

QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL
PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR
PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore effective instructional strategies of mainstream classroom teachers working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Many teachers feel unprepared to adequately educate English Language Learners. School systems have attempted to rectify this situation by providing teachers with professional development that provides instructional strategies which may or may not be effective. This study answered the questions: What teaching strategies do teachers and administrators perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELLs?; How does the culture of the classroom and school impact ELLs' academic success?; and What are building level administrators' perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELLs' academic success? Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions, as well as videotaped lessons. Data collected provided a means to identify themes and shared experiences of effective teaching practices for ELLs; the data provided insight that will assist other school systems in helping their ELLs achieve academic success. All data collected was analyzed utilizing methods of data analysis as discussed by Moustakas (1994), *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of structural and textural descriptions to arrive at the essence of the phenomena. During the data analysis the following themes were identified as pertinent to the research study: (a) specialized programs, (b) differentiation, (c) hands on learning, (d) high expectations, (e) respect for home cultures, (f) bilingual staff and translators, (g) community, (h) safety, (i) language barriers, (j) low schooled in native languages, (k) lack of experiences.

Key Words: English Language Learners, culture, instructional strategies, Second Language Acquisition, Sociocultural Theory

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Dedication/Acknowledgement Page

Completing this dissertation has taken me on a journey that has brought me new friends, new challenges, and brought me even closer to the ones who love me unconditionally. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my amazing husband, and my wonderful parents.

The first person that I want to dedicate this dissertation to is my wonderful husband, who has supported me through the tears, anger, and successes. When we were married I was in the beginning stages of my doctoral program. He saw me through the late night study sessions, sacrificed weekends together so that I could finish assignments, and brought me snacks when I refused to leave the computer. His patience and understanding always encouraged me to continue my work. I know that without his love and support I would never have reached the end of this program.

I would also like to dedicate my dissertation and my education, are my wonderful parents. From the time I was very young my mom and dad encouraged me to do my best and get the best education possible. Throughout this process there were many times I thought I might not be intelligent enough, or have the ability to keep up with everything. No matter how discouraged I got they were always right there with words of encouragement and support.

This dissertation is not the result of my efforts. It is the result of the unending love and support of my husband and parents. Without them none of this would have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language

Learners (ACCESS)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Bachelors of Arts (BA)

College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Language Acquisition Device (LAD)

Parent, Teacher, Organization (PTO)

Professional Development and Support (PD&S)

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

English language learners currently constitute the most rapidly growing population of school-age children in the United States (Wessels, 2011). Educators are faced with the challenge of not only teaching the academic standards, but also helping these students learn how to effectively and fluently communicate in the English language (Wessels, 2011). Without effective instruction these students will have a difficult time reaching their full academic potential, but how do educators determine the most effective strategies? This study focuses on determining effective teaching strategies that educators in one school district currently utilizes, and have found to be successful. Chapter one provides the reader with an overall introduction, the background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement. The chapter continues with the research questions, and significance of the study, delimitations, and an outline of the research design being utilized during the course of research. A summary finalizes chapter one.

Background

In the past 15 years, the enrollment rates of Hispanic school age students have grown at a faster pace than that of monolingual students (DaSilva-Iddings & Rose, 2012). This influx of Hispanic students has added strain to teachers who may not be properly trained to work with these students. These students are not only bringing their new languages into the classroom, they are also adding a new culture to the classroom. Once these students enter the public school system, they receive a label of English Language Learner or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. August, Carlo, Dressler, and Snow (2005) define English Language Learners as students who enter the schools speaking a different language and have a

greater difficulty acquiring and building a fluent vocabulary in the English language when compared to their native speaking peers. A lack of teachers' knowledge about culturally and linguistically diverse students can have significantly negative consequences for those ELL students (Rodriguez, Ringler, O'Neal, & Bunn, 2009).

Even though a student's culture plays an integral role in education, many teachers do not reflect those cultures within the classroom and/or school culture in regards to their educational practices (Cho & Christenbury, 2010). By developing an awareness of the cultural differences of their students, teachers can better understand and have the ability to present skills in appropriate ways that will increase students' academic success (Cho & Christenbury, 2010).

Prior research has demonstrated that many teachers feel that they are inadequately prepared to work with ELL students and therefore have negative perceptions of these students (Rodriguez; et al., 2009). Previous studies of principals indicated that when teachers and staff prepare together to work with ELL students, they can share language and understanding that will lead to academic success for ELL students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). In order to help ELL students reach academic success educators must stop labeling them as having learning deficits and instead embrace their culture and language. Teachers must then use that to help the students develop their second language while maintaining their native culture (DaSilva-Iddings & Rose, 2012).

Socio-cultural theory, founded by Lev Vygotsky, is concerned with the learning that takes place through social interactions in the daily lives of students (Mahn, 1999). Culture is everywhere and cannot be separated from the mind; therefore, the culture that students experience in the home and at school directly impacts their mind (Miller, 2011). Students and teachers present their own cultures in the classroom on a daily basis, and these various cultures

influence teaching and learning. Scott and Palincsar (2009) discuss that socio-cultural theory focuses on the sociocultural perspective that being active in social interactions and culturally based activities influence the psychological development of the person. Even though culture impacts every aspect of life, new cultures can be used to facilitate learning. Rezaee (2011) discusses that new languages can be developed through cultural interactions. When working with ELL students, teachers need to embrace the culture of their classroom to assist the learning of their ELL students.

Situation to Self

This study bears relevance and interest for me because I was raised with an immigrant grandmother who faced the daunting task of learning the English Language. Growing up I often found myself helping my grandmother communicate with people in grocery stores and at banks. I was comfortable with her accent and found it easy to understand, however, it was always heartbreaking when I saw other people failing to attempt communication with her due to her accent.

Along with personal ties to an English Language Learner, this study is also directly related to the Title I school system where I teach. According to the U.S. Department of Education Title I “Provides financial assistance to local education agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015, para. 1).

The Gilmer County School System has an ever increasing population of ELLs. Each year brings an increasing number of students who speak little to no English. This year, in my

own classroom, I have two non-English speaking students. Working with these students has revealed weaknesses within my own pedagogy due to a lack of knowledge of working with ELLs, despite holding certification in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Instruction.

During the 2013-2014 year the Gilmer County School System implemented a program offering afterschool tutoring for our ELL students in an effort to increase their vocabulary and to assist them with reaching their academic potential. Upon organizing this program, it became increasingly obvious that many teachers within the school held negative attitudes toward working with these students. For example, the teachers stated that they are not confident in their ability to effectively support the educational needs of ELLs and therefore are unaware of how to assist these children in reaching their full academic potential. Also, while working in a rural school district I have found that many teachers feel that the students' cultures and languages are not important and consequently should not be utilized during instruction to assist in student learning. DaSilva-Iddings and Rose (2012) found that often rural educators are not equipped with the skills and strategies necessary to assist English Language Learners reach their academic potential. Having witnessed firsthand how the lack of knowledge and skills, in regards to teaching ELLs, can have a negative impact on student's education, I consider it to be a substantive topic and desire to contribute to the literature in the area of teaching ELLs.

The research participants who have been selected for this study work with a large Hispanic population and have found strategies to help their students reach their academic success. Most of the ELLs attending this school either meet or exceed the criteria on Georgia Standardized testing. It is my sincerest hope that the information obtained during this study can be used within my own school district to equip our teachers with the skills necessary to feel

confident when teaching ELLs. This study seeks to help administrators gain an understanding of the importance of including these students' cultures with the school and classroom cultures. Utilizing a phenomenological study allows me to further examine a phenomenon of teaching ELL students that I am in contact with on a daily basis, and allows me to learn approaches to education that will benefit ELLs within the classroom.

My motivation for conducting this study was to obtain information that can be utilized to help teachers within my district, as well as other school districts, feel more comfortable working with ELLs. The information can be used to provide them with effective instructional strategies that they can use with their students. This research study will be guided by Social Constructivism. Creswell (2007) explains that in social constructivism researchers seek to understand the world in which they live or work.

Problem Statement

Many classroom teachers do not have the training and strategies necessary to effectively meet the needs of the increasing ELL student population (DaSilva-Iddings & Rose, 2012). Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) explain that by the year 2050 most, if not all teachers will likely teach ELLs. Rodriquez, et al. (2009) state that one of the primary concerns for teachers and researchers is that there has been a large increase in the number of students entering the school system who are English Language Learners. In addition to another language, ELL students bring a new culture into the classroom, and many teachers are unprepared to work with these students. Cho and Christenbury (2010) found that teachers may not know how to adjust their instruction, instructional materials, or academic tasks for their ELL students.

The cultures of ELL students cannot simply be overlooked. Their culture impacts all aspects of their lives, including their education. Cho and Christenbury (2010) say that awareness of cultural differences can help educators' present literacy skills in an appropriate manner. Despite the cultural differences presented by ELL students, many teachers are unaware of the role culture places on all educational practices. Friend, Most, and McCrary (2009) state that it is important for educators to examine beliefs in regards to linguistic and cultural diversity, that impact expectations and instructional practices for ELL students while also altering ways teachers approach ELLs. It is important to discover effective strategies, as well as school and classroom cultures that can assist ELL students in achieving academic success, thus changing negative perceptions of educators working with ELL students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the instructional practices that contribute to the academic success of ELLs at Brown Elementary School in North Georgia, a pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the school. Meador (2013) defined instructional strategies as instructional approaches educators utilize in an effort to actively engage student learning. These strategies drive instruction while working to meet specific learning objectives and standards. In order for instructional strategies to be considered effective, they must meet the learning styles and diverse needs of all learners (Meador, 2013). Classroom instruction relies heavily on differentiation to meet the diverse learning needs for all students in the classroom. Differentiation is of particular importance for ELLs as well. This study looked at the teachers' abilities to effectively differentiate instructional strategies based upon the educational and cultural needs of all students in the classroom with an

emphasis on the needs of ELLs. Effective instructional strategies are generally defined as strategies that are differentiated based on educational and cultural needs of ELL students. By understanding effective instructional strategies and how to differentiate those strategies based upon cultural and educational needs for helping ELL students achieve academic success, school systems can provide necessary training and materials to assist teachers with helping students achieve academic success.

Significance of the Study

This study provides educators with effective instructional strategies for working with ELL students. Along with providing effective instructional strategies, this study also demonstrates the importance of school and classroom culture on the academic success of students. Student culture, as well as classroom and school culture, can have tremendous impacts on student success. Furthermore, if culture is ignored it could lead to negative consequences for the students (Rodriquez et al., 2009). This study relates to previous and future studies by providing further information in regards to the obstacles and additional resources necessary to help ELL students achieve academic success. This study also provides insight into professional development strategies that can be instated to help change negative attitudes of teachers working with ELL students.

This study is of particular importance in the rural north Georgia area due to the influx of English Language Learners and their families. By valuing and respecting the cultures of these families, the school can create relationships between parents and teachers. This study helps teachers gain confidence when working with ELL students while alleviating some of the stressors of working with these students. DaSilva-Iddings and Rose (2012) found that teachers

in rural areas tend to be unaccustomed to working with diverse student populations and are not prepared to understand cognitive, linguistic and academic needs of English Language Learners.

Research Questions

Immigrant students that do not speak fluent English are among the fastest growing student population within U.S. schools (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). This increasing number of ELLs within the public school system is causing debate among educators regarding the most effective teaching strategies for these students (Tissington & LaCour, 2010). The education of ELLs goes beyond teaching strategies. It encompasses all aspects of the school, including school and classroom cultures, administrators, stakeholders, and teacher attitudes. In an effort to determine the best teaching strategies, as well as cultural and administrative aspects of educating ELLs, the following research questions guided this research study:

1. What teaching strategies do administration and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?
2. How does the culture of the classroom and school impact English Language Learners' academic success?
3. What are building level administrators' perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELL students' academic success?

Research Plan

A transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to observe how differentiated instructional practices, school and classroom cultures of teachers and administrators within an elementary school work together to incorporate culture. In addition differentiated instructional strategies, and professional development were also investigated in an

effort to assist ELLs in achieving academic success. Phenomenological qualitative research seeks to describe meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological research design was the most appropriate approach for this inquiry, since the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The methodology of transcendental phenomenology utilized to guide this research study was outlined by Moustakas (1994) and included *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative, variation and synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions.

Participants in this study are teachers and administrators from Brown Elementary School in North Georgia. The teacher participants represented a range of grade levels from Kindergarten through fifth grade. One of the teacher participants is currently the lead ESOL teacher at Brown Elementary School. The field of participants also included the principal and assistant principal. The sample size included six teacher participants and two administrators.

