they [ELL students] just blossom once they get in the right environment with different people and different things.” Another
component added by the participants is the continuous effort on the part of the teacher to provide compassion and nurture the learner and learning environment. Lynn described this as, “showing the student that we do care; a lot of times we get kids that have never had a stable environment. Some of our ELL kids move around a lot such as some of our military, and it’s difficult because they get to know somebody, and you keep going, and then they get to know somebody, and they lose them because they have to move, and they build relationships that they’ve never been able to keep, so I think that persistence has a lot to do with, ‘Okay, I must really mean something to her because she’s still around me,’ and it can be something as simple as you get to know them, you sit down, you have a conversation with them, you learn they like something like a favorite book and you base your next lesson on that book, or just something they can relate to. I think it would make a humongous difference.”

Rachel shared a personal story concerning her oldest daughter who was a struggling learner. In fact, she struggled so much that her daughter’s first and second grade teachers had told Rachel her daughter was below average and would struggle in school. However, Rachel and her daughter both had a desire to work hard and be persistent over time to ensure that the daughter did not fall behind in school and would receive a quality education. By the time the daughter was in the fifth grade, things started to look up and currently the daughter is enrolled in a university pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree.

Another story was shared by Lynn, who was herself an ELL student. She told me that she was retained in the first grade due to a lack of knowledge and language development. Her teachers felt she wasn’t ready to advance to the next grade level. That next year she had a teacher who had a tremendous impact on her and encouraged and motivated her to work, and she has excelled since then.
Factor IV: Knowledge is Certain

Table 7: Participants’ Epistemological Beliefs in Terms of Knowledge is Certain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“I don’t think it is certain and unchanging. I think that each day we come upon new ideas or new scientific knowledge, and I think sometimes that changes other things that we thought were certain and true, and puts a new light on situations. I don’t think we have all the answers yet.” [Barbara Jones]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s not the absolute certainty that it’s going to be like this every time. Knowledge is evolving.” [Britt Boggs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to Highly Sophisticated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Some things are fairly certain, but many things are open to change. As a science teacher, I have seen many ‘scientific facts’ change in my time. So not all knowledge is certain.” [Nikki Blevins]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The material should be examined to determine its value and explore the material. There is a lot of information that may or may not change so we have to be aware.” [Lynn Gomez]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I don’t think you can just give them a little tidbit of information and say ‘Go explore it.’ You’re going to have to give them a little bit of fact to try to get them started.” [Nick Bell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Level of Naivety</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I would say that’s knowledge is certain for the most part, but some time something does come in to play that changes.” [Rachel Dabbs]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Factor IV, of the study’s eighteen participants: ten participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs with mean scores ranging from 4.1-5.0, four participants were identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological
beliefs with mean scores ranging from 3.1-4.0, three participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological beliefs, one was found to have a moderate to naïve epistemological belief system with mean scores ranging from 2.1-3.0, and one was found to have a naïve epistemological belief system with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.0.

Barbara supported her stance that knowledge is evolving in her statement, “I don’t think it [knowledge] is certain and unchanging. I think that each day we come upon new ideas or new scientific knowledge, and I think sometimes that changes other things that we thought were certain and true, and puts a new light on situations. I don’t think we have all the answers yet.”

Britt stated that, “There’s not the absolute certainty that it’s going to be like this every time. Knowledge is evolving.” Due to Britt’s epistemological belief on the certainty of knowledge, he suggested that he should engage students in practices that: “allow for discussion. That’s one of the things I love in my class is to get them to come up with their own response. If I sit up there and tell them this is what it is, take it for what it’s worth, a kid’s going to sit there and look at you, but when you allow them to discuss it among themselves in turn and talk, abc brainstorming, and things like that, they can understand that those facts might change. Like Pluto, [no longer being a planet] things are evolving, the way we acquire knowledge . . . That is showing change, so you need to allow students to explore and find out for themselves. This way you have an engaging classroom.”

Dana Smith also believed that students should explore the information to make meaningful inferences from it, “I think we should allow for discussion and explore within [the material]. I believe that we should discuss among ourselves and we should explore to see what might be changing along the way, and there can be changes, and kids can even help us come up with new ideas that we didn’t think about before. In math, my kids come up and say, ‘What
about this trick in math?’ and it was something I never thought of because there’s several different ways to do things. There’s a division problem. Your parents say, ‘Well I did it this way, and my child’s doing it this way,’ but you’ve still got the same answer in the end, so when kids come up with something like that, yeah, they’re helping change that. I try to tell them, ‘You come up with what way’s better for you because it might not be the easiest way for so-and-so sitting next to you, but it might be the easiest way for you,’ and so there is more than one solution, so we have to talk about this, and we have to see.”

This was evidence that these teachers allowed for multiple ways of problem-solving in their classroom. As it has been illustrated before, dictating a one-size-fits-all mode of instruction or learning is detrimental to so many ELL students. By allowing for multiple means of collaboration, problem-solving, discussion and engagement within the material, we support the individual’s modality of learning, thus better serving their needs.

Reflective Practice Findings

Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s Reflective, Ethical, and Moral Assessment Survey was used to develop the line of questioning used in the interview to determine the teachers’ reflective practice and beliefs. Additionally, the survey questions assessed how the participants used their reflective practice to guide their interactions with students and strategies implemented in the class. The survey results assisted the researcher in understanding how teachers interpret their actions and behaviors and how these actions affected their students.

Four factors were derived from the original study, and those factors where used to determine the constructs for questioning used in the interview. Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s previously determined factor structure is comprised of the following factors: Factor I: Ethical

Through coding and analysis of the participants’ interviews, the researcher determined the sophistication or complexity level of each participant’s reflective practice. These scores are presented in Table 2, p.68. The researcher then analyzed each participants’ response to the questions comprising the four factors derived from Arredondo Rucinski’s and Bauch’s research (2006). According to Arredondo Rucinski (2005), the following criteria must be met for a participant to be identified on the continuum of reflective practices and beliefs from emergent to complex ethical and moral elements.

**Emergent use of reflective practice standards**
- Reviews actions and accepts feedback about actions and perceptions of those actions in conversations with others.
- Plans actions, describes plans and checks plans with others.

**Competent use of reflective practice standards**
- Interprets and constructs meaning in conversations, and inquires about interpretations of others.
- Invites feedback and asks questions about assumptions, perspectives and beliefs of self and others.

**Expert use of reflective practice standards**
- Openly accepts criticisms for actions and decisions and does not become defensive when questioned by others.
- Accepts responsibility for decisions or actions taken. Does not rationalize behaviors, blame policy, others, or practices for actions or decisions.

**Ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards**
- Asks questions about the effects of actions or decisions on others (e.g. colleagues, employees, clients, students, on policy and/ or future practice).
- Asks questions about the extent to which the actions or decisions are moral or ethical.
- Asks questions about the results of actions or decisions on disenfranchised, underrepresented, and/ or marginalized populations (p. 79).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Practice and Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and Socially Just</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“You have to have an environment where students are going to be comfortable and have the right to speak their opinion or tell you how they feel. So you have to consider the emotions or whatever you are taking about. With ethics... dealing with ELL, their customs are different than our customs, and that's what they are used to. You have to learn you can’t just automatically offend someone. [If you do] they are not going to learn, so you have to take the feelings, emotions, and ethics of people into consideration because they're going to shut you out [unless you respect their differences].” [Sue Jett]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I worry about public schools in general, because public schools are public schools and there’s this box and not everyone fits in the box. I don’t think our public schools are realizing we have a lot of kids who are not fitting in the boxes we are using and we need some other boxes.” [Judy Witt]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I guess [when criticized] I would consider that practice and take that criticism and take that and work on it. I’m not going to be defensive, but I may explain or change what I am doing.” [Nikki Blevins]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My first thought that comes to mind [when questioned or criticized] would be did I do something wrong, then I question myself, ‘Did I engage the students in a way that some of them felt uncomfortable.’” [Mandy Brant]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I try to take into consideration their [the ELL students] culture and their heritage and their practices and not be offensive to them and show appreciation for their culture and heritage and have things in the classroom that they appreciate that come from their culture and heritage.” [Frank Hill]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I think it lets them know that I’m not just a teacher . . . that I want to learn about their culture just like I want them to learn about ours. I think it lets them know that I actually care.” [Nick Bell]

| Emergent | 1 | “[When Criticized] I feel a little put down and hurt because I start to feel insecure and unsure of myself. My reaction is usually silence and to not talk again in those situations. It really depends on how I am approached though. I will explain my reasoning.” [Gina Hayes] |

Overall, of the study’s eighteen participants: nine participants were identified as utilizing an ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 4.75-6.0, seven participants were identified as utilizing an expert use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 3.5-4.74, two participants were identified as utilizing a competent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 2.25-3.49, and only one participant was identified as having an emergent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.24.
Factor I: Ethical Moral Dimensions

Table 9: Participants’ Reflective Practices and Beliefs in Ethical Moral Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Practice and Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ethical and Socially Just             | 10           | “You have to realize that you’re not the only person in the room, even though you are the teacher. You’re students are part of your classroom. Every student is going to be different. You’re going to have to try to process things based on each individual child, not just the group as a whole.” [Nick Bell]  
 “To give an example, last year I had an exchange student from Germany, and we were talking about WWII. In the middle of class he raised his hand and asked, ‘Where did you get that information from?’ I replied, ‘from the US history book.’ He said, ‘That’s not what we were taught in Germany.’ Several people from the class were like, ‘Well go back to Germany’, but I said, ‘No, lets allow him to explain what he’s taught in Germany from their side of their history and how they interpret these wars.’ It opened a lot of kids’ eyes to see we’re not the only place in the world and you have to see both sides of the story.” [Britt Boggs] |
| Expert                               | 5            | “In order to teach ELL students you have to have an environment where student are going to be comfortable and have the right to speak their opinion or tell you how they feel. So you have to take the feelings, emotions, and ethics of people into consideration because they’re not going to shut you out.” [Sue Jett]  
 “I mean, even if me and you sat down and you started discussing your background, what you believe in and what I believe in, we’d have some big differences, but as our society has proven over the years, we’re a melting pot of different cultures and groups of people, and you can co-exist. I’m not saying you have to agree on everything, but you have to understand the other person and hope they...
In Factor I, Ethical Moral Dimensions, out of the study’s eighteen participants: ten participants were identified as utilizing an ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 4.75-6.0, five participants were identified as utilizing an expert use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 3.5-4.74, two participants were identified as utilizing a competent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 2.25-3.49, and one participant was identified as having an emergent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.24.

As illustrated by the teacher’s position of the continuum of reflective practice and beliefs, most were very aware of how their practices impact their students, colleagues, and parents. Participants seemed to consider and react to the ethical and moral impact their decisions and the schools’ decisions have on their students. Additionally, several described their reflection upon their lessons and actions, and how they would impact the learning, emotions, and feelings of the students in their classroom, to have a positive influence on their students regardless of background.

The participants generally reflected upon how their practices would impact their students and those involved in the educational process. Sue talked about the importance of having an open and comfortable environment where everyone is accepted. She went on to say, “You have to have an environment where students are going to be comfortable and have the right to speak their...”
opinion or tell you how they feel. So you have to consider the emotions or whatever you are talking about. With ethics . . . dealing with ELL, their customs are different than our customs, and that’s what they are used to. You have to learn you can’t just automatically offend someone. [If you do] they are not going to learn, so you have to take the feelings, emotions, and ethics of people into consideration because they’re going to shut you out [unless you respect their differences].”

Additionally, Nick mentioned that, “You have to realize that you’re not the only person in the room, even though you are the teacher. Your students are part of your classroom. Every student is going to be different. You’re going to have to try to process things based on each individual child, not just the group as a whole.”

Karla described how she was careful to present information that was accurate, yet didn’t offend anyone. She taught fourth grade, so she felt it was especially important to strongly consider how she presented the information so that it didn’t offend or emotionally hurt any of her students. She added, “Right now, we’re talking about before the Civil War: the slavery. That is so hard for me to teach with these kids looking at me like, ‘Why did this happen?’ . . . You do have to be very careful in your wording and how you speak to children, but they’ve got to know the history of what has led us to where we are to be educated and informed.”

Britt also added a personal story from teaching WWII. “To give an example, last year I had an exchange student from Germany, and we were talking about WWII. In the middle of class he raised his hand and asked, ‘Where did you get that information from?’ I replied, ‘from the US history book.’ He said, ‘That’s not what we were taught in Germany.’ Several people from the class were like, ‘Well, go back to Germany’, but I said, ‘No, let’s allow him to explain what he’s taught in Germany from their side of their history and how they interpret these wars.’ It opened a
lot of kids’ eyes to see we’re not the only place in the world and you have to see both sides of the story.” Britt said this assisted him in transforming his classroom from a provider of knowledge to a facilitator of knowledge. After this experience, he suggested that his students research material and come to their own understandings and decisions concerning certain events.

Furthermore, teachers suggested they often questioned the morality of some of the decisions made by the school boards, colleagues, etc… Nick specifically said that he believed that there were “some things that the school does that are not morally, and especially, ethically right toward students in our schools.”

Judy said that she, “worried about public schools in general, because public schools are public schools and there’s this box and not everyone fits in the box. I don’t think our public schools realize we have a lot of kids who do not fit in the boxes we are using and we need some other boxes.”

Paula believed that in some cases we had our priorities out of line, which particularly had a negative impact on ELL students. She argued that, “When you have a mindset that is aimed more at let’s say, sports or, just getting students to graduate. Not looking to the future where they could possibly go…because of economic status, culture, background and that kind of thing. That definitely is input into whether or not they would go to college, but if your focus is not college prep, most likely these kids will be affected in the future by that. If they’re not ready for college, they’ll fail out.”
### Factor II: Reflective Dimensions

Table 10: Participants’ Reflective Practices and Beliefs in Reflective Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Practice and Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and Socially Just</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“You have to embrace their students culture, but it has to be in a way that they don’t think they’re so different from everyone else.” [Karla Works]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“[Educators must] take into consideration their [the ELL students] culture and their heritage and their practices and not be offensive to them and show appreciation for their culture and heritage and have things in the classroom that they appreciate that come from their culture and Heritage.” [Barbara Jones]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>When discussing the topic at hand with the student, I try to understand and see how my point of view and theirs differs. By looking at it from their perspective I can gain an understanding on how I should teach the student better.” [Delilah Clark]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Assumptions you may make about a different students population, you cant make here. Their experiences are different, but let them know those experiences are as good as our, just different. [Rachel Dabbs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“There’s a lot of discussion about it before actual teaching takes place.” [Dana Smith]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I guess over time I began growing and adapting to them. I guess I changed over time getting to know them and what they go through.” [Nikki Blevins]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Factor II, Reflective Dimensions, out of the study’s eighteen participants: eleven participants were identified as utilizing an ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 4.75-6.0, five participants were identified as utilizing an expert use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 3.5-4.74, one participant was
identified as utilizing a competent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 2.25-3.49, and one participant was identified as having an emergent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.24.

