

# ART AS A LANGUAGE: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER SUPPORT IN ELEMENTARY ART CLASSROOMS

By

Alicia Butler

July, 2025

Director of Thesis: Robert D. Quinn

Major Department: School of Art & Design

## **ABSTRACT**

Art education provides a powerful and unique platform for supporting English Language Learner (ELL) students in developing language skills through creative and engaging instruction. The visual, experiential, and collaborative nature of art offers significant opportunities to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. However, elementary art teachers often face substantial challenges in maximizing this potential due to gaps in professional development (PD) and systemic barriers that hinder their ability to meet ELL students' needs effectively. This study investigates these challenges by examining the PD opportunities available to elementary art teachers, the systemic obstacles they encounter, and the resources they require to better support ELL students in their classrooms. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and interviews with elementary art teachers across North Carolina, providing a comprehensive analysis of their experiences, perceptions, and strategies. Results reveal a critical lack of targeted PD that equips art educators with the tools to implement language acquisition strategies. Additional systemic barriers, such as limited access to resources, insufficient collaboration time with ESL specialists, and inadequate

institutional support, further compound these challenges. Despite these obstacles, findings underscore the immense potential of art instruction to enhance language learning through its inherently visual and interactive processes.

Keywords: English Language Learners, art education, professional development, vocabulary acquisition, systemic barriers, elementary education



Art as a Language: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities for English Language  
Learner Support in Elementary Art Classrooms

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art & Design  
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education in Art Education

By

Alicia Butler

July, 2025

Director of Thesis: Robert D. Quinn, Ph.D.

Thesis Committee Members:

Borim Song, Ed.D.

Nanyoung Kim, Ed.D.

© Alicia Butler, 2025

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Purpose of the Study .....	1
Research Questions .....	2
Problem Statement .....	3
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	6
Introduction to the Literature .....	6
Overview of Key Themes .....	6
Scope of Review .....	8
The Role of Art Education in Language Acquisition .....	8
Art as a Tool for Vocabulary Development .....	9
Multimodal Learning in ELL Instruction .....	12
Challenges Faced by Elementary Art Teachers .....	14
Lack of Targeted PD .....	15
Limited Collaboration with ESL Specialists .....	17
Institutional Constraints Limiting Resources and Support.....	22
Best Practices in Supporting ELL Students through Art .....	21
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	26
Setting and Participants .....	26
Data Collection.....	28
Data Analysis .....	28
Survey .....	28
Interviews .....	32
Qualitative Coding Methodology .....	35

Ethical Considerations .....	35
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	36
Data Analysis Framework .....	36
Descriptive Findings From Quantitative Data .....	37
Language and Communication Barriers.....	44
Cultural Differences and Unmet Needs.....	45
Class Size and Diversity of Proficiency Levels .....	45
Emotional and Behavioral Barriers.....	45
Lack of PD and Instructional Resources .....	46
Need for Art-Specific PD and ESL Collaboration .....	47
Gaps in Resources and Visual Supports.....	48
Limited Collaboration with ESL Specialists .....	48
Emotional and Language Expression Challenges .....	49
Technology Use and Training Gaps .....	49
Administrative Supports and Systemic Prioritization .....	50
Reflection on Interview Findings .....	51
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	52
Discussion of Findings .....	52
Limited PD and Confidence in ELL Support.....	53
Barriers to Collaboration with ESL Specialists .....	54
Time Constraints and Instructional Limitations.....	54
Emotional and Expressive Challenges for ELL Students .....	54
Lack of Cultural Responsiveness at the District Level .....	55
Implications for Art Education and ELL Support.....	55
Recommendations and Future Directions .....	56
Areas for Further Research.....	58
REFERENCES .....	61

APPENDIX A: IRB DOCUMENTATION .....	65
APPENDIX B: SURVEY.....	66
APPENDIX C: SURVEY ANSWERS .....	68
APPENDIX D: EMERGENT THEMES FROM SURVEY RESPONSES .....	78
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SCRIPT .....	79
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS .....	81
APPENDIX G: EMERGENT THEMES FROM INTERVIEW DATA .....	115
APPENDIX H: DESCRIPTIVE CODES USED IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS .....	117

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Survey Question Categories .....	30
2. Interview Question Categories .....	33

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Survey Question: Experience .....	31
2. Data Collection Process .....	34
3. Survey Question: Targeted PD .....	38
4. Survey Question: Confidence.....	39
5. Survey Question: Types of ELL PD.....	40
6. Survey Question: Resources.....	41

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The increasing linguistic diversity in U.S. public schools presents both opportunities and challenges for educators seeking to support English Language Learner (ELL) students. While much attention has been given to integrating language acquisition strategies in core subjects like English Language Arts and Mathematics, art education remains an underutilized yet powerful avenue for fostering language development. The visual and creative nature of art instruction offers unique opportunities for ELL students to build vocabulary, enhance comprehension, and develop communication skills in a multimodal learning environment. However, elementary art teachers often lack the necessary professional development (PD) and institutional support to integrate language acquisition strategies into their classrooms.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This study explores how elementary art teachers perceive and respond to the challenges and opportunities of supporting ELL students in the art classroom. Art education offers a unique, multimodal learning environment that supports vocabulary acquisition and language development through visual, experiential, and creative processes. However, many art educators face limitations due to inadequate PD, systemic barriers, and insufficient institutional support.

By centering teacher perspectives, this study seeks to identify specific gaps in PD, instructional resources, and collaborative opportunities that hinder teachers' ability to integrate language acquisition strategies into visual art instruction. Additionally, it

highlights effective tools and practices already in use, with the goal of fostering more inclusive and linguistically responsive art classrooms.

## **Research Questions**

This study is guided by three research questions designed to illuminate the key challenges and strengths at the intersection of art instruction and ELL support:

1. **How do elementary art teachers perceive PD gaps in supporting ELL students?**

In this context, *perceived PD gaps* refer to teachers' recognition of areas where existing PD is missing, insufficient, or irrelevant to their instructional context.

These gaps may include a lack of training in language acquisition strategies, minimal attention to the needs of ELL students within visual art instruction, or the absence of collaboration with ESL specialists. By exploring these perceptions, this study aims to identify how current PD falls short and how it could be improved to better support linguistically diverse learners.

2. **What systemic barriers hinder art teachers' ability to integrate language acquisition strategies into their classrooms?**

Previous research highlights structural challenges, including rigid scheduling, limited access to appropriate instructional materials, and inadequate collaboration time between art educators and English as a Second Language (ESL) staff (American University School of Education, 2023). This question examines how systemic constraints affect art teachers' ability to implement language-supportive strategies.

### **3. What strategies and tools do art teachers find most effective in fostering vocabulary acquisition for ELL students?**

Multimodal learning strategies, which integrate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities, have been proven beneficial for language development (Guo, 2023).

This question seeks to identify which specific methods, tools, or classroom practices elementary art teachers use to support ELLs and how they adapt instruction to be both artistically and linguistically inclusive.

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a growing body of research that advocates for equitable, cross-disciplinary approaches to education. Findings aim to inform the development of more targeted PD programs, improve school-level support systems, and promote systemic reforms that position the arts as a central and impactful space for supporting multilingual learners.

#### **Problem Statement**

The integration of ELLs in U.S. public schools has become increasingly urgent as the number of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds continues to rise. Between fall 2011 and fall 2021, the proportion of students identified as ELLs increased from 9.4% (approximately 4.6 million) to 10.6% (about 5.3 million), signaling a clear need for instructional strategies and support structures that effectively meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). While significant efforts have been made to support ELLs in core academic subjects such as English language arts and mathematics, visual art education has often been excluded from these initiatives (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

Art education offers a uniquely effective platform for supporting language acquisition through nonverbal communication, visual storytelling, and collaborative creation. Unlike traditional academic subjects, art instruction offers multiple entry points for ELL students to develop vocabulary, express complex ideas, and increase confidence while learning a new language (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Multimodal instructional strategies, those that integrate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, are particularly beneficial for ELLs, enabling more accessible and engaging language learning experiences (Guo, 2023). Through these approaches, art instruction has the potential to lower affective filters, support cultural identity, and foster meaningful peer interaction (Wilkey, 2018).

Art classrooms also offer unique opportunities to affirm students' identities, especially for those navigating cultural and linguistic shifts. Culturally responsive instruction in the arts enables students to share their personal stories while connecting with peers across differences. Wei and Mosley (2023) highlighted this in their study of a preservice teacher program, where art lessons centered on resilience and identity formation for students in Title I schools. The authors described how students created flags to represent their backgrounds, stories, and values, providing both a visual and emotional platform for self-expression. As they observed, "Art educators could contribute to cultivating resilience in children by validating their emotional needs and lived experiences, nurturing a positive self-image, building social connections, and offering a safe space to explore critical issues within a given school community" (Wei & Mosley, 2023, p. 15). These practices demonstrate the power of art education to support

emotional growth and community-building, particularly among ELLs and other marginalized learners.

Despite this potential, art educators face significant challenges in supporting ELL students. PD opportunities remain disproportionately centered on core subjects, often excluding art teachers or failing to provide subject-specific strategies for integrating language support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Many art educators report feeling underprepared to address their students' linguistic needs, particularly when serving students who speak less commonly supported languages or have limited English proficiency. Institutional barriers, including limited planning time, a lack of collaboration with ESL specialists, and the continued marginalization of the arts, further limit teachers' ability to implement inclusive, language-supportive instruction.

This underexplored intersection of art education and ELL support presents a critical equity concern. Without access to targeted training, integrated support systems, or linguistically responsive materials, art educators are left to navigate the complexities of ELL instruction in isolation. Consequently, opportunities for language development, cultural affirmation, and emotional expression through the arts are inconsistently applied or overlooked entirely. Addressing these issues requires systemic change, including the expansion of interdisciplinary PD, dedicated collaboration time, and the prioritization of visual arts as a meaningful site for language acquisition. This study responds to that need by investigating how elementary art educators perceive and navigate the challenges of supporting ELL students in their classrooms

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction of the Literature**

In recent years, art education has garnered increasing attention for its potential to support language acquisition among elementary ELL students. As educators seek innovative methods to address the diverse needs of ELLs, the integration of visual arts into language instruction has emerged as a promising tool for fostering both cognitive and emotional growth. This chapter reviews the literature on art education's role in language acquisition, highlighting key themes such as multimodal learning, vocabulary development, and the cultural relevance of art instruction. Through this review, it becomes evident that art education provides a unique avenue for language development that transcends traditional linguistic approaches, offering a holistic and inclusive framework for ELLs.

### ***Overview of Key Themes***

The research literature on art education and language acquisition reveals several core themes that underscore the value of the visual arts in supporting ELLs. Central to this discussion is the idea of multimodal learning, which suggests language learning can be enhanced through the integration of various sensory and cognitive processes. Art activities, such as drawing, painting, and collage, enable students to express abstract ideas before achieving full linguistic proficiency, thereby helping to develop early literacy and verbal skills (Guo, 2023). Alongside cognitive benefits, art education serves as a powerful tool for vocabulary development by embedding language learning within hands-on, creative contexts. Art education provides opportunities for cultural expression, enabling ELLs to connect their linguistic development to their personal and

cultural identities (Wilkey, 2018). As Aghasafari et al. (2022) note, “arts integration empowered learners to explore, express, and develop their identities in new and affirming ways that went beyond the limits of verbal language” (p. 36), illustrating the dual role of art as both an expressive and linguistic support tool for multilingual learners.

However, research also points to the challenges faced by art teachers in effectively supporting ELLs. Among these challenges are PD gaps, which hinder educators' ability to incorporate language acquisition strategies into art instruction. Further, systematic barriers to collaboration with ESL specialists can limit the potential for integrated teaching practices that combine language and visual arts (Olds et al., 2021). This chapter explores these barriers in depth, highlighting how institutional and PD gaps impact the success of art-based language instruction.

In addition to foundational studies in multimodal instruction, vocabulary development, and ESL collaboration, this review also draws on findings from the Supporting Multilingual Learners (SML) Study by Leider et al. (2024). This recent pilot study surveyed 26 art teachers across various educational settings to investigate their beliefs, confidence levels, and instructional practices in supporting multilingual learners. While limited in sample size, the SML Study offers timely insight into how art teachers engage in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Their findings highlight wide variation in teacher confidence and PD access and suggest that factors such as bilingualism, teaching experience, and SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) training influence how well art educators support multilingual learners (Leider et al., 2024). As such, this study complements the broader literature by reinforcing the importance of targeted, discipline-specific training for art teachers working with ELLs.

## ***Scope of Review***

This review synthesizes existing studies on the intersection of art education and language acquisition, focusing on research conducted in elementary school settings. It draws from a range of academic disciplines, including education, psychology, and linguistics, to provide a comprehensive overview of the role that visual arts play in fostering language development among ELLs. The methodology behind the review includes an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as a focus on best practices for integrating art and language instruction. By examining these diverse perspectives, the literature provides a well-rounded understanding of how art education can serve as a catalyst for improving linguistic outcomes in ELL students.

As this review demonstrates, the integration of art education into language instruction not only supports vocabulary acquisition but also promotes cognitive development, lowers affective filters, and fosters cultural relevance. The following sections delve deeper into each of these themes, exploring how art education functions as a dynamic tool for both language acquisition and emotional growth in elementary ELL classrooms.

## **The Role of Art Education in Language Acquisition**

Art education provides a unique and effective avenue for language acquisition, offering multimodal opportunities for communication, vocabulary development, and cultural expression. Research indicates that the integration of visual arts into language instruction supports both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning by

fostering engagement, lowering affective filters, and promoting meaningful language use (Tyler & Likova, 2012).

As Tyler and Likova (2012) explain, “art may serve as a unique cognitive pathway to enhance both verbal and nonverbal learning processes, particularly in children acquiring a second language” (p. 2). Through artistic creation, ELLs engage with new vocabulary in authentic and contextualized ways, thereby enhancing retention and application. This embodied, hands-on engagement provides learners with “immediate, lived experiences with content that allow for language to develop in more intuitive, sensory-informed ways” (Latta & Chan, 2010, p. 55). By their very nature, visual arts support language exploration as students connect images with words, improving comprehension and retention (Latta & Chan, 2010; Sousa, 2011).

This review examines how these dynamic interactions between language and art provide foundational support for ELLs, ensuring that they have not only the vocabulary but also the cognitive and cultural tools needed for successful language acquisition. By situating art education at the center of the language learning process, this research highlights the significant contributions of art teachers in shaping the linguistic and academic growth of ELL students.

### ***Art as a Tool for Vocabulary Development***

Art education is an effective tool for vocabulary development, particularly for elementary ELLs. Engaging students in hands-on artistic experiences allows them to encounter and use new vocabulary in authentic and meaningful contexts. This multimodal approach enhances the retention and recall of words by associating them

with visual elements, promoting a deeper understanding of linguistic concepts (Zhang & Jia, 2022). As students engage in creating and discussing artwork, they naturally incorporate language related to materials, techniques, and thematic content, strengthening their language skills through both visual and verbal expression (Wilkey, 2018).

A key benefit of art education is its ability to provide students with opportunities to explore new vocabulary in a creative, non-threatening environment. For example, when students describe the colors, shapes, and textures used in their artwork, they engage in rich language interactions that reinforce descriptive and comparative language skills (Gonzalez, 2017). These language-rich experiences allow students to build a stronger foundation in both basic and academic vocabulary. Additionally, research suggests that art-based activities, such as storytelling and labeling, further support vocabulary development by providing students with additional opportunities to contextualize new words and make connections to their everyday experiences (Eubanks, 2002).

Museum-based art education offers another promising avenue for vocabulary acquisition. Lesk (2007) describes a weeklong museum program with underserved middle school students that promoted vocabulary growth through experiential, inquiry-based learning. During one sculpture activity, students generated dynamic vocabulary while exploring movement and design. As Lesk (2007) recalls, “I cannot record the responses quickly enough—revolving sculpture, rotating sculpture, floating, soaring, gliding... whirling, spinning sculpture” (p. 7). These responses reflected not only engagement but also the students’ evolving language capacity. Notably, Lesk (2007) observed that even those considered low-performing became “surprised by their own

vocabulary and their ability to think critically” (p. 8). These findings support the idea that hands-on, inquiry-rich art experiences create opportunities for spontaneous and meaningful language use, especially for students with limited prior exposure to academic vocabulary.

Art education fosters collaborative discussion and peer interaction, both of which are essential for language development in ELLs. Through group projects and critiques, students practice describing and analyzing their work, which encourages the use of academic and discipline-specific vocabulary (Echevarría et al., 2017). These discussions provide meaningful opportunities for ELLs to articulate their thoughts, refine their language skills, and develop confidence in expressing complex ideas. Additionally, written reflections on their artwork allow students to apply new vocabulary in personal and relevant contexts, reinforcing language acquisition in a way that feels authentic and engaging (Sousa, 2011).