Methods utilized within phenomenological research include documents, field notes, interviews, and focus groups (Schwandt, 2007). Analyzing school cultures and effective differentiated instructional strategies assisted in determining what strategies work for ELL students and what additional strategies teachers within other school districts could implement in order to help their ELLs reach their academic potential.

Data was collected through the use of videotaped lessons, semi-structured focus groups and interviews. The recordings of the focus groups, and interviews were transcribed following methods of data analysis of phenomenological data as outlined by Moustakas (1994). After transcriptions were completed they were submitted to participants for verification. The information was then analyzed using cross-case analysis, to identify any themes from the

interviews and focus group sessions. Upon completion of the cross-case analysis, bracketing was used to set aside any personal bias that I hold regarding the research study. Finally, open coding from horizontalization was used to review the information for descriptive categories that were identified during the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations within a qualitative study are the elements within the study that the researcher controls in an effort to establish clear boundaries within the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The participants of this study were elementary educators, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) educators, and building administrators who work closely with ELL students. A phenomenological study was selected over other designs in order to understand the experiences of the participants working with ELLs on a daily basis.

Definitions

1. *Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS)*: a large-scale, standards based assessment of English proficiency that is administered annually to English language learners in K-12 classrooms (Fox, & Fairbairn, 2011).

2. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defined adequate yearly progress as the minimum level of improvement required for school districts and schools to make yearly. This progress is measured by using achievement or growth-based measures (Haretos, 2005).

3. *College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)*: Georgia's school accountability measure, designed to replace the federal program Adequate Yearly Progress. The

measurement promotes college and career readiness for all Georgia Public Schools, and includes all aspects of education, including, attendance, assessment scores, parental involvement, and other areas (Rubin, 2015).

4. *Differentiation*: Tomlinson (as cited in Manning, Stanford, & Reeves, 2010) defined differentiation as doing “whatever it takes to ensure that struggling and advanced learners, students with varied cultural heritages, and children with different background experiences all grow as much as they possibly can each day, each week, and throughout the year” (pg.145).

5. *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)*: An instructional program utilized for students who are learning English as a second language. ESOL provides students with intense instruction with the English language with a focus on vocabulary (Ariza & Hancock, 2003).

6. *English Language Learners (ELLs)*: Students who come to school from non-English speaking backgrounds and require modified instruction to assist them in their ability to effectively communicate and learn in English (Taboada, Kidd, & Tonks, 2010).

7. *Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged (Title I)*: “Provides financial assistance to local education agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015).

8. *Language Acquisition Device (LAD)*: An innate system that assists language learning and is enacted by verbal stimulation within the learners’ environment (Coldwell, 2006).

9. *Second Language Acquisition (SLA)*: Juffs (2011) defined SLA as the ability to acquire a second language. Ariza and Hancock (2003) expand on the definition by stating it is determined by the comprehensible input in the second language that is understandable to the learner and just outside the realm of the current linguistic abilities of the learner.

10. *Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)*: STEM is an educational program that was designed to assist in the preparation for college study and eventual careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The learning objective is to nurture inquiring minds, logical reasoning, and build collaboration skills for all students (Ku, 2013).

11. *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)*: “A research based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners throughout the United States. The model consists of eight interrelated components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review & assessment” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004, p. 1).

12. *The English Language Acquisition Act (Title III)*: “Helps eligible IHE’s to become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, par.1).

13. *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*: Vygotsky defined zone of proximal development as:

The zone of proximal development defines functions that have not matured yet, but are in a process of maturing, that will mature tomorrow, that are currently in an embryonic state, these functions could be called the buds of development, the flowers of development, rather than the fruits of development, that is, what is only just maturing (As cited in Bozhovich, 2009, pg.49).

Summary

Chapter one provided an outline of the research study in this dissertation, focusing on effective instructional strategies to help ELLs reach their full academic potential. Specifically, the research sought to address three research questions that will be utilized to guide the research, and arrive at effective strategies and how to implement them in any school district.

Chapter two presents a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that help to structure this research study within established theories, and the literature utilized to establish connections between meeting the needs and cultures of ELLs, professional development for teachers, and what strategies are currently being utilized in many classrooms along with their effectiveness.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Those that have been called into the public responsibility to care for and educate children must care, and be courageous enough to do whatever it takes to help those children achieve academic success (Will, 1986). Every child's first experience with school needs to be positive, however research has shown that both positive and negative first experiences can have a lasting impact (Tissington & La Cour, 2010). In order for ELLs to have positive experiences it is crucial that educators provide effective learning environments that meet their needs (Tissington & La Cour, 2010). According to Verdugo and Flores (2007) the presence of ELLs within the public school system has become a challenge for diversity. Taboada, Kidd, and Tonks (2010) discuss that English Language Learners encompass one of the fastest growing populations in U.S. public schools. It has been predicted that by the year 2030 over 50% of all public school students will be classified as English Language Learners (Allison & Rehm, 2011). This rapid increase in ELLs has placed a strain on teachers, administrators, and students alike. In 2010 one out of every four students attending California Public Schools is an English Language Learner (Archibeque, Castellon, Kibler, & Vaughn, 2010).

Over the last ten years much research has been conducted in the area of the education of ELLs. The content of the literature review includes a presentation of current research related to the focus of effectively educating ELLs. The review is organized around empirical and theoretical research on: (a) effective instructional strategies for English Language Learners; (b) the challenges regarding the education of English Language Learners; (c) the importance of

effective professional development; (d) cultural aspects of educating English Language Learners and; (e) the role of stakeholders in the education of English Language Learners.

Schwandt (2007) stated, “Theory is a unified, systematic causal explanation of a diverse range of social phenomena” (p. 292). The theoretical framework outlines the roles of Second Language Acquisition Theory, Socioculturalism and Nativist Theory on the education of ELLs. The work done by Krashen (1985, 1994), and Vygotsky (1978, 1986) demonstrates the importance of cultural and linguistic awareness in the education of ELLs as well as all students within the public school system.

Theoretical Framework

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second language acquisitions investigate children and adults’ abilities to acquire a second language through a variety of theoretical perspectives (Juffs, 2011). SLA theory is a compilation of many different theories grounded in linguistics, and behaviorism (Van der Wait, 2013). According to Ariza and Hancock (2003) Krashen’s (1985, 1994) theory of second language acquisition attempts to look at all theories related to language acquisition in conjunction with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. Within the realm of research involving ELLs, Krashen’s second language acquisition Theory plays a critical role. Krashen’s theory says that second language acquisition (SLA) is determined by the comprehensible input in the second language that is understandable to the learner and just outside the realm of the current linguistic abilities of the learners (Ariza & Hancock). Van der Wait discusses that SLA operates within a framework that people have an innate knowledge of language. Krashen’s SLA theory is similar to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development in that second language acquisition is a scaffolded

learning process (Ariza & Hancock). Krashen believed that acquiring a second language is unconsciously acquired in much the same way that learners acquire their first language (Ariza & Hancock). In order for students to acquire a second language it is important that they are receiving messages that are comprehensible. Teachers can assist in making the information comprehensible through the use of various strategies, realia, pictures, graphic organizers, and other research based ESOL strategies (Ariza & Hancock).

A teacher's beliefs regarding SLA will have a tremendous impact on classroom instruction (Van der Wait, 2013). The overarching assumption is that if we know how languages are acquired we will know how to teach it (Van der Wait). Teachers of ELLs often incorporate peer tutoring or collaborative learning into their classrooms. Sociocultural theory focuses on three areas associated with SLA, the role of speech in SLA, learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and activity theory, as well as goals for language learning (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2011).

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is a philosophical approach which assists in understanding how individuals learn and behave in social contexts, and that this learning occurs on two different levels, through interactions and when information is integrated into an individual's mental capacity (McInerney, Walker, & Liem, 2011; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Sociocultural philosophy explores how social, contextual and individual issues impact the human activities of behavior and learning (McInerney et al.). Vygotsky (1978, 1986) is thought to be the father of sociocultural thinking. He wanted to explore the development of higher ordered mental processes. Vygotsky emphasized the priority of rebuilding environmental social and cultural

aspects that surround the subsequent development of consciousness and behavior (McInerney et al.).

The overarching goal of sociocultural research is to better comprehend relationships between human mental functioning, cultural, institutional, and historical settings (McInerney, et al., 2011). Human activity and mental functioning occur as people interact. Environmental forces combine with internal processing to impact motivation and impact cognitive actions and growth (McInerney, et al.).

Culture encompasses all aspects of daily life including cognition and decisions that are made, and cannot be separated out as an external factor; culture organizes all experiences. Culture cannot be separated from the mind (Miller, 2011). Vygotsky (1978, 1986) developed sociocultural theory as an inclusive theory which encompasses culture and development. The theory explains how culture can influence and shape the learning process for children (McBride, 2011).

Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) was interested in exploring how mental processes develop at a higher order. Vygotsky stressed an importance in reconstructing the environmental, social, and cultural conditions surrounding the emergence of consciousness and behavior and its subsequent development (McInerney et al.). McInerney et al. state that the goal of sociocultural research is to assist in the understanding of the relationship between human mental functioning, and historical, cultural, and instructional settings.

Vygotsky's work highlights that culture defined what skills and knowledge children need to acquire and provides them with tools such as language, technology, and strategies for properly functioning within that culture (Miller, 2011). Scott and Palincsar (2009) demonstrate that the role of sociocultural theory is explaining how individual cognitive functioning relates to cultural,

historical and institutional contexts, thus focusing on the sociocultural perspective that participating in social interactions and culturally based activities influence psychological development.

Mahn (1999) illustrates that sociocultural theory states that people learn through social and cultural interactions in their daily lives. Just as small children learn through play, older children can learn through social interactions with peers and family members. Consciousness evolves and is developed by interactions within cultural situations. Children learn the culture and language of the family they grow up in. According to sociocultural theory the same can be true for English Language Learners as well as their peers. The students can learn and develop new language and culture from interaction with one another.

Nativist Theory

Along with second language acquisition and sociocultural theory, nativist theory plays an integral part in research involving ELLs. Chomsky (1976, 1980) proposed that all people have the innate ability to acquire a language. Chomsky discusses that humans are born with an innate system named Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that assists language learning and is enacted by verbal stimulation found within the child's environment. Chomsky's theory highlights features that all languages share. LAD allows for the advancement of any language and also acquire grammatical aspects of that language (Coldwell, 2006). Nativist theory states that we are born with built-in devices that predispose us to language acquisition (Escamilla & Grassi, 2000).

Within the nativist theory children need to encounter the input language within a limited number of examples in order to arrive at the necessary language rules (Abbeduto & Boudreau, 2004). When students are learning a secondary language they already possess implicit knowledge of common properties of language. This implicit knowledge assists the child in

making connections between their native language and the second language (Abbeduto & Boudreau).

A study conducted by Hawkins (2007) looked at nativist theory in regards to second language acquisition. Hawkins found that nativist theory applies to second language acquisition due to the fact that learners may have grammatical knowledge of their native language but not of their L2 language; however even without grammatical knowledge in their L2 language they are able to deduce grammars that differ between the two languages (Hawkins). As Chomsky (1976, 1980) demonstrated everyone is born with the capacity to learn language. Hawkins discovered that this natural ability allows students to learn new languages when they receive exposure to the new language.

Related Literature

Effective Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

When working with ELLs there is no one magic strategy that works only for ELL students. Tissington and LaCour (2010) suggested that teachers with ELLs in their inclusion classroom should employ strategies that benefit all students within the classroom. The biggest argument among educational leaders and educators is exactly how to provide a learning environment that is beneficial for all students (Tissington & LaCour). Myburgh, Poggenpoel, and Resenburg (2004) argued that classroom instruction should be directed toward the learner's ability to comprehend instead of on the learner's language proficiency. Seo and Hoover (2009) suggested that teachers that work with ELLs need training that identifies learner's needs, effective communication strategies, and interventions that do not rely only on the learner's skills in the English language.

There is no one way to educate ELLs, it is important that educators use various approaches when working with ELLs (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Cummins and Krashen (as noted by Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006) discussed that ELLs need quality instruction that teaches academic as well as social English through the implementation of vocabulary instructional strategies, visual representations and various ways to make content comprehensible. Customization of instructional strategies is crucial for students to reach their academic success. Educators must also realize that ELL students often will not participate in whole group instruction, however they are more likely to participate in small group or one to one instruction (Brooks & Thurston, 2010). Research has found that when native languages are used for teaching content and understanding achievement is enhanced (Verdugo and Flores, 2007). When educating ELLs, explicit instruction as well as practice of new skills is crucial to their achievement.