Responses from the participants suggested that they welcomed feedback and input from diverse students, thus drawing from the knowledge and experiences of ELL students and making them a valuable resource in the classroom. Additionally, various strategies were implemented by all the participants to ensure the material was available in a meaningful way for the students to interpret, and participants suggested ways that they build prior knowledge and use their lived experiences to make the material more meaningful and engaging.

Participants were largely reflective upon how their students’ culture, heritage, and lived-experiences impacted their practices. Karla believed that it was important for an educator “to embrace their [the ELL student’s] culture. You have to . . . but it has to be in a way that they don’t think they’re so different from everyone else.” She suggested that she embraced the differences but tied the differences to something the students have in common.

Barbara suggested that it was essential that educators “take into consideration their [the ELL students] culture and their heritage and their practices and not be offensive to them, and show appreciation for their culture and heritage and have things in the classroom that they appreciate that come from their culture and heritage,” Additionally, she mentioned adding these things to the curriculum so they have a point of expertise. This expertise should be used to assist the ELL student gain confidence in his or her abilities and contributions to the learning of the entire classroom.

Building upon this, Nick stated that incorporating their culture into the lesson provided a sense of care for the students’ personal well-being and not just as a student. He added, “I think it
lets them know that I’m not just a teacher . . . that I want to learn about their culture just like I
want them to learn about ours. I think it lets them know that I actually care.”

Furthermore, participants were very aware of how their personal culture, heritage, and
lived-experiences impacted their practices. Frank understood how his intrinsic values, beliefs,
and life experiences have led him to where he is and how all these come out in the classroom. He
suggested that, “you can’t be a completely different person than what you are, so a lot of times,
those [values, beliefs, and experiences] come through whether you want them to or whether you
don’t want them to.”

Sue said she realized that she brought in intrinsic beliefs and experiences to the
classroom, so she tried to use those to her advantage. She mentioned, “of course it’s going to
impact the way I teach, because that’s me, what I am made of, what I know. I learn from them,
they learn from me and we mesh it together to get whatever objective we are trying to get across
or to teach or for kids to understand what its important. I have to bring my background to tell
them and they bring theirs in and we work together to put it together.”

Judy described how her personal culture, heritage and lived experiences helped develop
her passion to teach ELL students. She informed me that her “parents were immigrants, so I have
a lot of empathy [for ELL students]. My mom would not teach me German because it was so
hard for her to be successful when she was in school and she wanted me to be successful. I think
that’s why I took German, French and Spanish in school, and knowing what my parents
struggled through and how I still help them in some respects, that’s why I gravitate towards these
kids, maybe because I think I understand a little bit.” She did go on to add that from her
experience; she understood that students want to hold on to their families’ heritage while
embracing and learning in a new environment. Therefore, she believed that it was essential to embrace their culture and use it to educate all students.
### Factor III: Defensive Behaviors

#### Table 11: Participants’ Reflective Practices and Beliefs in Defensive Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Practice and Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ethical and Socially Just           | 8            | “Becoming defensive does no good . . . you lose your credibility when you get so defensive.” [Wilma Orr]  
“First of all, I want to know why. Is it affecting someone that’s being questioned, and then it goes into looking at, ‘Is it something I’m doing that I maybe need to change because it is affecting others in a way that is something I need to change about me, or our school system, maybe it’s a rule that needs to be changed,’ and so I don’t get mad and blow up, I think is there good reasoning behind the questions that are being asked and let’s go in and find a different way to solve it. And so that’s where you want to go in and look at the situation, is it something that I need to change about me? Did I study enough, did I prepare, am I looking in the right direction as far as I need to make changes, and am I making those changes?” [Dana Smith] |
| Expert                              | 7            | “Sometimes when you do raise questions some of them think, ‘Wow, why are we talking about that?’ It’s not that I want to embarrass them, but I want them to think about it [and engage themselves in the material]. Some may ask, ‘What is he teaching?’ or ‘Why is he not just teaching the facts anymore?’” He goes on to say that after reflecting upon himself and his actions, he may then “explain his actions and why he [chose those actions]. That seems to smooth things over instead of screaming and hollering, ‘This is what’s going to happen.’” [Britt Boggs] |
| Competent                           | 2            | “Alright, I admit I get my hackles up because I’ve spent a long time doing what I do, but after that first response I want to know [what they are thinking and what practices they |
suggest]. I have been known to ask about it, and I have been known to change. But at first response I am wanting to know why you are picking on me…. [Ultimately, this questioning] has been the basis of some of my changes.” [Judy Witt]

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>“I take offense to it at first because I have worked so hard on preparing those teaching practices that benefit the student's needs so they can learn. When criticized I do get hurt, cause I worked really and I think I am doing the right thing.” [Rhonda Simms]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Factor III, Defensive Behaviors, out of the study’s eighteen participants: eight participants were identified as utilizing an ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 4.75-6.0, seven participants were identified as utilizing an expert use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 3.5-4.74, two participants were identified as utilizing a competent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 2.25-3.49, and one participant was identified as having an emergent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.24.

As evidenced, participants had more moderate beliefs and practices in this factor than the other three. However, most participants stated that while they may initially become defensive when criticized or questioned, they do not blame others for their actions and they try to reflect upon why the person may have questioned their practices. Wilma proposed that “Becoming defensive does no good . . . you lose your credibility when you get so defensive.” Additionally, several participants suggested that they may explain their rationale and take advice concerning improved practices. Several acknowledged that they have even taken the criticism and revised their future practice based on the questioning or criticism.
Britt suggested that when confronted or questioned concerning a practice he engages in, the “first thought that comes to mind would be, ‘did I do something wrong?’”, then I question myself, ‘Did I engage the students in a way that some of them felt uncomfortable?’ Sometimes when you do raise questions some of them think, ‘Wow, why are we talking about that?’ It’s not that I want to embarrass them, but I want them to think about it [and engage themselves in the material]. Some may ask, ‘What is he teaching?’ or ‘Why is he not just teaching the facts anymore?’” He goes on to say that after reflecting upon himself and his actions, he may then “explain his actions and why he [chose those actions]. That seems to smooth things over instead of screaming and hollering, ‘This is what’s going to happen.’”

Dana Smith shared a similar belief when stating that when questioned, “First of all, I want to know why. Is it affecting someone that’s being questioned, and then it goes into looking at, ‘Is it something I’m doing that I maybe need to change because it is affecting others in a way that is something I need to change about me, or our school system, maybe it’s a rule that needs to be changed,’ and so I don’t get mad and blow up; I think is there good reasoning behind the questions that are being asked and let’s go in and find a different way to solve it. And so that’s where you want to go in and look at the situation, is it something that I need to change about me? Did I study enough, did I prepare, am I looking in the right direction as far as I need to make changes, and am I making those changes?”