Beyond language development, integrating art into ELL instruction enhances student engagement by combining visual and verbal communication. The intersection of art and language learning supports multimodal literacy, enabling students to make connections between images and words, which aids in vocabulary retention and comprehension (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). Furthermore, by incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies, art educators can create inclusive environments where ELLs feel valued and encouraged to share their cultural perspectives (Greer, 2011). This approach not only strengthens language development but also nurtures students' identities and sense of belonging within the classroom.

Lesk (2007) also highlights the importance of accessibility and exposure in language-rich art experiences. Many of her students had never visited an art museum before, yet quickly learned to use academic and visual arts vocabulary to describe texture, symbolism, and abstraction. She emphasizes that structured art viewing and discussion “positively affected students’ ability to decipher works of art” (p. 9) and improved their interpretive reading of other texts. These museum experiences illustrate how real-world art instruction can promote both critical thinking and vocabulary transfer, two vital elements for ELLs developing academic language in classroom settings.

As the decline of arts education continues to pose challenges in public schools, it is crucial to recognize the role of art in supporting ELLs' academic success (Azcuay, 2023). School leaders and administrators play a vital role in advocating for arts integration and ensuring that teachers receive adequate PD to support diverse learners (Elia, 2024). By prioritizing instructional strategies that merge art and language learning, educators can create dynamic, inclusive classrooms that empower ELLs to thrive both linguistically and artistically.

### ***Multimodal Learning in ELL Instruction***

Incorporating visual arts into language instruction aligns with theories of multimodal learning, which emphasize integrating multiple sensory and cognitive processes to enhance comprehension and retention (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). Art activities such as drawing, painting, and collage provide ELLs with alternative modes of expression, allowing them to communicate complex ideas before fully developing linguistic proficiency. This process fosters early literacy and verbal skills by creating

meaningful connections between visual representation and language (Lee, 2014). Additionally, engaging in artistic creation enhances cognitive functions such as pattern recognition, memory retention, and critical thinking, which are foundational for language development (Sousa, 2011). The Reggio Emilia and similar arts-based approaches emphasize the role of multimodal learning in fostering more profound understanding, particularly for young learners developing language skills (Aden & Theodotou, 2019). By integrating visual arts into language instruction, educators provide ELL students with a richer, more immersive learning experience that supports linguistic and cognitive growth.

Recent research highlights the value of digital media as a means of empowering multilingual learners through multimodal expression. In a high school communication course, Aghasafari et al. (2023) implemented a Photoshop-based collage project that helped ELLs visualize and articulate their evolving identities. Students explored the concept of identity collaboratively, then developed digital collages using personal images, symbolic objects, and text. According to the authors, this art integration approach enabled students “to not only construct their own definition and self-conception of ‘identity,’ but also present their identities visually” (p. 36). The project fostered both confidence and linguistic risk-taking, reinforcing the importance of using visual media to amplify student voice. By prioritizing visual storytelling, teachers offered an accessible and affirming pathway to language development and cultural expression.

The intersection of trauma-informed teaching and multimodal learning in the art room is especially impactful for ELLs. Wei and Mosley (2023) observed that “students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds seemed more likely to experience some

form of learning loss, including atypical unfamiliarity with art tools, skills and techniques, and an overall lack of self-confidence and social connection” (p. 10). By framing resilience as an instructional goal and leveraging multiple modes of engagement, the art classroom becomes a site of recovery and empowerment. This is particularly important for ELLs, many of whom navigate challenges beyond academics and benefit from instructional practices that support social-emotional learning, language acquisition, and self-expression.

Art education also affirms identity and emotional expression, especially for ELLs with lived experiences of displacement or interrupted formal education. Brown and Bousalis (2017) explain that “creative expression deepens understanding and honors diverse ways of knowing and is therefore a human right” (p. 49). For refugee-background students and multilingual learners navigating trauma or transition, the art classroom can become a safe space to “discover, be heard, and tell about their experiences” (p. 50). One Hmong artist, for example, preserved her life story on cloth to pass it on to future generations, an act of visual storytelling that strengthened cultural identity and family connection (Brown & Bousalis, 2017). These multimodal practices allow students to communicate deeply personal narratives while simultaneously building language and confidence.

### **Challenges Faced by Elementary Art Teachers**

The increasing population of ELLs in the United States presents both challenges and opportunities for educators. This is especially true in art education, where teachers must navigate the complexities of language acquisition while fostering creative

expression. Art, as a visual and experiential medium, holds the potential to bridge linguistic barriers, yet art educators frequently encounter systemic obstacles that hinder their ability to support ELLs effectively.

These challenges often fall into three interconnected categories: insufficient PD that fails to address the linguistic needs of ELLs in the art classroom, limited collaboration with ESL specialists due to scheduling or institutional barriers, and broader systemic constraints that restrict access to resources and support. Each of these issues contributes to the difficulty art teachers face in delivering instruction that is both inclusive and effective for multilingual learners. The following sections examine each of these categories in more depth, highlighting how they impact practice and what changes are needed to better support ELLs through visual arts instruction.

### ***Lack of Targeted PD***

A key factor in overcoming these challenges is targeted PD, which equips art educators with strategies for supporting language acquisition in the art classroom. However, many art teachers report feeling unprepared to address their ELL students' linguistic needs due to a lack of relevant training. Without structured PD that integrates language instruction with artistic pedagogy, art educators are left to develop their own strategies, often without sufficient guidance or resources (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005).

Recent research conducted by Leider et al. (2024), known as the *Supporting Multilingual Learners* (SML) Study, further highlights this issue through a pilot survey of 26 art teachers. Their findings revealed “wide variation in art teachers’ beliefs about the necessity of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices” (Leider et al.,

2024, p. 200), underscoring the inconsistent training and preparedness among art educators. The SML Study also raised important questions about whether this variation stems from differences in years of experience, bilingual status, or professional preparation. For example, the researchers found that “bilingual teachers were more supportive of MLs and more confident in their ability to serve them” (Leider et al., 2024, p. 200), suggesting that teacher background may play a critical role in shaping instructional practices and beliefs. They also noted an unexpected trend: teachers who had received SEI endorsements reported *lower* confidence, possibly due to an increased awareness of instructional complexities and gaps in their training. These findings call for more nuanced research into how teacher education, language background, and PD structures interact to influence the support of multilingual learners in art classrooms.

Effective PD programs should address the specific needs of ELL students by providing training in scaffolding techniques, visual literacy, and language-supportive instructional methods. When art teachers receive PD focused on integrating language acquisition strategies into their instruction, they feel more confident and effective. Glickman et al. (2024) emphasize that PD opportunities focusing on art instruction and language development help teachers build the skills needed to support ELLs effectively. Such programs should not be limited to theoretical discussions but should incorporate hands-on, practical applications that teachers can immediately implement in their classrooms.

Furthermore, collaboration between art educators and ESL specialists during PD sessions can significantly enhance instructional effectiveness. Art teachers often work in

isolation, separate from language specialists, which limits their ability to align art lessons with the language needs of ELL students. Azcuy (2023) highlights that collaboration between art teachers and ESL specialists fosters a shared understanding of how visual and verbal literacy intersect, leading to more effective teaching strategies for ELLs. Despite the proven benefits of cross-disciplinary collaboration, most PD programs remain siloed, preventing the integration of art education with language support strategies.

The growing demographic shift in U.S. schools necessitates continuous, rather than one-time, professional development. As Thomas (2017) argues, PD must be viewed as a long-term investment in teachers' abilities to support their students' academic and linguistic growth. Schools and districts must prioritize ongoing PD initiatives that address ELL students' evolving needs and art educators' pedagogical development.

### ***Limited Collaboration with ESL Specialists***

Effective collaboration between art educators and ESL specialists is essential for supporting ELL students holistically and inclusively. However, systemic barriers often hinder this collaboration, preventing seamless integration of their efforts. These obstacles arise from institutional constraints such as limited planning time, rigid scheduling, and a lack of shared PD opportunities. Additionally, logistical challenges and a persistent divide in understanding the roles of art teachers and ESL specialists further complicate collaborative efforts.

A primary challenge is the lack of designated time for collaboration. Schools operate on tightly structured schedules, leaving little opportunity for cross-disciplinary planning. As Loewus (2016) reports, “English-learner supports are added retroactively” (para. 23) to instructional materials, making it difficult for specialists to integrate support effectively across subjects. Without dedicated time for collaboration, art educators may be unaware of specific language strategies that could enhance their instruction, while ESL specialists may not recognize the role of art in reinforcing language acquisition.

The professional divide between art educators and ESL specialists often leads to a lack of mutual understanding and missed opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. Art educators typically focus on artistic techniques and creative expression, while ESL specialists are trained to support language acquisition. As Azcuy (2023) explains, this can “create a disconnect in understanding the overlap between art education and language learning” (para. 4). Without structured collaboration, both groups may struggle to recognize the complementary nature of their roles. Azcuy (2023) emphasizes, “instead of treating the arts as separate from other classroom endeavors, it’s time to embrace the value for the integration of music, painting, dancing, drawing, and singing into traditional subjects like science, math, and language” (para. 6). PD that fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration can help bridge this divide. Glickman et al. (2024) advocate for PD that brings together subject-area specialists and ESL experts to create a more cohesive and integrated approach to supporting ELLs. Unfortunately, most schools fail to provide such opportunities, reinforcing the isolation of art educators and ESL specialists within their respective fields.

Institutional barriers further complicate collaboration. ESL specialists often manage large caseloads, limiting their availability to support individual teachers. Azcu (2023) notes that ESL specialists often have more students than they can manage, which means they cannot dedicate as much time to each individual teacher's needs. As a result, art educators frequently lack access to language-support resources or strategies tailored to their students.

This lack of alignment between instructional goals and the resources available for ELLs further exacerbates the problem. As Loewus (2016) notes, many materials marketed for ELLs are either too simplified or designed as an afterthought, making them ill-suited to build the background knowledge and academic vocabulary that students need to access grade-level content. ELL supports are often *added retroactively*, which limits their effectiveness and leaves educators scrambling to create or adapt materials that support both content and language acquisition. These piecemeal solutions create a disconnect in understanding the overlap between art education and language learning because the foundational materials themselves fail to reflect an integrated approach to instruction.

Despite these challenges, fostering collaboration between art educators and ESL specialists is crucial for creating inclusive and effective learning environments for ELL students. Schools must address these barriers by restructuring schedules to allow for planning time, providing integrated PD, and fostering a culture that values interdisciplinary cooperation.

### ***Institutional Constraints Limiting Resources and Support***

Institutional constraints play a significant role in limiting the effectiveness of art education for ELL students. These constraints, stemming from district policies and broader educational systems, impact resource availability, PD, and the integration of language support into the art curriculum. One major challenge is the lack of resources specifically designed to support ELL students in art education. While schools often provide language support materials for core subjects, art classrooms are frequently overlooked in resource allocation. Glickman et al. (2024) observe that when districts do not prioritize funding for art resources or materials specifically designed for ELLs, it places a strain on art educators who are already juggling the challenges of integrating language support into their lessons. Without bilingual visual aids, culturally relevant materials, and adaptive lesson plans, art teachers are left with limited means to support their ELL students effectively.

Another constraint arises from the fragmented nature of PD. Many schools separate subject-specific training from ELL-focused training, leaving art educators without the necessary skills to incorporate language development into their curriculum. Thomas (2017) argues that PD is often siloed, meaning that art educators may attend training specific to their subject area, while ESL specialists receive separate training focused on language acquisition. This division prevents teachers from gaining interdisciplinary strategies that could improve ELL student outcomes.

The way schools prioritize instructional time often limits the role of art in language development. Art classes are frequently treated as ancillary rather than integral to academic achievement. This marginalization means that administrators may not

recognize the potential of art education as a vehicle for language acquisition. Research by Thomas (2017) suggests that schools that do not prioritize collaboration across disciplines often fail to create an environment where educators from different fields can work together to address the needs of ELL students. Without institutional support, art teachers struggle to implement language-focused strategies effectively.

Addressing these constraints requires systemic change. Schools and districts must allocate funding for ELL-specific art resources, integrate cross-disciplinary PD, and acknowledge the critical role of art education in language acquisition. By addressing these institutional barriers, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for ELL students in the art classroom.

### **Best Practices for Supporting ELL Students Through Art**

Best practices in art education for ELLs emphasize the integration of language acquisition with artistic expression in an inclusive and culturally responsive environment. According to Latta and Chan (2010), "successful art education for ELLs requires an approach that combines cultural relevance, visual literacy, and language development in a way that students can both understand and express themselves" (p. 48). Similarly, Latta and Chan (2010) argue that this integrated approach not only enhances comprehension but also allows students to communicate meaningfully across verbal and non-verbal domains. These foundational principles establish the art classroom as a unique environment where language learning is supported through hands-on, student-centered experiences.

A key best practice is the adaptation of the curriculum to reflect and honor students' cultural and linguistic identities. Incorporating culturally relevant themes into art-making helps bridge the gap between students' home cultures and the school environment, promoting a sense of belonging and reinforcing personal identity. Visual art offers ELLs a medium for non-verbal communication, providing them with tools to express complex ideas and emotions even when language is limited (Eubanks, 2002; Latta & Chan, 2010; Olds et al., 2021). When students engage in projects that reflect their cultural heritage, they not only develop artistic skills but also affirm their identities within the school context, fostering emotional safety and academic engagement. However, cultivating truly inclusive classrooms requires more than celebrating diversity. It requires educators to critically reflect on their own positionality and the systemic barriers embedded within curriculum and instruction. Link and Black (2024) share their journey toward antiracist art education, revealing how even well-intentioned teachers may unknowingly reinforce white normativity and marginalize students of color. They note that many preservice programs and in-service PD fail to prepare art teachers to critically engage with issues of race, power, and identity, stating, "Despite our best intentions, our curriculum failed to be meaningfully inclusive, and was actually harmful" (p. 1). This underscores the importance of PD that goes beyond technical skills or isolated lessons on cultural content. Instead, teachers must be supported in unlearning deficit perspectives and engaging in community-based reflection and collaboration. As this thesis argues, PD for art educators working with ELLs must include not only strategies for language development but also the tools to develop racial literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

This work aligns with critical pedagogy frameworks that position students as co-constructors of knowledge. Aghasafari et al. (2023) described their project as “an example of how art integration and instruction can be combined to create a learning experience that allowed students to invoke their own voices, identities, self-worth, and opinions” (p. 36). Rather than presenting identity as a fixed or teacher-defined concept, the educators collaborated with students to define the term and select visual materials that reflected their lived experiences. This participatory approach emphasizes the importance of allowing students to take an active role in shaping their learning experiences. When students are encouraged to contribute their voices, cultures, and perspectives, the classroom becomes a more inclusive and empowering space. For ELLs in particular, this validation of personal identity helps foster a sense of belonging, linguistic confidence, and emotional safety. By honoring students’ lived experiences and encouraging meaningful expression through art, educators can create learning environments where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

In addition to cultural responsiveness, visual literacy strategies play a critical role in supporting ELLs' language development. Teaching students to interpret and create visual imagery promotes a multimodal learning experience that supports both comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Olds et al. (2021) assert that "the integration of visual arts and language learning helps ELL students connect with content and use their native language to support the acquisition of academic language" (p. 22). They further emphasize that "by utilizing visuals and hands-on experiences, teachers can support students' academic language development, which, in turn, enhances retention and comprehension" (p. 23). These strategies enable ELLs to use both visual

and verbal modalities to construct meaning and participate more fully in classroom discourse.

Beyond linguistic scaffolding, artmaking can also serve as an act of cultural affirmation and emotional processing. Brown and Bousalis (2017) describe how refugee and immigrant students, when invited to express their experiences through art, often create deeply meaningful pieces that preserve personal and cultural history. They note, “Art can offer these children the opportunity to discover, be heard, and tell about their experiences” (p. 50), helping them rebuild identity in safe, affirming classroom spaces. Such practices support not only multimodal communication but also social-emotional development, particularly when artmaking reflects students’ heritage and lived realities.

Instructional scaffolding is another essential strategy that supports both artistic and linguistic development for ELLs. This includes providing vocabulary lists paired with images, breaking down complex instructions into manageable steps, and demonstrating techniques visually. Such approaches make abstract concepts more accessible while reinforcing academic language through contextualized, visual supports. As Loewus (2016) explains, “It’s not just about giving English-learners access to the same texts as their peers, but about making sure those materials are accessible and comprehensible” (para. 7). Scaffolding allows ELLs to progress at a developmentally appropriate pace, building confidence as they navigate both art content and language demands.