Often ELLs are pulled out of their regular education classrooms for more intensive instruction in vocabulary and content. Research has found that not all students can learn in this new environment, the students do better when they are surrounded by their peers and they feel comfortable in their surroundings (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). There is growing trend among educational systems that service ELLs to educate these students within the mainstream classroom (Edwards, 2014). This has created hardships for mainstream classroom teachers. Teachers often assume that ELLs can't do the academic work required because they are not proficient in English Language (Lee, 2012). When they exit ELL programs they are not prepared to handle rigorous academic content presented in the mainstream classroom (Lee). Students need to be given the opportunity to learn in a community setting. This collaborative setting allows for students to learn from their peers. When paired with explicit instruction, collaborative learning helps

enhance student learning by exposing them to other cultures and languages (Vedugo & Flores). Often when teachers consider remediation they focus on basic lower level skills. Research conducted by Ortiz et al. (2006) has found that ELLs that struggle academically benefit the most when basic skills and instruction are presented within the context of problem solving and higher order thinking.

According to Calderon, Slavin, & Sanches (2011) in the 1974 Supreme Court case, *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563, all public school districts must take steps to assist students in overcoming language barriers in order to meaningfully and actively participate in school programs. Even though the federal government has mandated that districts provide services for ELLs, it provides no guidance or policies for states to assess, identify, place, or instruct these students (Calderon, et al.). Due to this lack of guidance, school districts are left to determine what they feel is best for their ELLs, this leaves the education of a large number of students to chance. States are left to find research based effective instructional strategies to help provide their ELLs with the meaningful education that is necessary for lifelong success and learning. Another side effect of the lack of guidance from the federal government is that educators often disagree on what are the best instructional strategies for ELLs are (Tissington, & LaCour, 2010).

All teachers, not just ESOL certified educators, are responsible for the education of ELLs. This responsibility requires that all educators have information regarding the educational needs of their students. Smaller schools often lack expertise and resources to address the academic and emotional needs of ELLs (Lee, 2012). A study conducted by Allison and Rhem (2011) discovered five teaching and communication strategies for working with ELLs as well as other students. The first strategy for educating ELLs involves creating a supportive and welcoming environment. This environment is important for the students as well as the parents.

Students need to know that they are in a learning environment where they are respected and their needs are going to be met (Allison & Rehm, 2011).

The second strategy investigated was the implementation of instructional strategies such as student centered learning opportunities, cooperative learning, and hands-on learning (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Interactive teaching strategies require all the students to work together through interaction. According to Grant and Sleeter (2007) interactive classrooms are highly effective for ELLs. It provides them opportunities to learn from their classmates, to practice speaking English, and to utilize content vocabulary. Gersten (1999) explains that building English language vocabulary so one of the most critical concerns in terms of educating ELLs.

Interactive classrooms help to build content vocabulary while also allowing ELLs to take ownership of their learning by forming connections with the content. When students have the opportunity to work in centers, it ensures that they will interact with the content despite lack of language proficiency (Martin & Green, 2012). Research studies have shown that spending time working with peers can help advance fluency for ELLs while lowering their inhibitions and engaging them emotionally and intellectually (Martin & Green). When allotted time for interpersonal conversation and interaction is critical in acquiring new discourse, researchers have found a direct correlation between classroom conversations and acquisition of a second language (Brooks & Thurston, 2010). Often ELLs have adequate social conversational skills, it is the academic or content vocabulary that students need opportunities to build and utilize in order to be academically successful (Edwards, 2014). Brooks and Thurston (2010) explained that additional research needs to be conducted to further determine the instructional circumstances in which ELLs are likely to be engaged and experience academic success.

A third strategy investigated was to incorporate a variety of assessments (Allison & Rehm, 2007). Some students are not confident test takers and therefore do not fit into the mold of most standardized or textbook assessments. This limits the student's ability to demonstrate their actual learning. Rance-Roney (2009) found that in order for assessment to be effective it must be ongoing and reflect the actual learning objectives discussed within the classroom. Linguistic abilities of ELLs are also a major limitation during assessments. Even though students may have a "read to" accommodation, the linguistics of the assessment may be difficult for them to comprehend. Carrier (2005) and Marzano (2010) also found that for assessments to be effective they must be geared to the linguistic abilities of the students. Educators can gear their assessments to the students' linguistic abilities and also alter the formats of the assessments. The various formats allow the students to demonstrate their knowledge without being limited based on language barriers (Marzano).

Lewis, Maerten-Rivera, Adamson, and Lee (2011) found that teachers need to know subject matter required by state and local school boards as well as content specific learning strategies that will meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students.

Researchers found that when educators provide hands-on activities they are providing structured opportunities to develop English proficiency through authentic communication. Teachers must support students of all levels of English proficiency and provide their students with engaging opportunities for students to display and take ownership of their learning. Engaging opportunities for student learning include incorporating interactive teaching strategies into the curriculum (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Teachers can incorporate interactive strategies such as working in pairs, small groups and various other activities that involve whole class interactions (Allison & Rehm, 2011).

A fourth strategy investigated was to provide challenging lessons that reflect higher expectations for the students (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Too often educators feel that their students are unable to reach higher expectations and therefore they lower their expectations of student learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). When educators take this course of action students will begin to lower their expectations for themselves (Allison & Rehm). Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) argued that students benefit the most when they are challenged constantly throughout the day. Teachers can modify their existing lessons instead of recreating watered down versions of their lessons for the ELLs, educators can also present the content in multiple ways and therefore help ELLs become successful learners (Carrier, 2005).

The final strategy discussed was for educators to communicate with the parents and make sure that they are engaged in their students' learning (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Ramirez and Soto-Hinman (2009) explain that making and strengthening home and school connections is a major issue that confronts many school districts, mainly due to the language barrier between parents and school officials.

Allison and Rehm (2011) investigated teaching and communication strategies that work well for many ELLs, however Sibold (2011) discovered that simply changing instructional strategies may not be enough for ELLs to be academically successful. Sibold found that understanding vocabulary can be as important as the strategies utilized within the classroom. When looking at the reading comprehension skills of ELLs, Sibold found that when ELLs struggle with reading comprehension the underlying issue could be a difficulty understanding the vocabulary used in the readings. Teachers of ELLs need to discover strategies that can assist these students in gaining an understanding of the vocabulary as well as the other content that is being presented during classroom discussions.

Tomlinson, (as noted by Manning, Standford, & Reeves, 2010) defined differentiation can as doing “whatever is necessary to make certain that all students, struggling, advanced, or varied cultural backgrounds, grow academically as much as possible each day throughout the school year” (p.145). The overarching goal of differentiated instruction is to allow all students access to the classroom curriculum, by providing various avenues to learning tasks, and outcomes that are tailored to the learning needs of the students (Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, McDonald & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012). Tomlinson (as cited in Watts-Taffe, et al 2012) explains that differentiation can occur when educators focus on the process of student learning, the products of that learning, the learning environment, or even the content that the children are learning. Differentiating instruction for students can demonstrate a respect for student diversity (Watts-Taffe, et al).

Many educators turn away from differentiated instructions for ELLs because they feel they do not have adequate time to prepare various lesson plans, assignments, or performance tasks (Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson, & Spatzer, 2012). In order to be effective for students, differentiated instruction needs to meet certain minimum criteria. Before teachers can effectively differentiate instruction for their students’ teachers must have in in-depth knowledge and understanding of their students’ needs, academic, linguistic, and cultural (Watts-Taffe, et al, 2012). Educators will also need to be equipped with methods of monitoring the progress of their students and how to effectively group and educate students (Watts-Taffe, et al). Even though there are many ways to effectively differentiate the learning of students, educators must take into account, the interests, strengths, weaknesses, and individual needs of their students (Watts-Taffe, et al).

The importance of effective instructional strategies, and differentiated instruction prove to be critical for ELLs when determining placement in special education and gifted programs. Too often students are denied the opportunities to participate in gifted programs or are placed into special education classes due to their difficulties in speaking, writing, reading the English language (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005). Artiles et al. (2005) discussed the case of *Diana v. State Board of Education* of 1970 in which the courts ruled that Spanish speaking children should be assessed in English as well as their native language to avoid placement errors, the case also ruled in favor of extensive support data prior to placements. A study conducted by Artiles et al. found that analytical decisions are of key importance when placing ELL students within special education and gifted programs. The authors suggest that through the use of differentiated instruction and various instructional strategies, students will be able to acquire the content language necessary and be able to demonstrate their true academic capabilities (Artiles, et al., 2005).

Challenges Regarding the Education of English Language Learners

Bilingual education for Spanish speakers surged in 1958 with the revolution in Cuba (Escamilla & Grassi, 2000). The revolution brought Spanish speaking residents to southern Florida. Between the years 1968-1980 the practice of bilingual education began to spread across the United States (Escamilla & Grassi). Escamilla and Grassi discussed the Title VII Bilingual Education Act (1968) was passed authorizing funds for local school districts. The first year of funding supported 76 programs, serving students who spoke 14 different languages.

Calderon et al. (2011) discussed the 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* by further discussing the influence of bilingual education. *Lau v. Nichols* stated that programs that did not offer bilingual education were denying equal access to students who speak other languages

(Calderon et al.). The case determined that all students who speak a language other than English are to receive education in meaningful ways, however it failed to make bilingual education a requirement (Calderon et al.). In many public education settings bilingual education is not an option. Therefore, educators are forced to find alternative ways that they can facilitate conversations and convey curriculum to ELLs.

In some situations educators may have a negative attitude towards ELLs and their L1 languages. This disrespect, or negative emotion toward the students' L1 language can cause a barrier in the development of language proficiency and the education of ELLs (Cherciov, 2012). A study conducted by Cherciov found that for L1 students to be academically successful they must experience a lessening of their L1 language and an increase of the L2. When a negative attitude toward the L1 language is experienced the students may be thrust into a situation where they experience L2 languages only, therefore they may have a difficult time acquiring their new language and ultimately achieving academic success (Cherciov, 2012).

Crawford (2004) discussed the 2002 No Child Left Behind, The English Language Acquisition Act (Title III) replaced the Bilingual Education Act. Title III Program "Helps eligible IHE's to become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, par.1). The major issues facing many small school districts is a lack of guidance in the areas of educating ELLs.

Educators who participated in a research study conducted by Edwards (2014) explained that while confident in their knowledge of the curriculum, only 17% of participants felt confident in their knowledge of second language acquisition, ELLs' knowledge or characteristics. In

addition to a lack of knowledge of second language acquisition, participants also demonstrated a lack of knowledge in regards to resources and strategies to adequately support the education of ELLs (Edwards, 2014). This lack of confidence and knowledge can lead to an inadequate education for ELLs. Edwards believes that for teachers to be effective when educating ELLs they must have an in depth understanding of second language acquisition.

Sleeter (2008) found that teachers discussed the challenge of creating a democratic classroom in conjunction with teaching the material required for students to pass standardized tests. Sleeter discovered that teachers desire to provide a democratic learning environment that will encompass the needs of all students; however, they are often forced to submit to the pressures of covering the necessary material.

Within the past 15 years the enrollment rates of Hispanic school age students has grown at a faster pace than monolingual students (DaSilva-Iddings & Rose, 2012). Due to this influx of Hispanic English Language Learners, many teachers complain about not possessing adequate instructional strategies to help ELL students achieve academic success (Rodriquez et al, 2009). In the early years of educating ELLs the main goal was to Americanize the children instead of utilizing their culture and background knowledge to help them gain new learning and language acquisition (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). However, research is revealing the value of bilingual education when working with ELLs. Gersten (1999) explains that the transition from native language instructions to English instructions can be difficult and even torturous for some ELLs. Educators must be sensitive to the difficult transition that the students are going through during bilingual instruction.

Given the increasing demands to meet federal and state guidelines many school systems are faced with the challenge of not only educating ELLs, but also ensuring they can meet state

and federal testing criteria. According to a study conducted in 2002, less than 20% of all ELL meet proficiency standards on state testing; this can potentially contribute to the rising dropout rates of ELLs (Seo & Hoover, 2009). While these students bring an array of cultures into the public school classroom, they also bring many challenges that teachers are not adequately prepared to face. And even though teachers may not feel adequately prepared to work with ELLs it is the responsibility of all content teachers to help ELLs reach their academic potential (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Naevarez-La Torre (2011) say that many schools fear that ELL students have the possibility of lowering their academic standings and preventing the school systems from meeting the accountability demands imposed by local, state, and federal guidelines. Rubies-Davies, Hattie, and Hamilton (2006) suggested that low expectations of teachers in conjunction with stereotypes may possibly result in a self-fulfilling prophecy where students achieve the level of expectation set for them. The study also suggested that when teachers establish higher level expectations the students will rise to the higher expectations (Rubies-Davies, Hattie, and Hamilton, 2006).

