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# Teacher Perception of Cooperative Learning Strategies Impacting English Learner Engagement and Academic Performance Levels

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Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Teacher Perception of Cooperative Learning Strategies Impacting English Learner Engagement  
and Academic Performance Levels

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership

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2017

## Abstract

This study was conducted to determine teacher perceptions of cooperative learning strategies affecting the engagement and academic performance levels of English language learners. The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. Guided by the theories of Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978), and Piaget (1926), which are derived from elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories that focus on the benefits of group discourse, this study examined how communication and collaboration impact academia. The study revealed that high school English teachers perceived the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies positively impacted English language learners' academic performance and engagement levels. Seven English teachers participated in the study. These teachers completed two questionnaires, one at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study, participated in a cooperative learning lesson observation, and completed an interview with the researcher. The questionnaires, interviews, and observations were coded using Excel and NVivo software and were used to determine the teachers' perceptions on how cooperative strategies impact English language learners' engagement and academic performance levels. The results indicated that teachers perceive cooperative learning strategies have a positive impact on English language learner engagement and academic performance. The benefits of this study reveal the positive impact cooperative learning strategies have on English language learners and reflect that teachers perceive these strategies to be useful in their classrooms. Keywords: cooperative learning, English language learner, increased engagement, increased achievement.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredible support system: God, who has blessed me beyond measure; my amazing husband, Kenny, who is the light of my life, my best friend, and my biggest supporter, and who I could not live without; my three wild and beautiful children, Joey, JJ, and Raegan, who make every day an adventure; my dad (Cracka) and mom, who are my number one fans and who have molded me into the woman I am today by teaching me to never settle; and Didee and Richie, for their support and constant encouragement. I could not do what I do without every single one of you. I am incredibly blessed by each of you, and couldn't ask for anything more in a family. I love you all more than you know.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The problem statement associated with this review sought to explore English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners. Using a qualitative case study, data collection included observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

There is a lack of research that identifies the effectiveness of cooperative learning concerning English language learners or that explores the empirical data reflective of this subject (Callahan et al., 2010; Goldenberg, 2013). To fully analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies among English language learners, the case study method presented an understanding of the research problem by collecting data in the form of interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Gathering an abundance of data ensured that the study reflected an accurate account of the perceptions in question (Creswell, 2013). Further analysis of the data resulted in an understanding of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness that cooperative learning strategies had on English learner engagement and academic performance.

The theoretical framework that guided this study was centered on elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Wittrock, 1978). Dewey (1938) asserted that Democratic social theories place importance on group members working alongside each other to assist one another in guiding student learning. Developmental theories assert that the use of language is a primary cognitive tool. The ability to collaborate with team members becomes critical to the success of students' academic abilities

(Vygotsky, 1978). Cognitive developmental theory indicates that interactions between students increase their mastery of concepts. Thus, collaborative activities promote student growth (Piaget, 1926). Ultimately, cooperative learning techniques are effective means of elaboration because students are forced to explain information to others (Wittrock, 1978). These theories reveal the importance of collaboration when honing ones' cognitive development. Since English language learners are a growing demographic of students across schools nationwide that need additional intervention and support (Chen, 2011), it is vital to understand the effect that these strategies play in their role in education.

### **Background of the Study**

Student academic abilities can range from students who are below grade level to high achieving, students who are fluent in English to non-English speakers, and students who are general education students to resource specialist program students (RSP). Finding strategies that can serve and meet the needs of diverse student populations is essential to quality instruction. Cooperative learning is a group of instructional strategies used to increase student achievement and provide teachers with engaging activities to foster achievement. Scholars identify cooperative learning as the instructional use of small groups that allow students to work together to maximize each other's learning (Eskay, Onu, Obiyo, & Obidoa, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1989). Cooperative learning is different from other forms of group learning in that it has five components that include positive interdependence, face-to-face promotion interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small groups, and group processing (Eskay et al., 2012; Slavin, 1989). The small group components in cooperative learning strategies actively seek to promote interdependence among group members so that each member of a small group team is responsible, not only for learning content information, but also for helping and facilitating

their teammates' learning (Altun, 2015; Calderon et al., 2011; Curry, De Amicis, & Gilligan, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The problem statement associated with this review sought to review English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Diego, 2013; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 2015). The literature regarding this topic identifies qualities of effective teachers, components and explanations of cooperative learning, and English learner needs. This study provides information regarding the research question that addresses teacher perception of the effectiveness of cooperative learning and how to utilize these strategies in schools with diverse student populations (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Diego, 2013; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 2015).

As education underwent changes with the adoption of Common Core Standards, there was a shift from teacher-modeled instruction to group-lead instruction (Diego, 2013). This change gave way to a multitude of cooperative learning practices implemented in classrooms across the nation (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 1996). When classrooms utilize cooperative learning strategies, teachers see an increase in student performance levels (Boardman, Moore, & Scornavacco, 2015). Much of the research regarding cooperative learning focuses on the impact it has on overall student achievement. The gap in the literature indicates further research is needed regarding teacher perceptions of student achievement with English language learners (Callahan et al., 2010; Goldberg, 2013).

Cooperative learning strategies have been highly regarded as effective strategies to increase

student engagement (Boardman et al., 2015; Calderon et al., 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012;), but its impact on increasing performance levels of English learners requires additional research.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem statement associated with this review sought to explore English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners. Determining effective teaching strategies is essential to student success. English learners are a specific subgroup of students that benefit from effective strategies. In an effort to determine if cooperative learning strategies are effective in assisting English learners, a specific case study was used to explore its effectiveness. Exploring if cooperative learning strategies impact English language learners' academic performance and engagement required analysis of data within a single class of high school English language learner students. Focusing on teacher perceptions related to the effectiveness of the strategies reflects classroom practicality and effectiveness in high school classrooms. The following research question was answered:

R1. How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The problem statement associated with this review sought to explore English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners. For this research, a case study that explores teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative

learning strategies was addressed (Yin, 2014). The boundaries prescribed for this study focused on seven high school English teachers and their English learner students.

### **Rationale for Methodology**

The focus of this study explored the perceptions of teachers identified through interviews and questionnaires, making qualitative research methods the best fit for the study. With the use of interviews, observations, and questionnaires, the researcher was able to elicit data to gain an understanding regarding the strategies behind teacher perceptions. Interviews and questionnaires regarding teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the various strategies explored the effectiveness of the cooperative strategies on English learner performance (Yin, 2014). The qualitative methods used in this study explored the perceptions of seven traditional high school English teachers regarding their perception of the effectiveness of cooperative strategies on their English language learners' engagement and academic performance.

### **Research Design**

Merriam (1998) noted the use of particularization regarding identifying the description of the practical problem of research. In this case, the practical problem sought to explain the contextual conditions of a cooperative centered culture to ascertain the possible influence on the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). The descriptive nature of a single case study exposed the realities of differences in opinions that translated into identifying the effectiveness of the study (Yin, 2014). Finally, heuristics assisted in the researcher's understanding of the study by uncovering possible reasons for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the strategies, evaluating discrepancies between perceptions, and drawing conclusions for "increasing its potential applicability" (Merriam, 1998, p. 31).

For this study, data was gathered from a public high school located in Southern California. The criteria for participant selection was teachers who collectively taught high school English, who had English language learners in their general education classes, and who would be willing and able to be interviewed on a scheduled date. When selecting the participants for this study, convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) was used to select participants based on their position at the school of the study, teacher flexibility to meet with the researcher, and teacher understanding and use of cooperative learning strategies (Yin, 2014). Seven high school English teachers were selected for the study. The demographic breakdown of each teacher's student population was similar in nature with all classes taught made up of a blend of English language learners, approximately 20% of each classroom set by the school, and English-only students. All teachers were asked to engage in cooperative learning strategies as outlined in the cooperative learning checklist in Appendix A for an entire quarter and reflected on the engagement and performance levels of their English learner students. These lessons were used in conjunction with teachers' regular teaching methods. Teachers were given an initial questionnaire with definitions to key cooperative based vocabulary to ensure they had a clear understanding of what cooperative learning strategies were. The researcher observed a single lesson from each teacher and used a premade observation form, Appendix E, along with the cooperative learning checklist, Appendix A, to record notes. The researcher recorded the data regarding engagement levels observed during the lessons. Teachers were given a final questionnaire at the end of the study that evaluated their perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategies on the engagement levels and academic performance levels of the English language learners in their classes. Sampling for this study reflected a non-probability sampling process that gave the researcher information that determined the results regarding teacher perceptions of the

effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies impacting English language learners' engagement and academic performance (Yin, 2014).

### **Definition of Terms**

Cooperative learning has been a major focus for the English department at the school of study for the past two years, but some teachers engage in these strategies more frequently than others. Thus, the students of those teachers were more familiar with the process of cooperative learning. For the purposes of this study, the researcher noted that all the teachers within the study were given the same professional developments and expectations set by the administration of their school and should have had a general baseline for the understanding and usage of cooperative learning strategies within their classrooms. They should have also understood similar definitions of the term effective, had a general understanding of what student engagement entails, and understood what increased academic performance looks like. Teachers were given a list of definitions during their first questionnaire to ensure the terminology was consistent from teacher to teacher. The following was given to teachers:

**Student engagement.** In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education (Willms, 2003).

**Effective.** The successful completion of a specific topic (Willms, 2003).

**Increased academic performance.** Success that is measured by how well a student meets standards set out by their teachers, their school, and their state (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

**Think, pair, share.** Collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This technique requires students

to think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and share ideas with classmates (Think Pair Share, 2017).

**Give one, get one.** Investigation of an essential question in response to an essay prompt over the course of a unit of study. Students interrogate and investigate multiple primary sources and ideas to stimulate their thinking and find evidence. Teachers can also use this strategy as a way to have students share their work with peers. Students will practice being active listeners or readers—an essential skill for learning new information. (Facing History, 2017).

**Jigsaw activities.** A cooperative learning technique that reduces racial conflict among school children, promotes better learning, improves student motivation, and increases enjoyment of the learning experience (Jigsaw Classroom, 2017).

**Accountable talk activities.** Talk that is meaningful, respectful, and mutually beneficial to both speaker and listener. Accountable talk stimulates higher-order thinking—helping students to learn, reflect on their learning, and communicate their knowledge and understanding (Accountable Talk Instructional Practices, 2017)

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Research Study**

Assumptions within this case study were as follows: The researcher assumed that the participants in the study would give extensive and honest answers to questionnaires and interview questions that added value to the study. It was also assumed that because the researcher was employed on staff at the site where the study took place, the participants might have held back information from the researcher due to feeling uncomfortable or the fear of being judged by the researcher. The researcher explained the process of how anonymity and confidentiality was preserved during the study to alleviate any fears participants had. It was also assumed that a qualitative study was the appropriate research design for this study since it was centered on



exploring teacher perceptions regarding a specific teaching strategy, and exploration of perceptions is commonly explored with the use of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2014).

Limitations that the researcher could not control in this study included sampling size, teacher experience, and self-reporting. The size of this study was dependent on the number of English teachers willing to participate in the study. The number of teachers within the English team at the school of study was small, therefore placed limits on the study such that the study may not be broadly generalizable. The data collected was limited to seven high school English teachers from which were taken from a department of 20 English teachers. The decision to focus on the English teachers was due to their specific emphasis on cooperative learning strategies for the coming school year. The study was limited to one high school; therefore, it did not represent all English teachers within the state of California. Another limitation of the study was that the researcher was employed at the research site which might have caused some participants to have felt uncomfortable sharing truthful information with the researcher. The researcher ensured all participants of the objectivity, anonymity, and confidentiality of the study. This study was conducted within a single high school, among the teachers from the English language arts department. There were only 20 teachers that made up this professional learning community, thus making the sampling size relatively small. These teachers have been working together for many years and were an ideal team to study in that they were all familiar with the components of cooperative learning strategies and had chosen to focus on these strategies as a professional learning community for this school year. The cooperation and collaboration of this specific professional learning community made the group an appropriate one to study because they all possessed a similar baseline understanding of the strategies examined in this study. These teachers possessed a variety of teaching experiences and education levels, but they were all

working at the same school, so it made their perceptions slightly uniform in that they shared a common student population from a similar demographic.

Teacher experience and understanding of cooperative learning strategies also impacted the study. Novice teachers and tenured teachers have varying abilities to lead an effective cooperative lesson in that there are differences in classroom management techniques and confidence levels of the teachers. It was imperative for the researcher to gauge that all participants in the study had the ability to lead a classroom and partake in an effective cooperative lesson. Outside factors such as classroom management issues could have potentially skewed the data. Understanding of specific cooperative strategies was also a limitation of the study. Teachers who were more familiar with the strategy may have been more effective in implementing them in a lesson; thus, provided more effective opportunities for students to engage with the lesson.

Self-reporting was another limitation in this study. Questionnaires provided a quantitative means to interpret teacher perceptions, but much of the study was centered on interviews, observations, and individuals' feelings about the topic (Yin, 2014). The essence of the research questions rested on teacher perceptions, making the nature of the study subjective to the various teachers' views. As a researcher, remaining an objective nonparticipant observer was essential to the accuracy of the data collection process (Creswell, 2013). Conducting interviews without alluding to one's beliefs and recording observations without personal opinions was crucial to ensuring an objective answer to the research question (Creswell, 2013). In the end, the study focused on teacher perceptions, so self-reporting was a necessity of the study and was kept as objective as possible. One final limitation of the study was that the demographics of the study focused entirely on English teachers, rather than an array of content area teachers. The study

focused on solely the English team because this group of teachers made cooperative learning strategies a part of their shared practices and common lesson plans throughout the school year.

Delimitations of the study included the lack of various subject areas and school sites for the study. The study was delimited to seven English teachers because these teachers were intentionally focused on incorporating cooperative learning strategies into their classrooms on a regular basis. The teachers had a generalizable understanding of the strategies and could meet during weekly department meeting times. The study was also delimited by the requirement that all study participants be actively engaged in utilizing cooperative strategies within their lessons. The results of the study may not be representative of all English teachers. The choice to focus on English teachers was made because they were a specific professional learning community that focused on incorporating cooperative learning techniques within their classrooms. The English professional learning community at the school of study was a group of teachers who were willing to work on the study and meet with the researcher on a regular basis. The decision to conduct the study on one school in Southern California was made for the purpose of meeting time constraints. The study focused on a single quarter of the school year, 8 weeks, and required the researcher to observe each teacher's class, survey each teacher, and confer with them for interviews. To ensure the researcher was available to meet with all teachers, one school site was used for the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

Students enter American classrooms with an array of learning needs, and it is up to the educational system, and more specifically, the classroom teacher, to find a way to meet everyone's needs. Student academic abilities can range from students who are below grade level to high achieving, students who are fluent in English to non-English speakers, and students who are general education students to resource specialist program students (RSP). Finding strategies that can serve and meet the needs of diverse student populations is essential to quality instruction. The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The problem statement associated with this review sought to explore English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Diego, 2013; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 2015). The literature regarding this topic identified qualities of effective teachers, components and explanations of cooperative learning, English learner needs, and the overall perception of cooperative learning methods in a classroom where there are English learners. This literature review provides information regarding the research question that addresses teacher perception of the effectiveness of cooperative learning and how it can be utilized in schools with diverse student populations (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Diego, 2013; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 2015).

As education undergoes changes with the adoption of Common Core Standards, there has been a shift from teacher-modeled instruction to group-lead instruction (Diego, 2013). This change has given way to a multitude of cooperative learning practices implemented in

classrooms across the nation (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 1996). When classrooms utilize cooperative learning strategies, teachers see an increase in student performance levels (Boardman, Moore, & Scornavacco, 2015). Much of the research regarding cooperative learning focuses on the impact it has on overall student achievement. The gap in the literature indicates further research is needed on teacher perceptions of student achievement with English language learners (Callahan et al., 2010; Goldberg, 2013;).

Cooperative learning strategies have been highly regarded as an effective strategy to increase student engagement (Boardman et al., 2015; Calderon et al., 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012;), but its impact on increasing performance levels of English learners requires additional research.

The general tone of education reflects a climate where teachers implement teacher-centered practices that focus on teacher-lead instruction that is proven ineffective in raising student performance levels (Diego, 2013). Effective strategies that have proven to increase engagement include a broad range of cooperative learning strategies that facilitate engagement (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011; Diego, 2013; Slavin, 1996). To meet the challenges of teaching, pre-service teachers need explicit models of what facilitating engagement looks. When evaluating successful strategies, teachers can gain valuable knowledge that can assist in their understanding of effective strategies. Studies show that student achievement relates directly to the type of preparation their teacher has received (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Brown, 2004; Calderon et al., 2011; Diego, 2013; Irvine, 1999; Patrick, Turner, Meyer & Midgley, 2003). The majority of underprepared teachers lack the skills needed to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The impact that these individuals have on the learning environment is great and can cause significant long-term deficits if not properly rectified (Brown, 2004). Although adopting collaborative practices can potentially be challenging, the

acceptance of these practices must be universal for them to be successful (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). The faster student concerns are identified and rectified, the faster the changes can be implemented. These changes are essential to growth in that the context of learning has the potentiality to either facilitate or hinder academic achievement.

### **Background to the Study**

Understanding how students interact with each other is a neglected aspect of instruction. Cooperative learning strategies outline specific techniques that relate to student-student interaction. The way in which teachers structure student-student interaction impacts the way they learn. The process of grouping students using cooperative learning techniques has evolved over the past 50 years (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2000). Prior to the 1960's, individualistic learning styles took precedence over the practice of grouping students (Johnson et al., 2000). There was cultural resistance to cooperative learning during this time as society believed in a Darwinist approach to learning that pushed rugged individualism. As time passed and values within the educational system evolved, the benefits of grouping students within the academic setting began to take shape. Cooperative learning techniques have become the accepted and often preferred instructional practice at all levels of education (Johnson et al., 2000).

Cooperative learning is a group of instructional strategies used to increase student achievement and provide teachers with engaging activities to foster achievement. Scholars identify cooperative learning as the instructional use of small groups that allow students to work together to maximize each other's learning (Eskay, Onu, Obiyo, & Obidoa, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1989,). Cooperative learning is different from other forms of group learning in that it has five components that include positive interdependence, face-to-face promotion interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small groups, and group

processing (Eskay et al., 2012; Slavin, 1989). The small group components in cooperative learning strategies actively seek to promote interdependence among group members so that each member of a small group team is responsible for not only learning content information, but also for helping and facilitating their teammates' learning (Altun, 2015; Calderon et al., 2011; Curry, De Amicis, & Gilligan, 2011).

Supporting classmates is a fundamental strategy of cooperative learning groups. The notion of students working together allows teachers to provide additional assistance to students. Peer support is encouraged to help students learn; thus, planning for small groups becomes a cornerstone of the process (Andre, Louvet, & Deneuve, 2013; Calderon et al., 2011). The particular structuring of the cooperative learning groups recognizes that there may be stronger and weaker students in a classroom; therefore, teachers must be very aware of whom they place in each group (Clapper, 2015). Randomly selected groups should not be utilized because they could potentially be filled with students of the same ability level. A student that is weak in one area may also be strong in another so knowing one's classroom is essential to cooperative instruction. Cooperative learning groups are intentional groups that focus on strategic discussion topics and activities where learners work together to achieve common learning objectives; it is not to be confused with group work.