Peer collaboration also supports ELLs by creating opportunities for authentic, social use of language. When students work together on shared artistic tasks, they engage in meaningful conversations that promote both expressive and receptive language skills. Echevarría et al. (2017) emphasize that collaborative learning

environments provide opportunities for both social and academic language acquisition, particularly when interactions are structured around creative, student-driven activities. These peer interactions also help foster a sense of community in the classroom, contributing to emotional well-being and increasing students' willingness to take academic risks.

Technology and multimedia tools further enhance instruction by offering multimodal entry points into both language and art content. Tools such as video demonstrations, digital art platforms, and visual step-by-step tutorials can support ELLs by reinforcing verbal instructions with visual and auditory cues. These resources allow students to revisit information as needed and offer differentiated access to content. As Wilkey (2023) observes, "arts integration can help lower kids' affective filters and boost their confidence" (para. 6), which is especially important for ELLs navigating the dual challenges of language and academic content acquisition. Integrating technology meaningfully ensures that diverse learners have equitable opportunities to succeed.

Taken together, these best practices, culturally responsive curriculum design, visual literacy integration, targeted scaffolding, peer collaboration, and multimedia tools position the art classroom as a dynamic and inclusive space that advances both language development and personal expression for ELLs. When art educators thoughtfully implement these strategies, they not only meet students' linguistic and academic needs but also nurture a sense of belonging and identity. The art room becomes more than just a creative outlet; it becomes a space where ELLs are empowered to grow, connect, and thrive.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

To investigate how elementary art teachers perceive, navigate, and address the challenges of supporting ELL students, this study employed a mixed-methods approach that captured their lived experiences within increasingly linguistically diverse classrooms. The intersection of art education and language acquisition warrants deeper exploration, particularly given the limited PD many art teachers receive. Grounded in qualitative and quantitative approaches, this mixed-methods study seeks to identify systemic barriers, examine current instructional strategies, and highlight areas for growth in professional support structures. The design and methods presented in this chapter aim to capture a nuanced understanding of art educators' lived experiences and inform future practices that promote equity and inclusivity in arts instruction for ELL students. This research was reviewed and certified as exempt by the ECU IRB under category 1, 2b (see Appendix A).

### **Setting and Participants**

The population for this study consisted of 30 elementary art teachers from across North Carolina, representing a diverse range of school settings and student demographics, including those with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds, such as ELLs. North Carolina was selected due to its rapidly growing multilingual student population and its status as a national leader in public school language immersion and dual-language programs, making it a relevant and meaningful site for examining how art educators support ELLs.

The participants were recruited through email and social media platforms commonly used by art educators, including professional groups and forums where teachers regularly engage with one another. This recruitment strategy ensured that the study captured a broad spectrum of perspectives on supporting ELL students in the art classroom, reflecting the varied contexts in which these educators teach.

The teachers who participated in the survey represented a range of teaching experience levels, providing valuable insights into how PD opportunities and the challenges of supporting ELL students vary across career stages. Of the 30 survey participants, 40% (n = 12) had more than 10 years of teaching experience, while 13.3% (n = 4) had 7-10 years of experience. Additionally, 23.3% (n=7) had 4 to 6 years of experience, 13.3% (n=4) had 1 to 3 years, and 10% (n=3) had less than one year of teaching experience. This diversity in experience enabled a comprehensive understanding of the varying needs and perspectives of art teachers at different career stages.

Twelve of the 30 educators volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews. These interviewees were selected to further explore the themes raised in the survey, providing qualitative perspectives that enriched the quantitative findings. The interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the challenges these educators face in supporting ELL students and the PD opportunities they have encountered throughout their careers. The combination of survey data and interview insights offers a well-rounded view of the current support for ELL students in elementary art education across the state.

## **Data Collection**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the PD experiences and resource challenges of elementary art teachers who support ELL students. Using quantitative and qualitative interviews, the findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic barriers and instructional needs educators face. The survey offers broad statistical insights into teachers' confidence, access to PD, and perceived challenges, while the interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of individual experiences and institutional constraints. Together, these methods contribute to a robust analysis of the support structures available for art teachers working with ELL students.

## **Data Analysis**

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine both broad patterns and individual perspectives. Quantitative data were collected through structured survey items, while qualitative data were gathered from open-ended survey responses and semi-structured interviews. This combination enabled a layered analysis, as survey statistics provided insights into confidence levels, PD access, and perceived barriers, while qualitative responses revealed nuanced themes and personal experiences.

## **Survey**

A structured, anonymous survey was developed to gather quantitative data on the PD experiences and resource challenges of elementary art teachers supporting ELLs. The survey included:

- Likert-scale items, such as "How confident are you in supporting ELL students' language development in your art classroom?"
- Multiple-choice questions, such as "What professional development opportunities have you received for ELL instruction?"
- Open-ended responses providing participants an opportunity to elaborate on systemic barriers and unmet needs.

The survey was disseminated via email and social media, targeting art educators across the state. Participants could indicate their interest in participating in a follow-up interview by providing their contact information. Survey questions are detailed in Appendix B, and the results are presented in Appendix C. Responses were analyzed descriptively, informing the development of themes. The emergent qualitative themes from the open-ended survey questions are presented in Appendix D. Table 1 summarizes the key categories of the survey questions.

**Table 1**

**Survey Question Categories**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Demographics and Background	Questions about years of teaching experience and prior ELL-focused professional development.
Professional Development Access	Items measuring the types and availability of PD for ELL instruction.
Confidence and Resource Gaps	Questions assessing teachers' confidence in supporting ELLs and identifying missing resources.
Challenges and Barriers	Open-ended responses exploring difficulties in teaching ELLs.
Interest in Follow-Up Interview	Option for participants to provide contact details for further discussion.

The quantitative findings are based on a Google Form survey completed by 30 elementary art educators. The survey explored respondents' professional backgrounds, experiences with ELL training, and their perceived needs for better support of ELL students in visual art classrooms. The data offer insight into the current preparedness of art educators and highlight systemic gaps in resources and training.

As shown in Figure 1, the participants represented a range of experience levels, with 40% (n=12) having more than a decade of experience. Meanwhile, 36.6% (n=11) reported having 6 years or fewer of teaching experience. This diversity allows for

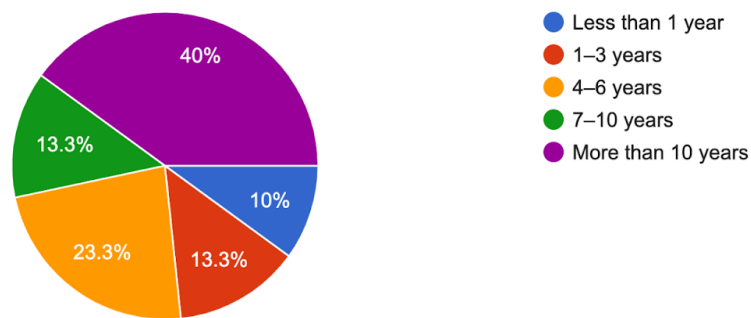
insights from both veteran and newer teachers, revealing how training and confidence in teaching ELLs may vary with experience.

**Figure 1**

**Survey Question: Experience**

How many years have you been teaching elementary art?

30 responses



In the qualitative analysis of survey responses, 30 elementary art educators responded anonymously to a set of open-ended questions. These responses were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, which allowed patterns and categories to emerge directly from participants' words rather than being influenced by pre-existing assumptions. The process began with a close reading of all open-ended responses, followed by initial open coding to identify key concepts, recurring phrases, and emergent topics. Each survey response was broken down into thematic units, which were then coded line by line using descriptive labels. As codes accumulated, they were grouped into broader categories through a process of constant comparison and refinement. Tally marks were used to track the frequency of each theme across all

participants, enabling a clearer understanding of which concerns and ideas were most widely shared.

### ***Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 volunteer participants to gain richer, more detailed insight into their lived experiences. Interviewees were greeted with an overview of the study's purpose and consent procedures. With verbal permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to preserve confidentiality. Interview questions are outlined in Appendix E, and transcripts are compiled in Appendix F.

Thematic coding was used to identify patterns and recurring ideas. The analysis of the twelve teacher interviews reveals consistent and compelling themes that reflect both the challenges and the underutilized potential in supporting ELL students through visual art education. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. Through iterative rounds of open and focused coding, six major themes were developed, which are presented in Appendix G. Table 2 summarizes the interview question categories.

**Table 2**

**Interview Question Categories**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Background Information	Teaching experience and interaction with ELL students.
Professional Development	Types and effectiveness of PD received.
Systemic Barriers	Challenges in supporting ELLs and institutional constraints.
Perceptions and Needs	Ideal PD support and school/district improvements.
Open-Ended Reflections	Additional insights from participants

To illustrate the sequential steps of data collection, Figure 2 presents an overview of the methodology.

**Figure 2**

**Data Collection Process**



### ***Qualitative Coding Methodology***

Across both open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts, an inductive thematic approach was used. This involved repeated close readings of the data to identify initial codes and emergent patterns. Descriptive codes were applied to highlight key phrases, challenges, and instructional practices, which were then grouped into broader categories. Frequencies were tallied to determine which themes were most common among participants.

The coding scheme used for both data sets is provided in Appendix H. This appendix outlines each code label, a brief definition, and example quotes or paraphrases that exemplify its usage. The coding process ensured that themes reflected the authentic experiences of participants rather than pre-imposed frameworks.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before accessing the survey, participants provided informed consent electronically. For those who participated in interviews, additional verbal consent was obtained before recording. To protect participant confidentiality, all identifiable information was either anonymized or replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. Data were securely stored in password-protected digital files and locked physical storage. Any identifying details were permanently deleted within six months of transcription. De-identified data will be retained for three years following the study's completion for potential future analysis or audit purposes.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

The findings from the mixed-methods research, which explore the experiences, perceptions, and needs of elementary art educators working with ELL students, are presented below. Drawing from quantitative survey data and qualitative open-ended responses, the analysis highlights patterns in PD access, teacher confidence, and the availability of instructional resources. It also highlights broader systemic issues that affect the ability of art teachers to support language development through effective visual arts instruction. By examining numerical trends alongside the lived experiences of educators, this chapter provides a multidimensional view of the challenges faced and support structures needed in the field. The data are organized to first address the quantitative findings, followed by qualitative insights that deepen and contextualize the statistical patterns.

### **Data Analysis Framework**

A comprehensive approach was used to analyze this study's quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis aimed to identify trends in PD access, teacher confidence, and resource availability while exploring systemic barriers and instructional challenges faced by art educators supporting ELL students. The quantitative survey data were examined using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, to summarize patterns in participant responses. Likert-scale data were aggregated to investigate trends in self-efficacy and institutional support.

Open-ended survey responses were analyzed inductively, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic coding process. Codes were not predetermined, but

emerged naturally from the data, allowing participants' voices to guide the direction of the analysis. This method ensured an authentic representation of the educators' perspectives and aligned with best practices in qualitative research. Such integration of quantitative and qualitative methods mirrors recommendations from Casteel and Ballantyne (2010), who stress that mixed-methods studies enhance contextual understanding, particularly when investigating how teachers adapt to support multilingual learners.

### **Descriptive Findings from Quantitative Data**

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in access to PD, teacher confidence, and instructional resource availability. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated for key Likert-scale items, providing insight into teachers' preparedness and the extent of institutional support for ELL instruction in the arts. This foundational quantitative analysis provides a broader understanding of trends, which are later contextualized through qualitative findings.

To deepen the analysis, open-ended responses within the survey were thematically coded using an inductive approach. These responses allowed the emergence of patterns not constrained by predetermined categories, enabling the data to speak for itself. According to Casteel and Ballantyne (2010), combining statistical summaries with participant-generated narratives can provide a more comprehensive understanding of professional learning environments for educators working with ELLs.

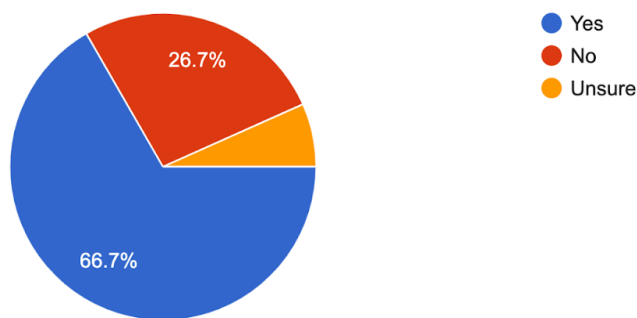
This approach also aligns with Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) model of effective PD, which emphasizes the importance of context-specific inquiry and iterative feedback. By integrating educator voice into both quantitative and qualitative strands, this study ensures that the findings reflect not only systemic issues but also lived professional experiences, highlighting where supports are working and where gaps persist.

As shown in Figure 3, 66.7% (n=20) of participants indicated they had received some form of PD related to ELL instruction. However, a notable 33.4% (n=10) reported either no training or uncertainty, pointing to inconsistencies in how ELL focused PD is delivered or labeled, particularly for specialists in the arts.

**Figure 3**

**Survey Question: Targeted PD**

Have you received any professional development specifically focused on teaching ELL students?  
30 responses

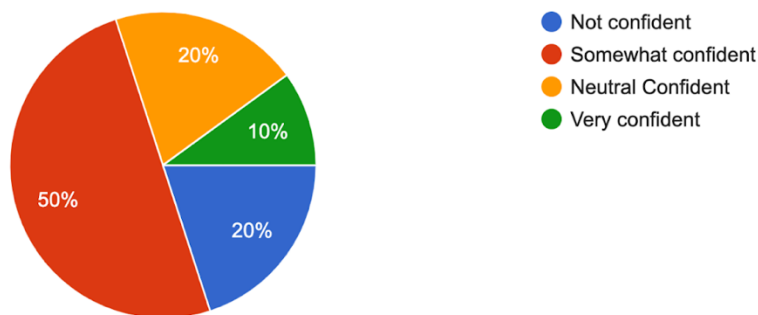


As shown in Figure 4, even though 66.7% (n=20) had received some form of ELL training, only 10% (n=3) of respondents felt “very confident” supporting ELLs' language development through art. Half of all participants identified themselves as “somewhat confident,” and 40% (n=12) expressed neutrality or a lack of confidence. This suggests

that even when training is provided, it may not translate into perceived preparedness, especially within the unique context of the art classroom. These findings are echoed in the SML Study, which noted that even teachers with specialized credentials, such as SEI endorsements, reported *lower* confidence levels than those without such training. As Leider et al. (2024) noted, “Teachers who have an SEI endorsement were less confident in their ability to teach MLs” (p. 200), speculating that deeper awareness of pedagogical gaps may actually lower self-efficacy.

**Figure 4**  
**Survey Question: Confidence**

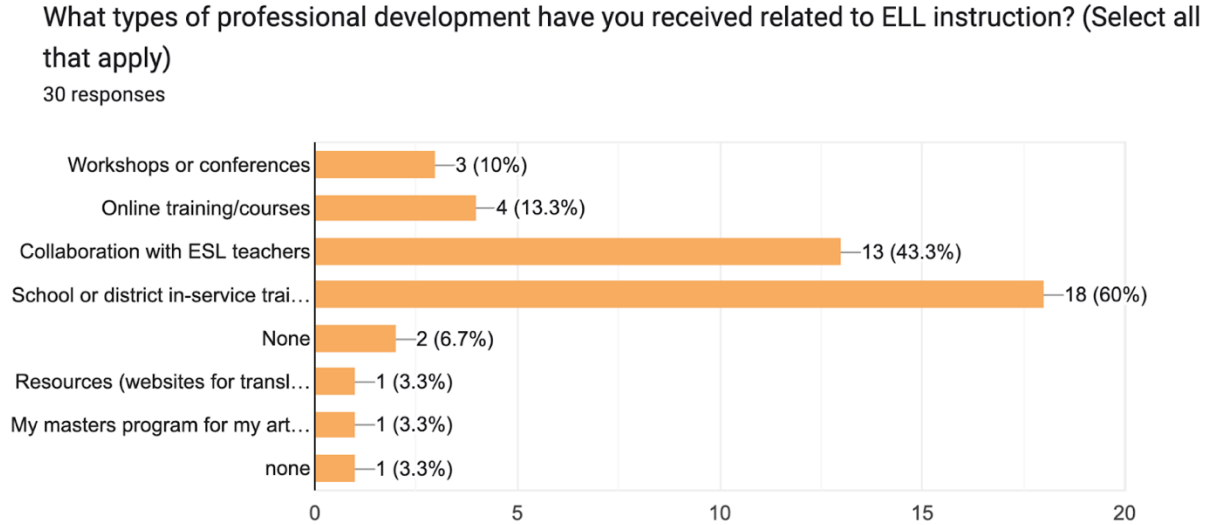
How confident are you in your ability to support ELL students’ language development in your art classroom?  
30 responses



As illustrated in Figure 5, the most common formats of PD were school or district in-service training (n=18) and collaboration with ESL teachers (n=13), resources typically accessible through institutional frameworks. Far fewer respondents cited external or formal training opportunities such as workshops (n=3) or graduate coursework (n=1). This suggests that while PD is occurring, it is often generalized and not specific to visual arts education. The minimal representation of discipline-specific

PD points to a systemic gap in professional learning targeted at art educators working with ELLs.