Taboada, Kidd, and Tonks (2010) conducted a study regarding autonomy in classrooms that incorporate ELLs. Autonomy refers to the sense of volition and self-determination behaviors necessary to achieve intrinsic motivation. Due to language barriers or a feeling that their culture is unimportant motivation becomes an issue for ELLs. state that Teachers have the ability to support student's autonomy in regards to learning by providing tasks that are meaningful, providing various options, ensuring that students understand the relevancy of the tasks they are being asked to complete, and not intruding on students' work (Taboada et al, 2010). The researchers also found that educators must learn optimal ways to motivate their

ELLs and they must develop an understanding that what works for mainstream students may not be effective for ELLs.

Teachers that are the most successful when working with ELLs have taken the time to identify pedagogical and cultural skills, as well as knowledge that includes the ability to effectively communicate with students while engaging their families (Rios-Aguilar, Gonzalez-Canche, & Moll, 2010). Teachers play a key role in the education of ELLs and research has demonstrated that both the way teachers perceive their own skills as well as those of their students can influence student outcomes (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2010). Knowing the opinions and beliefs of teachers can help building administrators as well as policy makers improve the conditions in which teachers teach while improving the educational opportunities and attainment for all students (Rios-Aguilar et al.). Educators need to accept the conditions of learning and combine familiar and new learning process when introducing new academic tasks (DeCapua, & Marshall, 2011). Educators need to create learning environments that will support student learning while making new demands and raising the expectations for learning (DeCapua & Marshall).

The language barrier creates difficulty for the teachers as well as the students. Even though ELLs develop social English quickly, they need four to seven years to develop their academic language necessary to graduate from high school within the traditional four year time frame (Lee, 2012).

Despite the struggles and challenges of working with ELLs it is imperative that teachers remember that it takes many years for ELLs to become academically proficient within a second language and that trial and error is all part of the process (Allison & Rehm, 2011). Too often a fear of failure will keep ELLs from taking risks or chances to demonstrate their knowledge

(Gersten, 1999). Improving academic achievement in cost effective ways is an issue many school systems face Ortiz et al., (2006) believed that by establishing positive school climates, preventing inappropriate special education referrals, ensuring effective instruction, and helping prevent at-risk students from falling even further behind are all cost effective ways for districts to better assist ELLs.

The Importance of Effective Professional Development

According to Gersten (1999) The National Center for Educational Statistics revealed that 25.3% of teachers of ELLs have little or no training in second language acquisition or instructional strategies to use with this population of students. Many elements contribute to the academic success of all students. One of the most crucial elements is the preparation and expertise of the teachers who serve them. Many educators explain that they simply do not have the time or resources to find acquire the skills necessary to assist in the learning of ELLs (Edwards, 2014; Ortiz, et al, 2006). Naevarez-La Torre (2011) explained that it is critical for mainstream educators to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to effectively teach ELLs, however, numerous investigations have revealed that mainstream educators lack sufficient training in the education of ELLs. Language teacher education has focused on methodology, applied linguistics and language acquisition and fails to focus on teaching (Freman, 1989). This lack of training begins with teacher education programs. Few teacher-education programs require teacher candidates to take courses that will provide them with the skills and strategies needed to meet and overcome the challenges that ELLs bring to the classroom (Naevarez-La Torre, 2011). Ortiz et al (2006) discussed a survey of college deans conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, within the study 60% of participants stated that their coursework provided failed to adequately focus on linguistically and culturally diverse students.

An NCES report from 1996 suggested that less than one third of classroom teachers working with ELLs had specific training. Most educators had less than a day's worth of professional development (Seo & Hoover, 2009).

Most often ELLs are placed in classrooms with teachers who are not ready or equipped to work with them (Seo & Hoover, 2009). A lack of training in teacher-education programs places the burden of training on the individual school systems through the utilization of professional development. In order to alleviate this burden on school systems teacher education needs to be refocused to define teaching as a decision-making process based on awareness of students' abilities, attitude, and categories of student knowledge (Freeman, 1989).

“Almost 70% of teachers who responded to an NCES (2000) survey indicated that they were not well prepared to teach this group (Ortiz et al, 2006, p.53) This study supports findings by Cho and Reich (2008) that a large majority of mainstream classroom teachers felt that they needed more knowledge in the area of instructing ELLs. The teacher participants also stated that their greatest challenges included a lack of background knowledge, lack of time to effectively work with ELLs, and a great need for training in the understanding of student cultures and instructing ELLs in a manner that is culturally responsive (Cho, & Reich, 2008). Ortiz et al. (2006) suggest that teachers who have a lack of experience when working with ELLS participate in intervention assistance teams. Intervention assistance teams “Can help teachers design and implement interventions to improve the performance of ELLs” (Ortiz et al, 2006, p. 55). Participating on the teams allows teachers to develop strategies they can use to help other ELLs that are struggling. Intervention assistance teams generally consist of experts, such as certified ESOL teachers, parents, and interpreters (Ortiz, et al., 2006).

The ever increasing disconnect between teachers trained to teach ELLs and students with diverse needs is leading to academic failure and eventually the possibility of ELLs dropping out of school (Echevarria, 2006). According to Ortiz et al. (2006) NCES reported Hispanic students have the highest dropout rates. The dropout rate for Hispanic students is almost double the rate of native students (Ortiz et al.). Closing the achievement gap is concerning due to the correlation between poor academic progress and special education referrals for ELLs (Ortiz et al.). Santau, Maerten-Rivera and Huggins (2010) explained that in-service elementary teachers' exposure to quality, effective professional development is critical in closing the academic achievement gap. Many school systems attempt to provide their teachers with professional development in the area of working with ELLs, unfortunately the professional development is not always quality. A majority of the professional development offered to mainstream classroom teachers is insufficient in meeting the changing demands of students (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000).

Professional development is more effective for educators when a support system is in place following professional learning. Brown and Inglis (2013) found that engagement in a program that combines professional development and support can improve the knowledge and skills of participants, thus in turn enhances learning and positive experiences for students. A professional development and support program provides educators with options for their professional development (Brown & Inglis, 2013). Teachers can participate in a variety of mandatory and optional programs online, evenings, and weekends. Teachers can then take their learning and share it with their colleagues while having the option of sharing their learning and their experiences (Brown & Inglis, 2013). Neavarez-La Torre (2011) found teachers educating one another can lead to amplified learning experiences for all students in the classroom.

Neavarez-La Torre (2011) recommended that teachers learn from one another and create a supportive learning network for ELLs. Birman et al., (2000) suggested a form of professional development in which the teachers or other administrators with experience in effectively educating ELLs lead the training and share their knowledge with the participants. Allowing educators to learn from others that have similar experiences will allow them to share freely and feel comfortable voicing their concerns in regards to working with ELLs (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000).

Mainstream educators expressed frustration in regards to insufficient time, and training for teaching ELLs (Walker, Shafer, & Iams, 2004). Walker, Shafer, and Iams (2004) called for more substantial training in the area of teaching strategies to aid in student learning. Without proper training teachers begin to lower their expectations and standards for their ELLs. Rodriquez et al. (2009) suggested that as teacher's expectations for ELLs begins to diminish their prospects for knowledge gains also diminish. This is because there is a clear consensus among educators that expectations contribute to the academic success of ELLs (Rodriquez et al., 2009). When educators receive proper training and begin to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic differences that ELLs bring into the classroom they can begin to increase academic achievement. Improving the levels of support for ELLs across all grade levels can lead to increased graduation rates for Latino students (Rodriquez et. al., 2009).

Proper staff training can help with developing skills while raising teachers' expectations, thus leading to a more effective school (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). However, staff development must go beyond what teachers learn during a training session. In order for the training to be effective it must be specific to the students' needs. Staff development needs to incorporate

parents and students (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). By incorporating the parents, teachers are demonstrating a respect for the family cultures and valuing parental input.

Everyone who has a public obligation to the education of students should strive to be compassionate, courageous, and caring enough to do whatever is required to help students achieve academic success (Will, 1986).

Cultural Aspects of Educating English Language Learners

Often people are so deeply involved in their personal lives that they may not be aware of their own culture or how they feel about their culture. Even though the study participants may be proud of their cultures they view them as normal everyday life and are often unaware of the impact of their culture on those around them. In addition to participants not feeling that their culture was anything special, Ndura (2004) also noted that many participants held negative views of other cultures and how those cultures impact interpersonal interactions. Culture influences social behaviors, interests, and interactions with others (Zhu, Devos & Li, 2011). Unfortunately in an effort to fit in to cultural norms, many ELLs may reject their home culture and language while struggling with acculturation (Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson, & Spatzer, 2012). In an effort to help students assimilate, it is imperative that educators teach the skills and language necessary to be successful in America, while supporting cultural differences. Karabenick and Noda (2004) noted that when teachers possess the knowledge of how to integrate students' cultures in to the curriculum, this can lead to reduced apprehension towards teaching ELLs. Educational challenges faced by ELLS are often the result of unappreciated or unrecognized cultural differences (Lee, 2012).

Often immigrant ELLs have lower test scores, lower graduation rates, and higher dropout rates than non-ELLs (Lee, 2012). Rodriguez et al. (2009) discusses that a lack of teachers'

knowledge about culturally and linguistically diverse students has significant negative consequences for ELL students. Culturally and linguistically diverse students often behave in ways reflective of their culture. Teachers may mistake the culturally accepted norms as behavior issues, thus causing negative contexts for the students (Ortiz et al., 2006). By understanding learning climates, teachers are provided additional information of individual differences and are able to assist in student learning (Rodriquez et al., 2009). Relationships are developed when teachers show an interest in student culture, demonstrate awareness of family dynamics and are willing to utilize the native language of their students (Friend et al, 2009). High academic achievement and engagement occur when educators' highlight and demonstrate the importance of native languages, identities, and cultures (Lee, 2012). Pedagogy plays a critical role in how classroom teachers view the students in their classroom. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) stated that part of the problem with the education of ELLs is that pedagogical practices are shaped by the dominant cultural values found in the school climate, and not the cultural values of the individual teachers. Goodlad's nurturing pedagogy (as cited in Seo & Hoover, 2009) poses that all educators have the responsibility to provide a learning environment that values each student, and encourages learning while compensating for student interest, developmental needs and their overall wellbeing.

Culture plays an integral role, teachers often do not reflect classroom and school culture in regards to educational practices (Cho & Christenbury, 2009). Having an awareness of cultural differences helps educators understand and have the ability to present skills in appropriate ways, therefore reaching their students at their individual levels (Cho & Christenbury, 2009). Schools need to build on ELLs strengths while responding to their academic, social and emotional needs, and fostering an attitude that will allow them to hold onto their home languages and cultures

(Lee, 2012). Brunner (1994) proposed that classroom teachers that recognizes and hold another's beliefs important can impact how teacher education is presented in the classroom. Lee (2012) noted that educators often view the cultures and language differences of ELLS as a barrier to academic success. As an alternative, educators need to build on the students' backgrounds instead of disregarding native languages and cultures of the students (Lee, 2012).

Even though large amounts of research have been conducted on the educational achievement of ELLs, much less research has been conducted on the social and cultural capital of Hispanic parents, and their desire to connect with schools in meaningful ways (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities can develop mutual understandings and partnerships that will ultimately benefit the students and help them reach their academic potential (Good et al., 2010). A cultural shift toward higher expectations for all students, sharing a mission and vision with parents, students, and staff, and meaningful parental involvement, and student engagement will help to close the academic achievement gap for Hispanic ELLs; without this shift the gap will continue to widen and students will suffer (Good, et al., 2010). According to Will (1986) for schools to demonstrate a respect for the cultures and education of ELLs is to establish connections with families. Parental advisory boards are an effective way of determining what parents would like to see in regards to their child's education (Will, 1986).

Effective school culture depends on goals set by building administrators. When administrators have strong values, shared visions and a commitment to their teachers and students they can create effective learning environments (Msila, 2013). The culture of a school also encompasses the way that students are treated while they are in school. Supportive school environments are ones in which parents, teachers, and students expect that students will achieve

academic success (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Positive school environments create positive school experiences which are crucial for ELLs to be successful, prior research has shown that ELLs that have dropped out of school attribute it to feeling that they were treated unfairly while they were in school (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Positive school environments are emphasized by involving students in school operations, valuing linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and having high expectations for students (Verdugo & Flores, 2007).