Judy took the approach that initially she would like to know why a person is questioning her. However, her self-reflection intrigued her as to how other people perceived her actions and if they did indeed have a better practice. Judy said, “Alright, I admit I get my hackles up because I’ve spent a long time doing what I do, but after that first response I want to know [what they are thinking and what practices they suggest]. I have been known to ask about it, and I have been
known to change. But at first response I am wanting to know why you are picking on me . . . [Ultimately, this questioning] has been the basis of some of my changes.”

Furthermore, Nikki suggested that she openly accepted any criticism or questioning. She said that she would typically explain her rationale behind what she did, allow them to have their input and when approached with an idea or philosophy that was sound practice, she analyzed its merit and considered changing her practice. This is similar to Rachel who stated that she, “would be open and make sure that whatever practice [she is] engaging in is to the best [advantage] of [her] students. That whatever I am doing, is for the kids and not for me. To advance their [the students] learning.”

Paula added that knowledge and best practices are continually evolving. For a teacher to stay on the cutting edge of best practices, he or she must be open and willing to make revisions within his or her practice and accept suggestions and criticism, especially when geared at improving instruction.
### Factor IV: Ethical Priorities

Table 12: Participants’ Reflective Practices and Beliefs in Ethical Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Practice and Belief Score</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Statement of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and Socially Just</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“When you make those special efforts for the disadvantaged, you’re also helping the general public. Teaching “old school” obviously doesn’t reach the needs of students. They’re not learning anything. I think a large majority of the general public aren’t going to get it if you’re just teaching “old school” and you’re just dictating. So, adding the strategies and the visuals and the graphic organizers, you are benefiting [ELL students] and you’re also reaching that part of the general public that wouldn’t get it if it’s just dictation. So, when you take those extra steps for the disadvantaged group, you’re helping the general population also.” [Paula Mitchell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I enjoy teaching the ELL population. I enjoy engaging in dialogue with them and comparing our system of meaning to theirs and the customs, heritage, celebrations, etc…” [Nick Bell]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Every student has individual and specific needs of themselves and their culture. As a teacher I am responsible to provide that student the type of education they need to actively engage in the learning process.” [Lynn Gomez]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“We have to ask ourselves what can we do to improve the lives of the students in our classroom during the period we are teaching.” [Gina Hayes]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“It depends on setting. If I could be in a small group where I can make an impact for disadvantaged, I’d rather be in small groups, but if I’m going to have 35 in my class I’ve got to teach whole class.” [Rachel Dabbs]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Factor IV, Ethical Priorities, out of the study’s eighteen participants: ten participants were identified as utilizing an ethical and socially just use of reflective practice standards with
mean scores ranging from 4.75-6.0, six participants were identified as utilizing an expert use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 3.5-4.74, one participant was identified as utilizing a competent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores ranging from 2.25-3.49, and one participant was identified as having an emergent use of reflective practice standards with mean scores for this category ranging from 1.0-2.24.

The participants generally agreed that educators must take the needs of individuals and disadvantaged populations into consideration when planning their lessons and curricula. Many shared the sentiment that an inclusive educational environment takes everyone into account regardless of socioeconomic status, background, or heritage.

Paula promoted the idea that teaching disadvantaged and minority populations supports and improves the education for all students. She stated that, “When you make those special efforts for the disadvantaged, you’re also helping the general public. Teaching “old school” obviously doesn’t reach the needs of students. They’re not learning anything. I think a large majority of the general public aren’t going to get it if you’re just teaching “old school” and you’re just dictating. So, adding the strategies and the visuals and the graphic organizers, you are benefiting [ELL students] and you’re also reaching that part of the general public that wouldn’t get it if it’s just dictation. So, when you take those extra steps for the disadvantaged group, you’re helping the general population also.”

Delilah Clark supported this theory. She described bringing in resources, materials, building schema, and sharing student experiences and said these improve the knowledge base for all students.
Major Findings

Epistemological Beliefs

As previously presented, out of the study’s eighteen participants: eleven participants were identified as having highly sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs, one participant was identified as having a moderate to high level of epistemological beliefs, five participants were identified as having moderate levels of epistemological beliefs, and only one was considered to have a low level or considerable naivety within their epistemological belief.

Schommer’s epistemological research linked sophisticated epistemological beliefs to higher-order thinking. Her research suggested that the greater degree an individual recognized the complexity of knowledge, the more likely that person was to present and consume information in multiple ways. Additionally, such persons tended to be more flexible in their thinking. Higher epistemological beliefs also tended to be correlated with the evolution of knowledge and the importance of being consumers of knowledge rather than simply following the information, because what we held as evidence and facts may not remain constant.

From the data collected in this study, it seemed possible to conclude that those identified as exemplary teachers have fairly high epistemological belief systems. The identified belief about learning is quick or not at all was seldom reported. The participants held very sophisticated beliefs that with effort and persistence, learning can take place for a student. Additionally, the participants suggested that the continuous effort and hard work of students can result in increased learning and ability for a student. Schommer’s (2002), research supported this finding that there was a correlation with high epistemological beliefs and reflective thinking, which is described in the next section.
The participants’ beliefs that learning is evolving and that you can build upon your knowledge and knowledge sources supported the ideology that learning is not quick and can take time. Teachers fundamentally believed that the more a student learns, and the more effort and persistent effort a student places in learning allows for the evolution of that student’s ability to learn in future situations. This suggested that an average student is not destined to always be an average student, that we did have some control over our outcomes when provided with proper motivation, effort, strategies, and resources.

The factor that represented Knowledge is Discrete and Unambiguous, and the factor Knowledge is Certain were found to be points of sophisticated beliefs of the participants. Participants responded that knowledge is quite ambiguous and evolving. The participants generally agreed that the teacher may have to give facts at certain times, but that exploration of the learning material was a preferred and more sophisticated way of teaching. It was believed by the participants that this mode of exploration allowed for a more permanent retention, as opposed to simple recalling of facts, which may be forgotten in the near future. Additionally, a theme that arose from the interviews was that we couldn’t hold all knowledge as certain. As we advance in our technology and one finding leads to another, our knowledge will expand and improve upon and change the ideologies we have concerning many things.

Reflective Beliefs and Practices

In Factor I, Ethical Moral Dimensions, the mean from Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s research was 5.12, illustrating a proficient use of reflective practice in considering how actions influenced people such as colleagues, clients, society, and their future practices. This was similar to the results obtained from the interviews conducted in this research. When spatially factoring the participants’ responses on a continuum of reflective belief and practices, an ethically and
socially just response as a score of 6, an expert response as a 4.5, competent as a 3, and an emergent response as a 1.5, the mean of this factor was 5. Therefore, the sample of graduate students and the sample of exemplary teachers of ELL students were similar in reflective practices and beliefs in the ethical and moral dimensions.

In Factor II, Reflective Dimensions, the mean from Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s research was 4.93, illustrating a strong use of reflective practice in considering how they solicited and responded to feedback, how they questioned the perspectives of others as well as themselves, how they constructed, interpreted, and clarified meaning, and how they planned their actions accordingly. The mean score of those interviewed was found to be 5.17, which explained a slightly more sophisticated set of beliefs and practices under the factor of reflective dimensions.

Under Factor III, Defensive Behavior, 4.87 was determined to be the mean from the original study. It was important to note that the scoring under this factor was reversed. This illustrated that those surveyed accept criticism and responsibilities for their actions. According to analysis of the responses from the interview participants, a mean score of 4.8 was derived. These scores essentially indicated very similar beliefs and practices concerning defensive behaviors.