**Figure 5**  
**Survey Question: Types of ELL PD**



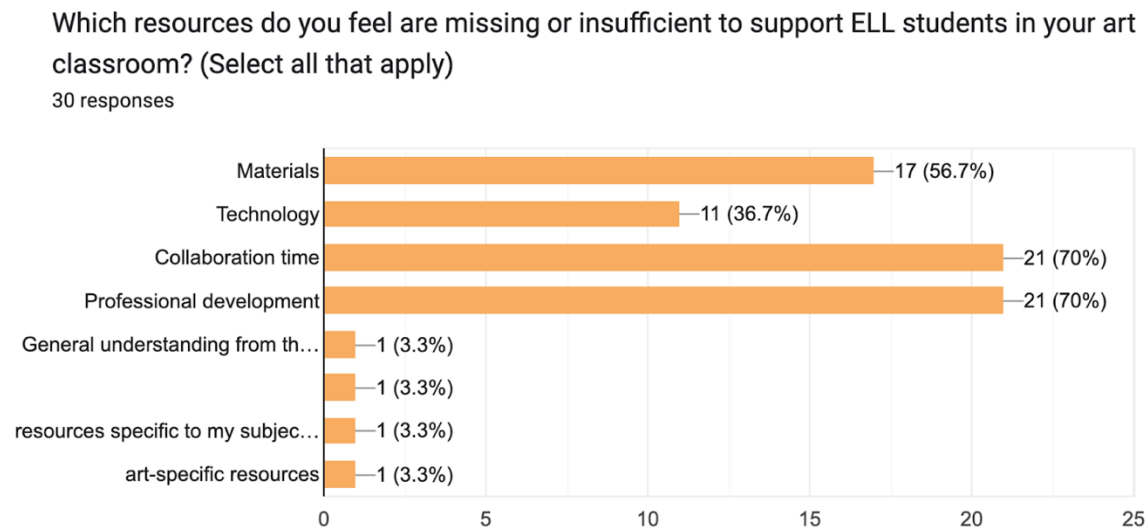
A striking finding is that collaboration time (n=21) and PD (n=21) were tied as the most commonly identified missing supports, suggesting that both structural and instructional barriers hinder ELL support in art classrooms. The responses also emphasize a shortage of appropriate materials (n=17) and technology (n=11) that could aid language development and access to the curriculum.

As seen in Figure 6, only two respondents cited a lack of art-specific resources, but this may indicate that such resources are not widely known or recognized, rather than unnecessary. Notably, one respondent called attention to a larger systemic issue, a lack of district-wide cultural and linguistic awareness that affects communication,

documentation, and outreach to multilingual families. This points to a broader equity concern that extends beyond classroom instruction.

**Figure 6**

**Survey Question: Resources**



To address the challenges that art educators face in teaching ELL students, two open-ended questions were included in the anonymous survey. Responses were collected without identifying information, and pseudonyms have been assigned to each teacher (e.g., Carmen, Aisha, Matthew) to improve readability.

One key question asked, "What challenges have you encountered in teaching ELL students in your art classroom?" Responses revealed significant barriers related to language and communication, as well as a lack of support and PD. Approximately 45% of respondents (n=13) highlighted language and communication as primary obstacles. Many teachers reported relying on bilingual peers to facilitate communication, with Carmen stating, "I rely on students who speak their language" (Carmen, anonymous

survey, 2025). However, this reliance highlights several concerns, particularly the potential for privacy issues or miscommunication when students are tasked with translating information, especially when personal or sensitive details need to be explained. Additionally, this practice creates challenges for students who speak languages not represented in the classroom, as it excludes them from the support they need. Even when translating simple directions, it is not appropriate to expect students to assume this responsibility, as it can lead to misunderstandings and increased stress. The inability to communicate directly with students often resulted in confusion about art concepts, as Matthew shared: "It's hard to explain concepts and history to them a lot of the time. Explaining the *why* of the artwork is where they sometimes get lost" (Matthew, anonymous survey, 2025, emphasis added). Language barriers hinder the ability to explain complex art concepts, making it harder for students to grasp the "why" behind the artwork, which diminishes their understanding of the material.

Despite these communication difficulties, 40% (n=12) of respondents noted that visual learning in the art room helped ELL students succeed, despite language barriers. As Nicole explained, "Art offers a lot of visual communication, which allows some ELL students to thrive" (Nicole, anonymous survey, 2025). Visual communication through modeling, gestures, and the use of translated materials was cited as an effective way to help students understand instructions and content. Several teachers reported using digital tools, such as Google Translate, to bridge the communication gap. Nicole also stated, "I frequently use Google Translate to explain what we're learning, the artists we're studying, and the techniques we're exploring" (Nicole, anonymous survey, 2025). While these tools support language acquisition, they cannot entirely replace the need

for a deeper understanding of art concepts, especially when students struggle to express their thoughts verbally.

The challenges associated with these language barriers are compounded by the fact that 30% (n=9) of respondents indicated that the diversity of languages spoken in their classrooms created additional difficulties. As Kiara noted, "One of the biggest challenges I face...is the wide range of languages spoken - many of which are not supported by translation tools like Google Translate" (Kiara, anonymous survey, 2025). This is particularly true when ELL students speak less commonly spoken languages, such as Swahili or Kinyarwanda, which are not easily supported by common translation tools. The absence of appropriate resources to help these students adds another layer of complexity in supporting their needs effectively.

Further complicating the situation is that 37% (n=11) of respondents pointed to the lack of adequate bilingual support and PD for art teachers. As Kiara explained, "I often feel like I'm reinventing the wheel to meet students' needs" (Kiara, anonymous survey, 2025). Many respondents reported a lack of collaboration with ESL specialists and felt that art teachers were often excluded from PD opportunities related to ELL education. Teachers expressed the need for more training on supporting ELL students, particularly those speaking languages not commonly addressed in district resources.

Another prominent challenge identified by 27% (n=8) of respondents was the time constraints inherent in the art classroom. With many teachers only seeing their students once a week for 45 minutes, it becomes increasingly difficult to build trust and understanding, especially when language is a barrier. As Tiana shared, "I only see my students once a week, and when language is a barrier, it takes even longer to build trust

and understanding" (Tiana, anonymous survey, 2025). These time limitations further impede the development of language skills and hinder the ability to assess students' understanding of both the art concepts and their ability to communicate about them.

Overall, the responses reflect the need for tailored PD that equips art teachers with the tools, strategies, and resources necessary to support ELL students effectively. As Emily stated, "Professional development that's art-specific and includes collaboration with ESL teachers would be incredibly helpful" (Emily, anonymous survey, 2025). Such PD would help bridge the gap between visual arts instruction and the language acquisition needs of ELL students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

### ***Language and Communication Barriers***

Many teachers identified language barriers as the primary challenge. Several other teachers (n=8) echoed the difficulty of communication, particularly when no bilingual student is available for translation. Carmen noted, "If a student translator is not available, there may be a challenge with communication" (Carmen, anonymous survey, 2025), highlighting the dependency on others for successful interaction. Elena explained that "The beauty of the art room is that students see step by step what they need to do," yet the inability to communicate verbally remains a significant hurdle (Elena, anonymous survey, 2025).

### ***Cultural Differences and Unmet Needs***

Cultural differences were another significant concern. Several teachers noted that different art traditions and histories across cultures present challenges in making art concepts relatable. Similarly, Kiara mentioned the lack of support for less common languages, such as Swahili or Arabic, making communication with non-Spanish-speaking students especially difficult. Kiara expressed, "I rely heavily on visuals, modeling, and gestures... but these strategies can only go so far when students don't yet have the language to express their needs or understand expectations" (Kiara, anonymous survey, 2025).

### ***Class Size and Diversity of Proficiency Levels***

Teachers also acknowledged the challenges posed by large class sizes and the diversity of English proficiency levels. Aisha described the high student-to-teacher ratio as a major issue, while Isaiah noted the difficulty in managing multiple languages, such as Spanish and Farsi, simultaneously. Yolanda further underscored the difficulty of communicating with students who have no English proficiency, while Julia highlighted the lack of communication between educators and administrators regarding students' language skills. She suggested that clearer communication about language abilities would allow for better preparation and support for ELL students in the art classroom.

### ***Emotional and Behavioral Barriers***

Behavioral challenges were another common theme, with teachers, like Brianna, reporting that students' lack of understanding often led to behavior problems. Nicole

pointed out that, “Without any foundational knowledge of English, students often shut themselves off from learning or simply mimic what others are doing” (Nicole, anonymous survey, 2025). This behavior was attributed to frustration with communication, which further complicated the process of active learning. Brian also noted that ELL students often have difficulty participating in classroom discussions or critiques, leading to disengagement and frustration: “They often have ideas but lack the vocabulary to share them” (Brian, anonymous survey, 2025).

### ***Lack of PD and Instructional Resources***

In terms of PD, teachers identified several areas where additional support would be beneficial. A common theme among the responses was the need for more resources and training in communication tools and strategies to support ELL students. Monique advocated for translation technology as a crucial tool, while Andre expressed a desire to learn “basic Spanish” and have more resources to communicate with Spanish-speaking people. Kiara called for PD that integrates language acquisition strategies in visual arts instruction, emphasizing the need for tools like multilingual resources and strategies for building communication bridges for students who speak less-common languages. Brian suggested training focused on creating sentence stems and visual prompts for better discussions and reflections, while Jasmine called for PD on how to differentiate expectations for language learners without sacrificing academic rigor.

### ***Need for Art-Specific PD and ESL Collaboration***

Overall, the responses reflect the need for tailored PD that equips art teachers with the tools, strategies, and resources necessary to support ELL students effectively. As Emily stated, “Professional development that’s art-specific and includes collaboration with ESL teachers would be incredibly helpful” (Emily, anonymous survey, 2025). Such PD would help bridge the gap between visual arts instruction and the language acquisition needs of ELL students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

An urgent need for PD that specifically addresses the unique needs of ELLs in the art classroom was also a dominant theme across all twelve interviews. Participants frequently mentioned that while they had attended general PD sessions, few, if any, offered strategies applicable to their visual arts instruction. Grace (personal communication, March 15, 2025) expressed: “It’s like we’re expected to figure it out on our own. I’ve had PD on ELLs, but nothing that actually applied to art.” Sophia (personal communication, March 8, 2025) emphasized the disconnect: “I understand language objectives, but I don’t know how to embed them into an art lesson on perspective drawing or color theory.”

This concern echoes Echevarría et al.’s (2017) call for scaffolded instruction that is contextualized within the content area and supported by visual and interactive methods. It also supports Anderson and Milbrandt’s (2005) argument that authentic, subject-specific instruction must be prioritized in professional learning communities.

### ***Gaps in Resources and Visual Supports***

Nearly all teachers described having to create visual aids, translated materials, or pictorial guides themselves to help ELL students navigate art instruction. While these efforts demonstrate creative problem-solving, they also highlight systemic gaps in resource allocation. Brianna (personal communication, March 15, 2025) explained, “I keep a folder of visuals I’ve made over the years. But it’s patchwork. There’s no centralized support.” Carmen similarly noted the time-consuming nature of crafting visuals for each unit.

This aligns with Olds et al. (2021), who assert that visual literacy tools are central to helping ELL students engage in both meaning-making and language development. The absence of institutional support forces teachers to rely on fragmented and inconsistent strategies, which often vary by classroom and school.

### ***Limited Collaboration with ESL Specialists***

Several teachers reported rare or informal collaboration with ESL staff. While they valued the expertise ESL specialists offered, systemic constraints such as lack of time, scheduling conflicts, or departmental silos, made consistent collaboration difficult. Matthew (personal communication, March 24, 2025) noted: “We work in the same building, but I have no idea what the ESL teachers are doing. I’d love to plan something together, but there’s just no space for that in our schedules.”

These responses reinforce Greer’s (2011) findings on the need for school leadership to institutionalize collaboration between content and language educators.

Without designated co-planning time or shared goals, ELL support remains uneven, particularly in non-tested subject areas, such as art.

### ***Emotional and Language Expression Challenges***

Teachers consistently observed that ELL students sometimes struggled to express emotions or ideas through artwork, not because of a lack of creativity, but due to their limited English vocabulary. Jasmine noted, “I see them wanting to share their ideas, but they get stuck. It’s like the idea is there, but the words aren’t” (personal communication, March 3, 2025). Elena added that ELL students were often hesitant to share in group critiques or discussions, fearing mispronunciation or misunderstanding.

This emotional filter can inhibit creative risk-taking, a concept supported by Wilkey (2023), who argues that lowering affective filters through the arts builds confidence and enhances language acquisition. The tension between expressive intent and linguistic ability underscores the importance of integrating multimodal communication strategies in the art room (Guo, 2023).

### ***Technology Use and Training Gaps***

While some teachers utilized tools such as Google Translate, digital portfolios, or visual search engines to support ELL students, many reported a lack of training in effectively using these tools. Grace (personal communication, March 15, 2025) said, “I know there are tech tools out there, but nobody’s shown me how to use them in art specifically. So I stick with what I know.” Andre emphasized the trial-and-error nature of

implementing digital supports: “It helps sometimes, but I don’t always know if it’s accurate or useful” (personal communication, February 17, 2025).

This inconsistency highlights a missed opportunity to provide PD that equips art educators with the skills to utilize digital and multilingual tools to support ELL engagement. While such tools have the potential to increase accessibility and enhance language acquisition through multimodal means, their effectiveness depends largely on teacher preparedness. As Olds et al. (2021) and Guo (2023) advocate, the integration of technology can significantly support ELLs’ access to content, particularly when visual, auditory, and interactive elements are combined. Without targeted PD, however, the promise of these tools remains underutilized, and ELLs are less likely to benefit from the full range of instructional supports available.

### ***Administrative Support and Systemic Prioritization***

Several teachers described having supportive relationships with their administrators but noted that their needs as art educators working with ELLs were often overlooked in broader school planning. Sophia shared, “I have a great principal who values the arts, but PD around ELLs still goes to the classroom teachers first” (personal communication, March 8, 2025). Nicole said, “They assume we don’t need that kind of training because we don’t give grades or tests” (personal communication, February 25, 2025). This perception, that art educators are exempt from the academic rigor expected in core subjects, reflects systemic assumptions that devalue the role of the arts in language development. As a result, art teachers are frequently excluded from targeted PD that supports ELLs. Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) challenge this misconception by

framing art education as a legitimate vehicle for academic and social development. When schools fail to integrate the arts into their ELL strategies, they miss opportunities for engagement, emotional support, and alternative communication pathways.

### ***Reflection on Interview Findings***

The interviews provide a compelling narrative of passionate and resourceful art educators working at the margins of institutional support. Their stories reinforce the scholarly literature that calls for discipline-specific PD (Echevarría et al., 2017; Latta & Chan, 2010), multimodal instruction (Guo, 2023), and the need for administrative structures that support equity across all content areas, including the arts. The recurring themes of emotional expression, resource gaps, and missed collaboration signal that ELL support must be reimagined as a whole-school effort in which the arts are not optional, but essential.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Understanding the experiences of elementary art educators working with ELL students requires reflection on the collected data and the broader systems that shape instructional practices. The findings reveal an environment in which dedicated teachers strive to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners, often without sufficient support or training. Several key themes illustrate persistent challenges and promising opportunities at the intersection of visual arts and language development. The following discussion explores these findings in depth, offering insight into how art educators can more effectively support ELL students and what systemic changes are needed to make that support sustainable and equitable.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Before examining each theme in detail, it is important to acknowledge that many of the challenges teachers described are interconnected, shaped by both school-level limitations and broader systemic issues. The voices of art educators reveal not only the instructional gaps they face but also the emotional labor involved in striving to support students with limited, consistent resources. While some strategies, such as visual scaffolding or peer translation, emerged repeatedly, their application was often improvised rather than institutionally supported. The discussion that follows is organized around five key themes that surfaced across survey responses and interviews, demonstrating both the consistency and complexity of the challenges teachers face.