Cooperative strategies create opportunities for reciprocal teaching where learners teach other members of the group. There are over 150 cooperative learning structures, also known as Kagan structures (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). These structures have various functions including some that are designed to produce mastery of high consensus content, others that develop thinking skills, and others that foster and develop communication skills (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). Specific strategies for cooperative learning include the jigsaw method, the learning

together technique, constructive controversy, student team achievement division, complex instruction, teams-games-tournament, team-assisted-individualism, team-accelerated instruction, group investigation, cooperative integrated reading and comprehension, and small group talks and activities; all of which are planned in advance by the teacher (Basak & Yidiz, 2014; Chen & Goswami, 2011; Curry et al., 2011). Planning is vital to a successful cooperative-based activity as the planning component of instruction better one's chances of having a successful cooperative learning activity. Successful cooperative-based activities equate to increased student achievement and participation; thus, the model of cooperative learning has taken the form of an organized educational movement that promises better learning results of students (Berger & Hanze, 2015; Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011). Research has shown that, among other benefits, it facilitates the development of analytical thought as well as the communication and socialization of young children, and contributes to a better instruction of diverse school populations (Carter, Moss, Asmus, Fesperman, Cooney, Brock, & Vincent, 2015; Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011). Techniques that foster communication and socialization skills are vital in academic settings; thus, finding ways to implement these strategies are essential.

Implementation of cooperative learning strategies requires the understanding that it cannot be successful without proper planning. Effective utilization of cooperative learning strategies requires teachers to make selective decisions when grouping students. To promote the growth of lower level students, teachers should not put friends together, and groups should include a low, a medium, and a high student (Eskay et al., 2012; Horton, 1990). Groups should be changed every two to three weeks to promote socialization within the classroom (Eskay et al., 2012; Horton, 1990). Cooperative learning groups and other peer tutoring strategies work best when students of different ability levels work together so that high-achieving students can



reinforce their understanding through the assistance of lower level students, while the lower level students can receive additional support from the point of view of a fellow student (Eskay et al., 2012; Kunsch, Jitendra, & Stood, 2007). The purposeful distribution of students and changing the groups frequently allows for the leveling of each team and promotes effectiveness and socialization within the classroom (Bradford, Hickson & Evaniew, 2014; Eskay et al., 2012). While in their groups, students should be encouraged to talk and listen, and engage in academic conversations. These conversations are the center of effective cooperative activities because they require students on both sides of a discussion to participate and engage with each other.

Cooperative learning requires students to actively listen to each other while they work to collaborate on their individual tasks as well as on their group assignments and group roles. Cooperative activities promote and encourage risk taking so that students form bonds with one another and gain the courage to become active participants in their groups (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012). Furthermore, taking risks allows students to trust in their ability and increase their academic performance. Increased academic performance is the goal for educators and successful implementation of cooperative learning techniques assist teachers in meeting these goals.

Ideally, in a cooperative learning environment, students work together with little interference from the teacher on carefully planned and organized assignments so that the individuals and groups as a whole can meet their learning goals (Curry et al., 2011, Cziprok & Popescu, 2015). A successful cooperative learning team forces students to share individual knowledge regarding a particular task, and then allows them to discuss their knowledge within the team, correct any information, and come to a consensus regarding the conclusion or answers found (Hsiung, Luo, Lin, & Wang, 2014). The discussion between students will bring about new learning and new insights. How much a student learns or takes away from their small-group

discussion will depend on the quality of student interactions. The more they discuss, subsequently, the more comfortable they are with their group members, and the more interactive and effective the activity will be (Boardman et al., 2015).

The effectiveness of the strategies is also dependent on the teams' ability to help their partners, share their ideas, and remain responsible for other group members' successes. According to Bandura (1997), supported discourse exchanges during academic discussions can encourage student motivation, which can then affect their performance. Ultimately, student achievement and performance levels are a driving force in cooperative learning.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Many fundamental theories behind what makes cooperative learning successful are built upon pedagogy and psychology that were used by the ancient Greeks and had been utilized in education since the early part of the twentieth century (Chung, 1998). Educators and psychologists have long studied the art of conversation, collaboration, and group settings as they pertain to the impact on academia (Slavin, 1995; Slavin, 2015). The theories behind cooperative learning strategies include elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories that focus on the benefits of group discourse.

**Democratic theories.** John Dewey (1938) asserted that environments such as democratic social arrangements and socially formed groups foster increased human interactions and experiences. Democratic social theories place an importance on group members working alongside each other to assist one another in guiding student learning. Dewey noted that an innovated, democratic classroom is not one where the teacher leads the discussion and gives lectures, but rather one where students receive the control and the responsibility of finding information on their own. Engaging students in inquiry-based lessons force students to interact

with one another on specific problems and assist students in developing social and interpersonal skills that enhance the learning process. Democratic-based, collaborative strategies bring real-life experiences into the classroom and provide a forum where people work together and communicate with one another as members of a team. Democratic theories allow students to work with peer groups to solve problems in a democratic and collaborative way. Collaboration becomes a purposeful act and begins to impact cognition or the way students think about content (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Developmental theories.** Dewey (1938) believed in the positive democratic attributes of cooperative groups; Vygotsky (1978) noted that the social context of learning plays a significant role in what and how students think. Vygotsky's cognitive theory noted that language also plays a critical role in cognition. Cooperative learning strategies create environments where collaboration provides meaning to activities; however, the use of language is an essential component of the activity. Vygotsky believed that the use of language is a primary cognitive tool. In as such, this device, or the ability to collaborate with team members, becomes critical to the success of students' academic abilities. Focusing on language and including activities that force students to speak to each other will have an impact on their cognitive abilities.

Cognitive developmental theory indicates that interactions between students increase their mastery of concepts. Vygotsky (1978) identified the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers " (p. 86). Vygotsky believed that collaborative activities promote student growth because students of similar ages are likely to be performing within each other's zone of proximal development; therefore, students can work

together and better assist in bringing each other's comprehension up rather than if the students were working independently. Vygotsky noted the influence of collaborative activities as functions that are initially formed as relations that develop into mental functions for the individual. He stated that reflection originates from an argument; consequently, the more time students spend engaged with others, the more they can reflect and comprehend. The interactions with their peers directly affect their language and cognition.

Along with Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1926) also asserted that social-arbitrary understanding, or one's values, rules, and language, could be learned only through interactions with others. Piaget focused his theory on the notion of conservation; the ability to recognize that particular characteristics or quality of an item will stay the same when there is an adjustment to the size or shape of that piece. Most children learn the notion of conservation between the ages of five and seven and learn to identify that objects can change shape but stay the same mass (Slavin, 1995; Slavin 2015). Piaget found that when students who are non-conservers interact with conservers, they could grow to learn to become conservers. This notion supports the use of the zone of proximal development and cooperative learning strategies supporting student growth. Similar to Vygotsky, Piaget used the theory of conservation to show that students engaged in conversation could share knowledge, thus increase their cognitive abilities.

**Cognitive elaboration theories.** Along with the developmental theories of Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978), and Piaget (1926) noted earlier, Wittrock (1978) expanded upon the cognitive theories and noted that cooperative learning strategies could also stem from cognitive elaboration theories. Cognitive Elaboration theory is different from development theories in that research in cognitive psychology shows that if the information is to be retained, a student must engage in some cognitive restructuring of the information (Wittrock, 1978). Cooperative learning

techniques are effective means of elaboration because students are forced to explain information to others. The process forces students to do more than just hear information; they must verbally discuss information and cognitively elaborate on their understanding. Benefits are found in students relaying information and in students receiving information. Both acts require cognitive elaboration, and ultimately increase cognition.

The activities done within a cooperative learning lesson force students to use conversation and language to expand upon their cognitive elaboration of information. When students interact with each other, they get the chance to learn from their peers. According to Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978), this interaction increases cognitive abilities and language abilities, which is essential for English learner comprehension. Shared activities force students to expand their thinking and clarify their language so that others can understand the message one sends (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). English learners are a specific subgroup of students who need additional talk time (Day & Bryce, 2013; Slavin, 1995). Vygotsky's theory that language is a vital cognitive tool supports the learning process of an English learner because it assists in their content understanding as well as in their language understanding. Language acquisition requires dialogue, which is an essential component of cooperative-based activities. English learners develop their language acquisition when they engage in-group dialogue focused on specific content. Vygotsky noted that the principles of interaction are a primary mental tool that increases student cognition of content from the assistance of peer interaction.

The conceptual framework of cooperative learning strategies stem from developmental and cognitive theories defined by Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1926), and Wittrock (1978). Dewey believed in the social nature of man and emphasized shared experiences so that students could work together on meaningful tasks and construct knowledge together while the

teacher remained a facilitator in the learning. Vygotsky also recognized the social aspect of learning and believed that students learn as they receive assistance from other students. Vygotsky believed that the true direction of the development of thinking transfers from the group to the individual, not the individual to the group. Piaget noted the importance of using groups in education so that students could learn from each other through discussions, conflicts, and reasoning. Piaget believed higher quality education emerges from classrooms where learning is student-centered. The collaborative process subsequently increases student understanding, and as Wittrock contends, students who receive elaborated explanations, such as those found in collaborative classrooms, learn more than students who work alone. These theories have proven to be true with general education students as well as English learners (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). The more conversation and accountability among student groups, the more content is retained.

### **Review of the Literature**

Throughout the literature review, the sources that focus on the topic of cooperative learning, engagement levels, and English learners, reflect an interpretivism methodology. Research presented gives meaning to the process of cooperative learning and engagement levels in the classroom. The articles ascertain that cooperative learning activities impact the classroom culture, thus, impact engagement (Calderon et al.; 2011; Edwards, 2015; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Slavin, 1996). Once there is an impact on classroom culture, the subsequent behaviors and environment changes. In order to understand why student engagement levels increase with the use of cooperative learning strategies, one must also analyze the classroom environment as it plays a key role in affecting the student perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and performance (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Calderon et al., 2011; Diego, 2013; Slavin, 1996). Researchers are open to identifying prior classroom norms and cultures that can potentially affect results. Some

environmental identifiers that can affect the success of cooperative learning strategies include the preparedness of teachers in the experiment and previous performance of students in the class. Environmental factors within the classroom and throughout the process of cooperative learning affect engagement by affecting perceptions.

The majority of research regarding the effectiveness of cooperative learning impacting student performance levels are qualitative studies (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Han, 2015; Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011). These studies reflect observations and anecdotal experiences of teachers and case studies. Quantitative studies such as those conducted by Puzio and Colby (2013), Goldenberg (2013), Boardman et al. (2015), and Hsuing, (2014), used the results of surveys and questionnaires to determine that cooperative learning strategies are an effective tool to increase engagement and increase the quality of instruction for English learners. These studies were conducted in classrooms where cooperative learning strategies were implemented as part of instruction. The quantitative results were impacted by previous behaviors and classroom culture that was not mentioned prior to the study. Furthermore, teacher preparedness was not discussed in these quantitative results. Survey results emphasized increased academic scores in literacy, vocabulary, and student achievement in the specific classes. Meta-analysis and quasi-experimental studies reflect increases in engagement levels with the use of cooperative learning strategies (Chen & Goswami, 2011; Curry et al., 2011; Han, 2015; Hosseni, 2012; Kharaghani, 2015; Ning & Hornby 2014; Sadeghi, 2012). Further studies conducted using qualitative studies utilized anecdotal information, teacher surveys, and observations that evaluated the culture of classrooms, the use of cooperative learning, and the impact it had on student achievement. Qualitative studies documented the use of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom and revealed that cooperative learning positively impacted literacy, engagement,

and student performance levels (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Han, 2015; Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011).

The qualitative methods dealing with anecdotal evidence and observations utilized interpretivism methodology and accounted for the behaviors of the classroom affecting the student success. Cooperative learning strategies are an environmental practice that emphasizes culture and perceptions. The more students can feel comfortable in their working teams, the more they can engage with each other and raise their performance levels (Clapper, 2015; Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Martinez et al., 2014). Other qualitative research revealed interpretivism characteristics when noting the success of cooperative learning. Overall, classrooms that allows students to engage with each other, increase achievement levels (Clapper, 2015; Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Han, 2015; Martinez et al., 2014;). The more engaging a classroom environment is the more engaged a student will be, and the more his academic performance will increase.

Many educational studies show the effectiveness of collaborative learning methods compared to teacher-centered methods (Johnson et al., 1990; Fernandez-Rio, 2015; Purzer, 2011; Slavin, 1987; Slavin, 1991). Social interactions alone, regardless of the quality of the actual discussion, can also increase student achievement (Lau, Kwong, King & Wong, 2014; Purzer, 2011). Engaging in meaningful and academic discourse gives students opportunities to enhance their vocabulary and partake in social skills development. The experience of discourse and utilizing various sentence frames allows the environment to become saturated with new terms that become assets in the learning process and compliment individual knowledge (Clapper, 2015). The overall process of engaging students in discourse increases engagement and performance; thus, reflects an influx in its use in education (Groccia, 2014; Purzer, 2011).



Cooperative learning offers a broad range of approaches, but the most effective ones are the ones where students work in mixed-ability groups, have multiple opportunities to teach each other after content is delivered by the teacher, and are recognized for the learning that is done by all members of a group or team (Calderon et al., 2011). Purzer noted that cooperative learning strategies are evident in more than just elementary and secondary humanities courses. He stated that more than half of science and engineering programs require students to work in groups on projects as part of their course curriculum. This percentage is likely to increase in the future because both employees and educational researchers agree that learning how to engage and work in a collaborative setting is essential to student success (Groccia, 2014; Purzer, 2011). The more students collaborate, the more support they receive.

**Teacher implementation.** The teacher's role during cooperative learning is essential to the success of cooperative learning strategies as much as preparing students for the lesson. Teacher expectations are at the center of successful cooperative learning practices. When students believe they have the intellectual capacity to succeed, they will succeed; thus, the teacher needs to create an environment to nurture this mentality. Once their expectations are clearly communicated, a teacher's role during the discussion is to promote the academic conversations while facilitating student progress by interacting closely with groups and monitoring dialogue (Eskay et al., 2012). Proper facilitation of cooperative learning groups ensures students are on task, and also builds communication and relationships between students and teachers. These relationships become an integral component of effective cooperative classrooms. Teachers maintain a large impact on student learning and can utilize this impact more efficiently when they develop strong relationships with students (Fergusun-Patrick, 2012; Horton, 1990). Teachers become central to the effectiveness of the learning process in a

cooperative-based classroom because their practices set the tone for the class. Student engagement centers on teacher practices, therefore, respect, communication, and attachment are encouraged between student and teacher so that a student's attention, brain development, and learning will follow (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Kusche & Greenberg, 2006; Mohammadjani & Tonkaboni, 2015).

Teachers that do not implement student-centered activities must identify the need to change their teaching practices and acquire knowledge and training so that they can be successful in implementing the cooperative learning strategies that may be unfamiliar to them (Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011; Nodding, 1992). With the implementation of cooperative learning strategies, teachers can focus on changing the culture of their classrooms. Cooperative learning strategies allow teachers and students to develop positive relationships and help manage conflicts which ultimately lead to a more harmonious and driven classroom (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Foss et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Classrooms centered on cooperative learning techniques provide a social setting conducive to the development of friendly relationships with diverse student populations and teachers. When effective cooperative learning groups engage mixed groups of students with varying races, genders, and learning styles, the outcomes reflect a deeper understanding of the content presented (Basak & Yildiz, 2014; Wenzel, 2000). Diversity in collaborative groups transforms the learning process because cooperative learning has its greatest impact on student performance when groups are mixed and students are recognized and rewarded based on the individual learning of each group member (Sadeghi, 2012). The push for success lies in the group dynamic. The more a group focuses on individual success, the more the group succeeds. This structure places an emphasis back on social tasks and responsibility.

For cooperative learning strategies to be effective, they must be implemented strategically and purposefully in a classroom. While some believe that the practice of in-class grouping techniques such as cooperative learning strategies is declining (Puzio & Colby, 2013), others note that they are on the rise (Curry et al., 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Hsiung et al., 2014). The majority of researchers believe that cooperative learning is an appealing tool because it is relatively easy to implement, it is cheap to implement, and it is effective in increasing academic performance in students (Curry et al., 2011; Zainuddin, 2015). Schools that begin to implement cooperative learning strategies on campus will see the cycle of isolation broken and see a shift to collaboration among teachers and students. This shift will break the isolation cycle, and students and teachers will see improvements in their collaborative abilities (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). Schools and students using collaborative methods learn to develop their capacity to respect, acknowledge, and capitalize on others' difference to enact change and growth in the school and classroom cultures.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Some researchers believe that the key component of cooperative learning is teamwork that provides a means of promoting student intrinsic motivation (Kusche & Grenberg, 2006; Ning & Hornby, 2014). These motivators include the ability to develop a student's satisfaction from helping their peers, being part of a collective working body, and develop a student's sense of control over and ownership over their individual learning (Kusche & Grenberg, 2006; Ning & Hornby, 2014). When students learn to complete tasks on their own and share their information in a supportive setting where they are responsible for explaining their understanding to others who listen to them, they learn to foster a sense of group unity that allows them to become interdependent. This positive interdependence allows students to develop their individual contributions while trying to complete a common goal.

Collectively, cooperative learning strategies support the individual student in developing his abilities to engage socially, while remedying any antisocial behaviors. According to Kagan, as stated in Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012), far too much of what goes on in school focuses on training asocial behaviors that are amplified by competitive academic situations. For students to see growth both academically and interpersonally, they need to feel connected to a group so that they can share ideas with others. Cooperative learning classrooms provide students with an environment where they can develop their individual academic abilities as well as their abilities to function and thrive in a group setting. The more cooperative learning takes place, the more students have the chance to hone these skills.

**Benefits of cooperative learning.** Cooperative learning environments not only reveal increased student learning performance and academic progress, but also provide data regarding positive interactions and social abilities of the students (Hsiung et al., 2014). The dynamics begin to shift from an individual focus where students are competitive and self-seeking, to an environment fostered by unity and collaboration where the group success is as important as the individual success. Cooperative learning becomes more important than competition or individual activities (Stevens & Slavin, 1995; Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). Students engaged in group activities not only take their learning seriously, but also support their teammates' learning by sharing knowledge, learning resources, and ideas (Hsiung et al., 2014; Wenzel, 2000). The success of these groups depends on effective implementation. Implementation of cooperative learning techniques requires routine examination of team goals (Hsiung et al., 2014). The success of achievement levels for team and individuals give way to dynamic and positive student behaviors and increased interpersonal skills. The benefits of cooperative learning and the ease of implementation make it a desirable education plan.