For Factor IV, Ethical Priorities, a mean score of 3.78 was derived from Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s research. This illustrated a moderate use of reflection concerning how their practices impact disadvantaged groups. However, participants identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students had a mean average of 5.08, which suggests a significantly higher use of considering the needs of disadvantaged populations when making decisions for future practices, policies, and needs.
Professional Development Findings

Commonalities were found among the study’s participants. Most of the participants had obtained advanced degrees in teaching. Two participants had completed the Master’s Degree plus thirty additional course hours. Twelve participants had obtained Master’s Degrees, two of whom were in the concentration of English as a Second Language. Four of the participants hold Bachelor’s Degrees only, two of whom had begun coursework aimed at their Master’s and the remaining two of whom have expressed interest in working toward a graduate degree.

Perhaps surprising, thirteen of the participants had engaged in professional development through either the WIDA consortium or the SIOP initiative. These professional development programs were aimed at increasing the efficacy of instruction for ELL students. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (2008) incorporated strategies into the education of ELL students such as sheltered instruction; lesson preparation with both content and language objectives adaptive based on students’ abilities; strategies for building student background knowledge; comprehensive input; teaching strategies that are metacognitive and cognitive; social/affective, verbal, nonverbal, and higher order questioning; interaction with peers and the materials; practice/application; and multiple modes of delivery; review and assessment by utilizing techniques such as contextualizing, language objecting, modeling, discussion, joint productivity, coaching, pairing. (Echavarria, 2008).
Strategies Implemented

Table 13: Strategies Implemented by Exemplary Teachers of ELL Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Strategies Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Student Background</td>
<td>• Visual Aids&lt;br&gt;• Posters&lt;br&gt;• Graphs&lt;br&gt;• Charts&lt;br&gt;• Discussion concerning materials and objects&lt;br&gt;• Utilizing authentic instruction&lt;br&gt;• Evaluating the relationship among materials/objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire Metacognitive Thought</td>
<td>Provide instruction that incorporates:&lt;br&gt;• Visual learning&lt;br&gt;• Auditory learning&lt;br&gt;• Kinesthetic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction With and Within the Material</td>
<td>• Peer learning&lt;br&gt;• Group Projects&lt;br&gt;• Kinesthetic Learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Research-Based Teaching</td>
<td>• Turn and talk&lt;br&gt;• Brainstorming&lt;br&gt;• Chunking text&lt;br&gt;• I do, we do, you do&lt;br&gt;• Muddiest point&lt;br&gt;• KWL charts&lt;br&gt;• Application cards&lt;br&gt;• Listen, think, pair, share&lt;br&gt;• Multiple solutions&lt;br&gt;• Visual situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study found that teachers were very concerned with building background knowledge among their ELL students. This was accomplished through visual aides such as pictures on overhead projectors, posters related to the learning objective, graphs, charts, discussions describing the material and objects, and, when feasible, actually bringing in the objects being discussed. Additionally, the students’ background knowledge was built through relating or comparing the content and materials to their culture when applicable and allowing the ELL
student to share their culture with the rest of the class, thus building background knowledge for the non-ELL students.

The teachers also suggested that they wanted to inspire thought among their students. This type of metacognitive thought process has been shown to be effective for increasing ELL students’ learning outcomes (Echavarria, 2008). Additionally, the teachers provided instruction on various modalities to ensure the students were taught the material in various ways so that the students’ preferred mode of learning was presented. This also ensured that there were multiple opportunities for the students to learn.

Interaction with and within the material was also presented. This illustrated the need for authentic instruction and assessment. Additionally, the use of peers as a source of knowledge allowed the students to be viewed as a source of knowledge and learning from each other.

Many strategic teaching and research-based strategies were also mentioned by several of the participants: strategies such as turn and talk; brainstorming; chunking text; I do, we do, you do; muddiest point; kwl charts; application cards; listen, think, pair, share; multiple solutions; and visual situations.

Summary

Three research questions were proposed in this study: What commonalities exist, if any, among successful teachers of English Language Learners? What are the epistemological belief scores of successful teachers of English Language Learners? What are the reflective Practice scores of successful teachers of English Language Learners?

Through the in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to conclude that there were commonalities among exemplary teachers of ELL students. Also, the researcher found that exemplary teachers of ELL students had sophisticated epistemological belief systems.
Furthermore, they engaged in complex levels of reflective practices. Therefore, it could be said that the participants were identified as having “high” scores in both epistemological beliefs and reflective practices.

Commonalities among the participants were identified in having sophisticated epistemological beliefs as well as reflective practices. However, the similarities did not end there. Commonalities were identified in their professional development activities. Five of the participants had been trained in the WIDA (World-Class Instructional Delivery and Assessment) standards and techniques. Nine of the participants have been trained in the SIOP (Strategic Intervention Observation Protocol) Model. Additionally, the teachers were very concerned with building background knowledge and used several strategies in build their background and vocabulary. Moreover, the teachers espoused that to be effective they must deliver the material in multiple modes to facilitate student learning. Furthermore, they all used research-based strategies and instructional strategies aimed at encouraging active participation.

The participants identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students were found to have sophisticated views or “high” scores concerning epistemological belief systems. Eleven of the participants were found to have highly sophisticated views concerning epistemological beliefs. Themes arose during the interviews that learning is evolving for all students, not just those identified as gifted. The participants believed that knowledge and the curriculum must be worked though and examined to determine and evaluate the thoughts and science rather than accept it. The responses suggested that this type of activity supports their long-term retention of the material and future learning practices.

Furthermore, effort, persistence, and the evolution of knowledge were themes that arose during the interviews as well. Teachers repeatedly stated that with persistence and effort a student
can transform his or her learning and ability to learn. While many admitted learning may come more easily and quicker to others, no one conceded that a student couldn’t advance their learning regardless of situation. This effort and persistence allows the student to evolve in his or her learning. But beyond that, the participants believed that knowledge wasn’t static and that with more knowledge comes additional understanding and the unveiling of the fact that ideas we once held as truths are false. These themes suggested that these participants with higher epistemological belief systems were encouraging the pursuit of knowledge rather than the consumption of it.

This study’s findings on reflective practice and belief highlight that effective teachers of ELL students had “high” scores or complex levels of reflective practices and beliefs. The participants in this study that were identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students and those identified in Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s survey consisting of leadership program graduates were very similar in the realm of ethical moral decision making, reflective dimensions, and defensive behavior. However, those identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students scored much higher in the realm of ethical priority and how they consider the effects of their decisions and actions on society and disadvantaged populations when making decisions for future practices, policies, and needs.

This illustrated that exemplary teachers of ELL students were very reflective in their practice. The participants generally agreed that educators must take the needs of individuals and disadvantaged populations into consideration when planning their lessons and curricula and that an inclusive educational environment takes everyone into account regardless of socioeconomic status, background, heritage, etc…Additionally, they did not blame others for their actions and they tried to reflect upon why the person may have questioned their practices; they welcome
feedback and input from diverse students, thus drawing from the knowledge and experiences of ELL students, making them a valuable resource in the classroom. Additionally, various strategies were implemented by all of the participants to ensure the material was available in a meaningful way for the students to interpret. They built prior knowledge and use their students’ lived experiences to make the material more meaningful and engaging, they were aware of how their practices impacted their students, colleagues, parents, etc. . . . Also, they considered and reacted to the ethical and moral impact their decisions and the school’s decisions have on their students.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY, AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter includes the conclusions, a discussion of the findings, responses to the research questions, limitations, practical implications, and recommendations for future research on exemplary ELL teachers’ epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. The purpose of this study was to identify areas of commonality, if any, among the practices, knowledge, and beliefs of successful teachers of English Language Learners’ (ELL) cultural competencies. An analysis of these teachers’ cultural competencies included an examination of both their epistemological beliefs and their use of reflective practices: two non-inclusive components of cultural competency. Epistemological beliefs and reflective practices are important to study due to the impact they have on the development of the teachers’ cultural understanding of a pluralistic society in rural Alabama, where a growing number of classrooms are being comprised of ELL students.