The Role of Administrators in the Education of English Language Learners

Diligent school leaders constantly endeavor to lead their schools, teachers, and students to success (Msila, 2013). Critics point out that school leadership paired with management inefficiencies lead to the underperformance of the school (Msila, 2013). Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that one critical attribute of an effective school when it comes to educating ELLs is strong school leadership. Building level administrators set the tone for their teachers in regards to valuing or devaluing cultural and linguistic differences of ELLs. Administrators hold a position of influence over the areas that are concerned with the teaching and learning process (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). School climate and culture are established by leaders, teachers and learners. Culture and climate of the school can impact teacher morale as well as student interest. If school leaders want to reshape the culture of their school they need to evaluate the climate within their school (Msila, 2013).

School effectiveness is accomplished over time through prolonged efforts of administrators and staff to improve effectiveness and quality of schools through creating environments that provide effective teaching and learning processes (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). They are guardians of the schools' threshold. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) explain that when principals view linguistic differences as acceptable and appropriate, they can promote social

justice for ELLs. Without understanding the correlations and distinctions of culture and climate it will be difficult to improve students. Building administrators have the ability to promote professional development (Msila, 2013). Research has shown that principals reported that when teachers and staff are prepared together to work with ELLS they develop a shared understanding and contribute to coherent and collaborative programs that benefit ELLs as well as all students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

Successful leadership has the power to positively change the mindsets of teachers, staff, and parents. Principals motivate students' and teachers' moral obligations by developing positive relationships, trust, and a commitment to achieving common goals that are based on the shared beliefs of all stakeholders (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Research demonstrates that one of the most critical aspects in reshaping schools is shared leadership (Msila, 2013). Effective schools need shared visions and perceptions among administrators, staff, students, and the community.

The Ventura Unified School District recently restructured its services for ELLs to include a participatory leadership model that included administrators, teachers, support staff, and student input (Robles, 2010). Ventura Unified School District's restructuring plan began with the superintendent, who made the initiative a priority. Administrators and school leaders took part in professional development in order to learn the necessary strategies for helping their ELLs reach their academic success. At the onset of the program the school district established a goal of increasing their number of long term English learners who cross the language gap and become reclassified as Fluent English Proficient students (Robles, 2010). Within the participatory leadership initiative the teachers and staff members completed professional development in the areas of careful placement of students, assessments, team approaches to teaching and professional development (Robles, 2010). The initiative was implemented during the 2008-

2009 school year (Robles, 2010). Since implementation the school district has seen an average growth rate of 9.5 percent each year of students reaching Fluent English Proficiency status (Robles, 2010).

In a study conducted between the California Public Schools and Stanford University's School of Education, researchers found that training educational leaders is crucial for the academic success of ELLs (Archibeque et al., 2010). The researchers connected principals with the college and provided training sessions that included topics such as; English language development, characteristics of immigrant English learners, content instruction, accountability for schools, and assessment, among other topics. The meetings were designed to provide building level administration with strategies and information that could be utilized within their own buildings to assist students with reaching their academic potential (Archibeque et al., 2010). The research study discovered that academic achievement for ELLs begins with the principals and school leaders. Teachers and staff take their direction from school leaders. When the leaders have the necessary skills to make ELLs a priority, educators will also make them a priority.

Verdugo and Flores (2007) proposed that it is crucial for principals to take a central role in monitoring ELL programs. Principals have the interventional role on intervening in the improvement of learning by providing feedback and ensure that students meet their different learning needs and score high on achievement tests (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Effective leaders monitor the program and see that it is implemented and treated as a priority (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Research has shown that principals set the tone for their school. When they demonstrate the importance of programs for ELLs, teachers will also see the importance and begin to demonstrate the importance of ELL academic success (Verdugo & Flores, 2007).

Neavarez-La Torre (2011) suggests that effective professional development must begin with school administrators. Efficient leadership is seen as the most important factor in program effectiveness when working with ELLs (Neavarez-La Torre, 2011). The training for administrators should include cultural and linguistic diversity as well as resources to assist with the development of programs for mainstream educators to utilize.

Effective principals share common traits. Research has shown that effective principals are strong, involved and purposeful (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). They also provide efficient supervision and monitoring. Effective principals also possess strong leadership skills, maintain discipline and influence greater communication between the school and parents (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Effective principals lead to positive school climates. According to Khan and Iqbal (2013) a positive climate is essential for effective schools. The school climate is directly impacted by the intervention of principals that take it upon themselves to provide learning environments that are conducive to learning and teaching (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Principals intervene in effectiveness of the school by being personally involved in school activities, and providing a shared vision that focuses on academic success and providing assistance and feedback to teachers (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Even if a principal is actively engaged in the school without interpersonal skills that encourage the staff to support and follow them, they will have difficulty facing the challenges of education (Khan & Iqbal, 2013).

Summary

Lopez (2010) disclosed that 18.4% of the population of the United States speaks languages other than English in the home. That means that in addition to another language these students are bringing other cultures into the classroom as well. Lopez states:

“The development of adaptive strategies is believed to be enhanced by (a) social and cultural environments that validate students’ actions and outcomes; (b) opportunities that are challenging and promote risk-taking, and self-confidence; and (c) supportive relationships with teachers” (p. 4).

In order to help ELL students achieve academic success, it is important that their culture and language are embraced instead of rejected. Rodriguez et al. (2009) explain that by understanding learning climates teachers can obtain additional information about individual differences and assist students in learning. Teacher/student relationships formed through respect are crucial for all students. Friend et al. (2009) explained that relationships are developed when the teachers show interest in student cultures, are willing to utilize native languages of their students, and demonstrate awareness of family dynamics.

Effective professional development can help to strengthen the skills of both teachers and administrators. Effective professional development seeks to voice the diverse needs of teachers and students (Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011). Many professional development programs focus on simply delivering the materials instead of focusing on heightening the learning experiences of the teacher participants (Boud & Hagar, 2012). In an effort to ensure the effectiveness of professional development, teachers need to incorporate self-reflection as part of their professional growth (Stover et al.). Allowing teachers to work together and learn from one another can strengthen the professional growth of educators. Gertsen (1999) found that teachers desire ongoing professional development in the area of educating ELLs and desire opportunities to learn from one another in a professional context.

Academic success for ELL students goes beyond the classroom. School administrators play a crucial role in the education of all students. In order for teachers to change their perspectives it is important for administrators to respect the native languages and cultures of ELL students as well. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that when principals view language as acceptable and right, teachers and staff are prepared together to work with ELL students and they are able to share language and understanding that can lead to academic success.

Administrators hold the position of influence over the learning process and professional development that can lead to educational development (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Effective principals provide support and guidance for the teaching and learning process (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). It is not enough for administrators to support teachers. Building administrators are responsible for providing the shared vision that is necessary for schools to be effective (Msila, 2013).

The successful education of ELLs takes the combined effort of teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. ELLs must feel that they are valuable within the school culture and climate (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). According to Decapua and Marshall (2011) with the ever increasing number of ELLs in the public school systems it is important that ELLs can adjust to culturally different ways of learning. Educators must learn the value of cultural diversity and how to implement it in their classrooms before these children can reach their full academic potential.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to observe the implementation of effective instructional strategies of teachers working with ELL students and how instructional strategies as well as school and classroom culture can help ELLs reach their academic potential. The study also investigated how the school and classroom cultures impact student achievement and if they incorporate student cultures. Chapter three includes a discussion of the phenomenological design that was utilized in this study. Moustakas (1994) explained that phenomenological research describes what the participants experienced and how they have experienced it. This research study focused on the education of ELLs and how to better meet their needs through the use of instructional strategies.

The participants for this study were educators and administrators at a public elementary school who work directly with ELLs and have student test scores that indicate the effectiveness of teaching strategies that are being used. The school chosen, Brown Elementary (pseudonym), is part of a school district that has a large ELL population. Currently Brown Elementary School has a 97% Hispanic Rate as well as a 100% free and reduced lunch population, and has shown gains on standardized testing (Governor's office of Student Achievement, 2011). Participants took part in teacher surveys, video-taped lessons, semi-structured focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audio taped for transcription and then submitted to participants for accuracy checks. In an effort to maintain trustworthiness pseudonyms were used for all participants as well as the site.

Design

Phenomenological research investigates participants' shared experiences and interests with a certain phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To continue the definition of phenomenological research, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) explained that phenomenological research studies the world as it appears to people when they lay down personal bias and revisit the phenomenon. Phenomenological research requires participants to develop a deep rich understanding of the phenomenon through examining people's lives and experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Patton 2002). Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (2010) further contributed that phenomenological research utilizes interpretive methods and descriptive methods in an effort to examine lived experiences of the participants.

Moustakas (1994) continued the definition of phenomenology as being "concerned with the wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essence of the phenomenon of the experience is achieved" (p. 58). Moustakas (1994) continues the discussion by explaining that phenomenological research focuses on the shared experiences of the participants involved in the study in an effort to gain a deeper understanding and meaning of the phenomenon being investigated. The shared experiences of the study participants will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of strategies and techniques that help ELL students achieve their full academic potential, while maintaining a high level of respect for their native cultures.

Husserl (1970) shared that phenomenological research involves an in-depth study of the things that people know best, take for granted, and are most familiar during various experiences. As ELLs become more prevalent in our public schools it is crucial that teachers have strategies

for working with these students. The life experiences of the study participants will provide insight into effective strategies for helping these students reach their full academic potential.

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted through interviews, videotaped observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. This approach is appropriate for the study due to the investigation of how the culture of school and classroom impact the academic success of ELL students while observing effective differentiated instructional practices. Moustakas (1994) continues the discussion of phenomenological studies by explaining that phenomenological studies focus on a shared phenomenon of the participants. By conducting teacher surveys focus groups as well as observing the videotaped lessons, I was able to perceive how the teachers used differentiated instructional strategies, in conjunction with classroom and school cultures discussed during the focus groups and interviews into practice. I was also able to observe how ELL students' cultures are incorporated into the classroom environment.

Qualitative research often involves topics that are significant to the researcher and therefore involve personal learning and often lead to change (Stiles, 1993). The topic of this research study is of particular interest to the school system where I work due to the increasing number of ELLs, many of whom do not speak English. The questions utilized in the focus group and semi-structured interviews initiated from concerns that were addressed by faculty and staff in my school. The questions in this study were piloted by the ESOL Director of a neighboring school system. She has experience working with other school districts and has had the opportunity to watch many other successful districts work with their ELLs. Her insight provided direction I sought to address in this research study.

Research Questions

1. What teaching strategies do administration and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?
2. How does the culture of the classroom and school impact English Language Learners' academic success?
3. What are building administrators' perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELL students' academic success?

Setting

The study was conducted in the East Gate County school district in Georgia. The study was focused on Brown Elementary School in northern East Gate County. Brown Elementary currently has 696 students with 607 of those students listed as Hispanic. Brown Elementary is a Title I school that has consistently met AYP requirements. At the time of the research study the school had an 86% Hispanic population, however, not all of those students were still be served under the ESOL program (Governor's office of Student Achievement, 2011). Brown Elementary School was built in a high poverty area, and therefore has a 100% free and reduced lunch population (Governor's office of Student Achievement, 2011). Due to the location of the school, the students have very few real world experiences, and many of them never hear the English language until they enter the school system.

The teacher sample included representatives from Kindergarten through fifth grade. The teachers hold a variety of degrees that include Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees and Specialist's Degrees. All of the teachers in the building hold their ESOL Endorsements and have received specialized training in programs designed to assist in the education of ELLs. The

participant sample that was invited to participate in the research study included 31 classroom teachers, 16 support teachers (ESOL, Special Education, Speech), and three connections teachers (Art, Music, and Physical Education).

The school has established itself as a safe place within the community and works very hard to participate in community outreach and has recently become partners with Shaw Industries, local banks, and other local merchants. Their goal is to provide their students and families with a safe haven, where they can receive a quality education, while feeling safe and loved. The teachers and staff at Brown work diligently to provide their students with experiences they may otherwise not experience due to their poverty levels and parents' work schedules.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the teacher participants for this research study. Creswell (2007) defined purposive sampling as selecting participants who meet certain criteria or have experienced or are experiencing the phenomena under study. The teachers at Brown Elementary school have experience working with LEP students and have demonstrated effective differentiated instructional strategies within their classrooms, as evident on ACCESS for ELLs Summative Assessments. At Brown Elementary School, teachers who work directly with ELLs, and two building level administrators were invited to participate in the study.