Cooperative learning creates an environment where students can increase their academic achievement as they learn social skills. Students learn behaviors such as the ability to resolve disputes with other people, help their peers feel welcomed, listen to others who are speaking, and identify effective ways to contribute information. They also master ways to explain ideas clearly, encourage others, and criticize ideas rather than individuals (Eskay et al., 2012). When implemented effectively, cooperative learning strategies teach students to care about the class they are in and keep students positively engaged in their lessons, while increasing their ability to succeed academically (Eskay et al, 2012.; Slavin, 1998). These factors lead to an increase in performance on tests and an increase in critical reasoning and thinking abilities (Eskay et al., 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Cooperative learning has contributed to advancing academic indicators and social improvements. Peer tutoring and working with others is shown to decrease aggression and increase student achievement (Eskay et al., 2012; King, Stafferi, & Adelgais, 1998; Slavin, 1987). Social problems are averted because students actively engage and learn to manage conflicts in a positive and safe environment (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Kunsch et al., 2007). Students who work in group and cooperative settings develop a concern for those around them. This concern forms within the cooperative classroom, helps build respect and tolerance for one another, contributes to building social skills, and encourages students to reflect on these skills.

When students engage in cooperative learning activities, they learn to respect their peers, simultaneously enhance their self-esteem, and develop harmonious interpersonal relationships without impeding the cognitive performance of any of the students working together (Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011, Slavin, 2015). Students learn to feel safe in their groups, focus on themselves, and concentrate on the success of the group unit as a whole. The environment sets up

the students for success. Cooperative learning effectively reduces learners' anxiety, increases learner motivation, promotes teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships, and increase self-confidence (Han, 2015). For many children, problem solving becomes easier when in a group setting because students can bounce ideas off other students and develop the confidence in themselves and their knowledge and answers (Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011; Hattie, 2003, Ovarzun & Morrison, 2013). The dynamics of the cooperative learning group structure encourages group members to strive to assist their peers while simultaneously encouraging each other to engage to the best of their ability and produce the most effort they can on assignments and discussions.

Cooperative-based instruction also reduces anti-social behaviors and maintains an environment where children are excited about the content presented to them (Brier, 1994; Eskay et al., 2012). The focus shifts to the engagement levels of the students, while content and social skills develop because of the dynamic. When learning new skills and content, students may sometimes need assistance when receiving information and with the metacognitive skills of processing their thoughts related to the information they receive (Clapper, 2015). Learners may need assistance moving through the disequilibrium process that occurs when receiving new information contradicts with their existing frames of references or prior understanding (Clapper, 2015). Cooperative based learning can be used to assist students in working through this confusion by allowing a forum to ask and answer questions.

The support students receive while in their working groups effectively supports their reading, comprehension, and vocabulary, while promoting reading and writing achievements (Puzio & Colby, 2013; Stevens, 2003). The functionality of the strategy gives more students the chance to talk and helps them actively struggle through new ideas while elaborating on their

understanding and cognition (Boardman et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2000). Students develop a metacognitive awareness of their misunderstandings of the texts they read and are given the tools to work alongside their group members to discover discrepancies in their understanding to repair any misunderstandings they may have (Boardman et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2000).

Clapper (2015) stated that there is an abundance of evidence to support the use of cooperative learning strategies and its effects on achievement and motivation. When properly implemented, cooperative learning can have several pedagogical benefits such as enhancing academic performance and promoting a better attitude towards learning (Hsiung et al., 2014). The growth in the process of group understanding to individual understanding allows students and team members to increase performance gradually over time. The cooperative process results in many pedagogical benefits. These effects can be as effective as one-on-one tutoring but also seen as a way to reduce the number of students needing additional support on a one-on-one basis (Calderon et al., 2011; Mohammadjani & Tonkaboni, 2015). The implementation of cooperative strategies show positive effects on many learning outcomes such as the quality of the learning environment and other domains, increased academic achievement, higher student self-esteem, and increases in social competency (Curry et al., 2011; Gagne & Parks, 2013; Johnson et al., 1990). Cooperative learning maximizes the learning outcomes and overall social skills development because collaboration focuses on developing positive relationships between students (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson et al., 1990). Maintaining the cooperative environment creates classrooms where teachers are effectively teaching coping strategies, social, and life skills to students.

**Individual and group responsibility.** The reasons cooperative learning strategies are successful as an educational methodology is its use of group-oriented tasks that focus on group

goals based on individual responsibility. Regardless of subjects or proficiency levels of students, learning achievement can increase when lessons include cooperative strategies (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). Cooperative based strategies afford students many opportunities to practice communication skills with others such as listening and speaking skills and the development and mastery of social and communication skills (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). This mastery enhances the development of subsequent academic abilities such as critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and assessment (Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011; Salako, Eze, & Adu, 2013). Student oriented, cooperative-based classrooms, allow students to have more confidence when expressing their ideas; therefore, improving their communicative competence, academic performance, attitudes regarding school, and interpersonal relationships.

Cooperative-based groups allow students to have more opportunities to initiate and regulate themselves, feel a sense of cohesiveness to their peers, and meet challenges far more successfully than in traditional teacher-centered environments (Ning & Hornby, 2014). Ning and Hornby asserted that recent studies show that students who engage in cooperative learning activities reported substantially better autonomy than those in traditional classroom settings where the environment is teacher-centered. Overall, successful implementation of cooperative learning strategies results in a favorable impact on students' academic achievement and social growth (Hsiung et al., 2014). The growth of student performance is the cornerstone of academia.

The academic success of students is the ultimate focus of educators. Ensuring students are achieving and seeing an increase in academic performance is of great importance. There are many issues currently surrounding education that reflect a drop in student performance. Spoon-feeding information to students is still a teaching method present in classrooms that increase the cases of antisocial behavior and further the decline of intrinsic motivators in students (Carreira,



2010; Chen & Goswami, 2011; Eskay et al., 2012). National and international studies have revealed that significant numbers of adolescents and young adults do not adequately understand complex texts, which impedes their eventual success, access to postsecondary learning, and opportunities within our increasingly competitive work environment (Vaughn, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed, Stillman-Sposak, 2011; Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). Not only are students failing to think critically, but their ability to understand complex texts is also the lowest that it has been in a decade (Vaughn et al., 2011). A report by ACT reveals that only 50% of the ACT-tested students are ready to read and understand the college-level material (Vaughn et al., 2011). These claims reveal that as a whole, students are underprepared and underperforming. These statistics present information that reflects general student performance, but when identifying specific subgroup performances, English learners' statistics are far worse than the general population. Cooperative-based classrooms attribute to an increase in academic growth in students' achievement in general and are seen in various subgroups of students such as English learners. There is a need for specific implementation of cooperative learning strategies within the English learner population.

**English learners and cooperative learning.** English learners are a specific subgroup of students embedded into the educational system who require additional modifications in their instruction. The number of English learners in the United States has risen in recent years (Diego, 2013; Martinez, Harris & McClain, 2014). Children of immigrant families are the fastest growing student population in American schools today, half of whom do not speak English fluently and labeled as English learners (Calderon et al., 2011). Demographers predict that even if all immigration halts, by 2050, culturally and linguistically diverse populations will be the majority (Martinez et al., 2014). These students come to American schools and require the same

instructional opportunities as English speaking students. English learners need innovative instruction like every other student, but also require additional instructional support to assist in their learning process. English learners need early and ample opportunities to develop proficiency in English because if denied these services, they experience academic failures related to their lack of effective instruction (Goldenberg, 2013). English learners who attend regular classes, usually with teachers who are underprepared to teach them, either sink or swim (Calderon et al., 2010; Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). The lack of instructional practices that accommodate English learner needs lead to English learners failing to perform at a level similar to their English speaking peers.

There are consistent achievement disparities between English learners and English-proficient learners that reveal that the quality of instruction matters the most when trying to close the achievement gaps between these groups of students (Calderon et al., 2011; Lv, 2014). States vary widely in the policies and practices by which they identify and assess English learners. The federal government requires schools to provide services to English learners but does not offer specific policies to follow (Calderon et al., 2011). The responsibility of providing proper instructional strategies to assist this subgroup of students falls on individual school districts and school sites. Fortunately, the strategies used to reach out and assist English learners are effective strategies for increasing student performance of all students.

Effective teaching can increase achievement at any level; however, most English learners spend their time in regular classrooms with teachers who feel that they are ill-prepared to meet their needs (Calderon et al., 2011, Gagne & Parks, 2013). Diego (2013) noted that teachers in general, are ill-prepared to meet the needs of a diverse population such as English learners. Teachers are underprepared to provide high-caliber instruction to English learners, and there is a

desperate need for infrastructure that supports reform to prevent harm to diverse student populations. Calderon et al. further states that researchers consistently find broad and persistent achievement gaps between English learners and English-proficient learners. It is important for schools to understand this notion and find ways to solve the problems. Guidelines and procedures must be developed, implemented, and maintained to collaborate successfully for the sake of English learners (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). Schools are becoming increasingly diversified; however, training and professional development related to working with English learners are limited (Martinez et al., 2014). There are discrepancies among educators about which path to take in regards to instructional strategies that are most effective in bridging the achievement gap between English learners and English-proficient students.

The debate over English-only instruction compared to second language instruction reveals that the quality of instruction is most important to student success (Slavin et al., 2011; Slavin, 2015). Understanding that quality of instruction is a major determiner of achievement allows teachers to learn the tools needed to see increased achievement. Teachers must be aware of specific instructional strategies practiced that can assist student engagement and also understand that culture has an impact on education and can influence student achievement (Diego, 2013). When evaluating the needs of an English learner, one must take into account a multitude of requirements. It is easy for educators to think of English learners as different or even deficient because of their lack of English speaking skills (Annamma, Boele, Moore, & Klingner, 2013). While a third of all English learners lack critical thinking abilities, inadequate reading and writing proficiencies in English places rapidly increasing English learner populations to the sidelines. This limits the nation's potential for economic competitiveness,

innovation, productivity growth, and quality of life (Annamma et al, 2013; Martinez, Harris, & McClain, 2014; Sadeghi, 2012).

Ensuring English learners are proficiently skilled increases the likelihood that students will become productive contributors to society. Language-minority students who cannot read and write proficiently in English cannot participate fully in American schools, the workplace, or society; thus, they face limited job opportunities and earning power (Martinez et al., 2014). Reading is one of the main skills in developing language proficiency and the fastest way to increase English learner achievement is through their understanding of the language (Kharaghani & Ghonsooly, 2015). Targeted instruction that focuses on critical thinking skills and language acquisition can transform instructional strategies to meet the needs of English learners. Strategic collaborative practices have shown to impact English learners on a large scale. English learners do not enjoy critical thinking activities, so finding a way to engage them is a major component of their academic achievement (Sadeghi, 2012). It is up to the teachers to help students make connections between abstract foreign language concepts and concrete English language concepts (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012).

Unfortunately, the way English language learners perceive and interact with each other is taken for granted in instructional programs as an instructional strategy (Bondy et al., 2007; Sadeghi, 2012). Rather than utilizing cooperative-based instruction, teachers resort to singling English learners out and force them to work in isolation. The strategies that teachers use to structure teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions have a significant effect on English learner achievement (Sadeghi, 2012). The level of interaction will greatly affect how well the English learners will learn, how they feel about school and the teacher, and how they feel about themselves and their self-esteem. Many times the way English language learners

perceive and interact with their peers is taken for granted as a functional instructional strategy (Sadeghi, 2012; Bondy et al., 2007). Understanding the effects of successful cooperative-based groups can assist teachers meeting the needs of English learners. Simply placing students in a group to complete work is not the focus of cooperative learning strategies. Teachers must understand that there is a difference between having English language learners work in a random group assigned without prearranged and thought out teams, than those that are structured specifically based on cooperative learning strategies (Sadeghi, 2012).

A group of English language workers who sit together at a table and do their work is considered a successful group (Sadeghi, 2012). Teachers must understand that grouping should be deliberate and precise. For a collaborative group of English learners to be successful, the cooperative group should be selected for all levels of language acquisition, the group must have a sense of individual accountability, and all language learners must know the material presented (Gagne & Parks, 2013; Sadeghi, 2012). Individualistic learning situations allow English language learners to work towards a goal or set criteria where their individual success is dependent on their performance in relation to the established criteria and their ability to collaborate with their team or group members. The limited success or failure of the other people in their group should not affect the individual's scores, but their ability to partake in the group process should (Sadeghi, 2012). English learners can be held accountable for the same content understanding presented to non-English learners in a classroom, but scaffolding information should aid in their language acquisition (Rueckert, 2013).

English learners need to be able to apply course content in a way that has increased meaning for them. Since English learners demonstrate a strong motivation orientation towards both competition and recognition from their peers, a collaborative setting allows them to thrive

(Komiyama, 2013; Rueckert, 2013). The motivation and the driving force behind their actions impact their second language acquisition and their content mastery as a whole (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). When English learners receive a forum where they can speak and engage in academic conversations, they spend time practicing their second language skills. The more time students spend speaking, the more accurate their pronunciation abilities and understanding of the language become. Accurate pronunciation by English language learners is essential for communication and academic performance (Chen, 2011; Gagne & Parks, 2013). Chen ascertains that the known benefits of cooperative learning strategies for English language learners make a desirable learning environment to teach academic content as well as overall pronunciation and language skills.

The benefits of speaking and engaging in a group through cooperative learning strategies affect more than just academic indicators. Communication skills focused on cooperative learning improves English learners' ability to speak and pronounce words. Accordingly, accurate pronunciation in English develops one of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Chen, 2011; Gagne & Parks, 2013). Developing students' pronunciation skills increases their communication abilities, as well as their writing abilities that can have a long-term impact on their overall academic achievement. The improvement in students' writing abilities ultimately increases school-wide reading comprehension (Chen, 2011; Fernandez, 2015). Cooperative strategies focus on group assistance makes reading feasible for English learners who are not completely comfortable with the English language. Strategies integrated into reading and language arts instruction equate to a positive effect on English learners and English-speaking students (Vaugh, Klinger, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammad, & Stillman-Sposak, 2011). Impacting English learners will impact overall student achievement

rates. Many strategies that are effective in increasing English learner achievement and overall student achievement rely on specific cooperative learning techniques.

Cooperative learning strategies maintain a plethora of techniques that can amplify English learner language acquisition and content mastery. The overall academic performance of English learners increases with the use of cooperative learning strategies because of the extreme focus on communication and peer collaboration (Calderon et al., 2011, Slavin 2015).

Cooperative learning strategies have been found effective for elementary and secondary students across a broad range of subjects and are especially beneficial for English learners who are learning English and utilizing the language across a variety of school subjects (Calderon et al., 2011; Edwards, 2015). Cooperative-based activities give English learners regular opportunities to collaborate, communicate, and discuss the content presented to them. The academic environment allows English learners to use the language of the school in a clear context and receive feedback from their peers in a non-threatening way.

Many English learners are shy and reluctant to speak in front of the class when entering new classroom environments. Placing them in a small group allows them to become more comfortable and begin to form relationships with their group members (Calderon et al., 2011; Cziprok & Popescu, 2015). Once placed in a small group, English learners become more confident and able to share information with their friends and teammates (Calderon et al., 2011; Slavin, 2015). The group dynamic encourages students to collaborate. For a group to be successful in their collaboration, and for the sake of the English learner achievement, following cooperative guidelines and procedures is essential (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). Developing, implementing, and maintaining guidelines cultivate the transition from hard working independence to a collaborative team (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). These procedures ensure

students know their expectations and will maintain those expectations for the group unit. Once initiated, the collaborative groups reflect increases in academic and social indicators (Calderon et al., 2011). Research has shown that structured cooperative learning methods are effective for general education students as well as English language learners (Calderon et al., 2011; Slavin, 2015). Effective ways to engage English language learners include building up group dynamics and cohesiveness and having a positive learning experience that is not intimidating, but rather engaging for all students (Ning & Hornby, 2014).

Students in cooperative-based classrooms score higher on performance assessments than students in Spanish or English-only classrooms without cooperative-based instruction (Calderon et al., 2011). Specific cooperative strategies such as Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, and its bilingual version, Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, are particularly effective in targeting and increasing performance levels of the bottom quarter of student performers (Goldenberg, 2013). These strategies focus on English language development while simultaneously engaging the student with content that becomes accessible through their gaps in language comprehension. English learners with higher initial performance levels see an impact on their content comprehension levels when they participated in instructional (Goldenberg, 2013). Dozens of reports have examined the types of strategies learners use as well as how they are used in conjunction with other variables such as gender, proficiency, style, motivation, and autonomy (Calderon et al., 2011; Goldenberg & Slavin, 1995; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Rueckert, 2013). A study by Goldenberg and Slavin showed that higher performing English learners went from 73% concept mastery to 91% concept mastery when cooperative learning strategies were part of the instruction.



English learners need to feel accepted socially to fully engage with the content presented to them. Engaging English learners becomes successful when cooperative learning strategies are used in conjunction with SDAI methods and maintain pedagogical practices that actively engage students with academic content that foster critical inquiry at all levels of English proficiency (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010; Carter et al., 2015). Classrooms that use SDAI methods, as well as cooperative learning strategies, include a variety of ethnic groups, teaching tolerance, language acquisition, and ultimately improving inter-ethnic relations in the classroom become effective (Curry et al., 2011). English learner language deficiencies cause a barrier for their social approval, but cooperative learning environments build a reciprocal relationship between the native languages of the English learner. Establishing English acquisition in a cooperative environment will facilitate a non-threatening, supportive, and nurturing, academic environment (Bradford et al., 2014; Chen, 2011). Cooperative-based classrooms set up an environment that is accepting and inviting and assist the SDAI strategies already in place.

Cooperative learning provides metacognitive strategies and supports both English-proficient and English learner students by providing teaching that is reciprocal and increase reading comprehension and content learning (Boardman et al., 2015). Group discussions bring about many opportunities for students to practice their English and share their content knowledge (Andre et al., 2013; Chen, 2011). Studies such as one conducted by Boardman et al. showed that all students, including those identified with low comprehension and English learners, made significant gains in reading comprehension when utilizing cooperative learning strategies. Research has shown that cooperative learning benefits English language learners in various aspects such as constructive interactions with peers and active learning that promotes literacy acquisition (Chen, 2011; Mohammadjani & Tonkaboni, 2015). Ongoing literacy acquisition has

its foundation on strong oral language proficiency, so it does not come as a surprise that cooperative-based classrooms are seeing an increase in performance levels of English learners (Martinez, Harris, & McClain, 2014). Research and experiences in English language classrooms have established that the benefits of small-group activity expands student exposure to the new language and provides many more opportunities to practice language naturally than are available in a non-cooperative-based classroom (Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). Research has shown that English language learners who work in cooperative groups do better on tests, especially when it comes to critical thinking skills, than those who are not partaking in cooperative learning activities (Sadeghi, 2012).

Classrooms that incorporate cooperative learning strategies facilitate a supportive environment for English language learners. Studies show that the effectiveness of cooperative learning on learner's academic achievement reflects both subject content areas and language learning (Calderon et al., 2011; Chen, 2011; Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012). Cooperative-based instruction is becoming an increasingly popular model that provides a supportive learning environment and many opportunities for participation while lowering English language learner's affective filter and dissatisfaction with the content material (Chen, 2011; Nan, 2014). In the framework of cross-cultural education, studies reflect findings that confirm the efficiency of cooperative learning in organizing mixed ability and multicultural classes (Calderon et al., 2011; Chen, 2011; Davoudi & Mahinpo, 2012; Mitakidou & Tamoutseli, 2011). Most classrooms in the United States are a blend of students with various ability level as well as language acquisition levels (Calderon et al., 2011; Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). The melting pot of diversity in classrooms calls for a supportive method of instruction.