The research questions were: 1. What commonalities exist, if any, among beliefs, backgrounds and practices of successful teachers of English Language Learners? 2. What are the epistemological beliefs of successful Teachers of ELL students? 3. What are the perceived reflective practices of successful ELL teachers? These are answered in the conclusions and in the discussion of results.
This research study was based on interviews with eighteen exemplary teachers of English Language Learners, each nominated by district principals and supervisors across the northeast region of Alabama. These eighteen were interviewed in depth to identify and describe their teaching practices. They also responded to assessments of epistemological beliefs and reflective practices. These instruments provided the researcher with background information about the characteristics of the participants. The participants’ scores were then compared to the previously collected data sets for interpretation (Schommer, 1989; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Garcia, 2004).

The researcher hoped to identify the epistemological beliefs and reflective practices of exemplary teachers of ELL students. It was hypothesized that if the identified effective teachers of ELL students were shown to have higher levels of epistemological beliefs, and if they were more reflective, future practitioners could be asked to engage in activities that might transform their epistemologies and thus improve their reflective abilities and their teaching practices. Thus, the study could hopefully impact teachers who might increase their capacity through application of the research and benefit the students who can benefit through improved instruction.

Discussion of Findings

It is imperative that students be provided every opportunity to be successful. This begins with the classroom teacher. Ferguson’s research illustrates that a teacher’s expertise has a powerful influence on student outcomes (Ferguson, 1999). Furthermore, Darling-Hammond argued that achievement differences between non-ELL and ELL students can be narrowed or eliminated by high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Hanushek (2002) discovered that when students who have highly effective teachers are compared to students who have less
effective teachers, there can be as much as a grade level difference in performance on standardized tests, and Hanushek suggests this can have a residual effect for years to come.

Ultimately, the goal of this research project was to identify the epistemological beliefs, reflective practices, and areas of commonality among the exemplary teachers identified and then provide a means to nurture and develop the beliefs and practices that result in improved student outcomes. Through analyzing the belief systems of exemplary teachers of ELL students, commonalities were identified among their beliefs and practices. In response to the research question about the sophistication of beliefs of epistemology, participants in the study were sophisticated in how they viewed various aspects of knowledge. The teachers showed a strong belief that knowledge is evolving and that it is not static. This evolution led teachers to suggest their practices included an examination of the material through small-group collaborative projects that pre-explore the material and then post-explore what they learned and re-evaluate their interpretation of the material. The participants believed that knowledge and the curriculum must be worked though and examined to determine and evaluate the thoughts and science rather than accept it, therefore, they used hands-on activities with manipulatives, labs, and experiments.

The teachers also recognized that learning may not come quick to all, but that effort, persistence, and reviewing the material can improve learning outcomes. To encourage this, the teachers provided instruction and activities that engage the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners by using visual aids, graphic organizers, manipulations, hands-on experiments and activities, as well drawings and illustrations. This effort and persistence allows the student to evolve in their learning and sustains additional understandings and new learning. As mentioned, participants with higher epistemological belief systems encouraged the pursuit of knowledge rather than the consumption of it.
Participants in the study overwhelmingly had sophisticated epistemological belief systems. Considering their epistemological belief system and their esteemed placement as an exemplary teacher of ELL students, the evidence suggests that sophisticated epistemological beliefs are an integral part of being an effective ELL teacher.

In response to the research questions about the sophistication of beliefs of reflective practice, we can suppose that the participants engage in reflective beliefs and practices to a high degree. The beliefs and practices of the participants in this study were similar to those identified in Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s (2006) research of reflective beliefs and practices of graduates of an instructional leadership program. However, in one area, ethical priority, those identified as exemplary teachers of ELL students held a more sophisticated belief system and engaged in more sophisticated practices. For example, participants in this study had a mean score of 4.78 compared to a mean score of 3.78 in the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch study (p. 499). It is reasonable to assume that these exemplary teachers of ELL students are naturally more concerned about ethical treatment of students that the broader example of leaders in the previous study. This suggests that they consider the effects of their decisions and actions on society and disadvantaged populations when making decisions for future practices, policies, and needs.

The participants established that educators must take the needs of individuals and disadvantaged populations into consideration when planning their lessons and curricula and that an inclusive educational environment takes everyone into account regardless of socioeconomic status, background, heritage, etc… Furthermore, the participants agreed with Ecchavaria (2008) that building lessons that are based on best practices for ELL are also highly beneficial for the non-ELL population. Teachers in this study suggested that they utilize strategies such as scaffolding lessons and units based on students’ abilities, building background knowledge
through discussion and pre-lesson activities, comprehensive input, teaching strategies that are both metacognitive and cognitive in nature, using both verbal and nonverbal cues, engaging the student in higher-order questioning, interaction among teacher and pupils to assist in the learning process, practice/application, delivery, and review and assessment by utilizing techniques such as contextualizing, language objecting, modeling, discussion, joint productivity, coaching, and pairing.

Additionally, this study supports the notion that teachers who are reflective are less likely to engage in defensive behaviors. Much like Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch’s (2006) research, the participants in this study were less likely to have full control over their defensive behaviors in comparison to the other factors. However, it is noteworthy that the participants still held beliefs and engaged in practices at relatively sophisticated levels.

In response to the research questions about any commonalities that exist, if any, among beliefs, backgrounds and practices of successful teachers of English Language Learners, this study found commonalities among the teaching practices of exemplary teachers of ELL students. These exemplary teachers built background knowledge through the use of visual objects such as pictures on overhead projectors, posters related to the learning objective, graphs, charts, materials related to the learning, and discussions describing the material and objects. Furthermore, they attempted to inspire thought among their students, providing instruction in various modalities to ensure the students were presented the material in multiple ways with multiple opportunities to learn. Participants identified the use of strategies such as turn and talk; brainstorming; chunking text; I do, we do, you do; muddiest point; kwl charts; application cards; listen, think, pair, share; multiple solutions; and visual situations.
The findings of this study suggested that exemplary teachers of ELL students had sophisticated levels of epistemology and engaged at high levels of reflective beliefs and that their practices were based on current research suggesting they are best practices for ELL students. The participants’ dispositions, beliefs about knowledge, reflective beliefs and practices have been shown to improve learning outcomes for ELL students. The teachers in the study exhibited their competency in epistemology and reflective practices through their encounters with students as well as through the curriculum and strategies they employed to educate their students for a pluralistic society.

Limitations

This research had limitations that may have affected the outcome of the study. One should consider that the study was limited to teachers of ELL students in schools in the northeast region of Alabama, where large quantities of English Language Learners have migrated in recent years, and where teachers are still harnessing their best practices for teaching a diverse population. Additionally, this study focused on the commonalities among teachers’ epistemological beliefs, reflective practices, and classroom behaviors of ELL teachers identified as exemplary by their supervising principals. These are all based on perceptions of the teachers, perceptions of the researcher, or on perceptions of principals.