Prior to selecting teacher participants all teachers at Brown Elementary were invited to participate in an orientation program where they learned about the research study and had the opportunity to ask any questions they had regarding the study. Upon completion of the orientation program participants were asked to complete a survey that asked various questions

regarding their years of service, teaching strategies, and their willingness to participate in the study. Teacher participants were determined from their willingness to participate upon completion of the initial survey. The participants were taken from a sample that included 31 classroom teachers, 16 support teachers (ESOL, Special Education, Speech), and three connections teachers (Art, Music, and Physical Education). The study focused on the strategies utilized by six educators and two administrators. Five of the educators that participated in the study were mainstream classroom teachers who taught a variety of grades from Kindergarten through fifth grade. The sixth educator was the lead ESOL teacher for the school.

The educators that expressed willingness to participate in the study represented various grade levels within Brown Elementary ranging from Kindergarten through fifth grade. One other participant was the lead ESOL teacher at the school. The teachers had a wide range in years of experience, with experiences outside of Brown Elementary School as well. Their range of experience provided extra insight into the study and allowed them to have a comparison of their previous districts and their current district. The lead ESOL teacher was able to provide valuable insight into how the school utilized native cultures in conjunction with American culture to help the children reach their full academic potential.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured for this study in order to proceed with the process of data collection. Prior to beginning the research study, an orientation was conducted in which teachers that work with ELLs and building administrators were provided with an overview of the study. I answered questions openly to ensure that participants knew the purpose of the study and that their involvement was strictly voluntary. I videotaped and posted

the orientation online in an effort to make participation in this study convenient and easily accessible for all teachers and administrators chosen for this study. I sent teachers a written invitation, and an e-vite to watch the video and access the surveys. There was also an online question and answer session so that teachers were able to ask any questions they had about the research study.

After potential participants completed the orientation video, and all questions were answered, I asked them to complete a short survey found in Appendix G. After completing the orientation video and after all questions had been answered potential participants were asked to complete the survey in which they were asked about their years of experience, instructional strategies utilized within the classroom, classroom and school culture, approximate number of ELLs served within their classrooms, and their willingness to participate in the study. Once participation had been established, participants were asked to complete and sign a consent form (Appendix A) verifying their understanding that participation is voluntary and they are aware of the focus of the research study. Once participants had been established and all consent forms had been completed, participants were also educated of the risks and opportunity to withdraw without penalty, then data collection began.

The Researcher's Role

I am an elementary teacher in a Title I school in North Georgia. I have had the privilege of working with underprivileged Hispanic students for the past ten years. I hold a BA from Reinhardt College, an MS and an Ed. S from Piedmont College. I also secured my English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement from the University of North Georgia. One issue of relevance for perspective on this study is my own personal experience working with

non-English speaking students. For the past several years I have been honored to work with students who had just moved from Guatemala or Mexico. It was seeing the struggles that these children faced, as well as the frustration of the teachers who were ill-equipped to work with them, that inspired me to conduct research to find effective instructional strategies for these students.

In this study, my role was the principal investigator. My responsibility was to facilitate and lead semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Once that was completed it was my responsibility to analyze video recordings of three lessons, analyze and reflect upon the data collected, research previous literature, place themes found in my research in the light of those found in prior studies. Finally I had the responsibility of synthesizing the combined information into narrative form. I documented information and findings to the best of my abilities and I set aside my preconceived biases and experiences of working with Hispanic students in an effort to increase reliability and validity of the research that I conducted.

Data Collection

The data collection process was not activated until permission was granted by the Institutional Review Board, and any privacy or ethical issues in regards to participants and the sites had been addressed. Moustakas (1994) discussed the importance of using pseudonyms within qualitative research to ensure confidentiality for all participants. Within this study pseudonyms were used to protect the identities and ensure confidentiality for all participants and sites involved. Data collection began with a teacher survey that provided a snapshot of participant demographics. The survey provided information regarding years of experience, and teaching strategies utilized on a daily basis. Data collection continued through the utilization of

videotaped lessons, recorded semi-structured focus groups with teacher participants, and semi-structured interviews with building level administration. It was important that videotaped lessons were completed and analyzed prior to the focus group sessions in order to discuss themes identified from the videos with the teacher participants. The interviews took place following the focus group sessions in an effort to discuss any themes identified from the videos and focus groups with building level administration.

The teacher participants and I sat down after reviewing the videotaped lessons. During the lessons I was able to witness student-teacher interactions, student-student interactions, as well as differentiated instructional strategies that were utilized in the classroom. I was also able to witness the utilization of specialized programs that have been adopted by the school district to help meet the needs of the students in the classroom.

Once I had completed the focus group session with the classroom teachers, I had the ability to sit down with the administrators of Brown Elementary. I chose to meet with them at the same time in an attempt to allow them to share their thoughts at the same time, while allowing them the opportunity to express their thoughts on what one another was saying. This allowed them to both speak freely about the questions and other topics that came up during the interview.

Video Recorded Observations

Observations as fieldwork descriptions which include conversations, interpersonal interactions, organization, and behaviors are observable by the researcher (Patton, 2002). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) continued the discussion by including that observations allow researchers to form their own versions of what is occurring within the observed settings and then verify those ideas with the participants in the study. Data collected from observations may include field

notes, detailed descriptions, which include the context of the observations being made (Patton, 2002). When conducting observations often researchers will utilize field notes in an effort to record observations. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) defined field notes as the detailed accounts which describe the experiences and observations made by the researcher while observing situations.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) discuss the utilization of video recording when many behaviors that need to be observed occur at the same time or in closely related intervals. Video recording allows the researcher to replay the observations numerous times in order to conduct careful observations. I used video recording in an effort to observe instruction within the classroom. Video recorded observations of differentiated instruction were conducted in an effort to observe the interactions of students with their school and classroom environments as well as their peers and teachers.

I asked teacher participants to videotape three of their lessons during a one month period, in an attempt to answer the research question: How does the culture of the classroom and school impact ELL's academic success? During which time the teacher participants were asked to video two small group lessons involving a group of students that incorporates ELL and non-ELL students, as well as a whole group lesson to show interactions among all students and the teacher, the teacher participant will be asked to utilize different effective instructional strategies for each lesson, thus demonstrating a minimum of three instructional strategies for the study.

Once all videos had been completed and submitted I analyzed them to determine differentiated instructional strategies that were utilized within the classrooms as well as to observe teacher student interactions, and identifying themes in regards to student interactions, culture, and instruction. When viewing the videos I took detailed field notes to record my

observations, a blank field notes form can be found in Appendix B. When reviewing the videoed lessons student interactions with their peers, teachers, and classroom environments were observed. In addition to student interactions classroom and school culture were observed to determine their impact on the academic success of ELL students. The data collected from the videotaped lessons provided an opportunity to witness the differentiated instructional strategies employed at Brown Elementary in an effort to meet the needs of all ELL students. The videotaped observations also provided opportunities to witness the classroom culture to determine if individual student cultures influence the culture of the classroom.

The videos offered me a window into various classrooms and allowed me to witness team teaching with the lead ESOL teacher as well as small and whole group instruction. They also provided large amounts of information about how the teachers adjust their instruction continually to ensure they are meeting the needs of all of the students they are working with. Having the ability to witness the student interactions allowed me the opportunity to observe peer tutoring, as well as scaffolding for students who speak little to no English.

Focus Group Sessions

Focus groups are a group of people who are asked about their perceptions attitudes, beliefs, and opinions regarding the topic of research (Patton, 2002). Krueger (2000) defined focus groups as carefully planned discussions of an area of interest within a nonthreatening and permissive environment. The focus groups should be relaxed and enjoyable for the participants as well as the interviewer.

Participants share their ideas and perceptions of the topic while influencing the responses of the other group members by responding to their various ideas and comments within the discussion (Krueger, 2000). Semi-structured focus group interviews involves asking structured

questions that are open ended questions that allow participants to provide additional information that the researcher may not have specifically requested (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2006). After videos were submitted and analyzed semi-structured focus group sessions took place with teacher participants at their building in an effort to create a comfortable environment for the participants.

Teacher participants participated in a one hour audio recorded semi-structured focus group in which they were asked to discuss instructional strategies that they feel are effective as well as those that they feel are ineffective. The focus group sessions attempted to answer the research question: What teaching strategies do administration and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students? The teachers were also asked about how the culture of their students, school and classrooms impact academic success of their ELL students. The data collected during the focus group sessions helped to determine what aspects of the school and classroom culture have positive or negative influences on student achievement as well as the steps necessary to change negative perceptions about working with ELLs. Focus group prompts can be found in Appendix C.

The focus group session was a wonderful way for the teacher participants to openly share their views in a safe environment. It also allowed them the opportunity to add their experiences and their individuality to the study. Throughout the focus group session, the teachers shared knowledge and experiences they may not have shared in a one-on-one setting. The level of comfort provided them the freedom to discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and also helped them to remember to share different things they had done as individual teachers to help their students reach their academic potential.

Focus Group Open-Ended Questions

1. Thinking about the culture of your school, how would you say that culture impacts the academic success of your students?
2. Thinking about the culture of your classroom, how have you incorporated the cultures of your students into your classroom?
3. Thinking about the school culture, what positive and/or negative impacts would you say it has on the academic success of your ELLs?
4. Thinking about your individual classroom cultures, what positive and/or negative impacts would you say it has on the academic success of your ELLs?
5. Thinking about teaching your ELLs, what would you say is your biggest challenge in working with the students? Why do you feel that way?
6. How do your building level administrators encourage/discourage the incorporation of ELLs' cultures into the school?
7. Is professional development in the area of educating ELLs a priority within your school? If so, what types of things does the professional development incorporate? If not, what would you like to see in the form of professional development?

The purpose of the questions in the focus group sessions were to provide a better understanding of how the teachers that work directly with ELLs on a daily basis feel about the various aspects of their jobs.

Questions one through four focus on the importance of culture within the classroom, this includes individual cultures, classroom, and school cultures. According to Zhu, Devos, and Li (2011) culture influences social behaviors, interests, and interactions with other. Due to their tremendous effort to fit in to social and cultural norms, many ELLs may reject their home cultures and languages in their struggle with acculturation (Baecher et al., 2012).

Classroom teachers have the tremendous responsibility of helping their ELL students gain the academic knowledge necessary to be successful, while helping them to embrace and respect their native cultures and languages.

Question five focuses on the challenges that educators of ELLs face on a daily basis. ELL students bring with them a wide variety of challenges. Students bring with them language barriers, as well as cultural and social differences that they must overcome. Classroom teachers must find ways to overcome these challenges. It is important that educators acknowledge the conditions of learning and combine familiar and new learning processes when introducing new academic tasks (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Teachers require training and strategies to help their ELL students overcome these barriers.

Question six focuses on successful school leadership. Administrators have the daunting task of setting the expectations of their school. Their attitudes can greatly impact the academic success of all students within their school. According to Msila (2013) diligent leaders constantly endeavor to lead their schools, teachers, and students to success. Khan and Iqbal (2013) continue the discussion by explaining that administrators hold a position of influence over areas that are concerned with teaching and learning. Administrators help to set the climate and culture of their school (Msila, 2013). When the administrators embrace the cultures of ELLs and pass that mentality on to their teachers they can help all students reach their full academic potential.

Question seven focuses on the importance of effective professional development. Professional development is a major buzzword in education, however, all professional development is not effective. Question seven seeks to explore the importance of effective professional development in regards to educating teachers on effective ways to educate

ELLs. Gersten (1999) discussed a survey conducted by The National Center for Educational Statistics reveals that 25.3% of teachers of ELLs have little or no training in second language acquisition or instructional strategies to use with this population of students. Due to this lack of training many teachers feel inadequate when working with ELL students.

Interviews

Once I completed the teacher surveys, videotaped lessons and focus groups sessions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with building level administrators within their buildings. The interview took approximately one hour and provided insight to answer research question number three; What are building level administrators' perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELLs' academic success? Semi-structured interviews consist of open-ended questions that allow new ideas to develop during the interview process (Patton, 2002). Within the one hour audio recorded semi-structured interviews the administrators were asked about their role in educating ELL students, as well as what additional resources and obstacles teachers and administrators face when working with ELL students. The data collected during the semi-structured interviews provided insight from the stakeholders to help determine their perceptions of obstacles faced when educating ELLs, as well as the additional resources that need to be provided for schools to adequately educate all students, including ELLs. In addition to obstacles and additional resources the interviews will also provide insight into how the cultures of ELLs are incorporated into the school and classroom environments. Semi-structured interview prompts can be found in Appendix D.