English learners reflect a positive impact of phonetic and phonological instruction with cooperative learning strategies, and given the benefits as mentioned above of cooperative learning strategies, the more a student receives cooperative-based instruction, the more successful they will be (Chen, 2011; Slavin, 2015). The benefits of structuring cooperative learning in English language classrooms have far-reaching effects beyond academic and language proficiency levels. Not only are the advantages of cooperative learning seen with increased academic performance of English learners, but are also seen in their long-term social development as well (Chen, 2011, Slavin, 2015). Cooperative learning builds the academic and social success of all students, and English learners are one subgroup where these notions hold true and are invaluable to student academic success.

**Critique of research findings.** Cooperative learning must be implemented correctly to be effective in raising students' academic performance levels. As with any research topic, there will be proponents who disagree or state a counter argument to the research. Goldenberg (2013), while an advocate of cooperative learning, states that there are limits to the success of cooperative learning techniques. When identifying the effects of cooperative-based instruction for English language learners, some caveats were found. Instructional conversations, in general, may have no overall effect on English language learner comprehension (Goldenberg, 2013). During a study that analyzed comprehension levels of English learners, Goldenberg found that students who received cooperative learning support and those in a classroom with no cooperative-based instruction scored the same on assessments. Furthermore, in this study, the lowest level English speakers performed lower in instructional conversation (Goldenberg, 2013). These results suggest that instruction targeted at improving English language learner comprehension is likely to be more effective when the English learners have higher English

skills, but will be less effective, ineffective, or even counterproductive when their English skills are low (Hsiung et al., 2014).

Although cooperative learning strategies have many pedagogical benefits, if the cooperative learning teams become ineffective, the benefits are lost (Hsiung et al., 2014). The functionality of the group becomes the crux of the success of the cooperative learning team. Many obstacles exist to hinder the effectiveness of the functionality of the cooperative learning team. Factors such as having team members with obstructive behaviors or students who dominate the conversation, teammates who refuse to participate in the conversation, or a lack of preparation can significantly affect the effectiveness of the cooperative learning activity (Hsiung et al., 2014). If inferior teams are established, it becomes increasingly difficult to fix the group dynamic and reinforce an organized group that will see academic performance increases. Ineffective groups halt student learning. Ineffective groups see a disruption in the group-to-individual knowledge transfer process, and the learning performance trends take a downward turn and are much different from a functioning team (Hsiung et al., 2014).

The success of a cooperative learning group can differ in a single classroom. Simply putting students together in a group, especially English language learners, does not necessarily lead to a gain in positive interdependence or individual accountability; structures must be preplanned and managed by the teacher (Sadeghi, 2012). When cooperative learning groups are unstructured or not monitored, results show that performance indicators do not rise (Chen, 2011; Yewtich & Kanner, 2015). When reflecting on a study where the observed students in a cooperative learning group were structured, as opposed to a group working together without the presence of any cooperative learning elements, Chen (2011) asserted that the difference in performance of students was not significant enough to claim that cooperative learning strategies

were an important differential factor in student performance. Cooperative learning structures are successful in classrooms with English learners when the essential elements of the cooperative learning methods mentioned earlier are present (Chen, 2011, Slavin, 2015). According to Vygotsky, as stated by Hosseini (2014), the context of learning has the potentiality to either facilitate or even hinder academic achievement.

Most of the present methods of cooperative learning disregard the role of intergroup competition, individual accountability, and ignore the notion that some learners could intentionally hinder the learning environment (Hosseini, 2014). When looking at the effects cooperative learning has on English language learners, or a student body as a whole, Hsiung et al. (2014) noted that the failure of even a single member of the cooperative group can compromise the success of the rest of the group members. A cooperative team requires both sufficient time and practice before the full benefits of the cooperative learning process can be seen. A single performance assessment cannot validate the claim that cooperative learning is or is not beneficial to all students because there will be enigmas that present themselves through various cases. Maintaining functional cooperative learning teams can increase student achievement, but maintaining dysfunctional cooperative learning classrooms will inevitably hinder the learning process (Hsiung et al., 2014).

Students in a dysfunctional cooperative learning team tend to exhibit more off-task behaviors such as being off task, walking around the classroom, engaging in outside conversations, or even sleeping during the assigned task. Once a team becomes dysfunctional and develops negative behaviors, the team members may consequently develop bad attitudes towards each other, their team as a whole, or even the cooperative learning exercise they are currently engaged in (Hsiung et al., 2014). These behaviors and mentality shifts can result in

lower performance at the individual or team level (Hsiung et al., 2014). Thus, when a team becomes dysfunctional, the benefits of cooperative learning are lost. Hsiung et al. notes that in groups that are deemed dysfunctional, the scores of all the team members tend to fall over time, and the ability of the team resurrecting its functionality becomes slim. In essence, cooperative learning can be unsuccessful and produce little benefits when groups engage in dysfunctional behaviors, when they are in the absence of external scaffolds that build the unity of the team, and in the absence of group rewards (Sears & Pai, 2012). The failure of the cooperative learning teams equates to lower student performance.

While cooperative learning strategies do have the potential for failure, when implemented correctly and mindfully, it has been proven to positively affect student academic performance. It is clear that the ability to identify dysfunctional teams is critical to the pedagogical success of the students. Teachers also need to maintain the ability to identify poor performing groups and provide the means to gauge the success of the cooperative learning groups they create (Hsiung et al., 2014). Adjusting materials and strategies, observing interactions closely, and making modifications to the groups as needed, allows teachers to ensure the effectiveness of their cooperative learning teams (Hsiung et al., 2014). When groups are engaged and effectively follow the elements of successful cooperative learning strategies, student achievement, and more specifically, English learner academic performance will increase.

### **Summary of Chapter**

Cooperative learning strategies are an essential tool in classrooms with English learners. Cooperative learning techniques build social skills and increase academic performance of English learners. Not only does it provide an environment where students get to engage in conversation, but they also get to work alongside peers of varying ability levels to increase their

successes (Chen, 2011; Rueckert, 2013; Slavin, 1995). The use of cooperative learning strategies lowers student anxiety levels and increase engagement levels, while allowing students to interact with others; thus, keeping them on track and engaged, as opposed to direct instruction models. Cooperative classrooms give students the opportunity to speak freely and become a part of the learning process, rather than sitting back in a teacher-centered classroom unengaged. Cooperative classrooms lower the affective filter and create a more welcoming and safe environment (Calderon et al., 2011). English learners within cooperative based classrooms learn to become more comfortable in their language abilities as well as becoming more comfortable with content presented in the classroom. English learners learn English faster and build relationships with peers in a way that enables them to ask for assistance from others. These relationships form from environments where students feel comfortable to give and receive assistance from others. Cooperative based classrooms unite students from varying academic levels as well as varying cultural backgrounds. When cooperative learning techniques are implemented, competition within classrooms disappears and students learn to work together.

Successful implementation of cooperative learning strategies requires teachers to be purposeful in their planning and methodologies. The forming and organizing of cooperative teams require preplanning and must apprise of students of varying ability levels. The purpose of diverse teams is to utilize the skills of the higher performing students so that they can assist the lower performing students. Competitiveness within a classroom diminishes when these students work together. The teams become support systems for each other and expand each other's ideas and knowledge. Groups must have adequate time to prepare their answers and time to collaborate and talk to each other (Calderon et al., 2011; Zainuddin, 2015). The support of one's group becomes the guiding light to their individual success.

The teacher in a cooperative environment, although an active monitor, should be present to ensure dialog is continual and refrain from lecturing to the group. The purpose of the cooperative based activities is to take the focus off of the teacher and create a student-centered classroom where the students are responsible for their knowledge as well as the knowledge of their peers. When high-level and low-level students work together, students become comfortable and dependent on one another. The classroom becomes the center of activity while learning becomes the byproduct of student engagement with one another. With proper preparation, cooperative classrooms build higher-level reasoning and communication skills of general education students as well as English learners (Chen, 2011; Gagne & Parks, 2013).

The evidence presented in this literature review reflects how cooperative learning improves student performance and engagement by helping them process information as a group to complete complex tasks and self-guided practice. By creating a more interactive classroom, general education, and English learner students develop a more positive attitude about language acquisition and academic content material presented to them (Curry et al., 2011; Gagne & Parks, 2013). Student engagement and performance levels increase because they are in an environment that they enjoy. English learners become better in building relationships, acquiring confidence in their language abilities, and building confidence in their abilities. Engaging in academic discourse within a small group setting allows students to become more confident in their abilities and more understanding of students of other cultures. American classrooms possess students of varying academic and cultural differences. Cooperative based classrooms bridge the gaps of academic understanding, social differences, and language barriers so that students can form ownership of their learning processes as well as of those in their group.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The problem statement associated with this review sought to explore English teacher perspectives of whether or not cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners. The study focused on student performance, engagement levels, and teacher perceptions regarding the effect that cooperative learning strategies had on their English language learners. Through a qualitative case study using observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the study explored how teachers perceive cooperative learning strategies when used with English language learners to impact engagement and academic performance.

The focus of the study explored perceptions of teachers and their perceptions were identified through a qualitative case study that utilized interviews and questionnaires. With the use of interviews, observations, and questionnaires, the researcher was able to elicit data and gain understanding regarding the strategies behind teacher perceptions. Interviews and questionnaires regarding teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the various strategies explored the effectiveness of the cooperative strategies on English learner performance (Yin, 2014). The qualitative methods used in this study explored the perceptions of seven traditional high school English teachers regarding their perception of the effectiveness of cooperative strategies on their English language learners' engagement and academic performance.

The theoretical framework that guided this study was based on elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Wittrock, 1978). Dewey (1938) asserted that Democratic social theories place importance on group

members working alongside each other to assist one another in guiding student learning. Developmental theories assert that the use of language is a primary cognitive tool. In as such, the ability to collaborate with team members becomes critical to the success of students' academic abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). Cognitive developmental theory indicates that interactions between students increase their mastery of concepts. Thus, collaborative activities promote student growth (Piaget, 1926). Ultimately, cooperative learning techniques are effective means of elaboration because students are forced to explain information to others (Wittrock, 1978). Cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories reveal the importance of collaboration when honing ones' cognitive development. Being that English language learners are a growing demographic of students across schools nationwide that need additional intervention and support (Chen, 2011), it was vital to understand the effect that these strategies play in their role in education.

### **Research Questions**

Exploring if cooperative learning strategies impact English language learners' academic performance and engagement required analysis of data within a single class of high school English language learner students. The following research question was answered:

R1. How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners?

### **Purpose and Design of the Proposed Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. Exploring teacher perceptions regarding this problem allowed the researcher to see the value of cooperative learning strategies. For this research, a case study that explored teacher perceptions of the

effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies were addressed (Yin, 2014). The boundaries prescribed for this study focused on seven high school English teachers and their English learner students. The purpose of this study focused on cooperative learning strategies' impact on English learner engagement and performance and is useful to educators in outlining effective teaching strategies for this demographic (Creswell, 2013).

There is a lack of research that identifies the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies concerning English language learners that explores the empirical data reflective of this subject (Callahan et al., 2010; Goldenberg, 2013;). To fully analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies among English language learners, a case study method presented an understanding of the research problem by collecting data in the form of interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Gathering an abundance of data ensured that the study reflected an accurate account of the perceptions in question (Creswell, 2013). Further analysis of the data resulted in an understanding of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness that cooperative learning strategies had on English learner engagement and academic performance. According to literature presented by Yin and Merriam (1998), an embedded single case study revealed the perceived effectiveness of these strategies from various teachers and utilized qualitative measures to determine the outcomes.

For this study, the criteria for participant selection were teachers who collectively taught high school English, who had English language learners in their general education classes, and who were willing and able to be interviewed on a scheduled date. Merriam (1998) noted the use of particularization regarding identifying the description of the practical problem of research. In this case, the practical problem sought to explain the contextual conditions of a cooperative centered culture to ascertain the possible influence on the phenomenon under study (Creswell,

2013). The descriptive nature of a single case study was intended to expose the realities of differences in opinions that translated into identifying the effectiveness of the study (Yin, 2014). Finally, heuristics assisted the researcher's understanding of the study by uncovering possible reasons for the effectiveness of the strategies, evaluating discrepancies between perceptions, and drawing conclusions for "increasing its potential applicability" (Merriam, 1998, p. 31).

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

For this study, data was gathered from a public high school located in Southern California. This high school resides in a suburban city that strives to produce students who are college and career ready. Although the city and the students within the school district are predominantly working class minorities and consist of a low socio-economic makeup, there was a strong desire to see academic achievement within the youth in the city. The demographic breakdown of the school was as follows: 61% Hispanic, 27% African-American, 9% white, and 3% other (Carter, 2013). Most students, 89%, were classified within low socioeconomic levels and participated in free or reduced lunch. The high school had a large English language learner population and was the third high school built in the city, constructed in 2004. It has worked its way up from a gang infested campus, to a thriving college ready organization.

When selecting the participants for this study, convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) was used to select participants based on their position at the school of the study, teacher flexibility to meet with the researcher, and teacher understanding and use of cooperative learning strategies (Yin, 2014). Seven high school English teachers were selected for the study. The demographic breakdown of each teacher's student population was similar in nature with all classes taught being made up of a blend of English language learners, approximately 20% of each classroom set by the school, and English-only students. All teachers were asked to engage

in cooperative learning strategies as outlined in the cooperative learning checklist, Appendix A, for an entire quarter and reflected on the engagement and performance levels of their English learner students. These lessons were used in conjunction with the teachers' regular teaching methods. Teachers were given an initial questionnaire, Appendix B, with definitions to key cooperative based vocabulary to ensure they had a clear understanding of what cooperative learning strategies were. The researcher observed a cooperative learning lesson from each teacher and used a premade observation form, Appendix E, along with the cooperative learning checklist, Appendix A, to record notes. Teachers were given a final questionnaire, Appendix C, at the end of the study evaluating their perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategies on the engagement levels and academic performance levels of the English language learners in their classes. Sampling for this study reflected a non-probability sampling process that gave the researcher information to determine the results regarding teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies impacting English language learners' engagement and academic performance (Yin, 2014).

### **Sources of Data**

Sources of data included interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Interviews provided the researcher with anecdotal evidence regarding the progress of the study. Questionnaires examined the teachers' base understanding of the components of cooperative learning strategies as well as their ultimate perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies (Yin, 2014). Observations ensured teachers were using cooperative learning techniques within their lessons during the study.

Interviews and observations served an important role in the study and provided insight into teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies presented. Along with open-ended

questionnaires, teacher interviews were the crux of the data collection process. Through interviews, teachers had an opportunity to reflect on the lesson delivery after each observation, documented student interactions, engagement levels, and academic performance during each lesson. Through interviews, teachers were able to focus on specific areas of the study and were provided an opportunity to reflect on the success or failure of the specific strategies used within their lessons (Yin, 2014). During the interviews, the researcher recorded the interviews and took field notes reflective of answers given by the teachers and act as a nonparticipant observer. The researcher did not provide any opinions or insights on the lesson or strategies and asked open-ended questions to engage the teachers in a discussion. The purpose of the interviews was to allow the researcher to gauge teacher perceptions on a more qualitative level (Creswell, 2013).

The questionnaires within the study were given to the teachers at the beginning of the case study and asked open-ended questions about their understanding of what cooperative learning strategies were and the current use of these strategies within their classroom. The questionnaire given to teachers at the end of the study, Appendix C, focused on their perspectives of the effectiveness of the strategies impacting engagement and performance. The first questionnaire, Appendix B, consisted of nine open-ended questions that reflected the teachers' current perspectives on the effectiveness of the strategies regarding English learner achievement, academic performance, and engagement levels (Creswell, 2013). In this questionnaire, teachers were asked questions that assessed their understanding of cooperative learning strategies, their current usage within their classroom, their comfort level when using the strategies, their preconceptions of its effectiveness, and their current perceptions of ability levels of students. The first questionnaire focused on the teachers' current implementation of cooperative learning strategies and students' current abilities. The second open-ended

questionnaire given at the end of the study focused on teacher perceptions, specifically teachers' perceived ability to implement the cooperative strategies, student engagement levels, student performance levels, and projected future use of cooperative strategies. The second questionnaire focused on teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative strategies implemented throughout the study and was more indicative of the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing performance levels of English language learners (Creswell, 2013). The questionnaires were reviewed and cleared by academic experts and deemed valid prior to use.

Observations provided further data that teachers were effectively presenting cooperative learning strategies in their classrooms. During the observations, if the researcher identified lessons that were not indicative of a true cooperative lesson, based on one of the cooperative learning checklist provided in Appendix A, future lessons were observed to ensure the study variables remained aligned to the research questions presented, and that the lessons utilized cooperative based strategies. Furthermore, the observations gave insight into student engagement levels and performance levels. Field notes regarding student interactions, student progress, teacher participation, and engagement levels were recorded. All data gathered from the classroom observations acted as further support that the study provided insight on student impact.

Qualitative data was objectively recorded and the researcher presented an unbiased view of the data. Observations gave insight to the effectiveness of the delivery of the cooperative lessons. Some challenges that were avoided related to the role of the inquirer (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the researcher assumed the role of a nonparticipant observer and took notes on lesson delivery, engagement and performance levels of students, and general information about the classroom and environment. This study required the observer to remain focused on the

engagement levels of the English language learners and required prior confirmation and notification of which students were English language learners. Interviews were considered practical and the most useful way to answer questionnaire questions and were best done in person (Creswell, 2013). Small groups were used to receive data from interviewees, however since this study focused on individual perceptions, the researcher held one initial group interview focused on procedures and discussion of lesson delivery at the initial phase of the study. Any information gathered regarding teacher perceptions was done on an individual level to preserve the integrity of teacher perceptions (Creswell, 2013). Recordings were used to record information and were transcribed at a later time.

To ensure validity, questionnaires were created and then reviewed by external parties that consisted of other English teachers not in the study who were familiar with cooperative learning. Reviewing the questionnaires allowed the researcher to compute qualitative data on teacher perceptions generated from open-ended responses (Yin, 2014). The questionnaires provided data that reflected the overall teacher perception of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with English language learners. The questionnaires were analyzed in a similar manner to discover the perceptions of the teachers. The interviews acted as verbal reports of data, while the questionnaires corroborated the data (Yin, 2014).