Practical Implications

Previous research illustrated that both epistemological beliefs and reflective practices and beliefs can be transformed over time. Establishing that teachers with more sophisticated views concerning epistemology and reflection have superior outcomes concerning ELL students, it may be beneficial that we request and provide for their participation in this type of professional development (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Howard et al., 2000; Perry, 1968).
Perhaps one of the most feasible methods to transform epistemological beliefs in a public school system was provided by Arredondo & Rucinski. Arredondo and Rucinski (1998) provided educational leaders a theoretical model for advancing the epistemological belief systems for school faculty, thereby, improving standards of practice through the use of structured interactions via conferences and journal writings. Mentors with sophisticated levels of epistemology could be trained and paired with a mentee and work to engage in directive-supporting/challenging interactions to transform beliefs over time.

Furthermore, there are several models of professional development aimed at increasing reflective practice. Huber et al. (1997, Murrell & Diez (1997), Arredondo Rucinski (2005), Westberg (2001), and Blasé & Blasé (2004) all identify methods of improving reflection among teachers. Many of these focus on evaluating and comparing planned versus actual outcomes, impact of instructional and the behavioral practices on students. By using these models, instructional leaders could identify a means of professional development that best serves their situation, personnel, and student population.

Future Research

The results of this study can be used to implement professional development programs aimed at increasing teacher epistemology and reflective practice in schools consisting of a diverse population. The teachers’ beliefs and practices can be measured through the use of interviews and dialogue much like the instrument used in this research study. Additionally, if the outcomes of the research illustrate an increase in epistemological beliefs and reflective practices, the students’ growth could be evaluated through performance-based assessment, collaborative projects, and state-mandated assessments.
Furthermore, a study evaluating epistemological beliefs and reflective practices among elementary, middle and high school teachers might be beneficial in determining how teacher epistemology impacts student learning at various stages of their cognitive development. Moreover, the strategies and practices implemented associated with their competency level could be evaluated at each grade level.

Finally, this study could be replicated on a larger scale. The research could be conducted throughout the Southeastern United States to support the theory that exemplary teachers of ELL students have sophisticated views of epistemology and engage in highly reflective practices.

Conclusions

This research is beneficial in that it identifies that exemplary teachers of ELL students have sophisticated views on epistemology and reflective practices. This commonality among exemplary teachers can be used to design and implement professional development that fosters the development of teachers in these areas to increase their cultural competency and improve practices. An added bonus it that previous research has shown in separate studies that higher levels of epistemology or higher levels of reflection have been shown to improve student learning, not just those identified as ELL.

The findings are consistent with literature that suggests that teachers with higher levels of epistemology have a better understanding of the nature of knowledge, the nature of learning, the certainty of knowledge, the source of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, the sequence of knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge (DeRose, 2005; Jehng et al., 1993; Schommer & Duell, 2001; Schommer, 2004). This suggests that such teachers will use multiple modes of instruction and participation to ensure student learning takes place. In considering this research within what is known from previous research, we can be confident that teachers with higher-
order beliefs concerning epistemology tend to transform students’ beliefs of epistemology into more sophisticated modes (2002). This may possibly explain a portion of the sophisticated views of the participants in the Arredondo Rucinski and Bauch (2006) research.

Furthermore, this study shows how effective teachers of ELL students analyze various aspects of their instruction and the impact thereof. This is consistent with literature that suggests reflective teachers of ELL students are able to analyze the impact of their practices on all students and make improvements to their practices (Alger, 2006; Arredondo Rucinski, 2005; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; Blasé & Blasé 2004; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Hirsch, 1996; Nolan, 1989; Westberg, 2001). Moreover, such use of reflection assists the teacher in constructing meaningful learning experiences for the ELL student since he or she is able to draw upon lived experiences to relate to his or her current educational content (Asante, 1991; Huber, 1997; Nieto, 2006).

Another important finding is that reflection allows the teacher to conceptualize his or her resources to a particular setting, population, background, ability and context. The teacher can then align his or her beliefs, practices, strategies and teaching methods to his or her current assignment, teaching situation and population so that the best resources, strategies, materials, and practices are utilized to serve their students’ needs. This idea has been supported by Larrivee (2000).

The results of this study provided evidence that sophisticated levels of epistemological beliefs and engaging in reflective beliefs and practices impact teaching and learning. From the results of this study, the researcher concluded that instructional leaders must develop the beliefs and skills concerning epistemology and reflective practice among their faculty. Additionally, the review of literature and interviews suggested that these exemplary teachers utilized strategies and
practices that engage the students in multiple modes to ensure that learning takes place. While this may not be an overnight endeavor, the research illustrated that these beliefs and practices increase both teacher and student outcomes. Therefore, we must continue to investigate the relationship among this phenomenon and the effects it has on teacher and student growth.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Schommer’s Epistemological Survey

Schommer’s Epistemological Survey

Directions: There are no right or wrong answers for the following items. We only want to know what you really believe. For each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree.

1. If you are ever going to be able to understand something, it will make sense to you the first time you hear it. 1 2 3 4 5

2. The only thing that is certain is uncertainty itself. 1 2 3 4 5

3. For success in school, it’s best not to ask too many questions. 1 2 3 4 5

4. A course in study skills would probably be valuable. 1 2 3 4 5

5. How much a person gets out of school mostly depends on the quality of the teacher. 1 2 3 4 5

6. You can believe almost everything you read. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I often wonder how much my school leaders really know. 1 2 3 4 5

8. The ability to learn is innate. 1 2 3 4 5

9. It is annoying to listen to a speaker who cannot seem to make up his/her mind as to what he/she really believes. 1 2 3 4 5

10. Successful students understand things quickly. 1 2 3 4 5

11. A good teacher’s job is to keep his/her students from wandering from the right track. 1 2 3 4 5

12. If scientists try hard enough, they can find the truth to almost anything 1 2 3 4 5

13. People who challenge authority are overconfident. 1 2 3 4 5

14. I try my best to combine information from several sources or even across classes. 1 2 3 4 5
15. The most successful people have discovered how to improve their ability to learn.

16. Things are simpler than most professors would have you believe.

17. The most important aspects of scientific work are precise measurement and careful work.

18. To me studying means getting the big ideas from the text, rather than details.

19. Educators should know by now which is the best method, lecture or small group discussions.

20. Going over and over a difficult textbook chapter usually won’t help you understand it.

21. Scientists can ultimately get to the truth.

22. You never know what a book means unless you know the intent of the author.

23. The most important part of scientific work is original thinking.

24. If I find the time to reread a textbook chapter, I get a lot more out of it the second time.

25. Students have a lot of control over how much they can get out of a textbook.

26. Genius is 10% ability and 90% hard work.

27. I find it refreshing to think about issues that authorities can’t agree on.

28. Everyone needs to learn how to learn.

29. When you first encounter a difficult concept in a textbook, it’s best to work it out on your own.

30. A sentence has little meaning unless you know the situation in which it is spoken.

31. Being a good student generally involves memorizing facts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Wisdom is not knowing the answers but knowing how to find the answers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Most words have one clear meaning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Truth is unchanging.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>If a person forgot details, and yet was able to come up with new ideas from a text, I would think they were bright.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Whenever I encounter(ed) a difficult problem in teaching, I consult(ed) with my principal or department chair.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Learning definitions word for word is often necessary. to do well on tests</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>When I study, I look for specific facts.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>If a person can’t understand something within a short amount of time, he/she should keep on trying.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Sometimes you just have to accept answers from a teacher even though you don’t understand them.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>If teachers would stick more to the facts and do less theorizing, students could get more out of school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>I don’t like movies that don’t have an ending.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Getting ahead takes a lot of work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>It’s a waste of time to work on problems which have no possibility of coming out with a clear-cut and unambiguous answer.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Students should evaluate the accuracy of information in a textbook, if they are familiar with the topic.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Often, even advice from experts should be questioned.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Some people are born good learners, others are just stuck with limited ability.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Nothing is certain but death and taxes.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>The really smart students don’t have to work hard to do. well in school</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
50. Working hard on a difficult problem for an extended period of time only pays off for really smart students.