### ***Limited PD and Confidence in ELL Support***

The findings confirm that while elementary art teachers are deeply committed to supporting ELL students, they are often left without the tools, training, or institutional support necessary to do so effectively. A clear gap exists between the PD art educators receive and their perceived confidence in applying language acquisition strategies within the art classroom. Despite 66.7% (n=20) of respondents indicating some exposure to ELL-related PD, only 10% (n=3) felt "very confident" in their ability to support language development through art, suggesting a disconnect between generalized training and practical application in visual arts settings. This gap aligns with Echevarría et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of explicit, discipline-specific instructional support, and is reinforced by Anderson and Milbrandt (2005), who advocate for authentic instruction grounded in the unique dynamics of art education.

These findings are further supported by the SML Study. The study examined teachers' confidence levels, instructional beliefs, and engagement with culturally and linguistically responsive practices. Although the sample was limited, the researchers observed a striking range of beliefs and practices, suggesting systemic inconsistencies in training and preparedness. As they explain, "descriptive statistics suggest there is a wide range of beliefs and confidence among art teachers regarding working with MLs (Multilingual Learners)" (Leider et al., 2024, p. 203). This variation aligns with the gaps identified in this study's survey and interviews, reinforcing the idea that ELL students' access to support in the art room can vary significantly based on their teacher's training, experience, or language background.

### ***Barriers to Collaboration with ESL Specialists***

Participants also noted a lack of collaborative opportunities, particularly with ESL specialists, as a significant barrier. Informal or infrequent communication with ESL staff left many art teachers improvising or relying on their resourcefulness. This lack of structured collaboration aligns with Greer's (2011) argument that school leadership often fails to institutionalize effective collaboration between content and ESL educators. Teachers often cited their reliance on bilingual peers, translation apps, and visual aids strategies that, while helpful, were frequently insufficient when working with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds or when trying to explain abstract art concepts.

### ***Time Constraints and Instructional Limitations***

Teachers expressed concern about the limited time they have with students (often once a week for 45 minutes), which exacerbates challenges in building trust and supporting language development. This constraint reflects broader systemic limitations within the structure of specials classes and reinforces the importance of maximizing impact through targeted instructional strategies, a concern echoed by Latta and Chan (2010), who argue for stronger systemic supports for non-core educators.

### ***Emotional and Expressive Challenges for ELL Students***

The qualitative data, particularly from interviews, revealed an emotional dimension to these challenges. Teachers observed that ELL students sometimes struggled to express themselves in artwork due to language limitations, which could diminish the emotional and expressive power of art education. This theme supports the

argument by Wilkey (2023) that arts integration lowers affective filters and fosters confidence, aligning with Olds et al. (2021), who highlight how the visual arts can serve as a bridge between verbal and nonverbal communication for language learners.

### ***Lack of Cultural Responsiveness at the District Level***

Several teachers highlighted the lack of district-level awareness regarding their students' cultural and linguistic diversity, contributing to inconsistent or inadequate support across schools. This finding aligns with Latta and Chan's (2010) advocacy for arts-based education that is both culturally and linguistically responsive. The absence of district strategies that reflect the full diversity of ELL learners, particularly those who speak languages less commonly supported by mainstream translation tools, leads to inequities that diminish access and engagement.

Ultimately, this study underscores that PD must go beyond broad strategies and be discipline-specific, culturally responsive, and rooted in practical, visual arts-based approaches. It confirms the claims made by researchers such as Guo (2023), who stresses the importance of multimodal and emotionally resonant instructional strategies in language acquisition.

### ***Implications for Art Education and ELL Support***

The implications of this study underscore the urgent need to reevaluate the intersection of art education and ELL support. It affirms that art classrooms are powerful, multimodal spaces where language learning can thrive, but only if art educators are empowered with the proper training and resources. Without dedicated PD

that bridges art education and language acquisition, teachers are left to navigate this complex intersection without guidance. This finding directly aligns with the calls by Echevarría et al. (2017) and Guo (2023) for the creation of sustained, contextualized, and scaffolded support for language learners.

The findings also suggest that collaboration is not optional but essential. Art educators must be included in broader school efforts to support ELLs, including collaborative planning with ESL staff, access to student language data, and the development of culturally and linguistically responsive curricula. These practices not only align with the collaborative framework supported by Greer (2011) but also reflect Latta and Chan's (2010) argument that cross-disciplinary integration enhances language outcomes. When art teachers are excluded from these conversations, it reinforces the misconception that language development is irrelevant in the arts.

Finally, systemic inequities in prioritizing arts education impact the level of support ELL students receive. When "specials" teachers are excluded from targeted ELL initiatives, a significant opportunity is lost to support language development through visual, hands-on learning. This supports the conclusions of Anderson and Milbrandt (2005), who argue that authentic art instruction can promote broader educational goals, and Wilkey (2023), who identifies the arts as uniquely equipped to build identity and confidence in ELL students.

## **Recommendations and Future Directions**

To effectively support ELLs in the art classroom, school districts and educational agencies must prioritize developing and implementing discipline-specific PD.

Professional learning opportunities should be tailored to the unique needs of visual arts educators and include practical strategies for visual scaffolding, vocabulary instruction, formative assessment for language learners, and lesson modifications that accommodate varying levels of English proficiency. This directly addresses the literature's call for contextualized, content-based language instruction (Echevarría et al., 2017; Latta & Chan, 2010).

In addition to PD, schools must institutionalize protected collaboration time between art teachers and ESL staff. Regular co-planning sessions enable shared insights into student needs, coordinated instruction, and consistent support for students, particularly newcomers or those with limited English proficiency. Without structured time for collaboration, many art educators are left to navigate language barriers on their own.

Another critical recommendation is the development and distribution of ELL-specific toolkits for art teachers. These toolkits should include multilingual vocabulary cards, translated materials, visual prompts, and sample modified lessons. Materials must be adaptable and culturally responsive to reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the student population. By making these resources readily available, schools empower art educators to create more inclusive and accessible learning environments.

Districts must also adopt arts education policies that explicitly incorporate support for ELL students, ensuring that their unique needs are addressed across all content areas, including the arts. This means embedding ELL strategies not only in district-wide PD sessions but also in the processes used to select instructional materials and evaluate teacher effectiveness.

Ultimately, training on integrating technology is essential. Many art teachers already use translation apps and digital tools, but these efforts are often inconsistent or underutilized without proper guidance. PD should include training on leveraging digital content, translation technology, and culturally relevant visual media to support communication and instruction in linguistically diverse classrooms, especially for less commonly spoken languages that mainstream tools may not effectively support.

### ***Areas for Further Research***

Future research should explore how sustained, art-integrated language support impacts ELL students over time. Longitudinal studies can shed light on the role of visual arts instruction in language development, student engagement, and emotional expression. Tracking student progress in classrooms where art teachers implement targeted ELL strategies would provide valuable data on the long-term benefits of inclusive art practices.

Additionally, there is a need to elevate student voice in this area of research. Centering the experiences and perceptions of ELL students can reveal how they interpret and navigate the art classroom as a space for communication and creativity. Their insights could guide more responsive, student-centered teaching practices.

Comparative research across special area subjects such as music, physical education, and library instruction could also help develop a more cohesive model for inclusive instruction in non-core disciplines. Each of these areas offers unique opportunities for language acquisition through movement, music, visuals, and experiential learning, which may complement or contrast with strategies used in the art

room. By examining how ELL support is implemented in these different contexts, educators and researchers can identify cross-disciplinary practices that are particularly effective.

Another critical area of inquiry involves teacher preparation programs. Research into how preservice art educators are trained, or in many cases, overlooked, in supporting ELLs could drive meaningful changes in university coursework, student teaching requirements, and licensure expectations. Ensuring that future teachers enter the profession with foundational knowledge in language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogy is essential to sustaining equitable practices in visual arts education.

The SML Study by Leider et al. (2024) further reinforces the importance of refining teacher education and PD programs to address the diverse needs of multilingual learners in art classrooms. Their pilot survey revealed that bilingual teachers reported greater confidence in supporting MLs, while those with SEI endorsements were, somewhat counterintuitively, less confident in their ability to serve this population (Leider et al., 2024). This paradox suggests that training rooted solely in SEI frameworks may heighten teachers' awareness of instructional challenges without equipping them with actionable strategies. As Leider et al. noted, this raises critical questions about whether professional learning models are improving practice or unintentionally undermining teacher efficacy. Future research should investigate how various types of training, such as bilingual pedagogy, arts-integrated language support, and culturally responsive methods, impact art teachers' beliefs, confidence, and instructional practices. These findings point to the need for more tailored, subject-

specific, and asset-based PD that prepares teachers not only to meet compliance requirements but also to feel empowered in their role supporting MLs.

This study confirms that the art classroom possesses powerful, often untapped potential as a site for language development, cultural affirmation, and meaningful inclusion for ELL students. Yet this potential cannot be fully realized without systemic changes in preparing, supporting, and empowering the art educators who serve these students. The voices of the teachers who participated in this research reveal a deep commitment to equity but also a clear call for targeted PD, stronger collaboration, and better resources tailored to the realities of their classrooms. Supporting ELLs in art is not a peripheral concern. It is essential to creating inclusive schools where every child, regardless of their language background, can express themselves, connect with others, and grow. By recognizing and responding to the distinct needs of ELL students in the visual arts, we move closer to an educational landscape where creativity and communication are accessible to all learners and where every teacher is equipped to nurture both.

## REFERENCES

- Aghasafari, S., Bivins, K., Muhammad, E. A., & Nordgren, B. (2022). Art integration and identity: Empowering bi/multilingual high school learners. *Art Education*, 75(5), 32–37.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2022.2076543>
- Aden, F., & Theodotou, E. (2019). Reggio Emilia and the arts approach: Two exceptional examples of multimodal learning in early years. *Journal of Global Education and Research*, 3(2), 158–167. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2577-509x.3.2.1050>
- American University School of Education. (2023, July 17). *Supporting English language learners: Resources for educators and administrators*. Soeonline.american.edu.  
<https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/english-language-learners-resources/>
- Anderson, T., & Milbrandt, M. K. (2005). *Art for life: Authentic instruction in art*. McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.
- Azcuy, R. (2023, June 8). *Why we should care about the decline of arts education in our public schools - teach & kids learn (TKL)*. Teach & Kids Learn (TKL).  
<https://www.teachnkidslearn.com/why-we-should-care-about-the-decline-of-arts-education-in-our-public-schools>
- Brown, S. L., & Bousalis, R. (2017). Empowering young minds through communication, creative expression, and human rights in refugee art. *Art Education*, 70(4), 48–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2017.1317562>
- Casteel, C.J., & Ballantyne, K.G. (Eds.). (2010). Professional development in

- action: Improving teaching for English learners. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512636.pdf>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.  
[https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective\\_Teacher\\_Professional\\_Development\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf)
- Echevarría, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2017). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Elia, S. (2024, January 4). *The administrator's role in the success of ELLs*. Edutopia.  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-school-leaders-can-support-english-learners>
- Eubanks, P. (2002). Students who don't speak English: How art specialists adapt curriculum for ESOL students. *Art Education*, 55(2), 40.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3193989>
- Garcia, O., & Kleifgen, J. A. (2018). *Educating emergent bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners*. Teachers College Press.
- Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2013). *Supervision and instructional leadership*. Pearson Higher Ed.
- Greer, A. (2011). *Teaching English Language Learners in the art classroom: A survey of approaches*. [Master's Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University]. VCU Scholars Compass.  
<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1191&context=etd>
- Goldberg, M. (2019). *Using the arts to support English Language Learners*. The Kennedy Center. <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for->

[educators/classroom-resources/articles-and-how-tos/articles/educators/ell--special-education/using-the-arts-to-support-english-language-learners/](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1283625)

Guo, X. (2023). Multimodality in language education: Implications of a multimodal affective perspective in foreign language teaching. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1283625. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1283625>

Latta, M. M., & Chan, E. (2010). *Teaching the arts to engage English language learners*. Routledge.

Lee, H.-C. (2014). *English teaching: Practice and critique, 13*(2).

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1042518.pdf>

Leider, C. M., Tigert, J. M., Norova, N., Fotouhi, G., Sawyer, J., & Wang, R. T. (2024). Supporting multilingual learners: A pilot survey of art teachers. *Studies in Art Education, 65*(2), 185–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2024.2322412>

Lesk, S. M. (2007). Art worth millions ... of words. *Art Education, 60*(6), 6–9.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2007.11651127>

Link, B., & Black, C. M. (2024). Learning to listen to the pit in our stomachs: A call for vulnerability in art education. *Art Education, 77*(6), 8–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2024.2382655>

Loewus, L. (2016, May 11). *Quality learning materials are scarce for English-Language Learners*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/quality-learning-materials-are-scarce-for-english-language-learners/2016/05>

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). English learners in public schools. *Condition of education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>.

- Olds, J., McCraney, M., Panesar-Aguilar, S., & Cale, C. (2021). Adopting instructional strategies for English Language Learners in elementary classrooms. *World Journal of Education, 11*(3), 18–29. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v11n3p18>
- Sousa, D. A. (2011). *How the brain learns*. Corwin Press.
- Thomas, B. A. (2017). Language policy, language ideology, and visual art education for emergent bilingual students. *Arts Education Policy Review, 118*(4), 228–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2017.1287802>
- Tyler, C. W., & Likova, L. T. (2012). The role of the visual arts in the enhancing the learning process. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 6*(8). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00008>
- Wei, Y., & Mosley, K. L. (2023). Cultivating children's resilience: A preservice Art teacher training project. *Art Education, 76*(5), 8–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2023.2224693>
- Wilkey, E. (2018, April 6). *3 reasons why your ELLs need arts integration*. Common Sense Education. <https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/3-reasons-why-your-ells-need-arts-integration>
- Zhang, Y., & Jia, S. (2022). A study on the effects of language and visual art integrated teaching on language learning performance and satisfaction of ethnic minority students in China. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1048635>

## APPENDIX A: IRB DOCUMENTATION



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**  
Willis Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·  
[rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

### Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Alicia Butler](#)  
CC: [Robert Quinn](#)  
Date: 1/3/2025  
Re: [UMCIRB 24-002418](#)  
Art as a Language: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities for ELL Support in Elementary Art Classrooms

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 1/3/2025. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1, 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Art as a Language- ELL support(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Consent Form for Interview(0.01)	Consent Forms
Consent Paragraph(0.01)	Consent Forms
Email Campaign(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Interview Script & Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Social Media Campaign(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Survey Script & Questions (edited)(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

---

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY

### Exploring ELL Support in Elementary Art Classrooms

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. This survey is designed to explore professional development opportunities and challenges elementary art teachers face in supporting English Language Learner (ELL) students. Your responses will remain anonymous, and the survey should take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and you can stop at anytime. If you have questions, please contact Alicia Butler at [butleral23@students.ecu.edu](mailto:butleral23@students.ecu.edu)

At the end of this survey, you will have the opportunity to express your interest in participating in a follow-up recorded interview. If interested, you will be asked to provide your name and email address.

This contact information will only be used for scheduling and will not be linked to your survey responses.

1. How many years have you been teaching elementary art?

Less than 1 year  
1–3 years  
4–6 years  
7–10 years  
More than 10 years

2. Have you received any professional development specifically focused on teaching ELL students?

Yes  
No  
Unsure

3. How confident are you in your ability to support ELL students' language development in your art classroom?

Not confident  
Somewhat confident  
Neutral Confident  
Very confident

4. What types of professional development have you received related to ELL instruction? Select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

Workshops or conferences

Online training/courses

Collaboration with ESL teachers

School or district in-service training

Other:

5. Which resources do you feel are missing or insufficient to support ELL students in your art classroom?

Check all that apply.

Materials

Technology

Collaboration time

Professional development

Other:

6. What challenges have you encountered in teaching ELL students in your art classroom?

7. What specific professional development opportunities would be most beneficial to help you support ELL students?

8. Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up recorded interview to share more about your experiences?