### **Data Collection**

To initiate the study, prior to gaining the approval of seven high school English teachers at the school of the study, the researcher needed to gain approval from the district and school site where the study took place. The researcher met with district and school site administration to gain approval to conduct the study. A random selection of seven of the twenty English teachers on campus were recruited through a verbal recruiting process during their initial department



meeting (Yin, 2014). The researcher spoke to the teachers during the first quarter of the school year to gain their approval and informed them that the study would take place during the eight weeks of the second quarter of the semester. The informed consent forms were distributed to the participants during the first quarter of school and were signed and collected within two weeks of the beginning of the second quarter (Yin, 2014). The case study included seven English teachers on site to alleviate researcher bias. These teachers were all given professional development on cooperative learning, and all had classrooms with a mix of English learner and English-only students that were set by the school. If at any point in the study participants needed to withdraw from the study, the participants contacted the researcher and informed her in writing that they would no longer be participating. In the case of a participant leaving, the researcher continued the study as scheduled. If more than two teachers withdrew from the study, the study would have needed to cease and be resumed with a new group of participants the following quarter. Teachers were given a questionnaire in the initial stage of the study that explored their initial perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies regarding English language learners (Yin, 2014). The questionnaires were interpreted by the researcher and placed into categories that either asserted that cooperative strategies positively affected English learner performance, or negatively affected English learner performance (Yin, 2014).

Once teachers were selected and informed about the study, the researcher scheduled times to observe a cooperative learning lesson. Teachers were assigned a numerical value to ensure confidentiality of records. The document with the coded names and values was password-protected and deleted once data was uploaded into NVivo software. The observations were conducted throughout the eight-week study. One observation was to be done during week one of the study, and the other was done during week eight of the study. During the weeks that the

researcher did not observe lessons, teachers were asked to conduct at least one cooperative learning lesson each week. The researcher took field notes during the observations and focused documentation on the delivery of the lesson from the teacher, the placement of English language learners within the groups, the ease and flow of discussions, the engagement levels of English language learners, teacher engagement during the activity, and completion of the lesson and activities are assigned. These observations recorded specific student scores and student names were omitted from all observation notes as well as omitted from interview notes. These notes included specific descriptions of the class setting and seating arrangements, and unfiltered and unbiased reflections from the researcher. For teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies to be used, the teachers implemented the methods consistently to give a baseline for interpretation. Perceptions were not skewed due to inefficient delivery of the strategies.

Lesson observations served to set this baseline. The notes were coded and organized with a code book. The following code words were used to organized data from interviews and observations: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared responsibilities, enhances, on task, off task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, and disadvantages. All hand-written records were shredded and discarded after uploading as an electric file. All electronic files were password protected and will be deleted after three years.

Further data was collected through teacher interviews after each cooperative lesson. These interviews were recorded through a tape recorder and researcher handwritten notes. The

interviews were set informally and reflected on how the teacher felt the lesson went and the impact it had on the English language learners. The purpose of these interviews was to gauge the teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategies impacting engagement and student performance, and to gauge the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the lesson delivery. Ultimately, the study reflected perceptions of the 7 different English teachers. Further data regarding other lessons that teachers used within their classrooms on a normal basis will impact their overall perceptions of the strategies, but data gathered from these specific lessons was used to ensure effective delivery of the strategies and teacher understanding of cooperative learning strategies. To conclude the study, the researcher gave teachers one final questionnaire that recorded their perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative lessons. These questionnaires were scored in the same manner as the initial questionnaires by placing responses into two categories, positive impact or negative impact of cooperative strategies on English learner performance.

Once all data was gathered and coded from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations, the researcher reviewed the data to determine the answer to the research question. Questionnaires were scored by placing responses into multiple categories reflective of positive or negative perceptions on English learner performance. Observation notes were reviewed to explore that lessons conducted utilized cooperative strategies and would determine the engagement levels of students from various classes. Interviews with the teachers served as a secondary source that reflected teacher perceptions. The interviews were transcribed and sorted to reflect teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning strategies impacting English language learners' performance and engagement levels. Once recordings were transcribed, they were deleted immediately. When all data was recorded, the resulting evidence was used to evaluate

teacher perceptions of how cooperative learning strategies impact English learner engagement and performance levels. Data will be kept in an encrypted file for three years post completion of the study.

### **Phenomenon**

The phenomenon that this study focused on was how different cooperative learning strategies were used by individual teachers. The phenomenon focused on the classroom environments and relationships of students and teachers prior to the study, the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) levels of English language learners within each classroom, the amount of previous student exposure to cooperative learning strategies, teacher interpretations of the term effective, teacher interpretation of what an engaged student looks like, and teacher interpretations of what academic performance looks like. The study was defined by teacher perceptions of a teaching strategy; therefore, there were many phenomena that impacted both the perceptions as well as the strategies implemented.

The initial questionnaire ensured that all teachers had a general understanding of what techniques cooperative learning strategies employed. From there, teacher interviews revealed teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies on English language learners. During teaching interviews and observations, the phenomenon such as learning strategies and classroom environments and relationships were addressed. Transparency among teachers was essential in understanding the parameters of the phenomenon that could affect the study. CELDT levels of the diverse English language learners also potentially impacted the findings of the study. If classrooms contained a higher amount of level one and two students compared to levels four and five, the overall student performance levels could have been affected. Personnel at the school of study attempted to distribute English language learners evenly within classrooms with a random

selection process by CELDT level. The discrepancies revealed a potential need for a future study that focuses on how cooperative learning strategies affect the various levels of English language learners.

Previous exposure to cooperative learning strategies also varied among teachers. Cooperative learning has been a major focus for the English department at the school of study for the past two years, but some teachers engage in these strategies more frequently than others. Thus, the students in those classes were more familiar with the cooperative learning process. For the purposes of this study, the researcher noted that all the teachers within the study had been given the same professional development and expectations set by the administration of their school and had a general baseline for the understanding and usage of cooperative learning strategies within their classrooms. Participants also had similar definitions of the term effective, similar understandings of what student engagement entailed, and similar beliefs of what increased academic performance looked like. Teachers were given a list of definitions during their first questionnaire and ensured the terminology was consistent from teacher to teacher. The following was given to teachers:

**Student engagement.** In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education (Willms, 2003).

**Effective.** The successful completion of a specific topic (Willms, 2003).

**Increased academic performance.** Success that is measured by how well a student meets standards set out by their teachers, their school, and their state (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

**Think, pair, share.** Collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This technique requires students to think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and share ideas with classmates (Think Pair Share, 2017).

**Give one, get one.** Investigation of an essential question in response to an essay prompt over the course of a unit of study. Students interrogate and investigate multiple primary sources and ideas to stimulate their thinking and find evidence. Teachers can also use this strategy as a way to have students share their work with peers. Students will practice being active listeners or readers—an essential skill for learning new information. (Facing History, 2017).

**Jigsaw activities.** A cooperative learning technique that reduces racial conflict among school children, promotes better learning, improves student motivation, and increases enjoyment of the learning experience (Jigsaw Classroom, 2017).

**Accountable talk activities.** Talk that is meaningful, respectful, and mutually beneficial to both speaker and listener. Accountable talk stimulates higher-order thinking—helping students to learn, reflect on their learning, and communicate their knowledge and understanding (Accountable Talk Instructional Practices, 2017)

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

To analyze the data presented from interviews and observations the researcher focused on restorying data gathered. This data was coded with the following sections: 1. Engagement levels of students; 2. The quality of work from students; 3. Cooperative strategies used; 4. Teacher anecdotal accounts; and 5. Miscellaneous. The use of these coded sections allowed the researcher to focus on data relating to engagement and performance levels of students, cooperative strategies, and teacher perceptions. Data pertaining to the lesson plans was sorted into the

following categories: 1. Sufficiently embed cooperative learning strategies; 2. Moderately embed cooperative learning strategies, and 3. Does not embed cooperative learning strategies. If there were any lesson plans that did not meet the requirements of the study and did not engage the student in cooperative learning activities, they were thrown out of the study.

Data pertaining to questionnaires provided information regarding the knowledge levels of teachers concerning cooperative learning procedures and their perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies regarding their English language learners. The following categories were used for the initial teacher questionnaire regarding their knowledge of cooperative learning strategies:

1. Well knowledgeable of cooperative learning strategies and confident in my ability to utilize them in my classroom; 2. Well knowledgeable of cooperative learning strategies but not confident in my ability to utilize them effectively in the classroom; and 3. Limited knowledge of cooperative learning strategies. The following categories were used for the initial questionnaire as well as the final teacher questionnaire regarding teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of cooperative learning on English learner engagement and performance levels: 1. Cooperative learning strategies are highly effective in increasing English learner engagement and performance levels; 2. Cooperative learning strategies are somewhat effective in increasing English learner engagement and performance levels; 3. Cooperative learning strategies are minimally effective in increasing English learner engagement and performance levels; and 4. Cooperative learning strategies are not effective in increasing English learner engagement and performance levels.

The following code words were used to organize data from interviews and observations: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work,

mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared responsibilities, enhances, on task, off task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, and disadvantages. Once data was gathered and organized into subsequent thematic categories using NVivo software, the researcher processed the information and sorted through information that was reflective of cooperative learning strategies impacting engagement and performance levels. Data was coded thematically using NVivo software. NVivo analyzed student engagement and performance levels, as well as the teacher perception of the effectiveness cooperative learning strategies had on these attributes (Yin, 2014). Once the researcher had a clear understanding that all lessons were conducted, the student engagement and performance data was analyzed, the teacher perceptions scores were gathered, the final proposition was addressed, and the research question was answered.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Research Study**

Assumptions within this case study were as follows: The researcher assumed that the participants in the study would give extensive and honest answers to questionnaires and interview questions would add value to the study. It was also assumed that because the researcher was employed on staff at the site where the study took place, the participants may have held back information from the researcher due to feeling uncomfortable or the fear of being judged by the researcher. To alleviate this fear, the researcher explained the process of how anonymity and confidentiality were preserved during the study. It was also assumed that a qualitative study was the appropriate research design for this study since it was centered on exploring teacher perceptions regarding a specific teaching strategy, and exploration of perceptions is commonly explored with the use of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2014).



Limitations that the researcher could not control in this study included sampling size, teacher experience, and self-reporting. The size of this study was dependent on the number of English teachers willing to participate in the study. The number of teachers within the English team at the school of study was small, therefore placed limits on the study such that the study may not be broadly generalizable. The data collected was limited to seven high school English teachers from which were taken from a department of 20 English teachers. The decision to focus on the English teachers was due to their specific emphasis on cooperative learning strategies for the coming school year. The study was limited to one high school; therefore, it does not represent all English teachers within the state of California. Another limitation of the study was that the researcher was employed at the research site which may have caused some participants to feel uncomfortable sharing truthful information with the researcher. The researcher ensured all participants of the objectivity, anonymity, and confidentiality of the study. This study was conducted within a single high school, among the teachers from the English Language Arts department. There were only 20 teachers that made up the English department's professional learning community, thus making the sampling size relatively small. These teachers had been working together for many years and were an ideal team to study in that they were all familiar with the components of cooperative learning strategies and had chosen to focus on these strategies as a professional learning community for this school year. The cooperation and collaboration of this specific professional learning community made the group an appropriate one to study because they all possessed a similar baseline understanding of the strategies examined in this study. These teachers possessed a variety of teaching experience and education levels, but they were all working at the same school, so it made their perceptions slightly uniform in that they shared a common student population from a similar demographic.

Teacher experience and understanding of cooperative learning strategies also impacted the study. Novice teachers and tenured teachers had varying abilities to lead an effective cooperative lesson. There were differences in classroom management techniques and confidence levels of the teachers. It was imperative for the researcher to gauge that all participants in the study had the ability to lead a classroom and partake in an effective cooperative lesson. Outside factors such as classroom management issues could have potentially skewed the data. Understanding of specific cooperative strategies was also a limitation of the study. Teachers who were more familiar with the strategies may have been more effective in implementing them in a lesson; thus, providing more effective opportunities for students to engage with the lesson.

Self-reporting was another limitation in this study. Questionnaires provided a quantitative means to interpret teacher perceptions, but much of the study was centered on interviews, observations, and individuals' feelings about the topic (Yin, 2014). The essence of the research questions rested on teacher perceptions, making the nature of the study subjective to the various teachers' views. As a researcher, remaining an objective nonparticipant observer was essential to the accuracy of the data collection process (Creswell, 2013). Conducting interviews without alluding to one's beliefs and recording observations without personal opinions was crucial to ensuring an objective answer to the research question (Creswell, 2013). In the end, the study focused on teacher perceptions, so self-reporting was a necessity of the study and was kept as objective as possible. One final limitation of the study was that the demographics of the study focused entirely on English teachers, rather than an array of content area teachers. The study focused solely on the English team because this group of teachers was making cooperative learning strategies a part of their shared practices and common lesson plans throughout the school year.

Delimitations of the study included the lack of various subject areas and school sites for the study. The study was delimited to seven English teachers because these teachers were intentionally focused on incorporating cooperative learning strategies into their classrooms on a regular basis. The teachers had a generalizable understanding of the strategies and could meet during weekly meeting times. The study was also delimited by the requirement that all study participants be actively engaged in utilizing cooperative strategies within their lessons. The results of the study may not be representative of all English teachers. The choice to focus on English teachers was made because they are a specific professional learning community that is focusing on incorporating cooperative learning techniques within their classrooms. The English professional learning community at the school of study is a group of teachers who were willing to work on the study and meet with the researcher on a regular basis. The decision to conduct the study on one school in Southern California was made for the purpose of meeting time constraints. The study focused on a single 8-week quarter of the school year and required the researcher to observe each teacher's class, survey each teacher, and confer with them for interviews. To ensure the researcher was available to meet with all teachers, one school site was used for the study.

### **Reliability**

To ensure that the study remained credible and reliable, the researcher utilized, peer debriefing with other doctoral students, member checking and researcher reflections. The credibility of the study was supported by ensuring that the researcher took steps to control biases by not engaging in outside conversations with the participants. Peer debriefing by doctoral researchers ensured that the data gathered and the conclusions made were accurate. Utilizing others to review the data and results ensured that the researchers' biases did not impact the data.

Furthermore, the debriefing process allowed the researcher to get objective feedback from the participants during the study.

### **Ethical Issues**

The researcher of this study was employed as a teacher on site where the study was conducted, so there was a possibility for researcher bias. However, the researcher attempted to remain as unbiased as possible and ensured that the exchanges between her and the participants remained credible, objective, and focused on the study. As stated in the Belmont Report (1978), the study maintained respect for the persons participating, maintained beneficence, and maintained justice. To minimize any conflicts of interest, the researcher ensured that there was no dialogue between her and the participants outside of the study. Furthermore, the study included students that the researcher may have known on a personal level as former students, so to preserve objectivity, names of students were omitted from interviews. As the principal investigator within a non-participant observer role, it was the job of the researcher to be as objective as possible and not allow personal connections with the teachers or students to interfere with the objectivity of the study. The remaining objective could have become difficult when associating with these teachers on personal time. To ensure the study was as credible and objective as possible, the researcher did not meet with these teachers or students outside of the study while the study was in progress. Maintaining distance ensured the only communication between researcher and participant was centered on the study at hand.

Having the study conducted at the same school site that the researcher taught at posed advantages and disadvantages to the study. An advantage to conducting the study on location was the ease of accessibility to the participants (Yin, 2014). The researcher was able to schedule meetings and observations more efficiently being that they were in similar locations on a daily

basis. Additionally, the ease and transparency of dialogue served as an advantage of the study (Yin, 2014). Since the researcher knew the participants through working relationships, the level of their trust should have been increasingly higher and enabled more fluid dialogue during interviews. A disadvantage to conducting the study with teachers that the researcher was familiar with was maintaining objectivity. It was important to ensure that the teachers in the study understood that the results and their perceptions about the success of the strategies did not reflect their teaching abilities, but rather the effectiveness of the strategies on impacting the English language learners. There was a clear understanding that the researcher was not observing their lessons and judging them or critiquing their teaching style, it was focused on the strategies and its effectiveness with regard to English learner outcomes (Yin, 2014).

The use of deception was avoided for this study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study as well as the process that the researcher followed. Participants were debriefed at the beginning of the study and the end. They completed an informed consent form before the study started and were appraised of all data and findings at the end of the study. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study and the components of the research methods so that all participants were aware of the objectives and the requirements of the study. Participants were informed of the study within the first quarter of the start of school and were given the consent form two weeks before the start of the second quarter. The study took place during the eight weeks of the second quarter of the school year.

The bias within this study could be seen within the participants as well as the researcher. All of the participants, as well as the researcher, were familiar with cooperative learning methods and had implemented them within their classrooms at some point in time. There was a general push from the onsite administration where the study was conducted to utilize those methods

within classrooms on a regular basis which further added to the bias of the participants. The participants understood that the study was not reflective of their teaching abilities or feelings about cooperative learning in general, it specifically focused on their perspectives of the effectiveness of the strategies in impacting English learner engagement and performance levels. The participants and the researcher put aside any biases of the students' previous abilities and focused on the single study with regard to the strategies and its impact. The study was based on teacher perceptions so it was difficult to isolate the teacher perceptions of the strategies without allowing previous beliefs to enter the minds of the participants. Participants were asked to remain as objective as possible and focus only on the lessons and study at hand.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore if cooperative learning strategies increase the academic performance of English learners within their English courses. The study focused on teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies impacting English learner engagement and academic performance and answered the research question that asked: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? A qualitative study was used to determine these perceptions (Yin, 2014). The findings helped to understand that teachers perceive that cooperative learning strategies are effective in increasing English learner engagement and performance. The key actions of the study utilized cognitive and developmental theories to explore teaching strategies (Yin, 2014). The action steps consisted of surveying teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning strategies, observing lessons, conducting interviews, and surveying teachers to determine their final perceptions of whether or not cooperative learning strategies were effective in assisting English language

learners and determined that these strategies should be focused on in classes with this demographic of students.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Data Analysis and Results**

This study explored traditional high school English teachers' perceptions of how cooperative learning strategies affected English language learners' academic performance and engagement. Through a qualitative case study that used observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the study provided data that answers the research question: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? The purpose of chapter four of this study was to provide insight on the data gathered from the study and come to conclusions regarding the analysis and results of the study. The data gathered from the observations, interviews, and questionnaires, was coded and analyzed to give a qualitative answer to the research question.

Data from this study was obtained through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The research utilized the website Survey Monkey as a platform to provide the questionnaires to the participants. Participants completed the initial questionnaire (Appendix B) and then allowed the researcher to observe of their classes while they conducted a cooperative learning activity. The researcher filled out the observation form (Appendix E) to record observations. The researcher did not evaluate the teacher, but rather confirmed that the lesson utilized cooperative strategies, which allowed the researcher to gauge whether or not the teacher had a clear understanding of what cooperative learning was. After the observations, the teachers answered interview questions (Appendix D) and completed the final survey on the Survey Monkey website (Appendix C). Once all data was gathered, it was coded using word frequency in Excel and NVivo software.