51. If a person tries too hard to understand a problem, he/she will most likely just end up being confused.

52. Almost all the information you can learn from a textbook you will get during the first reading.

53. Usually you can figure out difficult concepts if you eliminate all outside distractions and really concentrate.

54. A really good way to understand a textbook is to reorganize the information according to your own personal scheme.

55. Students who are “average” in school will remain “average” for the rest of their lives.

56. A tidy mind is an empty mind.

57. An expert is someone who has a special gift in some area.

58. I really appreciate instructors who organize their lectures meticulously and then stick to their plan.

59. The best thing about science courses is that most problems have only one right answer.

60. Learning is a slow process of building up knowledge.

61. Today’s facts may be tomorrow’s fiction.

62. Self-help books are not much help.

63. You will just get confused if you try to integrate new ideas in a textbook with knowledge you already have about a topic.
Appendix B: Reflective Leadership Practices Survey

Please Note: All responses will be kept confidential. After completing this survey please return it to the Educational Leadership Program Office. Please contact educational leadership faculty for information about the survey. Thank you for your assistance in assessing program quality.

PART I: REFLECTION. Please mark the frequency with which you engage in the reflective action described for each item. For example, if you perceive that the activity is one in which you engage very often then you would put an X in the far right column (“6”); if the activity is one in which you never engage, please mark an X in the first column (“1”).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item.</th>
<th>While reflecting on activities and actions at work, how frequently do you - - - - - -?</th>
<th>Not at all 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Often 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Review actions in conversations?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ask questions about assumptions underlying actions?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Invite feedback about actions?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Respond to feedback from others with clarifying questions or paraphrased statements?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ask questions about perspectives of others?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ask questions about your own perspective?</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Construct meaning in conversations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Interpret and check interpretations of others?</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Plan actions?</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Describe plans and check plans with others?</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Become defensive when questioned by others?</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Deny responsibility for decisions or actions you take?</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Intentionally screen out criticisms, e.g., Use expressions like, “I don’t remember saying that –“?</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Rationalize behaviors, e.g., “I only did that because –“?</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Blame others, e.g., “I could not do that because policy/ past practice/ others/ forbid it –“?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>View workplace decisions and actions as having moral and ethical dimensions?</td>
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<td>Ask the question: “Is this a moral action?”</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask: “Is that an ethical decision?”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask: “What is likely to be the result of this action on fellow employees?”</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Ask: “What is the likely result on future practice?”</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask: “What is the likely result on policy?”</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Ask: “What is the likely result on clients or customers?”</td>
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<td>Ask: “What is the likely result on society in general?”</td>
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<td>Ask: “What is the likely effect on marginalized or disadvantaged groups?”</td>
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<td>Examine decisions from an ethical or moral perspective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask: “Is this decision right or wrong?”</td>
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<td>Exhibit moral or ethical motivation in the workplace (i.e., prioritize moral and ethical values relative to other values)?</td>
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<td>Exhibit moral or ethical character in the workplace (i.e., demonstrate sensitivity, courage, persistence, and, implementation behaviors)?</td>
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<td>Rate the needs of employees first and above future practice, policy, clients or customers, society in general, or persons from disadvantaged groups?</td>
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<td>Rate practice first and above the needs of employees, policy, clients/customers, society in general, or persons from disadvantaged groups?</td>
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<td>Rate policy first and above the needs of employees, future practice, clients/customers, society in general, or persons from disadvantaged groups?</td>
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<td>Rate clients/customers first and above the needs of employees, future practice, or persons from disadvantaged groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rate the needs of society in general first, and above the needs of employees, future practice, policy, clients/customers, or persons from disadvantaged groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rate the needs of persons from disadvantaged groups first and above those of employees, future practice, policy, clients/customers, or society in general?</td>
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Appendix C: Epistemological Belief and Reflective Practice Interview
Directions: All questions will be kept confidential. Remember, there is no right or wrong answers to the following questions. We only want to understand the beliefs and practices that you perform and engage in with your students. After your response I may ask you to describe how that practice or belief looks like or is carried out in your classroom.

1. What are your thoughts concerning the student’s ability to learn in terms of fixed or evolving?

2. What, if any, control do you believe an individual has over his or her ability to be a successful learner in school?

3. What, if anything, can an individual do to improve a student’s ability to learn?

4. Is knowledge certain and clear, or is there some murkiness at times? How?

5. What are your thoughts on teaching facts versus allowing students to explore and interpret the materials to make interpretations?

6. Do you think that knowledge is certain or that it could possibly change at some point in the future?

7. Do you believe that with additional practice, reading, and hard-work, students can improve their ability to learn over time or that a student’s ability is fixed at birth?

8. What impact does a student’s effort have upon his or her learning?

9. Can persistence improve learning over time? How?

10. Please address the following statement: Scientific knowledge is certain and unchanging.

11. Is there a legitimate explanation for scientific data, or should teachers allow for discussion and the validity of the facts and exploration within them?

12. When making decisions concerning your practices as the classroom
teacher, do you consider how the decision impacts the feelings, emotions, and ethics of others? How?

13. Do you ever question the morality or ethics of the decisions you and the school make and the impact these decisions will have on students in the future? How?

14. How does your students’ culture, heritage and lived experiences impact your teaching practices?

15. How does your personal culture, heritage and lived experiences impact your teaching practices?

16. If questioned or criticized about a practice in which you engage, what is your first response or thought?

17. How do you feel when criticized or questioned concerning your practice or decision-making? How do you behave (defensive, blame, explain, etc…)?

18. Do you believe teaching should be for the welfare of the general public or for the individual needs of the disadvantaged populations?

19. Do you prefer teaching for the general needs of society and class or do you prefer the needs of the individual and disadvantaged groups? How?
Would you please provide the following information about yourself?

1. Gender: _____Female _____Male

2. Highest level of education: _____Bachelor’s Degree _____Master’s Degree _____Master’s plus 30 credit hours _____Specialist _____Doctorate

3. Number of graduate courses taken since last degree: _____

4. Undergraduate major: __________________________

5. Graduate major: _______________________________

6. Work experience: _____NA _____< 1 year _____1-5 yrs _____6-10 yrs _____11-15 yrs _____16-20 yrs _____21-25 yrs _____>25 yrs

7. Teaching and leadership positions held: ___________________________________

8. Your primary work context has been in:
   Grade Level: _______________________________
   Subject Taught: ____________________________

9. Age; _____<21 years _____21-27 yrs _____28-35 yrs _____36-43 yrs _____44-51 yrs _____52-58 yr _____>58 yrs