9. If yes, please provide your name, email address, and phone number (if you prefer text). This information will only be used to contact you for scheduling and will not be linked to your survey responses:

### APPENDIX C: SURVEY ANSWERS

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Professional development	Verbal communication. I rely on students who speak their language.	Better visual instruction practices.	Yes
More than 10 years	Yes	Very confident	School or district in-service training	Materials	High student to teacher ratio	Refresher course in esl. I'm certified in esl but it's been a while since I took classes.	Yes
4–6 years	No	Not confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	Communication	Technology that can be utilized, tips, etc.	Yes
1–3 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers, Resources (websites for translation, common phrase sheets, etc.) shared in staff meetings and PLC	Collaboration time, General understanding from the district that we are a heavily ELL populated school and forms, resources, and news should be shared in a more comprehensible way for other cultures and languages	I have personally learned a lot of Spanish and worked on this in my free time, so i am able to communicate rules and instructions in Spanish, however I think the cultural differences in art and society are hard for them to understand. Other countries have different forms of art and talk about art in different ways, so it is hard to explain concepts and history to them a lot of the time. Explaining the WHY of the artwork is where they sometimes get lost. That is also much more difficult language wise.	Learning about common cultural practices within the art world in Latin American countries and middle eastern countries. This is where most of our ELL students are from and I think if we had an idea of what they did in their country we could explain things in terms they would understand by comparing the two.	Yes
7–10 years	No	Somewhat confident	None	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	If a student translator is not available, there may be a challenge with communication.	Translation Technology/Devices... Tools.	Yes

Less than 1 year	No	Neutral Confidence	My masters program for my art education degree	Technology, Professional development	Not having enough support to support ELL in the classroom	Working with the school as well as others within the area to achieve more consistency in how we can get on the same page as ELLs	No
More than 10 years	Yes	Very confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Materials	Most challenges occur early on, especially if the student has no english. The beauty of the art room is that students see step by step what they need to do. The challenges are mostly the inability to communicate.	I don't know what PD opportunities there are in that area so I really can't say.	No
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers	Collaboration time	ELL students often excel in art class on their actual projects because we teach a visually based subject... but they are often left out of classroom discussions/critiques unless there is a spanish speaking classmate who can directly translate for them.	I would love to learn basic spanish -- in addition to having more resources to communicate with spanish speaking parents. Also something on integrating writing/esl with these students when I'm doing the same with my english speaking students	Yes
4-6 years	Yes	Neutral Confidence	Online training/courses	Collaboration time	It would be helpful to know more about my students' language skills. There is little communication about this. My district does flag these students on rosters, and I am usually notified who needs to sit with a bilingual peer.	I would like to see more research about how creating a collaborative student led classroom culture where talking is allowed and encouraged helps students to develop language skills faster. I feel that the talking norms and expectations I am expected to enforce actually	No

						<p>are limiting students use of language too much.</p> <p>My district really pushed for earning ELL endorsement via PRAXIS testing because my state laws are changing. I feel that endorsement via testing is not an honest way to go. Quality professional development is necessary not having an endorsement achieved by cramming for a test.</p>	
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Collaboration time,	if there are too many students who do not speak english to be able to pair them with a bilingual student	Seeing examples of what other art teachers do	No
More than 10 years	No	Somewhat confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers	Materials, Professional development	<p>As an ELL teacher who speaks three languages, I can deeply relate to my students' frustration when they can't communicate. It's challenging, and without any foundational knowledge of English, they often shut themselves off from learning or simply mimic what others are doing. This isn't active learning.</p> <p>Art, however, offers a lot of visual communication, which allows some ELL students to</p>	<p>Different ways to assess what they have been learning in my class beyond the final product, different tools/apps we can rely to translate our materials or visuals to help the ELL students to make the connections between their mother tongue and English.</p>	Yes

					<p>thrive. Since art doesn't rely solely on words, it can be a more accessible form of expression. But the challenge remains: how do we bridge the gap between visual communication and language itself? We often lack the necessary tools or time, especially since we only meet once a week for 45 minutes in a classroom with 20ish students.</p> <p>To help with this, I frequently use Google Translate to explain what we're learning, the artists we're studying, and the techniques we're exploring. This gives my students the confidence to try, and some even start repeating words as they pick up the language.</p> <p>However, my biggest challenge is ensuring my class isn't frustrating for them and making sure I'm not assuming the visuals will do all the work. I'm also unsure how to fully assess what they're grasping and how much they're truly learning from the experience.</p>		
1–3 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	Online training/courses, Collaboration with ESL teachers	Professional development	Having too many students with different languages i.e. Spanish, Farsi, etc...	More resources available on school laptops to help translate.	No

4–6 years	No	Neutral Confident	None	Professional development	Students not understanding English and/or waiting for 1:1 instruction often leads to behavior challenges	If students don't speak any English or Spanish, I am at a loss.	Yes
More than 10 years	No	Neutral Confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Materials, Collaboration time	Not understanding directions	Using visual supports for them	No
More than 10 years	Yes	Neutral Confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers	Collaboration time, Professional development	very few as art is so visual. Sometimes it is a little difficult during cleanup but not remarkably. I also speak very basic Spanish	more training by the district	No
7–10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Collaboration time, Professional development	Having so many different languages, and English proficiency levels, represented in our student body- especially when I teach all students at the school.	Strategies specifically tailored to our subject/content.	No
4–6 years	Yes	Very confident	Workshops or conferences, Online training/courses, Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Technology, Collaboration time	I think if we have time to meet with out ELL teachers and to plan activities that would be very beneficial for our students	project ideas and creations	Yes
4–6 years	Yes	Neutral Confident	Collaboration with ESL teachers	Materials, Technology, Professional development	Dealing with many behavioral issues that ELL students are lost/not a priority	specific ELL strategies for Art Education	No
More than 10 years	Unsure	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Professional development	Communicating with students who have no English language knowledge.	A quick online translation app that is dependable for Burmese, Karen, Spanish, Chinese, Korean.	No

						Those are the languages we see most frequently.	
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	Workshops or conferences, Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Collaboration time	Language/communication barriers, ltd. Vocabulary of students regarding art curriculum, cultural differences	Scaffolding techniques for ELLs, culturally responsive teaching, visual literacy and multimodal communication	No
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Collaboration time, Professional development, resources specific to my subject are/ visual arts	One of the biggest challenges I face in teaching ELL students in my art classroom is the wide range of languages spoken - many of which are not supported by translation tools like Google Translate. While some support exists for Spanish-speaking students, there are virtually no resources for students who speak other languages such as Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Karen, and Arabic. This creates significant barriers to communication, especially when students are new to both English and the school environment. I rely heavily on visuals, modeling, and gestures, but these strategies can only go so far when students don't yet have the language to express their needs or understand expectations. Additionally, I've noticed a lack of professional	As an elementary art teacher working with a diverse population of ELL students, I would benefit most from professional development that is tailored to the unique context of the art room. Specifically, sessions focused on integrating language acquisition strategies into visual arts instruction, such as using academic and conversational vocabulary supports, scaffolding directions, and incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices would be especially helpful. In addition, training on how to collaborate effectively with ESL specialists and classroom teachers to reinforce cross-	Yes

					<p>development or targeted training for art teachers on supporting ELLs, especially those who speak less common languages. This makes it harder to design lessons that are both accessible and culturally responsive. Without consistent collaboration with ESL teachers or access to translated materials, I often feel like I'm reinventing the wheel to meet students' needs. Despite these challenges, I continue to advocate for more inclusive resources and use creative strategies to help every student feel successful and seen in the art room.</p>	<p>curricular language goals in art would strengthen my ability to support students holistically. I would also value PD that includes access to multilingual resources, visuals, and real examples of modified art lessons that support English learners at different proficiency levels. Finally, workshops that address the needs of students who speak less common languages with strategies for communication, community building, and trauma-informed support would fill a major gap that many general PD sessions overlook.</p>	
Less than 1 year	No	Not confident	Workshops or conferences, Collaboration with ESL teachers, School or district in-service training	Materials, Collaboration time, Professional development	<p>As a first-year teacher, I often struggle with knowing how to effectively support my ELL students beyond visuals and demonstrations. Sometimes I can tell a student doesn't understand a direction, but I'm unsure how to clarify it in a way that supports their language development without</p>	<p>I would benefit from beginner-friendly PD that breaks down basic language acquisition principles and offers practical, classroom-ready strategies for ELL support in an art context. A mentorship program connecting new teachers to ELL specialists would also be helpful.</p>	No

					slowing down the whole class.		
1–3 years	Unsure	Not confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	I've realized how easy it is to unintentionally leave ELL students out of classroom conversations, especially when I ask open-ended questions or critique artwork. They often have ideas but lack the vocabulary to share them, which can lead to disengagement.	PD that helps me build sentence stems and visual prompts for discussion and reflection would make my instruction more inclusive. I'd also love examples of how other art teachers modify critiques or class discussions for language learners.	No
4–6 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	A major challenge is that ELL students often come with varying degrees of formal education, and it's tough to balance teaching foundational art skills while also supporting language growth. I also don't always have access to interpreters for parent communication.	I'd like more training on how to use culturally responsive curriculum in art and how to differentiate expectations for language learners without lowering the rigor of the lesson. Hands-on workshops showing real classroom examples would be ideal.	Yes
7–10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	Over time, I've noticed that the biggest challenge isn't just language, but how limited ELL support is for "specials" teachers. While classroom teachers often receive ESL strategies and push-in support, art teachers are usually left out of those conversations.	Professional development that's art-specific and includes collaboration with ESL teachers would be incredibly helpful. I'd also benefit from learning how to assess and document student growth in both art and language in meaningful ways.	Yes
More than 10 years	Yes	Somewhat confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Collaboration time,	The language diversity has increased dramatically over the	Advanced PD focused on systemic solutions, like	Yes

				Professional development	years, and while I've developed strong classroom routines, it's still a struggle to make sure students with limited English feel like they're part of the community, especially when I can't pronounce their names or understand their needs without translation help.	how school leadership can support inclusive practices across specials would be valuable. I'd also appreciate training on designing multilingual signage, tools for family engagement, and trauma-informed approaches for refugee students.	
1–3 years	Yes	Not confident	Online training/courses, School or district in-service training	Materials, Collaboration time, Professional development	It can be difficult to know whether a student is struggling because of a language barrier or because they need more support with the art content itself. I sometimes worry I'm misinterpreting silence or off-task behavior as disinterest when it's actually frustration with communication.	I'd love professional development that shows how to build routines and visuals into the classroom that support both ELL and non-ELL students. A toolkit with editable templates for multilingual instructions, vocabulary cards, or visual schedules would be really helpful.	Yes
4–6 years	Yes	Not confident	School or district in-service training	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development	Even after a few years in the classroom, I still find that students with limited English proficiency miss out on some of the deeper parts of art lessons, like discussing symbolism or sharing stories through their artwork because I don't always have the tools to scaffold those conversations.	A workshop or learning community where art teachers can share strategies for helping ELLs express complex ideas visually and verbally would be great. I'm also interested in learning how to better assess ELL students' understanding beyond just their finished artwork.	Yes
7–10 years	Yes	Somewhat	School or district in-	Materials, Technology, Collaboratio	One ongoing challenge is time. I only see my students	PD that includes long-term strategies for	No

		confident	service training	n time, Professional development	once a week, and when language is a barrier, it takes even longer to build trust and understanding. For newer ELL students, it often takes weeks to even get a sense of what they enjoy or need help with.	relationship-building with ELLs in limited-contact classes like art would be incredibly useful. I'd also appreciate learning how to support ELL students through choice-based or TAB (Teaching for Artistic Behavior) approaches.	
Less than 1 year	No	Not confident	none	Materials, Technology, Collaboration time, Professional development, art-specific resources	As a brand-new teacher, one of the hardest parts has been realizing how much I take language for granted when giving directions. Even simple phrases like "line up" or "put your name on your paper" can be confusing for students new to English. I've had to slow down and rethink how I explain everything.	I would really benefit from beginner-level PD that focuses on breaking down instructions and building routines for multilingual classrooms. I'd also love examples of picture-based classroom management tools and ways to teach vocabulary naturally through hands-on artmaking.	Yes

## APPENDIX D: EMERGENT THEMES FROM SURVEY RESPONSES

Theme	Description
Lack of Targeted PD	Many respondents noted an absence of PD specific to ELL support in art.
Classroom Isolation	Art teachers expressed feeling left out of school-wide ELL planning.
Trial-and-Error Strategies	Teachers often create their own strategies without institutional guidance.
Desire for Collaboration	Respondents expressed a need to work with ESL specialists.
Language Barriers to Participation	Teachers noted difficulty engaging ELLs in class discussions or critiques.
Resource Gaps	Lack of bilingual materials and translated supports was frequently mentioned.
Cultural Inclusion as a Strength	Several respondents noted using art to validate students' cultural identities.

## **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SCRIPT**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Alicia Butler, and I am researching the professional development opportunities and systemic barriers elementary art teachers face in supporting ELL students.

This interview will last about 30 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential, and you can choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. With your permission, I will record the interview to ensure accuracy.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Interview Questions**

#### **1. Background Information**

- Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

#### **2. Professional Development**

- What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?
- Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

#### **3. Systemic Barriers**

- What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?
- Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

#### **4. Perceptions and Needs**

- What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?
- If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

#### **5. Open-Ended Reflections**

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for sharing your insights. Your input is incredibly valuable to this research. If I have any follow-up questions, may I contact you again?

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to reach out to me  
butleral23@students.ecu.edu

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

### **Teacher A “Carmen” Interview**

February 17, 2025

#### **Background Information**

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I honestly don't have as much experience teaching ELL students. I teach in a smaller school in a rural area where my own children went to school. I teach Elementary art- K-5, and we currently have around 300 students. I have been teaching here as an art teacher for 4 years, but prior to that I was involved as director for the musicals and I had my own dance studio. Closed it during COVID and then went back to school to get my licensure in art.
- I might have a couple of students each year that are ELL, but MOST (not all) have spoken English, or enough to be able to communicate on a small level.

#### **Professional Development**

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- To my knowledge, we haven't had any targeted specifically for ELL students. Being a specialist is somewhat hard. Sometimes, we just get “they are ELL” but nothing else. It's hard to plan accordingly and have visuals, etc., for those students.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The most effective PD I have had was with Krista Saunders- her science of behavior. I am happy to share the slides with you so you can see them, but she had a lot of resources to share with us to use- behavior charts, choice boards, tokens, etc.

#### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- The main challenge is communication. Specials at our school don't have a PLC, and oftentimes we are not told we are getting new students, or if we do, we are not sure whether they speak English or not. Usually, they are paired with another student who can help them communicate. I think because we only see them for a short period of time, we aren't always in the loop.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- If there are resources for us as specialists, we do not know about them. Everything is piecemeal and we are not included a lot of the time. If I didn't push, I wouldn't know. I want a student to feel comfortable in my class. Time can be an issue too, when our ELL teacher is between multiple schools.

### Perceptions and Needs

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I think having resources to pull from would be ideal. Best ways to communicate. What is best practice for that?

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- I think it would vary somewhat depending on if it's elementary, middle or high school. Key strategies for supporting ELLs in the art classroom (e.g., scaffolding, visual supports, language objectives). Understanding how students learn a second language. Strategies for creating an inclusive classroom environment. Building relationships with ELL teachers and support staff- be included more. This is not necessarily district wide but having people communicate with us. Having the right technology and digital tools that can offer support for teachers. I do think it's helpful that art is universal. Since I always model, it helpful BUT when listening to a story or video and they don't speak English, I can imagine how frustrating that could be. Having the right tools to help US as teachers be able to have a more inclusive environment/instruction. Incorporating language supports- editable of course! Strategies for fostering inclusivity, relationships, and confidence. Essentially, **A Resource Toolkit for Art Teachers!** – Ready-to-use visuals, bilingual glossaries, and technology integration ideas but all editable bc not everyone likes the same 1980's cheesy graphics and fonts :)

### Open-Ended Reflections

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I think that covers everything I can think of right now.

## **Teacher B “Andre” Interview**

February 17, 2025

### **Background Information**

#### **Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?**

I'm originally from Brazil, and I've been teaching art for about 12 years now, with the last few years spent in North Carolina. I speak Portuguese, Spanish, and English, which has definitely helped me connect with my students from different linguistic backgrounds. In Brazil, I taught a variety of age groups, but here in the U.S., I'm mostly focused on elementary art. In addition to teaching, I also serve as one of the lead art teachers in my district, where I help with professional development for other art teachers, especially on how to integrate cultural understanding into the classroom.

When it comes to ELL students, I have a good amount of experience working with them, both as a language learner myself and as a teacher in a bilingual environment. I try to use my language skills to bridge the gap between English-speaking students and my ELL students. I've found that building a relationship and creating a supportive classroom environment is key to helping them feel comfortable and succeed in art class.

### **Professional Development**

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've had the opportunity to lead PD sessions on how art can be used to support language acquisition and cultural understanding, particularly for ELL students. As one of the lead art teachers in the district, I've worked closely with ESL specialists to learn more about how I can adapt my lessons to meet the needs of ELL students. I've also participated in district-level PD workshops focused on language strategies in the classroom, which have been helpful in terms of learning how to incorporate more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching methods.
- It's been great to have the chance to present on art from my culture as part of PD sessions. I've shared how we use art to tell stories and preserve language and identity in Brazil. This has opened up conversations on how art can also serve as a powerful tool for ELL students to express themselves, even if they're not yet fully proficient in English.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The most helpful PD experience was when I participated in a training on culturally responsive teaching. The session focused on understanding the diverse backgrounds of our students and how we can integrate their cultural identities into the art curriculum. It was especially relevant for me as a bilingual teacher because I could see how much it benefited my students who come from various backgrounds. The training emphasized the importance of using visuals, storytelling, and hands-on learning to engage ELL students. What made it effective was how practical the strategies were. It gave me real tools to use in the classroom, such as using visual aids and incorporating students' native cultures into the projects we were doing. I also appreciated the collaborative aspect of the PD. There was a lot of group discussion and sharing of strategies with other art teachers, which made me feel supported in my work and allowed me to learn from others' experiences.

### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- One challenge I face is that while we do have some resources for ELL students, there is often a lack of specific strategies for supporting them in art classrooms. For example, it's sometimes difficult to know how to give clear instructions to students who are still acquiring English. While I can use my language skills to support students in Portuguese or Spanish, not all of my ELL students speak those languages, and we don't have consistent access to translators or bilingual support staff.
- Another challenge is time. With limited time for planning and the pressure of meeting district standards, it can be difficult to ensure that all students' needs are being met, especially for ELLs. I want to give them more opportunities to engage in the art-making process, but sometimes the structure of the curriculum doesn't always leave room for language-rich activities or individualized support.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- Yes, there are definitely systemic issues. For one, there's a lack of access to professional development that focuses specifically on ELLs in the art classroom. While we have general PD on supporting ELL students, there is very little focus on how to adapt visual arts curriculum specifically for ELLs.

- Another issue is the time constraints. We have a lot to accomplish in the short time we have with students, and sometimes it's challenging to balance the need for language support with meeting other curriculum requirements. More time for collaborative planning with ESL teachers and art teachers would be beneficial, as it would allow us to create more comprehensive and supportive lessons for our ELL students. Additionally, there are some logistical barriers, like the availability of bilingual resources, which makes it hard to provide ELL students with the materials they need to fully engage in lessons. The district could do more to provide these resources to make the transition into the art classroom smoother for ELL students.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I think one of the most important things districts could do is provide targeted PD for art teachers on how to support ELL students. As art educators, we are often expected to know how to integrate language acquisition strategies into our lessons, but we don't always have the training or resources to do that effectively. Providing bilingual resources, like picture dictionaries or translated instructions, would be really helpful. There are also opportunities to create more culturally relevant lessons, especially in schools with diverse populations. Art is a great way to build connections between students' home cultures and the school environment, but that requires more intentional planning and support.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- My ideal PD program would focus on providing practical strategies for art teachers to integrate language acquisition and cultural understanding into the art curriculum. It would include: Strategies for using visuals, gestures, and demonstrations to support ELL students. Guidance on incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into projects and lessons. Best practices for differentiating instruction to meet the needs of ELLs at different language proficiency levels. Collaborative planning time with ESL specialists and other art teachers to design inclusive lessons. Opportunities for teachers to share their experiences and strategies for supporting ELL students. It would also be helpful to have PD sessions that focus on the specific challenges and opportunities for ELLs in art classrooms, especially for teachers who work with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

## Open-Ended Reflections

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I've really enjoyed teaching ELL students and using art as a way for them to express themselves. I think art provides a unique opportunity for students who may struggle with language to still communicate and feel successful. However, there are definitely areas where I could use more support. As a bilingual teacher, I often find myself bridging the gap between different languages and cultures, and it would be great if there were more formal resources and support for doing this in the art classroom.

In terms of professional development, I think there needs to be more focus on the intersection of language acquisition and visual arts, so we can better serve our ELL students. This is a vital area of growth for me, and I know it would help me be even more effective in supporting all my students.

Finally, I think we should always remind ourselves how important it is to celebrate cultural diversity in the classroom. Art is such a beautiful way to bring students' identities to life, and when we allow our students to see their cultures reflected in the art room, we give them the confidence and motivation to thrive.

## Teacher C “Elena” Interview

February 17, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I have been teaching for 26 years, primarily in elementary education. I've taught a variety of subjects, including art, and I've had the privilege of working with students from diverse backgrounds, including many English Language Learners (ELLs). Over the years, I've seen a significant increase in ELL populations, especially in the past 10 years. In my current position, I have about 30% ELL students, with a range of language proficiency from beginner to advanced. I've worked closely with ELL specialists, and I've adapted my teaching strategies to ensure that all students, regardless of their language background, can engage with and understand the curriculum.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- Throughout my career, I've participated in a variety of professional development opportunities focused on supporting ELL students. Some of the most impactful have been workshops on differentiated instruction, cultural competency, and second-language acquisition strategies. I've also had specific PD around using visual aids and language scaffolding to support ELLs in all subjects, not just art. One of the most valuable experiences was a district-wide ELL training that involved hands-on strategies, like using sentence frames, word banks, and interactive vocabulary building techniques, that I still use to this day.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The most helpful PD experience I had was a workshop on "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL). It really transformed how I approach lesson planning for all students, including ELLs. The focus on providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression was eye-opening. This approach allowed me to design lessons that addressed different learning styles and language levels simultaneously, and it gave me concrete strategies for making

my content more accessible to ELL students, like offering visual aids, simplifying instructions, and providing more time for practice.

### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- One of the main challenges is the wide range of language proficiency levels in my ELL students. Some are just starting to learn English, while others are more advanced and may still struggle with specific vocabulary related to art. I have to balance providing language support without slowing down the curriculum for other students. Additionally, the lack of a consistent, systematic approach to ELL support across subjects can make it difficult. I also often find that there aren't enough resources specifically designed for ELLs in the arts, which means I have to create my own visual aids and language support materials.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- Yes, one of the main issues is time. As an art teacher, I only see students once a week for a short period, so it's challenging to provide enough individual support in a meaningful way. I also find that I don't always have the resources I need to effectively support my ELL students. For example, there are limited bilingual materials or resources tailored to the arts. It would also be helpful if there were more collaboration time with ELL teachers so we can better align our strategies and understand the specific needs of our students.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I think schools and districts could do more to provide targeted resources for ELL students in the arts. This includes bilingual art dictionaries, visual vocabulary guides, and instructional videos with subtitles. Additionally, more professional development focused on specific strategies for supporting ELLs in the arts would be beneficial. Having more collaboration time with ELL teachers to co-plan would also ensure that I am integrating the right language support into my lessons. Finally, it would be helpful if there were more support staff, like teaching assistants or translators, to help bridge communication gaps.

**If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?**

- If I were to design a PD program, it would focus on practical strategies for supporting ELLs in the arts, with an emphasis on creating accessible, inclusive classrooms. It would cover topics like using visuals, manipulatives, and bilingual resources in art lessons, as well as strategies for building vocabulary in both English and students' home languages. I'd also include strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management for diverse learners, and cultural competency, to help educators understand the cultural backgrounds of their students and integrate them into the art curriculum.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- Working with ELL students has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. It has challenged me to be more creative in my teaching and more patient with my students. I've learned a lot about how to teach through visuals, hands-on activities, and body language, which are all essential for language learners. While there are certainly challenges, I believe that supporting ELLs makes me a better teacher overall. However, there is always room for improvement, and I think more systemic support and professional development could make a huge difference in ensuring these students thrive in the arts and other subjects.

## Teacher D “Kiara” Interview

February 25, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I've been teaching art for 8 years, and in that time, I've had the opportunity to work with many different types of learners, including ELLs. Currently, I have a second-grade class with 5 different languages spoken at home, including Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, Farsi, and English. While we may not have a large number of students per language group, the diversity in the classroom adds complexity to the way I design lessons and structure activities to ensure all students feel supported.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've participated in a few PD sessions focused on general ELL strategies, such as using visuals and hands-on activities to support language acquisition. One session I found particularly helpful was about “language scaffolding,” where I learned techniques for building students' language proficiency without forcing them to speak right away. I've also taken workshops on culturally responsive teaching, which helped me understand the importance of creating an inclusive classroom that reflects the diverse cultures and experiences of my students. While these sessions were helpful, I feel that more focused professional development on supporting ELLs in specialized subjects like art would be great.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The most helpful PD experience I've had was a session on “Using Visuals to Support Language Learning.” This workshop focused on integrating pictures, symbols, and gesture-based communication to help ELLs understand new vocabulary. It was incredibly practical for my art classroom, where visual aids are crucial. I learned how to use image-rich instructions, labeled diagrams, and gesture-based teaching to ensure that all my students, regardless of their

language skills, could grasp the lesson content. This session also emphasized the importance of consistency, like using the same visual cues every time, which has helped build a predictable and supportive classroom environment.

### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- The biggest challenge is the varying levels of language proficiency in my classroom. While some students may have conversational English skills, others are still learning basic words and phrases. This means I need to differentiate my instruction even more than I would for a more homogeneous class. Additionally, many of my students are not yet literate in their home languages, which makes it harder to provide resources in their native language. Another challenge is the lack of bilingual art materials. I often need to create my own resources to ensure that the students can understand instructions and vocabulary, which takes time.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- There definitely are systemic issues that make it difficult to support ELL students. One major issue is the lack of time for collaboration with ESL specialists. I don't have enough time built into my schedule to meet with them regularly, and often, I'm left to figure out language strategies on my own. It's also hard to get access to bilingual resources tailored for art instruction because most materials are geared toward general subjects like math or science. Another challenge is the limited class time I have with my students. As an art teacher, I only see each class once a week for about 45 minutes, which isn't always enough to build the language proficiency my students need, especially in such a hands-on subject.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- One thing schools and districts could do is provide more time for collaboration between art teachers and ESL specialists. This would allow us to better align our teaching methods and create more effective lessons for ELLs. It would also be helpful if districts provided more bilingual resources for art teachers, such as bilingual glossaries of art vocabulary or visual dictionaries that are specific to the

subject. More PD focused on language support in specialized subjects would also be valuable. For example, how to integrate language acquisition strategies specifically into the art classroom - things like providing visuals for complex art terms or using storytelling to build vocabulary.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- My ideal PD program would include strategies for building both language and academic skills in a hands-on environment like the art room. It would focus on language support techniques that go beyond simple translation, like teaching through visuals, gestures, and student-led demonstrations. It would also include ways to incorporate students' home languages into the classroom, even if they aren't fluent in English yet. Practical strategies like creating bilingual word walls, using multilingual art books, and encouraging peer-to-peer language modeling would also be important. I think PD should be designed not just for general ELL support, but for how ELLs specifically engage with subjects like art, where visual literacy plays a big role.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- It's been a beautiful experience to watch my ELL students grow and express themselves through art. I find that art offers them a unique way to communicate, even when words aren't always available. Sometimes, just seeing their faces light up when they use color or shape to express something is enough to show me that they're understanding the lesson. However, I do wish that there was more institutional support, especially in terms of resources and collaboration time with ESL teachers. I feel that if I had more time and support, I could make a bigger impact on my students' language acquisition through art, and ultimately, help them feel more at home in the classroom.

## Teacher E “Nicole” Interview

February 25, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I've been teaching for 14 years, mostly in elementary schools. I've taught at a few different schools across the state, and each has had its own set of challenges. Right now, I'm at a school with a pretty diverse student population, including several ELL students. Many of them speak Spanish, but we also have students who speak a variety of other languages. In my art room, I have anywhere from 3 to 5 ELL students in a given class, and I've learned a lot over the years, even though I haven't had much formal training specific to ELLs. I do what I can with visuals and modeling, but there's always more to learn.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- Honestly, not much. There have been some school-wide trainings on supporting ELL students in general, but nothing specifically focused on art education. I've gone to some workshops over the years, but most of the PD I've had seems like it's more geared toward core subjects like math or reading, which isn't always applicable to what I'm doing in the art room. I've tried to make the most of what I can by talking with other teachers, but that's not always enough.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- One of the best PDs I've had was a district-wide session on equity and inclusion. It didn't focus specifically on ELLs, but it did give me a new lens on how to think about creating inclusive environments for all students, especially those who may feel left out or marginalized. The most effective part was learning how to build better relationships with students and how to create spaces where they can express themselves freely. It was a good reminder that art is a universal language and that's something I've carried into my practice.

## Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- One of the biggest challenges I face is the lack of support and communication. As a specials teacher, we often don't get the same attention or resources that core subject teachers do. When new ELL students come in, we don't always get the full picture on their language abilities or support needs. Sometimes I feel like I'm left to figure it out on my own, and it can be frustrating. It's hard to know how to best support these kids if we're not getting the right information from the get-go.
- Another issue is time. I don't have enough time to give ELL students the individualized attention they need, especially when I'm working with large groups. The short periods we have for art are just not enough to build strong relationships with students, and sometimes I'm forced to rely on peers to help translate or guide the students, which isn't ideal.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- The lack of resources is a huge problem. There are so many times when I wish I had a toolkit of resources specific to ELLs, something I could pull from to make their experience in the art room more successful. But most of the time, I'm left improvising, which isn't ideal. We don't have enough professional development focused on our specific needs as art teachers, and there's a big gap in terms of cultural competence and support for the diversity in our classrooms.
- The support from the district, particularly when it comes to ELL students, has been disheartening. There seems to be a lack of prioritization, and it's frustrating. With the current political climate in North Carolina, I feel like arts education in general, and ELL support in the arts, often take a backseat. The lack of funding and emphasis on standardized testing in core subjects means that the arts and ELL students' needs are overlooked.

## Perceptions and Needs

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- First and foremost, we need better communication. If I'm going to support ELL students, I need to know who they are, what their language skills are, and what

support they're getting in other areas. Schools need to be more proactive in sharing this information, especially with specials teachers who often don't get the same level of input or professional development.

- We need more PD opportunities that are specific to the challenges we face in the arts. It's one thing to get a general workshop on ELL support, but I need strategies and resources that are directly applicable to teaching visual arts. A toolkit or resource bank for art teachers would be incredibly helpful. And I think having more opportunities for collaboration with ESL teachers would go a long way. They can give us insight into what works in the classroom, and we can share what works in our art rooms.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- It would be focused on actionable strategies for art teachers. For example, I'd love to have a PD that focuses on scaffolding art instruction for ELL students, with an emphasis on using visuals, body language, and modeling. There should be a session on creating multilingual classrooms with bilingual glossaries and art-related vocabulary cards that teachers can use. Another part would focus on culturally responsive teaching practices and understanding the cultural backgrounds of students to inform instruction. But beyond that, there needs to be a focus on the support teachers need to work effectively with ELL students. How do we collaborate with ESL teachers? How can we ensure that art instruction is inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of language barriers?

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I'm just really tired of the lack of support from the district, to be honest. It's disheartening to see how much time and energy I have to put into figuring things out on my own, while the school system focuses more on testing and core subjects. Art and ELL students shouldn't be an afterthought. We have a diverse group of kids, and their needs should be met with resources, training, and time. I'm passionate about my job, and I love working with these kids, but it's exhausting to keep fighting for the support that should be provided by the district. The political climate right now doesn't make it any easier, and I just feel like we're constantly having to justify the value of arts education.

●

## Teacher F “Aisha” Interview

March 3, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I’m a first-year teacher, and I came into this role through lateral entry, so my background isn’t in art education specifically. I have a degree in a different field, but I’ve always had a passion for art and decided to take the plunge into teaching. This year, I’ve been working with a mix of students, including ELLs. My experience with ELL students is still pretty new, but I’ve quickly learned that I need to adapt my approach to make sure they feel comfortable in the classroom. I’ve got a second-grade class with a few ELL students, and some speak Spanish while others speak different languages. I’m trying to figure out what works best for them and incorporate strategies like visuals and simpler language to help.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- As a first-year teacher, I haven’t had much formal PD specifically about ELL students yet. I’ve attended a few workshops that cover general classroom management and teaching strategies, but none have been tailored to art education or supporting ELL students in the art room. I’ve had some informal discussions with my colleagues about strategies that work, and I’ve been trying to read up on best practices when it comes to supporting ELLs. I’m hoping to find more targeted PD soon because I know there’s a lot I can learn.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you’ve had? What made it effective?

The most helpful PD I’ve had was a general session on classroom management. Even though it wasn’t specifically geared toward art, it was extremely beneficial because it gave me strategies to keep all my students engaged and organized. It helped me develop a routine in the classroom, and having that structure has been really helpful, especially with the different language needs in my class. I’ve been trying to incorporate some of those strategies while also figuring out how to support ELLs. The session’s

effectiveness came from how practical the tips were. They were things I could implement immediately.

### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- One of the biggest challenges has been the language barrier. Even though I try to use visual cues and demonstrate as much as possible, some of the ELL students still struggle to understand what I'm asking them to do. I've also found that it can be difficult to balance the needs of all my students, including the ELLs, in a limited amount of time. Art is a hands-on, interactive subject, but with only one class period a week, I don't always have enough time to ensure that all students are fully grasping the lesson, particularly the ELLs. Another challenge is that I haven't had the proper training on how to integrate language acquisition strategies into my lessons. I know there's a lot I could be doing to better support the ELLs, but I'm still figuring it out as I go along, and I feel like I'm missing some crucial knowledge in this area.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- Time and resources are definitely a barrier. As a first-year teacher, I'm still building my classroom materials, and sometimes it feels like I'm just trying to stay afloat with all the other responsibilities. I'm doing my best to integrate strategies for ELL students, but without the proper resources, it's difficult to give them the support they need. We don't have specific tools or training on how to support ELLs in the art room, and I'm left trying to find things on my own.
- I also feel like there's not enough collaboration between the art department and ESL teachers. I don't get a lot of insight or information about the specific language needs of my students, and I think a more collaborative approach could help a lot. It's tough because I'm expected to know how to meet these needs but haven't been given the professional development or time to really get trained on how to do it effectively.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I think schools and districts could do a better job of offering PD specific to teaching ELLs in art classrooms. There's not a lot out there, and I feel like it's a

big gap. It would be incredibly helpful if there were more resources or toolkits available that focus on art education and language acquisition. If we had materials or strategies specifically geared toward supporting ELLs in art, it would make a huge difference.

- I also think it would be helpful if schools fostered more collaboration between art teachers and ESL teachers. I know the ESL teachers in my school are wonderful, but I don't always know how to get in touch with them or how we can work together to support our students. A more structured approach to collaboration would be great.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- My ideal PD would focus on the intersection of art education and language development. It would include strategies for using visuals, scaffolding language, and incorporating cultural relevance into art lessons. I would love to have a workshop that includes actual lesson plans and resources for ELL students in art classes. It would also cover how to differentiate instruction and support students at different levels of language proficiency. I think there should be a focus on creating inclusive classrooms that celebrate all cultures, and providing teachers with tools to make that happen in the art room.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I'm really passionate about making my art classroom a welcoming place for all students, and I'm trying my best to support my ELLs, but it's hard without more support. I feel like I'm learning as I go, and there's still so much I need to figure out. I think there's a big gap in terms of professional development for art teachers, especially around how to effectively teach ELL students. I wish there were more resources and training available to help teachers like me who are new to this and trying to do our best. We really need better systems in place to support ELL students in the arts, and I hope that this can change in the future.

## Teacher G “Brian” Interview

March 3, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I have been teaching for almost 3 years now, and all 3 of those years have been at the same school. We have a fairly high population of ELL students. Over the years, I would say the percentage of ELL students has ranged from 60-70, and those are only the ones who are documented as ELL. Most of our students speak Spanish, so I have learned a lot of Spanish through teaching them and building on the little knowledge I had from high school. There is definitely a range of skills among the students. Usually, most of our kindergarten students only speak Spanish, whereas the kids who have been there for a while speak both languages. However, when we get new kids in upper grades they often come straight from their home country and speak only Spanish and have a harder time than the younger kids at learning English.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- We discuss supports as a school and how we can make our classrooms more accessible to the students, but I have not had any formal PD on it that I can remember.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- I cannot remember any ELL specific PD that I have attended, but I guess the best advice I have gotten from other professionals is to create your instruction with many pictures and graphics because it is something that everyone can understand.

### Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- I actually think that art is one of the subjects that is easiest to teach to ELL students because it is so visually based. I had a student last year who spoke Housa and she didn't know any English, and we didn't have anything that would accurately translate for her. She ended up being one of my top-performing students, purely because she would watch what I did and the pictures I showed, and follow the visual instruction. I think the most difficult part is the content that we teach because it is so abstract and thought-provoking, it is hard for English speakers to understand and even harder for non-English speakers. That is also something I have a hard time explaining in other languages because of the nuances of language itself and the double meaning of words.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- District support/art shows. I think our specific school does all it can to support, but in terms of the district, I think these kids are often overlooked. A lot of times my students are very confused about the art shows because culturally, they have never heard of this or don't understand what exactly it is or why they have to go. I am pretty sure that the district sends out papers in Spanish and English for those shows, but I know recently a permission slip for the Duke show was only in English and I had to manually translate it for my families so my students could participate. It is also difficult for me to communicate with families about these things because I cannot just call them. I have to use a platform that will translate or set up a time to call with our family liaison, so she can help translate. Lack of time - I think that another difficulty is the short classes. If we had more time with the kids in general, I could support more kids one-on-one and possibly give them a better understanding of what to do. I also have to spend more time on worksheets and things like that because I have to put them in Spanish. A lot of our ELL students are also illiterate or close to it, so they need things to be read to them or read to them in Spanish. I have to spend extra time on this, but I am also not given enough time in class to go around and explain to everyone individually when they need it.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- Have training/resource sheets on Spanish words in the art room. Have district-led community engagement opportunities for families to come and do art activities together, but make sure it is marketed in Spanish and there is a translator. This, I think, would help families understand what we do in class better and possibly give the students a better understanding and foundation for art class. It would also help families take art more seriously. Subsidizing or supplementing language classes. I am about to start taking Spanish classes at Durham Tech and they are cheaper than private classes, but it would be nice to have it paid for since I am doing it to improve my communication with students and their families.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- If it is ELL in Art, I think I would include basic skills and actionable things that teachers can implement right away. I know that ELL students can be any language, but most of them in our county speak Spanish, so I think we could make a reference sheet of common phrases and words. It would also include credible translation websites and websites that offer materials/worksheets in Spanish and English. There would also be a session on how to best create visuals for those students and where to find those images and resources. I have found that the images used for EC (i.e., raise hand, sit in seat, etc.) are the simplest and effective images to use, but I have a hard time finding a database of them to choose from.  
Having this resource would be great for simple class instruction.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I know that it is hard, but working with kids who don't speak English has been one of my favorite parts of my job. I think it has made me a much more empathetic and well rounded person and has really helped me step out of my comfort zone. It makes me more vulnerable with the students because I actively show them that I have little knowledge on the subject and it is something they can teach me.

## Teacher H “Jasmine” Interview

March 3, 2025

### Background Information

**Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?**

I've been teaching art for 20 years, and in that time, I've worked with a wide range of students, including a significant number of English Language Learners (ELLs). I've had the opportunity to teach at various grade levels, from elementary to middle school, and I've seen how diverse our student population has become. My teaching philosophy revolves around creating an inclusive environment where all students, regardless of language ability, feel comfortable expressing themselves through art.

I've worked closely with ELL students throughout my career, and I've learned that while language can be a barrier, art is a universal language that can bring students together. Over the years, I've developed strategies to help my ELL students succeed by incorporating visual aids, using their native languages when possible, and collaborating with ESL specialists to support their learning.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've been fortunate enough to participate in several professional development opportunities aimed at supporting ELL students. Early on, I attended workshops that focused on how to integrate language acquisition into art lessons, which was incredibly helpful. More recently, I've attended PD sessions that focus on the importance of cultural responsiveness and how to incorporate students' diverse backgrounds into art instruction.
- One of the most impactful PD experiences was a workshop on using arts integration to support ELLs. It showed me how combining language arts, social studies, and visual arts could create a more engaging and effective learning environment for ELL students. I've also had the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues in the district, sharing strategies for working with ELLs and gaining insights from their experiences.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The most helpful PD experience I had was a course on culturally responsive teaching that specifically focused on ELLs in the classroom. It gave me a deeper understanding of how to connect with students from diverse backgrounds, not just linguistically, but culturally as well. The course emphasized the importance of creating a safe and welcoming environment where ELL students feel respected and valued. What made it effective was the way the PD was structured. It wasn't just theoretical, it was hands-on and practical. We spent a lot of time discussing real-life classroom scenarios and developing strategies we could immediately apply to our teaching. I found it especially helpful to work with a group of other teachers who shared similar challenges and ideas, which made me feel more supported in my role.

### **Systemic Barriers**

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- One challenge I face is the wide range of language proficiency levels among ELL students. Some of my students come in with little to no English, while others are more advanced. This makes it difficult to provide individualized support during art lessons. While I try to use visual cues, demonstrations, and simplified language, it's still a challenge to ensure that every student has the opportunity to fully participate and succeed.
- Another challenge is the lack of resources and training specific to supporting ELLs in the arts. While there is general PD available for working with ELL students, there's not much focus on how to adapt the visual arts curriculum to meet their needs. I often have to get creative with the materials I use and find ways to make my lessons more accessible to all learners.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- Yes, there are definitely systemic issues. One major issue is the lack of planning time for collaboration with ESL teachers. If there were more time to plan together, I believe we could create more cohesive lessons that support ELL students in both language and art. Right now, we often don't have enough time to meet and discuss strategies for supporting these students, which can make it more difficult to address their specific needs.
- Another issue is the lack of bilingual resources in the art classroom. It would be helpful to have translated materials, visual aids, and more culturally relevant resources to make art lessons more accessible to ELLs. Sometimes, I have to

rely on my own knowledge of languages and cultural understanding, but it would be beneficial to have additional support and resources in this area.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I think one of the biggest things districts could do is provide more professional development opportunities focused on the intersection of language acquisition and visual arts. There's a lot of general PD on working with ELLs, but there's less focus on how to make art lessons more accessible and meaningful for them. Providing art teachers with strategies and tools specifically tailored to ELLs would be invaluable.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- My ideal PD program would be one that focuses specifically on how art teachers can support ELL students. It would include: Strategies for differentiating art lessons to meet the needs of ELLs at different language proficiency levels, such as using visuals, gestures, and simplified instructions. Best practices for incorporating students' native languages and cultures into art projects, helping students feel seen and valued.

Collaboration opportunities with ESL teachers to develop integrated lessons that support language acquisition through art. Culturally responsive teaching techniques that focus on making art accessible to all students and celebrating their diverse backgrounds. Real-world case studies and examples from other art teachers who work with ELLs, allowing for discussion and brainstorming of effective strategies. The program would be hands-on, with time for teachers to plan and collaborate, ensuring that what we learn can be applied directly to our classrooms.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I've learned over the years that working with ELL students is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching. They bring such unique perspectives and creativity into the classroom, and it's amazing to see how art can help them express themselves when words might fail. However, the lack of specific training

and resources for art teachers working with ELLs is a real challenge, and I believe there's so much potential for growth in this area.

- If schools and districts could provide more targeted support for art teachers, particularly around language acquisition strategies, I think we would be able to better support our ELL students and ensure they thrive in the art classroom. Art is a powerful tool for language learning and cultural expression, and I'm passionate about finding new ways to use it to support all of my students.

## Teacher I “Sophia” Interview

March 8, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I've been teaching elementary art for 12 years. I've always worked in Title I schools, so many of my students are English language learners. Over time, I've developed informal strategies to help them feel successful, but I've never received formal training specific to ELL support.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've attended general PD sessions on inclusive practices, but very few addressed ELLs specifically, and none were geared toward the art classroom.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- One session focused on using visual supports and picture schedules across classrooms, and that helped me rethink how I set up my directions and vocabulary boards. The most effective part was seeing real examples from other specials teachers.

### Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- Communication is a constant challenge. Some of my students don't speak English or Spanish, and I don't have access to translators or even tech tools that support those languages. I do my best with visuals and demonstrations, but sometimes it just doesn't feel like enough.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- I only see my students once a week, and that makes it hard to build relationships or follow through on language goals. I'm also usually not looped into any ELL planning happening with homeroom teachers or ESL staff.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- Schools need to include art teachers in ELL focused conversations. We're often left out of those meetings and PD. Also, having easy access to translated materials would be a game changer.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- I'd love a hands on workshop where art teachers could build a toolkit of visual and multilingual resources. Maybe something that includes examples of modified lesson plans and space to collaborate with ESL teachers.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I really want my ELL students to feel empowered in the art room. I can see their creativity, but I sometimes wonder how much more I could help them grow with better support or training.

## Teacher J “Grace” Interview

March 15, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I've been teaching for 19 years and currently teach at a dual-language elementary school. Around half of my students are native Spanish speakers, and we also have students who speak Arabic and Swahili.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've attended bilingual education conferences, but the sessions are usually geared toward general ed or ESL teachers. There's rarely anything for art.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- I took a training on cultural responsiveness in curriculum design. It made me think differently about the artists I introduce and how to validate students' identities through the content I teach.

### Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- When students don't understand directions, they either shut down or rely on friends to explain. I've had students try to fake their way through projects just to avoid asking questions. That's frustrating because I want them to take creative risks.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- The biggest issue is time. With 45-minute classes once a week, it's hard to build language-rich routines. Also, we rarely have time to collaborate with ESL teachers, so I end up guessing what my students need.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- I wish districts understood that the art room is a huge opportunity for ELLs. We already teach visually. It wouldn't take much to make it even more supportive with the right training and resources.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- Give me examples! Let me see how other art teachers scaffold vocabulary, use visuals, and differentiate instruction. I'd love a training that includes time to create and test our own materials.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- I feel like art can be a safe space for students to try language and express themselves. But I need support to make that intentional and not just accidental.

## Teacher K “Brianna” Interview

March 15, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I’ve taught elementary art for seven years, most of that time in urban schools with a large ELL population. I speak a little Spanish but not fluently.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I’ve only had one PD that mentioned ELLs in the context of art. Most sessions are focused on reading or math.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- The best experience I’ve had was shadowing a colleague who teaches ESL. Watching her use gestures, sentence frames, and student repetition made me rethink how I give instructions in art.

### Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- The hardest part is knowing when a student is confused due to language or due to content. Sometimes it’s both, and I just don’t have time to reteach in a way that supports their language growth.

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- Art teachers don’t get access to the same student data ESL or gen ed teachers do. I rarely know what level my ELLs are at, so I can’t adjust instruction as intentionally as I’d like.

## **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- Districts need to stop treating art like an extra. If we want to reach ELLs, we need strategies that are integrated, not siloed. Start with acknowledging we're part of the instructional team too.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- A PD that lets me collaborate with ESL teachers and develop lessons together would be huge. I want to feel like I'm supporting the language goals, not just the creative ones.

## **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

- Sometimes I feel invisible in ELL conversations, even though I'm with these students every week. The art room should be seen as a core part of their learning journey.

## Teacher L “Matthew” Interview

March 24, 2025

### Background Information

Can you share a little about your teaching background and experience with ELL students?

- I've taught art for 14 years and am currently at a school with over 40% ELL enrollment. I'm National Board Certified and passionate about creating inclusive learning environments.

### Professional Development

What professional development opportunities, if any, have you received to support ELL students?

- I've had general sessions on working with diverse learners, but most ELL-specific PD is too general or not aligned with the arts.

Can you describe the most helpful PD experience you've had? What made it effective?

- I once attended a PD on integrating art and literacy. It wasn't specific to ELLs, but the focus on academic vocabulary and oral language gave me ideas for integrating speaking and writing into my art critiques.

### Systemic Barriers

What challenges do you face when trying to support ELL students in your art classroom?

- Students often lack the vocabulary to discuss their artwork, and that limits both their confidence and ability to participate. It also makes assessment tricky because how do I know what they're understanding?

Are there any systemic issues (such as lack of time, resources, or institutional support) that make it difficult for you to meet the needs of ELL students?

- We don't get materials translated, and I don't have time to make them myself. I also wish we had more intentional collaboration between art and ESL teams. It always feels like an afterthought.

### **Perceptions and Needs**

What do you think schools or districts could do to better support art teachers working with ELL students?

- Give us language goals or sentence stems we can use! Also, access to visuals and bilingual support materials would make such a difference.

If you could design your ideal professional development program for this topic, what would it include?

- A PD series with built-in collaboration time, sample lessons, and follow-up coaching would be ideal. Something ongoing, not just a one-off session.

### **Open-Ended Reflections**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with ELL students or the support you've received?

I believe art should be a place where ELL students feel seen and successful. But without targeted support, even the best intentions fall short.

## APPENDIX G: EMERGENT THEMES FROM INTERVIEW DATA

Theme	Description
Emotional Burden of Inadequate Support	Teachers described guilt and stress when they felt unprepared to help ELLs.
Role of Visual Literacy	Art was seen as a strength for ELLs, but often underleveraged.
Administrative Oversight	Interviewees described administrators as unaware of art's role in ELL support.
Informal Support Networks	Teachers relied on informal collaboration or online resources.
Missed Opportunities in PD	Many had attended PD that never addressed the arts or was overly theoretical.

Disparities in Access	Some schools had ESL supports in place; others had none for specials teachers.
-----------------------	--

## APPENDIX H: DESCRIPTIVE CODES USED IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
PD-General	Mentions of professional development broadly
PD-Lacking	Specific references to missing or insufficient ELL training
Collaboration-ESL	Mentions of efforts or lack of efforts to work with ESL teachers
Resources-Materials	Discussion of visual aids, bilingual tools, or lack thereof
Strategies-Created	Teacher-developed tools and trial-and-error practices

Emotional-Impact	Teacher feelings about being underprepared or isolated
Cultural-Integration	Use of student backgrounds in curriculum or validation of identity
Institutional-Barrier	Systemic issues like scheduling, funding, or prioritization of tested subjects