The data was gathered at the school site where the participants and researcher were employed. There was a social and working relationship between the researcher and the participants, so it was important to set up norms and study policies from the beginning. The norms focused on confidentiality and ensured that the participants did not discuss the study outside of the parameters of the questionnaires and interviews within the study. During the initial recruiting period of the study, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and ensured that it would remain a formal case study, and interpersonal relationships and friendships would be a non-issue due to the anonymity within the questionnaire responses within the study. Many participants were nervous about having a fellow teacher observe their classes and were informed that no one would evaluate their teaching, but rather observe lessons to ensure the teacher was conducting cooperative learning strategies. Regardless of previous personal relationships, the research remained objective. As a nonparticipant researcher, personal insight was never shared during the observations or interviews. Participants were provided the questionnaire links, given observation and interview appointments, and were sent reminders to ensure they completed all parts of the study. Throughout the study, finding the initial participants that were able to meet to complete the study, including observations and interviews, proved to be the hardest aspect of the study. Due to various schedules and an array of prep periods and other factors, it was difficult to arrange meeting times that worked for the participants. Once the final group of participants was selected, observations and interviews were scheduled during school hours, and the participants were able to complete the initial and final questionnaires on their own time.

### **Descriptive Data**

The sampling used for this study was convenience sampling. The participants of the study were all teachers that worked on site where the study took place. Participants elicited were all

individuals that taught English, understood what cooperative learning was, taught English during their first period, were able to meet with the researcher during their first period, and were willing to complete the initial and final questionnaires. As reflected in Table 1, all members of the participant pool had eight years of teaching experience and above. There was a mix of three male and four female participants, and an array of ethnicities: three Hispanics, two Whites, and two African Americans. All participants taught high school English classes from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. No participants withdrew from the study.

Table 1

*Demographic Data for the Participants*

| <u>Type of Teacher</u> | <u>N=7</u> | <u>Percentage Breakdown</u> |
|------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| General Education      | 7          | 100%                        |
| Special Education      | 0          | 0%                          |
| Gender                 |            |                             |
| Male                   | 3          | 43%                         |
| Female                 | 4          | 57%                         |
| Classes                |            |                             |
| ELD                    | 2          | 29%                         |
| ELA                    | 5          | 71%                         |
| Years Taught           |            |                             |
| 1-5                    | 0          | 0%                          |
| 6-10                   | 6          | 86%                         |
| 11-20                  | 1          | 14%                         |

All participants were found to have understood what cooperative learning was through interviews, observations, and questionnaire responses. One hundred percent of participants completed the initial questionnaire, and 71% participants completed the final questionnaire. Due to time constraints, the study ended before two of the participants were able to complete their final questionnaires; however, the data from their initial questionnaire, observations, and interviews were still utilized in the study.

## **Data Analysis and Procedures**

The data analysis of the study fit the applied research approach of a qualitative case study. A qualitative case study was chosen as it related to open-ended questions that evaluated perceptions of individuals (Yin, 2014). A qualitative study allowed for observations and interviews based on subjective information (Yin, 2014). The use of qualitative coding focused on word frequency and thematic patterns to inform the researcher of evaluations of the research question.

The initial questionnaire asked participants a series of nine questions. Question 1 asked: How familiar are you with cooperative learning techniques? All seven participants noted that they were very familiar with cooperative techniques. Participant 3 noted that they had also attended Kagan training. Participant 1 stated, "Very familiar." Participant 2 stated, "I am very experienced in being trained and using them." Participant 3 stated, "I'm very familiar. I've attended Kagan training and I've used the techniques in my classroom off and on for several years." Participant 4 stated, "Highly familiar." Participant 5 stated, "I am familiar with Kagan cooperative structures which are a part of cooperative learning techniques." Participant 6 stated, "I am very familiar with cooperative learning techniques." Participant 7 stated, "Very."

Question 2 asked: What is the extent that you use group activities in your classroom? Participants 1, 2, 4, and 7 noted they use these strategies on a daily basis. Participants 3, 3, and 6 noted they use the strategies at least once a week. Participant 1 stated, "I use group activities in my classes almost daily." Participant 2 stated, "About once per week." Participant 3 stated, "I use partner activities and group activities at least once a week. I am not strict with the academic language frames while discussing content, but I'm pretty thorough with assigning frames when

we write (paragraphs, essays). We will use group time to work on projects after a novel, and to discuss elements of fiction etc.” Participant 4 stated, “There is always some form of discussion between student groups in my class. My class desks are set up in groups of four in order to facilitate this process regularly.” Participant 5 stated, “I am off and on with these structures. They are not used every day, but the students are trained and familiar with the procedures.” Participant 6 stated, “I try to have group activities at least two to three times a week.” Participant 7 stated, “Almost daily.”

Question 3 asked: Discuss whether or not you believe that cooperative learning activities enhance class participation of English learners. All participants in the study noted that the strategies enhance participation of English learners. Participants 1 and 3 noted that the strategies allow English learners to feel more confident within the lessons. Participant 1 stated, “Cooperative learning activities help English learners participate because other students model for them and they can imitate appropriate responses. They can also clarify information with another peer in a less threatening environment.” Participant 2 stated, “They definitely help English learners.” Participant 3 stated, “I believe that it does enhance class participation because initially we start in a small (typically safe) setting which allows students time to find their voices, Once they’ve practiced with others, then they seem to be more confident (at times) with the whole class discussion.” Participant 4 stated, “Cooperative learning activities definitely enhance the participation of ELs because they feel more comfortable to share their answers because they have had multiple opportunities to practice before having to share out loud to the whole class. They also can bounce ideas off of each other to more fully develop their own answers.” Participant 5 stated, “Yes they do. They keep the students accountable to each other. They cannot hide in a sea of faces. They have to respond, but it is a safer environment.” Participant 6 stated, “If the ELs are

partnered with the correct people, cooperative learning activities do enhance class participation.” Participant 7 stated, “Yes, they are more involved and complete more work.”

Question 4 asked: Discuss the extent to which you believe or do not believe that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among English learner students. All participants noted that cooperative strategies enhance good working relationships. Participant 1 noted that the teacher must be purposeful in his/her grouping of students. Participant 1 stated, “Cooperative learning can enhance working relationships if the teacher is purposeful in how he or she groups students and also be purposeful in why the grouping is happening.” Participant 2 stated, “The interactions allow them to ask and answer more questions and help each other - a great help.” Participant 3 stated, “I don't have real evidence for this--just my perception--but I believe in many cases that working in teams does foster healthy working relationships among ELLs.” Participant 4 stated, “Cooperative learning allows EL students learn how to foster good working relationships with fellow students. They learn to speak professionally with their peers and to develop coping mechanisms for working with those students they don't particularly care for.” Participant 5 stated, “See number 3.” Participant 6 stated, “Since ELs are sometimes shy and need extra assistance, I think cooperative learning enhances not only production but good working relationships.” Participant 7 stated, “It does enhance working relationships.”

Question 5 asked: Do you feel that when students work together, the English learners remain on task more than when working alone? Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7 noted that English learners stay on task when working together. Participants 1, 3, and 6 noted that they stay on task as long as the groups were purposeful and that students are not allowed to work with friends. Participant 1 stated, “English Learners will be on task if they have been trained on how to do group activities, if the teacher's expectations are clear, and if they have a role to play in the

group.” Participant 2 stated, “Yes they stay more on task.” Participant 3 stated, “Actually, depending on the team the ELL is in, team work might be even more distracting. If the structure of the team is conducive to the nature of the learner, then it can be supportive, but I’ve certainly witnessed dysfunctional teams where the students are not really helping each other to be their best selves.” Participant 4 stated, “It can help them stay on task, but teacher monitoring is key in this endeavor.” Participant 5 stated, “Yes. Again, they become accountable to each other which is a stronger sense of accountability.” Participant 6 stated, “It would depend on the partner/group.” Participant 7 stated, “Yes, unless they are with friends.”

Question 6 asked: Do you feel that when English learners work together, they have a higher understanding of the content delivered than when working alone? All participants noted that English learners have a higher understanding of content when working with peers. Each participant noted that the interactions help the students. Participant 1 stated, “The structure of the activity can help English learners, especially if the teachers allow their interaction with other students who may be at a higher level than they are. Even if the peer is at the same level, it may help both if through discussion they can figure things out.” Participant 2 stated, “It definitely does increase their comprehension.” Participant 3 stated, “This is believed to be true. When I walk around to listen in on some of the conversations in teams, I may witness students saying what I’ve said but in a way that can be received. When we have our chairs facing forward and students have independent time (nothing wrong with this by the way :-)) some ELLs have a hard time getting started with the activity.” Participant 4 stated, “Yes I do because it gives ELs a chance to digest the content and bounce ideas off of each other. This leads to a better understanding of the lesson content.” Participant 5 stated, “Because of the smaller and safer environment, the students are much more willing to work.” Participant 6 stated, “Yes, if an EL is

struggling with the content, another student can help summarize/explain the content to them in terms they would understand.” Participant 7 stated, “Yes, different perspectives.”

Question 7 asked: What are some of the advantages of cooperative learning? Participant 1 skipped this question; participant 2, 3, 4, and 6 noted that conversations can reinforce student learning, accountability, and professionalism. Participant 1 skipped this question. Participant 2 stated, “Students are able to ask each other for help - the conversations reinforce their learning.” Participant 3 stated, “Sometimes higher level English learners (and speakers) will encourage and support each other with content and understanding directions, etc. Again, these cooperative learning teams can provide a small, safe place for ELLs to practice sharing their ideas so they maintain lower affective filters.” Participant 4 stated, “Students learn to speak professionally; this is vitally important for ELs because they must be given ample opportunities to orally practice the language. Students have extra think time to fully develop their answers before being called on.” Participant 5 stated, “Higher class participation. More accountability.” Participant 6 stated, “Cooperative learning can help enhance listening/speaking skills and the higher understanding of the content.” Participant 7 stated, “More focus and on task behaviors.”

Question 8 asked: What are some of the disadvantages of cooperative learning? Participant 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 stated a disadvantage of cooperative learning is the off task behavior some students exhibit, participant two discussed the difficulty of sharing as a whole group. Participant 1 stated, “Students may be off task if the activity is not structured well.” Participant 2 stated, “The hardest part is if they have to be the one to share out with the whole class - many lack confidence to do that – also sometimes can get off track if not monitored.” Participant 3 stated, “Some disadvantages would be students depend on others to do the thinking and then they will copy down what others say instead of struggling with the material as well. It is important to

have that independent practice consistently (for personal growth).” Participant 4 stated, “Students can get off task easily if they are not monitored. Also, they have to have structure built in to the cooperative learning process. If it isn't structured in some way, students will get off task much more easily.” Participant 5 stated, “If a teacher is not well versed in classroom management, it can quickly become a nightmare.” Participant 6 stated, “Depending on the partners or students, cooperative learning can allow students to get off task or just have one student complete all of the work.” Participant 7 stated, “If groups include friends, some kids will talk and not work.”

Question 9 asked: What is the impact that group activities have on your English learners? Participant 1 noted the group activities create a safer environment; participant 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 noted that the strategies increase learning, participant three noted that the strategies can positively and negatively affect a classroom depending on how it is monitored. Participant 1 stated, “ELs can imitate appropriate responses. They can also clarify information with another peer in a less threatening environment.” Participant 2 stated, “Very positive help to increased learning.” Participant 3 stated, “It has been mixed in my experience. If I had to give it a percentage, I'd say if the assignments are structured, timed, and there's accountability connected to the assignments and if the teams are well suited for learning (varying levels) then 70% or more are effective. The other "30%" may benefit from a mix of traditional learning and brief group activities.” Participant 4 stated, “Group activities give EL students the opportunity to improve their understanding of class content, to orally practice the language, to have extra think time when developing their answers, and to heighten their confidence level.” Participant 5 stated, “They learn.” Participant 6 stated, “The primary impact is that ELs complete more of their work, are on task, and better understand the content.” Participant 7 stated, “Positive impact.” After



viewing the responses from the initial questionnaire, responses showed positive perceptions about cooperative strategies unless groups were unstructured. For the cooperative strategies to be effective, teachers noted that the groups must be selected by teachers and not the students.

The final questionnaire asked participants a series of ten questions. Question 1 asked: Discuss whether or not you believe that cooperative learning activities enhance class participation of English learners. All five participants noted that the activities enhance participation. Participant 1 stated, “Yes, it definitely helps.” Participant 2 stated, “It can force them to participate, depending on the type of activity it is. They do like to converse with their peers, and they are fairly open to using the sentence frames.” Participant 3 stated, “Yes. I believe that cooperative activities help English learners. Group activities allow students to interact with one another with speaking and listening. Students that might feel uncomfortable speaking in front of a big group have greater success with peers in a smaller group.” Participant 4 stated, “Yes it does enhance participation.” Participant 5 stated, “Yes, I believe that cooperative learning does enhance the class participation of English learners.”

Question 2 asked: Discuss the extent to which you believe or do not believe that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among English learner students. All participants noted that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships. Participants 2 and 3 noted it fosters professional relationships as well. Participant 1 stated, “Yes it increases better working relationships among students.” Participant 2 stated, “Any opportunity to create academic dialogue between peers will enhance their working relationships for the better. One of the major concepts that I teach my students, EL or not, is that they need to learn how to work effectively with a variety of people. They do not need to like them--they just need to be able to work with them in a professional manner.” Participant 3 stated, “Yes. Cooperative learning

allows the students to get to know one another and work together. When they get to know one another it fosters good working relationships.” Participant 4 stated, “Enhances good working relationships.” Participant 5 stated, “Cooperative learning does enhance good working relationships among English learner students.”

Question 3 asked: Do you feel that when students work together, the English learners remain on task more than when working alone? All five participants noted that they think English learners remain on task when working together. Participant 1 stated, “Yes it increases being on task - they can get distracted if not monitored by the teacher, but students tend to bring each other on track.” Participant 2 stated, “ELs do remain on task more when working together, for the most part. When tasks are too difficult is when students tend to talk about other topics. The teacher should step in at that point and help the students through the rough patch or modify the activity.” Participant 3 stated, “I had not thought of this. I will say yes. Students tend to engage more when working in groups.” Participant 4 stated, “Yes, they have support.” Participant 5 stated, “For the most part, yes, English learners do remain on task than when working alone.”

Question 4 asked: Do you feel that when English learners work together they have a higher understanding of the content delivered than when working alone? All participants noted that they believe English learners have a higher understanding of content when working in a group. Participant 1 stated, “Yes it increases their comprehension of the lessons to a significant degree.” Participant 2 stated, “ELs definitely have a higher understanding of the content delivered than when working alone because they have extra think time, and they have any opportunity to bounce ideas off of each other.” Participant 3 stated, “Yes.” Participant 4 stated,

“Yes, different perspectives.” Participant 5 stated, “If English learners work together they do have a higher understanding of the content.”

Question 5 asked: What are some of the advantages of cooperative learning? Participant 1, 2, and 4 noted some advantages are increased understanding and increased use of language. Participant 3 noted an increase in engagement. Participant 5 noted increases on task behavior and listening and speaking skills. Participant 1 stated, “Increased understanding of lesson, increased confidence, increased use of language, improved relationships.” Participant 2 stated, “Students have more think time. They have opportunities to orally practice the language. Students learn to work with their peers in a professional, academic manner. They can get feedback on their ideas. It gives students a greater responsibility for their own learning.” Participant 3 stated, “Increased engagement and students tend to finish in a group when they might not have completed the task alone.” Participant 4 stated, “More participation.” Participant 5 stated, “Some of the advantages of cooperative learning is the extra help, clarification of other students, on-task behavior/learning, and enhancement of listening/speaking skills.”

Question 6 asked: What are some of the disadvantages of cooperative learning? Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 noted some disadvantages of cooperative activities are that students can get off track when working with friends. Participant 3 noted that it can be hard to introduce complex ideas in smaller groups. Participant 1 stated, “Possibility of getting off track with friends, anxieties if they have to be the one to share out with the whole class.” Participant 2 stated, “Students can get off task. There can be arguments at times. It can get noisy.” Participant 3 stated, “Students have difficulty listening to one another and valuing listening to each other. Sometimes it's hard to introduce difficult concepts in small groups.” Participant 4 stated, “Off

task behaviors if not monitored.” Participant 5 stated, “Off-task behavior or having one student do all of the work.”

Question 7 asked: What is the impact that group activities have on your English learners? Participant 1 and 2 noted similar responses as question 5 and stated there is an increase in learning, involvement and engagement. Participant 3 noted that the activities lead to greater participation. Participant 4 said that the activities help mastery. Participant 5 responded that the activities help students practice vocabulary and communication skills. Participant 1 stated, “Increased learning, comprehension, involvement, being on track.” Participant 2 stated, “I feel I explained that in the above answered questions. My main take away is that it makes students become better by making them mini teachers in a sense. It hands some of the responsibility for their own learning to them.” Participant 3 stated, “It leads to greater participation and higher grades.” Participant 4 stated, “Helps their mastery.” Participant 5 stated, “English learners are very comfortable with group activities and it helps them practice their vocabulary skills, communication, and collaboration skills.”

Question 8 asked: How does cooperative learning impact English learner engagement levels? Participants 1, 4, and 5 noted that cooperative learning increases engagement levels. Participant 2 noted that it helps to improve their reading and writing levels. Participant 3 was unsure. Participant 1 stated, “Increases student engagement and focus.” Participant 2 stated, “The more practice with academic language they have, the more it helps them improve their reading and writing levels.” Participant 3 stated, “Not sure.” Participant 4 stated, “Keeps them engaged.” Participant 5 stated, “Depending on the activity, English learners can be very engaged and on task.”

Question 9 asked: Do English learners turn in more or less work when they are involved in cooperative learning lessons? All five participants noted that students turn in more work when they work in groups. Participant 1 stated, “They turn in more work on time.” Participant 2 stated, “They turn in more when they are working together.” Participant 3 stated, “More work.” Participant 4 stated, “More.” Participant 5 stated, “They tend to turn in more work because they are held accountable by other students.”

Question 10 asked: How does cooperative learning strategies impact English learner academic performance? Participant 1, 2, 4, and 5 noted that student performance increases with the use of cooperative strategies. Participant 3 was unsure how it impacts performance. Participant 1 stated, “It increases their grades on exams and writing.” Participant 2 stated, “If ELs did not have any opportunities to interact with each other in an academic manner, they would never move forward in their performance. It provides them with opportunities to practice the language in an academic way; they don't get that practice at home or with their friends.” Participant 3 stated, “Not sure” Participant 4 stated, “Helps their mastery of content.” Participant 5 stated, “It increases it.”

After viewing the responses from the final questionnaire, responses revealed that teachers believed cooperative strategies enhanced participation and achievement levels of English learners. All questions on the initial questionnaire were answered by all participants, and five of the seven participants completed the final questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected and interpreted, and placed into categories that either reflected that cooperative strategies positively affected English learner performance, or negatively affected English learner performance (Yin, 2014). These questionnaires were also coded using word frequency and theme frequency. The following code words were used to organized data from the initial questionnaire: lack of

engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared, responsibilities, enhances, off task, on task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, disadvantages, familiar, unfamiliar, daily, weekly, model, and safe. Table 2 and 3 reflects the word frequency of keywords used in participant questionnaire responses. Table 4 reflects the word frequency query results triangulated with NVivo software.