During the semi-structured interview I had the opportunity to sit down with both administrators at the same time. Having them together allowed them to share even deeper experiences than they may have shared in a one on one situation. The administrators shared with

me their histories, the history of the school, and how important community outreach is to the success of their students. They also shared with me some of the amazing opportunities that they strive to provide for their students. They also expressed the importance of their teachers and their dedication to the education of all the students within the school.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What do you feel you have done within your own building to set the tone for teachers in regards to English language learners?
2. What additional resources do you feel would positively impact the academic success of ELL students in your school? What can be done to incorporate these resources into your school?
3. What are your perceptions of obstacles that prevent ELLs' academic success?
4. In your opinion what have you done and/or incorporated within your school to help your ELLs be so successful?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about ELLs, instructional strategies for ELLs, or academic success of ELLs?

The semi-structured interview with the administrators helped to better determine how the building level administrators at Brown Elementary have created an atmosphere of success for all of their students. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that building level administrators set the tone for their teachers in regards to valuing or devaluing cultural and linguistic differences of ELLs. I designed question one to determine how the administrators feel about the cultural and linguistic differences of their students and how they have set the tone for their teachers to accept these students

Question number two focuses on Lewis, Maerten-Rivera, Adamson, and Lee's (2011) findings that when educating ELLs teachers face many challenges such as not possessing adequate instructional strategies, and linguistic or cultural differences of the students. The responses from question number two will help to determine what steps the administrators have made to influence academic success of ELLs and the resources they use.

Sleeter (2008) discovered that teachers desire to provide a democratic learning environment that will encompass the needs of all students, however, they are often forced to submit to the pressures of covering the necessary material. Question number three seeks to discover the administrators' perceptions of obstacles ELL students face. In addition to the obstacles, I also used this question to determine how the administrators help the students overcome those obstacles.

According to Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) one critical attribute of an effective school is strong leadership. Based on criterion referenced test scores, the students at Brown Elementary have continuously met and exceeded the standards on standardized assessments for the 2009-2010 school year (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2011). Question number four seeks to determine how the administrators manage their school to help the students and teachers be successful on a daily basis. I wrote question number five to expand on the fourth question by allowing the administrators to add any other information that they feel would be beneficial to other school districts facing many of the same challenges that they are currently facing. The information provided may be used to help district leaders develop a plan for their schools and teachers to help all students, especially ELLs, reach their full academic potential.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data from the surveys, videotaped observations, focus groups, and interviews, they were analyzed using methods of analysis of phenomenological data as outlined by Moustakas (1994) was employed. The steps involved in the data analysis include *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of structural and textural descriptions to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). After applying the data analysis methods, all interviews, and focus group sessions were analyzed using horizonization and open-coding. During the coding process I attached codes to quotes from the participants. I utilized my own voice in an effort to make interpretations of the data. According to Patton (2002) “Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order” (p. 480).

Creswell (2007) defined cross-case analysis as “Examining themes across cases to discern themes that are common to all cases” (p.245). Cross-case analysis was used in order to examine themes that occurred and are common in all cases as noted from the transcribed focus group meetings (Creswell, 2007). Cross-case analysis allowed me to examine the interview data from the administrators and the focus group data from the teachers to determine similarities and differences in the strategies that they feel are working or that may not be working for their ELL students.

Moustakas (1994) discusses *epoche* by stating, “Systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience” (p. 21). Creswell (2007) further defines *epoche* or bracketing by stating that it is

“The first step in phenomenological reduction, the process of data analysis in which the researcher sets aside all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of the participants” (p. 235). I used bracketing in order to set aside personal bias of the researcher within a researcher’s journal. Since I have experience working with ELL students, bracketing allows for a more reliable data analysis. I used bracketing in order to eliminate my personal ideas of what I believe would be effective or ineffective when working with ELLs, thus allowing me to focus only on what was said during the interviews and focus groups.

I used phenomenological reduction to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994) after completing the analysis of the videotaped lessons in preparation for the focus group session. Schutz (1970) described phenomenological reduction as bracketing out any judgements of the phenomenon being investigated and reducing the cognitive experiences to the essence of the phenomenon. Before analyzing the videotaped lessons I set aside personal presumptions about what would be considered effective instruction for ELLs, that were influenced by my own beliefs and experiences. By setting aside these presumptions it left me the ability to consider each experience “in its singularity, in and for itself. The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). During the analysis of the videotaped observations I listened for explicit instructional strategies, student/teacher interactions, and student/student interactions. By setting aside my personal presumptions I was able to witness the effectiveness of the methods being used within the various classrooms.

Horizonalization was used as the next step in the data collection process (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization involves listing the statements made by the participants as they experience the phenomenon, and then giving each statement equal value and consideration (Moustakas, 1994). Open coding was used during the horizonalization process as I reviewed the

entire text for descriptive categories. Open coding involves segmenting data into categories of information (Creswell, 2007). By utilizing open coding when analyzing interview and focus group transcripts I was able to determine similarities and differences in the participants' perceptions of working with ELL students, therefore locating common themes in regards to what works and what doesn't. After reviewing all of the statements, redundant statements will be removed and the final statements will be clustered into themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual and composite textural descriptions were the next step in the data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) defined individual textural descriptions as "An integration, descriptively, of the invariant textural constituents and themes of each research participant" (p. 180); and composite textural descriptions as "An integration of all of the individual textural descriptions into a group or universal textural description" (p. 180). When I completed the data analysis I reported the findings using textural language, in which I focused my attention on the qualities of the experiences as seen through the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step I followed within the data analysis was imaginative variation. The overall purpose of imaginative variation is to vary possible perspectives and meanings of the phenomenon in order to arrive at the structural description of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The overarching goal of imaginative variation is to "identify how the experience of the phenomenon came to be and what it is" and therefore accounting for "how" it speaks to conditions that illuminate the 'what' of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Combining the what and the how of the experiences helped to arrive and the overall essence of the phenomenon. After identifying the structural qualities from the data collected, the information

was grouped into themes, then incorporated into the textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

The final step in the data analysis process was creating a synthesis of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Synthesis of meanings and essences are described as “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p.99). After obtaining all structural and textural descriptions from the participants, they were joined to attain the collective description of the essence of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

Within a qualitative study, the researcher needs to provide confirmation that the data provided represents the participants and their experiences (Merriam, 2009). For research to be trustworthy it must be credible, confirmable, dependable and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Trustworthiness was achieved through triangulation of data, selecting quotations, member checking, an audit of the audit trail, and thick descriptive data.

Credibility

Credibility ensures the accurate reporting of information that is gathered from participants is parallel to the researchers reporting of the information (Schwandt, 2007). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data. Triangulation is the utilization of three data sources to verify the integrity of the inferences made (Schwandt, 2007). My study had four data sources. The four data sources utilized within this study were the teacher surveys, focus group sessions, interviews, and videotaped observations. The four data sources allowed for cross

comparison of the data to ensure that what was being stated during the interviews and focus group sessions was really occurring in the classroom on a daily basis.

Confirmability

Confirmability authenticates the data and interpretations were actually collected during the course of the study (Schwandt, 2007). Selecting quotations was used as an illustration of the connection between the findings and information provided by the participants (Schwandt, 2007).

In addition to selecting quotations to confirm the research data, all transcriptions and identified themes were submitted to the participants for member checking. After confirmation of the transcriptions was received the cross-case analysis took place. Cross-case analysis is defined as the examining of themes across cases or interviews to determine common themes (Creswell, 2007). After identifying the themes within the data I submitted them to the participants to ensure that they agreed with the findings of the study. Once their feedback was received the data analysis continued.

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the process of inquiry is traceable and documented (Schwandt, 2007). Schwandt states “The purpose of the audit is to render judgement about the dependability of procedures employed by the inquirer and the extent to which the conclusions or findings of the study are confirmable” (p. 12). A review of the audit trail was conducted by a third party to determine appropriateness of the data based on terms and analysis. All transcriptions and recordings were submitted to a third party colleague that was unfamiliar with the research in an effort to verify accuracy and understanding of the findings. Grammatical revisions were recommended at the conclusion of the audit. Once revisions were assessed and completed, I continued analyzing the data and summarizing the findings.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to apply research findings to similar situations (Schwandt, 2007). Transferability will be met through thick descriptive data. Thick descriptive data is a narrative of which the degree of similarity can be altered to apply all or part of the research elsewhere (Schwandt, 2007). When reviewing the videotaped observations I took detailed field notes to help me identify themes during classroom instruction. I paid close attention to things such as class size, modifications made for the students, materials utilized, interactions between the students and the teachers, and interactions between the students. The descriptive data as well as quotes from the participants were utilized in conjunction with the transcriptions to further identify themes in the research.

The thick descriptive data collected during the study supports other school districts as they apply the findings of the study to their own school districts in an effort to meet the needs of their ELL population. The descriptions and field notes may provide other district leaders the ability to apply the findings to their schools and determine if they are effective within their situation.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the study was ethical, considerations were given to confidentiality of the participants and research site, security of the data, and obtaining permission from the IRB and district prior to the onset of the study.

Confidentiality for all participants was met through the use of pseudonyms for all participants as well as setting locations used in the study. As per IRB guidelines no data was collected until approval had been obtained for this study. Participant consent was important so

that all participants knew that their participation in the research study was voluntary and that they fully understood the context of the study. All data is kept in locked file cabinets and on a password protected personal computer.

Summary

I utilized a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to understand teachers' and administrators experiences and perceptions in regards to educating ELLs at Brown Elementary School. I chose this site due to its high number of ELLs and their consistently high assessment scores on state and federal standardized assessments.

I used three research questions to guide my study. I obtained data from different sources throughout this study, including teacher surveys, videotaped observations, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews. In an effort to ensure trustworthiness the research data needed to be credible, confirmable, transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In order to obtain credibility, I utilized triangulation of data and member checking. To achieve confirmability and dependability I incorporated a data collection audit trail and a data analysis trail. Finally, in order to ensure transferability, I utilized thick descriptive data.

I employed the process outlined by Moustakas (1994) when analyzing the data. The process involves *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesizing structural and textural descriptions, to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The data was interpreted and significance was attached to the information that was found in an effort to make sense of the findings.

I gave ethical considerations to protect the participants and data. Confidentiality is important and was maintained throughout the study. Data is protected and secured on a

password protected hard drive and in a locked filing cabinet. Findings from the research have been accurately reported.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to determine effective instructional practices that contribute to the academic success of English language learners within a public elementary school. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) defined phenomenology as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena” (p. 495). Phenomenology asserts careful descriptions of ordinary experiences of everyday life (Schwandt, 2007). The qualitative transcendental phenomenological method was used to study the perceptions of effective teaching strategies that are used by teachers and administrators who work with a large number of English Language Learners on a daily basis. In addition to teachings strategies, classroom cultures and their impact on academic success were also part of the phenomena studied. I used reflective memos and journals in an effort to eliminate my personal bias as I analyzed the data. I collected and analyzed data through the use of teacher surveys, videotaped lessons, focus group session, and semi-structured interviews. I provided rich descriptions by including quotes from participants.

Three research questions were addressed to understand effective teaching strategies as well as the perceptions and experiences of the participants as they work to help ELLs reach their full academic potential:

1. What teaching strategies do administration and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?

2. How does the culture of the classroom and school impact English Language Learners' academic success?
3. What are the building level administrators' perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELL students' academic success?

Once all data was collected and analyzed, I obtained and integrated structural and textural descriptions to arrive at a common description of the essence of the shared experiences of the participants. Data analysis went as outlined in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

This study was designed to determine effective teaching strategies that one school district utilizes to meet the needs of their large population of English Language Learners. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What teaching strategies do administrators and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?
2. How does the culture of the classroom and school impact English Learner's academic success?
3. What are building level administrators perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELL students' academic success?

The research pertained to the perceptions of teachers and administrators who work with English Language Learners and their families on a daily basis, within the classroom and throughout other areas of the school. In an attempt to collect a rich description of the phenomena, the collective voices of the participants were heard throughout the data collection process.

Participants

Nine participants with a range of teaching experiences participated in the research study. Each participant has experience working with English Language Learners and their families. A few of the participants are also bilingual and were able to offer perspectives that empathized with the families.

After obtaining permission from the district, I sent a participant survey to all of the teachers at the school. After the surveys were completed I sent participant consent forms to all the interested participants. Six of the teacher participants taught a variety of grades between kindergarten and fifth grade. One teacher participant was the lead ESOL teacher at the school. The final two participants were building level administrators at the school. All educators at the school have multiple years of experience and hold an ESOL Endorsement.

Table 1.