Table 2

*Word Frequency Initial Questionnaire*

---

| <u>Term</u>             | <u>Initial Questionnaire</u> |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| increase engagement     | 11                           |
| positive attitude       | 11                           |
| on task                 | 7                            |
| engaged                 | 7                            |
| familiar                | 6                            |
| high engagement         | 6                            |
| enhances                | 5                            |
| interaction             | 5                            |
| increase achievement    | 4                            |
| weekly                  | 4                            |
| effective               | 4                            |
| accountable talk        | 3                            |
| not engaged             | 3                            |
| disadvantages           | 3                            |
| model                   | 3                            |
| safe                    | 3                            |
| non-participant         | 2                            |
| mastery                 | 1                            |
| shared responsibilities | 1                            |
| off task                | 1                            |
| responsibilities        | 1                            |
| daily                   | 1                            |

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Table 3

*Word Frequency Final Questionnaire*

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| <u>Term</u>             | <u>Final Questionnaire</u> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| high engagement         | 11                         |
| shared responsibilities | 10                         |
| advantages              | 9                          |
| increase achievement    | 9                          |
| effective               | 5                          |
| mastery                 | 5                          |
| on task                 | 5                          |
| enhances                | 4                          |
| low interest            | 4                          |
| familiar                | 3                          |
| non-participant         | 3                          |
| disadvantages           | 1                          |
| moderate engagement     | 1                          |
| unfamiliar              | 1                          |
| lack of engagement      | 0                          |
| interaction             | 0                          |
| cooperative activity    | 0                          |
| Safe                    | 0                          |
| ineffective             | 0                          |
| group work              | 0                          |
| success                 | 0                          |
| challenge               | 0                          |
| small group             | 0                          |

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Table 4

*Word Frequency Query*

| <u>Terms</u>   | <u>Count</u> | <u>Weighted Percentage Used by Participants</u> |
|----------------|--------------|---|
| learning       | 114          | 4.48%   |
| cooperative    | 102          | 4.01%   |
| working        | 98           | 3.86%   |
| believe        | 41           | 1.61%   |
| enhances       | 37           | 1.46%   |
| discuss        | 29           | 1.14%   |
| together       | 28           | 1.10%   |
| impact         | 24           | 0.94%   |
| participation  | 22           | 0.87%   |
| relationships  | 22           | 0.87%   |
| understanding  | 21           | 0.83%   |
| help           | 20           | 0.79%   |
| complete       | 16           | 0.63%   |
| remain         | 14           | 0.55%   |
| increases      | 13           | 0.51%   |
| modified       | 13           | 0.51%   |
| advantages     | 13           | 0.51%   |
| familiar       | 13           | 0.51%   |
| academic       | 11           | 0.43%   |
| engagement     | 10           | 0.39%   |
| techniques     | 10           | 0.39%   |
| opportunities  | 8            | 0.31%   |
| involved       | 7            | 0.28%   |
| language       | 7            | 0.28%   |
| accountability | 6            | 0.24%   |

After the initial questionnaires were completed, the participants were observed conducting a cooperative learning lesson. Due to time constraints of the study and the semester ending, two observations were not utilized unless the initial observation did not lend itself to



being a cooperative lesson. No participant needed the second observation as all participants conducted lessons that were cooperative in nature. For record keeping purposes, participant observation and interview forms were assigned a numerical value to ensure confidentiality. Furthermore, to ensure confidentiality, the document with the coded names and values were password protected and were deleted once data was uploaded into Excel and NVivo software.

The observations were conducted throughout the eight-week study, and during the weeks that participants were not observed, participants were asked to conduct at least one cooperative learning lesson in their courses each week. Field notes were collected during the observations using a premade observation form that the researcher designed to record anecdotal evidence of the type of lesson given during the observation (Appendix E). The observation form was designed so that the researcher could record if a cooperative learning lesson was given and to record the engagement levels of students during the lesson. The form focused documentation on the delivery of the lesson from the teacher, the placement of English language learners within the groups, the ease and flow of discussions, the engagement levels of English language learners, teacher engagement during the activity, and completion of the lesson and activities that were assigned. The observations did not specify specific student scores and student names were omitted from all observation and interview notes. The notes included specific descriptions of the class setting and seating arrangements, and gave unfiltered and unbiased reflections from the researcher. The notes from the observations and interviews were gathered and coded. The following code words were used to organized data from interviews and observations: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest,

moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared responsibilities, enhances, on task, off task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, and disadvantages. After coding the data, words were inputted into Excel and NVivo software that identified word and theme frequency

Teacher observations revealed strategies such as think pair share, give one get one, jigsaw activities, and accountable talk activities were used in various lessons. Table 5 reflects the number of cooperative learning activities that were used by each participant.

Table 5

*Cooperative Learning Techniques Used*

| <u>Participant</u> | <u>Think and Share</u> | <u>Give One, Get One</u> | <u>Jigsaw</u> | <u>Accountable</u> |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Teacher 1          | 1                      | 0                        | 1             | 0                  |
| Teacher 2          | 0                      | 1                        | 0             | 1                  |
| Teacher 3          | 0                      | 0                        | 1             | 1                  |
| Teacher 4          | 1                      | 0                        | 0             | 1                  |
| Teacher 5          | 1                      | 1                        | 0             | 0                  |
| Teacher 6          | 0                      | 0                        | 0             | 1                  |
| Teacher 7          | 0                      | 1                        | 1             | 1                  |
| Total              | 3                      | 3                        | 3             | 5                  |

Observations indicated that all teachers had students sitting in small groups for the lesson. All teachers gave instructions and provided handouts for students to use as graphic organizers during the lesson. The English learners were placed in groups with English-only students. Teachers walked the classroom and spoke with all groups during the lesson. Observations revealed that the engagement level of English learners differed from each class, as did the level of student work. Table 6 reflects the level of engagement perceived by the researcher as well as the percentage of completed student work given to the teacher at the end of the observed lesson. Engagement levels were perceived by observing the number of students who remained on task

throughout the lesson and the number of students who turned in their work at the end of the lesson. Engagement levels were also perceived by observing the amount of content related, verbal communication students were utilizing when discussing within their groups. Students who were not completing assigned work, or who were not communicating verbally within their group were considered not engaged, while students who did reflect those behaviors were considered engaged. Percentages were calculated from student work that was or was not turned in.

Table 6

*English Learner Engagement and Completed Work*

| <u>Participant</u> | <u>Number of Els Engaged in Lesson</u> | <u>Number of Els Not Engaged in Lesson</u> | <u>Percentage of Els: All Work Complete</u> | <u>Percentage of Els: Unfinished</u> |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Teacher 1          | 4                                      | 1  | 80%   | 20%                                  |
| Teacher 2          | 7                                      | 4  | 72%   | 28%                                  |
| Teacher 3          | 9                                      | 0  | 90%   | 10%                                  |
| Teacher 4          | 10                                     | 3  | 77%   | 23%                                  |
| Teacher 5          | 5                                      | 0  | 100%  | 0%                                   |
| Teacher 6          | 7                                      | 1  | 88%   | 12%                                  |
| Teacher 7          | 6                                      | 2  | 75%   | 25%                                  |
| Total              | 48                                     | 11   | 83%   | 17%                                  |

Once the observations were completed, interviews were conducted with each participant and focused on a series of set questions (Appendix D). The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and handwritten notes. The interviews reflected how the teacher felt the lesson went and the impact it had on the English language learners. The purpose of these interviews was to gauge the teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategies impacting engagement and student performance, and gauge the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the lesson delivery. The interviews remained focused on the interview questions (Appendix D). The researcher asked the questions and allowed time for the participants to

answer them. No other questions were asked until all of the original interview questions were addressed. Most participants answered the questions and ended the interview, while two participants began an open discussion about cooperative learning after the interviews were over. The following code words were selected from a list of key terms that came up frequently within the research from the literature review. These terms were used to organize data from the interviews and observations: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared, responsibilities, enhances, off task, on task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, disadvantages, familiar, unfamiliar, daily, weekly, model, and safe. All hand written records were shredded and discarded after uploading as an electric file to Excel and NVivo software. All electronic files were password protected and are kept on the researcher's personal computer at her home and will be deleted after three years

During the interviews, participants remained open and honest when answering the questions. The following questions were asked during the interviews: Question 1: How frequently do you engage in cooperative based instruction? This question allowed the researcher to understand how often the participant used cooperative strategies. Question 2: What are the cooperative learning strategies that you utilize in your classroom? This question revealed the various strategies the participant regularly utilized in their lessons. Question 3: How do you prepare students for working in groups? This question gave insight into how the teacher prepped the lesson. Question 4: What is the current climate of English learner's interest in group work in

your class? This question provided insight on the English learner's participation in cooperative lessons. Question 5: If there is a generally negative attitude toward group work in your class, how do you combat this attitude? This question explored ways teachers maintain a positive, cooperative environment. Question 6: If there is a generally positive attitude toward group work in your class, what do you attribute to this positive outlook? This question explored teacher perception regarding why they thought students liked cooperative strategies. Question 7: Do you notice an increase in English learner academic performance when students work in groups? This question explored teacher perception on the effectiveness of cooperative learning. Question 8: Do you notice an increase in English learner engagement levels when students work in groups? This question explored teacher perception regarding English learner engagement levels. Question 9: In what situations do you find cooperative learning most and least useful? This question revealed if participants felt positive or negatively in regards to cooperative learning techniques.

The following code words, taken from a list of key terms that came up frequently within the research from the literature review was used to organize data from the interviews and observations: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared, responsibilities, enhances, off task, on task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, disadvantages, familiar, unfamiliar, daily, weekly, model, and safe. All hand-written records were shredded and discarded after uploading as an electronic file to Excel and NVivo software, and all electronic files were saved on the

researcher's personal computer at her home and password protected and will be deleted after three years.

To conclude the study, participants completed a final questionnaire (Appendix C) that recorded their perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative lessons. These questionnaires were scored in the same manner as the initial questionnaires by placing responses into two categories, positive impact or negative impact of cooperative strategies on English learner performance, and used word frequency and theme frequency from the responses. The following code words were used to organize data from the final questionnaires: lack of engagement, moderate engagement, high engagement, interaction, cooperative activity, effective, ineffective, increase achievement, decrease achievement, non-participant, group work, mastery, success, challenge, think pair share, small group, accountable talk, high interest, low interest, moderate interest, positive attitude, negative attitude, increase engagement, decrease engagement, shared, responsibilities, enhances, off task, on task, engaged, not engaged, higher understanding, advantages, disadvantages, familiar, unfamiliar, daily, weekly, model, and safe.

Once all the data were gathered and coded from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations, data was reviewed to determine the answer to the research question. Questionnaires were coded by placing responses into multiple categories reflective of positive or negative perceptions of English learner performance. Observation notes were reviewed to explore if lessons conducted utilized cooperative strategies, and determined the engagement levels of students from various classes. Interviews with the participants served as a secondary source that reflected overall teacher perceptions. After sorting and coding the data using word frequency in Excel and NVivo, the resulting evidence reflected the teacher perceptions of how cooperative learning strategies impact English learner engagement and performance levels. Table 7 reflects

the themes within each of the data collection sources. All data was kept in an encrypted file and will be stored for three years post completion of the study. The raw data collected was represented through questionnaires completed by participants (Appendix F); Excel notes from word and theme frequency analysis and NVivo word frequency chart (Appendix G).

Table 7

*Overall Themes Regarding Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning*

| <u>Participant</u> | <u>Initial Questionnaire</u> | <u>Observation</u> | <u>Interview</u> | <u>Final Questionnaire</u> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Teacher 1          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 2          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 3          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 4          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 5          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 6          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |
| Teacher 7          |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| Positive           | Yes                          | Yes                | Yes              | Yes                        |
| Negative           | No                           | No                 | No               | No                         |

## Summary

Data was coded using Excel and NVivo software that analyzed word frequencies and analyzed for theme frequencies, both positive and negative perceptions. When analyzing the data, patterns or themes within the participants' responses and observations were identified. These themes presented themselves as having positive or negative perceptions regarding the impact of cooperative learning strategies impacting English learner achievement and engagement levels. The initial and final questionnaire responses were examined first. The clusters and patterns of responses revealed that participants had very positive accounts of cooperative learning strategies.

The questionnaires asked specific questions about their perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to the English learners' engagement and achievement levels and in all of these questions, from both the initial and the final questionnaires, responses gave a positive account of the effects that cooperative learning had on students. The study revealed that one common theme all participants noted was that the cooperative groups must be monitored so that students do not get off task. Data from the observations and the interviews were coded using the same techniques with Excel and NVivo software that identified themes and word frequency. This data reflected similar patterns as the questionnaires did. Once the data was collected, the thematic data from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews, was analyzed in Excel and NVivo software to identify word frequencies. The word frequency tables (Appendix G and H) revealed positive associations between the questionnaire responses as well as the observations and interviews.



## **Presentation of Data and Results**

The research question of this study was answered by coding data and searching for common themes and word frequencies within the data. The research question: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English learners was answered by interpreting themes within teacher responses that focused on specific questions about their usage of these strategies and their observed outcomes. The study presented participants with the chance to answer questionnaire questions regarding their own perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to their English learner achievement and engagement. These questionnaires, combined with interview questions and observations, were analyzed and coded to determine teacher perceptions. Data from the questionnaires revealed that participants believed that, “Cooperative learning can enhance working relationships if the teacher is purposeful in how he or she groups students and also be purposeful in why the grouping is happening” (Appendix F). When data was gathered from all participant responses, the first step in the analysis was to look for common themes evident in participant responses. Themes that came up repeatedly suggested that cooperative learning enhanced English learner achievement and engagement. One participant noted that some advantages of cooperative learning were that, “Students have more think time. They have opportunities to orally practice the language and work with their peers in a professional and academic manner. They can get feedback on their ideas and it gives students a greater responsibility for their own learning” (Appendix F). This data provided insight into whether or not the data collected revealed negative or positive perceptions on the topic.

The next step following the thematic coding was to input these themes and word frequencies into an Excel document to determine commonalities within responses. The final step

was to upload the transcripts and questionnaire responses into NVivo software in order to determine word frequencies from the data. NVivo software revealed that words such as learning, cooperative, enhances, higher, and good were among the highest used (Appendix G). Data put into the Excel software revealed that terms such as high engagement, increase achievement, engaged, and on task were among the terms most frequently used by participants.

Between the theme frequencies and the word frequencies gathered from the data, the research question was answered. Data reflected that high school English teachers perceive that cooperative learning strategies positively impact English language learners' academic performance and engagement levels. The results of the analysis from the study are reflective of insights from the seven participants from the study; however, transferability and further inferences will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

There is an abundance of research that suggests cooperative learning strategies are effective in increasing English-only student engagement and academic achievement; however, there is a lack of data that reflects cooperative learning's impact on English language learners (Goldenberg, 2013). Understanding specific strategies to meet the needs of this diverse subgroup of students can help to bridge the achievement gap that is present in so many American schools. Research suggests cooperative learning is an effective tool in increasing engagement and achievement levels of mainstream students, and boasts in its ability to increase student buy-in to lessons and curriculum (Altun, 2015; Calderon, M., Slavin, R., & Sanchez, M. 2011; Curry, De Amicis, & Gilligan, 2011). Identifying techniques and strategies that can assist English language learners lends itself to looking at cooperative learning techniques as its impact is so widely known to improve student scores (Slavin, 2015). Identifying strategies that can meet the needs of this population is essential to quality instruction. To increase the research on how cooperative learning impacts English language learners, this study examined traditional high school English teachers' perceptions on how cooperative learning strategies affect English language learners' academic performance and engagement.

The study focused on student performance and engagement levels, and teacher perceptions regarding the affect that cooperative learning strategies had on their English language learners. The theoretical framework that guided this study was based on elements of cognitive, developmental, and democratic theories (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1978; Wittrock, 1978). Developmental theories assert that the use of language is a primary cognitive tool. Thus, the ability to collaborate with team members becomes critical to the success of

students' academic abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). The theoretical framework behind the study reveals the importance of utilizing interactions between students to increase their mastery of concepts. Data collection included: observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The study explored how teachers perceived cooperative learning strategies when used with English language learners to impact engagement and academic performance.

The research question that guided the study asked: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? This question focused the research on exploring teacher perceptions within their classrooms to analyze the effectiveness of the strategies discussed. The method of study utilized a qualitative case study that used questionnaires, interviews, and observations to identify common themes among participant responses. The study took eight weeks to conduct and revealed that teachers had positive perceptions of cooperative learning impacting their English language learners' academic achievement and engagement levels. Further conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be presented throughout subsequent sections of chapter 5.

### **Summary of the Study**

The study was conducted to explore teacher perceptions of cooperative learning strategies affecting the engagement and academic performance levels of English language learners. The specific research question of the study asked: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? Seven high school English teachers from various ethnicities and genders agreed to participate in the qualitative study and were given two questionnaires to complete, one at the beginning of the study (Appendix B) and one at the end of the study (Appendix C). All participants were English teachers from a single school site who had classes made up of English-only and English

language learners. Participants allowed the researcher to observe one or two cooperative learning lessons to confirm that the strategies were being utilized in the classroom, and participated in one post-observation interview to discuss how they felt the lesson went and how effective the strategies were. The questionnaires, interviews, and observations were coded to identify word and theme frequency and used to determine the teachers' perceptions on how the cooperative strategies impact English language learners' engagement and academic performance levels. Questionnaires were coded by placing responses into multiple categories reflective of positive or negative perceptions of English learner performance. Observation notes were reviewed to verify that lessons conducted utilized cooperative strategies and determined the engagement levels of students from various classes. Interviews with the participants served as a secondary source that reflected overall teacher perceptions. The raw data collected was represented through questionnaires completed by participants (Appendix F), Excel notes from word and theme frequency analysis and NVivo word frequency chart (Appendix G).

After sorting and coding the data using word frequency in Excel and NVivo, the results reflected the teacher perceptions of how cooperative learning strategies impact English learner engagement and performance levels. Results indicated that teachers perceive cooperative learning strategies to have a positive impact on English language learner engagement and academic performance. The benefits of this study revealed the positive impact cooperative learning strategies had on English language learners and revealed that teachers perceived these strategies to be useful in their classrooms.

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

The research question that guided the study was: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? Themes within the

participants' responses and observations were identified as being positive with regard to the effect that cooperative learning strategies had on English learner engagement and academic achievement. Data from the initial and final questionnaire responses were examined first. The clusters and patterns of responses revealed that participants had positive accounts of cooperative learning strategies. The questionnaires asked specific questions pertaining to teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to the English language learners' engagement and achievement levels. The initial and final questionnaire responses gave a positive account of the effects that cooperative learning had on their students. The study revealed that one common theme noted by participants was that the cooperative groups must be monitored so that students do not get off task. All observations from this study revealed that all participants monitored the groups and walked the classroom throughout the lesson. Participants noted in their interviews and questionnaire responses that their teaching experience has dictated that if they do not monitor the groups, students will get off task. Data from the observations and the interviews were coded using the same techniques that identified themes and word frequency. This data reflected similar patterns as the questionnaires did. Once the data was examined, the thematic data from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews, were analyzed in Excel and NVivo software to identify word frequencies. The word frequency tables (Appendix G and H) revealed positive associations between the questionnaire responses as well as the observations and interviews.

The positive impact that cooperative learning provides to this subgroup of students, coupled with the current research that reflects the positive impact it has on general education and English-only students (Slavin, 2015), indicated that these strategies can be used to effectively support various types of students in the classroom, including English learners. One thematic

category emerged as the answer to the research question: How do cooperative learning strategies impact the academic performance of high school English Learners? The English teachers within the study revealed that teachers perceived that the use of cooperative learning strategies positively impacts English language learner engagement and academic performance.

The present study qualitatively defined *organization of groups* as a theme that arose from the study. This category is summarized as (a) organization of groups. Based on the data presented, the organization of groups was an important contributor to the success of the cooperative learning strategies used within a classroom. Most of the participants described a need for purposefully placing students in groups, rather than random selection. When groups were designed according to ability levels and engagement levels, participants were able to create groups with a wide range of student ability levels. This diversity among groups allowed higher students to assist lower students and ensured there were no groups who didn't work. Most of the participants described this step essential to the success of the lesson. When groups were pre-organized, participants noted a positive impact on student engagement and performance levels.

In this study the indicators of the organization of groups included: (a) various student ability levels, (b) various student engagement levels, (c) assigned duties or roles, and (d) individual and group responsibilities. As noted in the results of the study, teachers who had groups that were pre-planned, and tasks that required students to be held accountable for individuals as well as group responsibilities, saw an increase in engagement and performance from students.

### **Implications**

The study revealed that teachers maintain positive perceptions regarding the impact cooperative learning strategies have on the engagement and academic performance levels of

English language learners. The research from this study implies that for practical purposes, cooperative learning strategies can be used to increase English learner engagement and performance in high school English classrooms. The theoretical frameworks generated by Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1926), and Wittrock (1978) held true in this study. Dewey noted the social nature of man emphasized shared experiences and enabled students to work together on meaningful tasks and construct knowledge together. Vygotsky recognized the social aspect of learning and believed that students learn as they receive assistance from other students. Piaget noted the importance of using groups in education so that students could learn from each other through discussions, conflicts, and reasoning. The theoretical theories supporting cooperative learning and the collaborative process subsequently increases student understanding. Students who receive elaborated explanations such as those found in collaborative classrooms, learn more than students who work alone. These theories have proven to be true with general education students as well as English language learners (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Through the evidence provided from this study, cooperative learning has shown to be effective in increasing the academic performance and engagement levels of high school English language learners in an English classroom.

**Practical implications.** Identifying successful teaching strategies that can be used with multiple subgroups of students becomes an essential tool in education. Identifying that cooperative learning techniques have shown to positively impact English language learners adds to the present research that notes its positive impact on English-only students. The findings from this study provide teachers with another set of strategies that appear to be useful in increasing engagement and achievement levels of various groups of students.



**Future implications.** Future implications of this study need to focus on the impact that cooperative learning strategies have within different subject areas such as math, science, and social science. The current study focused on the perceptions of high school English teachers and there is an array of other content areas that could potentially benefit from this focus. Determining if cooperative learning strategies can impact students in math and science classes would require another study that focuses on these specific courses. English is an analytical and subjective content area that seamlessly employs the use of group and individual discussions within the curriculum.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations for this study center around further insight on the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to its impact on English language learners. The focus of this study was to identify teacher perceptions and find evidence to identify if cooperative learning strategies impact the engagement and performance levels of English language learners. Recommendations regarding this study will focus on extending research to various other content areas, as well as ways to utilize the data from this study to assist students.

**Recommendations for further research.** This study explored the perceptions of teachers with regard to their opinions on the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies impacting their English language learners' engagement and academic achievement levels, however, further studies that focus on quantitative data from student performance could add value to this study. Future studies added to this one could seek to explore the quantitative data of student scores on assessments with and without using cooperative learning techniques in a high school English classroom. Data reflecting assessment scores from groups of students before and after using cooperative learning strategies could give further insight on the effectiveness these

strategies have on specific groups of students. This research would extend the data on this study and support teacher perspectives with quantitative student data. Furthermore, a study that focused on teacher perceptions from various other content areas would serve to indicate if cooperative learning strategies can benefit English language learners in courses other than English courses.

**Recommendations for further practice.** Results from this study indicate that teachers within the study perceive that cooperative learning strategies assist English language learners, therefore, implementing these strategies into classrooms where there are English language learners could serve students with a better opportunity for academic success than without them. Educators are constantly seeking new and effective strategies to make learning comprehensible for students. The data gathered from this study indicated that teachers perceive these strategies as contributing to the increase of English learners' engagement and performance. Educators reading this study can note the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies with regard to English-only students, as outlined in the research available, as well as with regard to the English language learners, as identified through this study. Overall, the study provides research that reflects that the high school English teachers within the study maintain positive perceptions of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies impacting English learner engagement and achievement.

The significance of this study relates to identifying successful teaching strategies that can positively impact English language learner engagement and academic performance levels. Current research lacks data focused on the impact cooperative learning has on English language learners. The findings from this study indicate that teacher perceptions within the study, reflect that cooperative learning strategies increase English learner engagement and academic

performance levels. Cooperative learning has already been noted to increase the performance and engagement levels of English-only students, this case study reflects those existing conclusions (Slavin, 2015).

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## **Appendix A: Cooperative Learning Lesson Checklist**

### Cooperative Learning Lesson Checklist

- Each student is involved. Students have been assigned specific roles, such as one person might be the "organizer," another could be the "reporter," a third person could be the "questioner," and a fourth member could be the "assessor." The roles are clearly defined in advance and are changed regularly, so that each person is accountable, and everyone in the group plays an important part.
- Students and their desks face one another so that they are more likely to interact well with others. Seats can be arranged in clusters or circles to facilitate this process.
- Students assume personal responsibility by reporting back to their group or to the whole group after each session.
- Students relate well to others. Since some students are better than others at interpersonal exchanges, weaker students are provided with practice opportunities to engage in cooperative activities.
- Members reflect in order to improve group effectiveness. Students are given a list of questions to consider, reflect on past discussions and activities, and create new understandings based on these discussions.



## **Appendix B: Initial Teacher Questionnaire**

### Initial Teacher Questionnaire

Instructions: Answer the following questions based upon your experiences with cooperative learning strategies in your own classroom.

1. How familiar are you with cooperative learning techniques?
2. What is the extent that you use group activities in your classroom?
3. Discuss whether or not you believe that cooperative learning activities enhances class participation of English learners.
4. Discuss the extent to which you believe or do not believe that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among English learner students.
5. Do you feel that when students work together, the English learners remain on task more than when working alone?
6. Do you feel that when English learners work together they have a higher understanding of the content delivered than when working alone?
7. What are some of the advantages of cooperative learning?
8. What are some of the disadvantages of cooperative learning?
9. What is the impact that group activities have on your English learners?

## Appendix C: Final Teacher Questionnaire

### Final Teacher Questionnaire

Instructions: Answer the following questions based upon your experiences with cooperative learning strategies in your own classroom.

1. How familiar are you with cooperative learning techniques?
2. What is the extent that you use group activities in your classroom?
3. Have you utilized more cooperative learning strategies in your lessons since the beginning of the study? Why or why not?
4. Discuss whether or not you believe that cooperative learning activities enhances class participation of English learners.
5. Discuss the extent to which you believe or do not believe that cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among English learner students.
6. Do you feel that when students work together, the English learners remain on task more than when working alone?
7. Do you feel that when English learners work together they have a higher understanding of the content delivered than when working alone?
8. What are some of the advantages of cooperative learning?
9. What are some of the disadvantages of cooperative learning?
10. What is the impact that group activities have on your English learners?
11. How does cooperative learning impact English learner engagement levels?
12. Do English learners turn in more or less work when they are involved in cooperative learning lessons?
13. How does cooperative learning strategies impact English learner academic performance?

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

### Interview questions

1. How frequently do you engage in cooperative based instruction?
2. What are the cooperative learning strategies that you utilize in your classroom?
3. How do you prepare students for working in groups?
4. What is the current climate of English learner's interest in group work in your class?
5. If there is a generally negative attitude toward group work in your class, how do you combat this attitude?
6. If there is a generally positive attitude toward group work in your class, what do you attribute to this positive outlook?
7. Do you notice an increase in English learner academic performance when students work in groups?
8. Do you notice an increase in English learner engagement levels when students work in groups?
9. In what situations do you find cooperative learning most and least useful?

## Appendix E: Cooperative Learning Lesson Observation Form

### Cooperative Learning Lesson Observation

Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time in and out: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Anecdotal Evidence:**

What does teacher do?

What do students do?

What does student work look like?

#### **Engagement levels of EL students: (Circle value)**

|            |   |   |                   |   |   |   |   |   |                              |
|------------|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10                           |
| Disengaged |   |   | Passive/Compliant |   |   |   |   |   | Actively on Task and Engaged |

#### **Cooperative Group Responsibilities: (Circle observed behaviors)**

- ◆ Students have defined responsibilities
- ◆ Students encourage one another
- ◆ Collaboratively producing a product
- ◆ Collaboratively problem-solving
- ◆ Participating in discussion
- ◆ Presenting

#### **Individual Responsibilities: (Circle observed behaviors)**

- ◆ Independently producing a product
- ◆ Independently solving a problem
- ◆ Independent practice/application
- ◆ Presenting
- ◆ Silent reading
- ◆ Writing activities

#### **Classroom Culture: (Circle observed behaviors)**

- ◆ Respectful, positive student-teacher relationships are evident
- ◆ Students demonstrate mutual respect
- ◆ Students are comfortable sharing ideas, questions, concerns, or needs
- ◆ Evidence of developing communication skills
- ◆ Respectful, positive student-teacher relationships are evident
- ◆ Students demonstrate mutual respect
- ◆ Students are comfortable sharing ideas, questions, concerns, or needs
- ◆ Evidence of celebrating student success

#### **Level(s) of Student Work**

- ◆ Remembering
- ◆ Understanding
- ◆ Applying
- ◆ Analyzing
- ◆ Evaluating
- ◆ Creating

**Cooperative Learning Techniques used:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Researcher Comments:**

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### Appendix F: Word Frequency Excel Chart

| <b>Initial Questionnaire</b>      | <b>Initial Questionnaire</b> | <b>Observation</b> | <b>Interview</b> | <b>Final Questionnaire</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| positive accounts                 | 7                            | 7                  | 7                | 7                          |
| negative accounts                 | 0                            | 0                  | 0                | 0                          |
| <b>Word and Meaning Frequency</b> | <b>Initial Questionnaire</b> | <b>Observation</b> | <b>Interview</b> | <b>Final Questionnaire</b> |
| lack of engagement                |                              |                    | 1                |                            |
| moderate engagement               |                              |                    |                  | 1                          |
| high engagement                   | 6                            |                    | 10               | 11                         |
| interaction                       | 5                            |                    | 13               |                            |
| cooperative activity              |                              |                    | 4                |                            |
| effective                         | 4                            |                    | 9                | 5                          |
| ineffective                       |                              |                    | 1                |                            |
| increase achievement              | 5                            |                    | 14               | 9                          |
| decrease achievement              |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| non-participant                   |                              |                    | 2                |                            |
| group work                        | 2                            |                    | 5                | 3                          |
| mastery                           |                              |                    | 6                |                            |
| success                           | 1                            |                    | 1                | 5                          |
| challenge                         |                              |                    | 1                |                            |
| think pair share                  |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| small group                       |                              |                    | 3                |                            |
| accountable talk                  |                              |                    | 3                |                            |
| high interest                     | 3                            |                    | 1                | 4                          |
| low interest                      |                              |                    | 1                |                            |
| moderate interest                 |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| positive attitude                 | 11                           |                    | 7                |                            |
| negative attitude                 |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| increase engagement               | 12                           |                    | 8                | 10                         |
| decrease engagement               |                              |                    |                  |                            |
| shared responsibilities           | 1                            |                    |                  |                            |
| enhances                          | 6                            |                    | 2                | 4                          |
| off task                          | 3                            |                    | 2                |                            |
| on task                           | 11                           |                    | 4                | 5                          |
| engaged                           | 7                            |                    | 7                |                            |
| not engaged                       | 1                            |                    | 1                |                            |
| higher understanding              |                              |                    |                  |                            |

### Appendix G: Word Frequency Query Results NVivo

| Word          | Length | Count | Weighted Percentage (%) | Similar Words                   |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| learning      | 8      | 114   | 4.48                    | learn, learning                 |
| cooperative   | 11     | 102   | 4.01                    | cooperative                     |
| working       | 7      | 98    | 3.86                    | work, working                   |
| English       | 7      | 87    | 3.42                    | English                         |
| learners      | 8      | 83    | 3.27                    | learner, learners               |
| students      | 8      | 72    | 2.79                    | student, students               |
| activities    | 10     | 50    | 1.97                    | activities, activity            |
| believe       | 7      | 41    | 1.61                    | believe                         |
| group         | 5      | 40    | 1.57                    | group, grouping, groups         |
| enhances      | 8      | 37    | 1.46                    | enhance, enhancement, enhances  |
| task          | 4      | 31    | 1.22                    | task, tasks                     |
| discuss       | 7      | 29    | 1.14                    | discuss, discussing, discussion |
| together      | 8      | 28    | 1.1                     | together                        |
| alone         | 5      | 27    | 1.06                    | alone                           |
| feel          | 4      | 27    | 1.06                    | feel                            |
| time          | 4      | 25    | 0.98                    | time, timed times               |
| 2016          | 4      | 24    | 0.94                    | 2016                            |
| content       | 7      | 24    | 0.94                    | content                         |
| impact        | 6      | 24    | 0.94                    | impact                          |
| link          | 4      | 24    | 0.94                    | link                            |
| web           | 3      | 24    | 0.94                    | web                             |
| class         | 5      | 24    | 0.94                    | class, classes                  |
| participation | 13     | 22    | 0.87                    | participate, participation      |
| relationship  | 13     | 22    | 0.87                    | relationships                   |
| understanding | 13     | 21    | 0.83                    | understand, understanding       |
| yes           | 3      | 21    | 0.83                    | yes                             |
| help          | 4      | 20    | 0.79                    | help, helping, helps            |
| extent        | 6      | 19    | 0.75                    | higher                          |
| good          | 4      | 17    | 0.67                    | good                            |
| complete      | 8      | 16    | 0.63                    | complete, completed             |
| use           | 3      | 15    | 0.59                    | use, used, using                |
| among         | 5      | 15    | 0.59                    | among                           |
| remain        | 6      | 14    | 0.55                    | remain                          |
| started       | 7      | 14    | 0.55                    | start, started                  |
| survey monkey | 12     | 14    | 0.55                    | Survey monkey                   |

|                |    |    |      |                                   |
|----------------|----|----|------|-----------------------------------|
| get            | 3  | 13 | 0.51 | get, getting                      |
| increases      | 9  | 13 | 0.51 | increase, increased, increases    |
| modified       | 8  | 13 | 0.51 | modified, modify                  |
| advantages     | 10 | 13 | 0.51 | advantages                        |
| delivered      | 9  | 13 | 0.51 | delivered                         |
| disadvantages  | 13 | 13 | 0.51 | disadvantages                     |
| familiar       | 8  | 13 | 0.51 | familiar                          |
| collector      | 9  | 12 | 0.47 | collector                         |
| last           | 4  | 12 | 0.47 | last                              |
| page           | 4  | 12 | 0.47 | page                              |
| spent          | 5  | 12 | 0.47 | spent                             |
| whether        | 7  | 12 | 0.47 | whether                           |
| academic       | 8  | 11 | 0.43 | academic                          |
| levels         | 6  | 11 | 0.43 | level, levels                     |
| practice       | 8  | 11 | 0.43 | practice, practiced               |
| ELA            | 3  | 10 | 0.39 | ELA                               |
| engagement     | 10 | 10 | 0.39 | engage, engaged, engagement       |
| October        | 7  | 10 | 0.39 | October                           |
| techniques     | 10 | 10 | 0.39 | techniques                        |
| classroom      | 9  | 9  | 0.35 | classroom                         |
| initial        | 7  | 9  | 0.35 | initial, initially                |
| one            | 3  | 9  | 0.35 | one                               |
| lessons        | 7  | 8  | 0.31 | lesson, lessons                   |
| November       | 8  | 8  | 0.31 | November                          |
| opportunities  | 13 | 8  | 0.31 | opportunities, opportunity        |
| peers          | 5  | 8  | 0.31 | peer, peers                       |
| structure      | 9  | 8  | 0.31 | structure, structured, structures |
| teacher        | 7  | 8  | 0.31 | teacher, teachers                 |
| teams          | 5  | 8  | 0.31 | team, teams                       |
| Thursday       | 8  | 8  | 0.31 | Thursday                          |
| turn           | 4  | 8  | 0.31 | turn                              |
| allow          | 5  | 7  | 0.28 | allow, allows                     |
| involved       | 8  | 7  | 0.28 | involved, involvement             |
| another        | 7  | 7  | 0.28 | another                           |
| language       | 8  | 7  | 0.28 | language                          |
| less           | 4  | 7  | 0.28 | less                              |
| accountability | 14 | 6  | 0.24 | accountability, accountable       |
| also           | 4  | 6  | 0.24 | also                              |



|             |    |   |      |                       |
|-------------|----|---|------|-----------------------|
| depending   | 9  | 6 | 0.24 | depend, depending     |
| final       | 5  | 6 | 0.24 | final                 |
| Friday      | 6  | 6 | 0.24 | friday                |
| listening   | 9  | 6 | 0.24 | listen, listening     |
| performance | 11 | 6 | 0.24 | performance           |
| September   | 9  | 6 | 0.24 | PERFORMANCE           |
| speaking    | 8  | 6 | 0.24 | speak, speaking       |
| think       | 5  | 6 | 0.24 | think, thinking       |
| 173         | 3  | 5 | 0.2  | 173                   |
| 224         | 3  | 5 | 0.2  | 224                   |
| address     | 7  | 5 | 0.2  | address               |
| better      | 6  | 5 | 0.2  | better                |
| definitely  | 10 | 5 | 0.2  | definitely            |
| extra       | 5  | 5 | 0.2  | extra                 |
| ideas       | 5  | 5 | 0.2  | ideas                 |
| learners    | 6  | 5 | 0.2  | learner               |
| may         | 3  | 5 | 0.2  | may                   |
| monitored   | 9  | 5 | 0.2  | monitored, monitoring |
| q10         | 3  | 5 | 0.2  | q10                   |
| share       | 5  | 5 | 0.2  | share, sharing        |
| strategies  | 10 | 5 | 0.2  | strategies            |
| tend        | 4  | 5 | 0.2  | tend                  |
| behavior    | 8  | 4 | 0.16 | behavior, behaviors   |
| confidence  | 10 | 4 | 0.16 | confidence, confident |
| develop     | 7  | 4 | 0.16 | develop, developing   |

## **Appendix H: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association

Randi Lee George

Digital Signature

Randi Lee George

Name (Typed)

3/21/17

Date

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