Demographics of Teacher Participants

Participant Name	Years of Experience	Position	ESOL Endorsed
Peggy	12	Third Grade	Yes
Jenny	5	Fifth Grade	Yes
Tracy	15	Kindergarten	Yes
Stephanie	10	Third Grade	Yes
Maria	12	Second Grade	Yes
Kathy	10	Lead EOSL Teacher	Yes

Note: Data for participant table was taken from teacher surveys.

Participant Profiles

Peggy taught third grade at the time of the study. She holds a degree in Early Childhood Education and is also ESOL certified. At the time of the study Peggy had been a classroom teacher for 15 years and had five years of experience as a paraprofessional prior to becoming a classroom teacher. At the time of the study Peggy worked with 20 students. Eighteen of those

students were considered ELLs. Two of her ELL students were being monitored to exit the ESOL program, while the remaining ELL students had already exited the program.

Jenny holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, is also ESOL certified, at the time of the study she taught fifth grade. Jenny began her teaching career in a different school district that had similar demographics. She has been teaching in the current school district for two years, for a total of six years of teaching experience. At the time of the study Jenny worked with more than 20 students. She was unsure of how many were monitored and how many had already exited the ESOL program. At the time of the study she did not have any students that were being served through the ESOL program.

Tracy holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, is also ESOL endorsed, and at the time of the study she taught Kindergarten. Tracy has 15 years of teaching experience all within the same school district. At the time of the study Tracy taught five ELL students that were being served within the ESOL program.

Kathy holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, is also EOSL endorsed, at the time of the study was the school's lead ESOL teacher and building testing coordinator. Kathy is also bilingual and knows the struggles associated with second language acquisition. As the lead ESOL teacher Kathy co-teaches with several different grade levels and also pulls out small groups of students new to the country.

Stephanie holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, is also ESOL endorsed, at the time of the study she taught third grade. Stephanie has 10 years of teaching experience all within the same school district. At the time of the study Stephanie worked with six to ten students who were being served through the ESOL program and/or were being monitored to exit the program.

Maria holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, is also ESOL endorsed, at the time of the study taught third grade. In addition to working with ESOL students, Maria is also bilingual and grew up in Mexico. She has a deeper understanding of what the parents and students are experiencing when they enter a new country and a new school. At the time of the study Maria had 12 years of teaching experience. She worked with approximately 19 ELL students on a daily basis that ranged from being served in the ESOL program to being monitored by the ESOL teachers. Some students have exited the EOSL program.

Dr. Gray was the principal of the school being studied. Prior to becoming principal she worked at the International Academy teaching fourth and fifth grade. The International Academy was created for students, who were new to the country as a transition before entering public school. Dr. Gray was the assistant principal when the school was opened then later became principal. As with many other faculty members at Brown Elementary, Dr. Gray is bilingual.

Dr. Martin was the assistant principal of the school being studied. Prior to becoming assistant principal he taught fifth grade and worked closely with ELL students and their families. As assistant principal he works closely with Dr. Gray to ensure that students receive rich experiences and a quality education.

Video Observations, Focus Groups, Semi-Structured Interview

Once all teacher surveys were submitted I began my data collection by discussing the video observations with the teacher participants. Participants were asked to video tape three different lessons, two small group and one whole group. The lessons were to be everyday lessons with no special changes made for authentication purposes. The video observations

allowed me to see interactions between the students and their teachers, interactions between the students, and also the classroom environment. I used the videos to gain a visual experience of how classrooms were set up and how students interacted with one another. As I viewed the videos and began to write thick rich descriptions I used reflective memos and journals in an effort to remove my personal bias from the data that I collected. Once all videos were submitted back to me, I scheduled the focus group session for all teacher participants.

The focus group session was conducted during post planning at a time that was convenient for all participants. The session lasted approximately one hour, during which all participants were asked the same questions and were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the questions. When clarification was needed deeper questioning was used. To ensure accuracy during the focus group session, I audio-taped and transcribed the interviews. Once all interviews were transcribed I sent them to participants for member checking and asked them to examine the transcription for accuracy. The member checking process revealed minor grammatical errors in the writing, and after all corrections were made, I coded the transcripts and cross referenced the data to find correlations in the list of themes for research question one found in Appendix F. As with the videotaped observations, I utilized reflective memos and journaling in an effort to remove my personal bias, and to allow me to focus on the essence of the phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

Horizontalization

Horizontalization builds upon data that is collected from the research questions and highlights substantial statements or quotes that can assist in providing an understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). After all semi-

structured interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed, the information was analyzed for significant statements that were relevant to the topic and analyzed in regards to the research questions. When considering participant experiences, I recorded the significant statements that directly related to the lived experiences of working with ELLs. After listing the relevant statements I reviewed the statements across the data to determine which ones did not change when discussed by multiple participants and sources.

Results

After creating the list of significant statements the next step was to group the significant statements into meaningful units or themes about the phenomenon that were identified during the data analysis process (Creswell, 2007). Once the themes were established I removed all overlapping or redundant statements so that I would be left with the key information that would answer my research questions. Transcripts were reviewed many times in an effort to determine theme.

The following is a discussion of the themes I discovered through an analysis of the data from all data collection methods. A representative sample of information was used to support each of the themes.

Research Question One:

I designed research question to determine what teaching strategies that teachers and administrators felt had the most positive impact on learning for the ELL students within their school. Four themes were revealed after a thorough analysis of the data: (a) specialized programs, (b) differentiation, (c) hands on learning, (d) high expectations.

Specialized Programs. Throughout the focus group and interview sessions teachers and administrators repeatedly discussed the usage of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Literacy Collaborative. SIOP is a teaching framework that utilizes planning support and delivering high-quality instruction to all students, with an emphasis on ELLs (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2015). The SIOP framework includes, building background knowledge, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and finally review and assessment. First year teachers in the district receive ongoing training and observations to ensure proper usage of the SIOP model. Current teachers receive additional professional development throughout the year to help with proper utilization of the SIOP model.

Another specialized program that was discussed during the sessions was Literacy Collaborative. When discussing Literacy Collaborative Dr. Gray stated “It is a constructivist philosophy that’s grounded in the conversations children have with each other and with their teachers and in reflecting on text and when they’re learning how to read” (Interview with Dr. Gray, May 2015). Literacy collaborative combines reading, writing, and communication to help the students grasp all three areas while reading about and talking about things that have meaning to them. Peggy stated:

Literacy collaborative is our framework that we use for reading, writing, talking, communicating, and it’s very individually based. You take that framework and apply it based on where each student is in their learning, and it’s very flexible as well. As the student grows more academically then they will change groups, they don’t stay in the same group all the time. Their groups are very flexible in reading and writing. We introduce something whole group, teach it in small groups, you individualize it based on any enhancing or reinforcing needs that

might be there. We use that framework and teaching style across the curriculum. (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

SIOP and Literacy Collaborative are the main frameworks that are utilized by the teachers and staff use across the curriculum to help meet the educational needs of all of their students, not just their ELLs.

Differentiation. Another theme that was identified throughout the observations, interview, and focus group session was differentiation. When discussing differentiation and classroom community in regards to ELLs Kathy shared:

Do things like provide wait time, label their classroom, and appeal to all learning styles, whether they are visual or kinesthetic, have all level of books in the classroom, and not expecting them to be able to automatically be able to do what their neighbor is doing, and even on grade level. And just be able to offer a lot of differentiation, creating their own community within their classroom specific to the needs of their current students is what our teachers do (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Differentiation goes along with Literacy Collaborative and provides students with the differentiation they need in order to meet their academic needs and achieve academic success. Teachers utilize flexible groupings in both reading and writing, buddies and peer tutoring, and scaffolded notes for older students. Teachers work diligently to ensure that the students are moving within their levels and are having their needs met in the classroom.

Hands on Learning. Hands on learning is a big aspect of the curriculum at Brown Elementary. Teachers utilized a museum model approach to learning. When discussing the museum model Jenny stated, “We use a museum model and allow students to use their creativity

to demonstrate their learning. Then all work is displayed for the parents and other students to see” (Focus Group Session with Jenny, May 2015).

Another aspect of hands on learning utilized is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). STEM plays a tremendous role in learning. Brown Elementary has a STEM garden and greenhouse, orchards, and various STEM labs. When discussing the value of the STEM labs Dr. Martin stated:

And experiences that have been provided in the STEM lab, and the learning garden have given our kids something to write about. So, you know, they’ll learn something in STEM, in Science, but then in literacy they go back and they take that on as informational writing. How do you write about that? How do scientists think? How does a scientist act, how do scientists write reports, and I’ve seen some excellent work coming out of that this year” (Interview with Dr. Martin, May 2015).

High Expectations. Throughout Brown Elementary all teachers are aware of, and hold their students to high expectations. When discussing expectations Peggy stated:

“We believe every child can learn period. And no matter what level they enter classroom, we set our expectations to be high. We don’t let things like a second language or some kind of a disability inhibit them. We expect them to get up to grade level and we just offer as much support as we can to help them get there.” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

High expectations for behavior and learning resonate throughout Brown Elementary. Building level administrators have established a certain level of expectation for students and teachers. This high level of expectation is evident in every classroom throughout the school. When

observing the videotaped lessons it was evident that the teachers were holding their students to extremely high expectations.

When discussing the high expectations Dr. Gray stated:

“These are not poor little things, these are capable, smart children, they may have to learn English but other than that, they are just as capable as any other child on the planet. If you expect kids to do badly because, oh poor little things have to learn English, they don’t speak English really well, they will probably live up to those expectations. But if you expect them to meet or exceed, they’ll do that. Same thing with behaviors.” (Interview with Dr. Gray, May 2015).

The high expectations that have been established have been shared with students and parents. In addition to being aware of the high expectations, the parents’ involvement plays a huge role in students meeting the high expectations that have been established. Given the nature of their students the teachers of Brown Elementary have to be empathetic to the personal needs of the children while helping them achieve the high level of expectations that have been set forth. Kathy stated, “We are very empathetic towards their situations but here they are going to be loved and nurtured, but at the same time they are going to work, learn, and be successful” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Table 2

Open-Codes and Themes in Light of Research Question Number One

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
SIOP Literacy Collaborative Reading Recovery ESOL Endorsement	73	Specialized Programs

Groups, Buddies, & Differentiation	45	Differentiation
Conversation & Hands on Learning	63	Hands on learning
High Expectations	29	High Expectations

Note. Open codes were analyzed using horizontalization to determine themes.

Research Question Two

Research question two was designed to determine how culture, school, classroom, and home, work together to impact the academic success of ELLs. Four themes were revealed after a thorough analysis of the data: (a) respect for home cultures, (b) bilingual staff and translators, (c) community, (d) safety.

Respect for home cultures. The teachers and staff have worked extremely hard to show a high level respect for the home cultures of their students. Peggy shared, “Culture is prominent in the school and we try to make sure to honor students’ lifestyles and cultures” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Teachers and staff make a conscious effort to ensure that the students have a voice about how they want to do things in the classroom. When various holidays are celebrated teachers provide opportunities for the students to share how they celebrate the holiday at home and how they would like to celebrate at school. This allows the students to feel they are valued as more than just students.

Many of the teachers that work at Brown Elementary make it a point to allow the students opportunities to share information about their home cultures. They invite the children to share how they celebrate various holidays, and their languages. Often when new students enter the school that do not speak English so, the other students that speak the same language will be invited to be buddies for them. This allows the students the opportunity to share their native

languages while helping their new friends assimilate their new language. When discussing how holidays are celebrated at home and interwoven into the classroom Peggy stated:

“Just by getting to know the kids. And talking about, liked during Cinco de Mayo, tell me what do you do at your house, how does your family celebrate this, what would you like to do here? And give them a voice, as to how they want to do something in the classroom. For any holidays, for anything that comes up. Um, I’m real big on, what would you like to do? This is what the holiday is about, or this is what’s coming up for our, um, what we are going to be teaching, is there any particular extra that you would like to do as well? And like I’ll send projects home, like a getting to know you kind of projects, where they sit, they do something at their house, they work together at something at their house. That kind of brings their personality of their home into the classroom.” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

By allowing the children to discuss how they celebrate, or by creating projects the teachers at Brown Elementary are actively demonstrating a great deal of respect for the home cultures of their students.

Another way that teachers and staff work hard to ensure respect for home cultures is through the use of projects. Peggy shared, “We send home get to know you projects where students work together with their families to work on a project that will allow them to share their personalities and cultures” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Maria also stated, “In preschool they dedicate a whole family tree wall all year long. I mean they have their family picture. And they will request a group picture, even if its grandpa, uncle, aunt, and they keep them up all year” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). The conscious efforts of the teachers and staff have paid off.

The parents are constantly visible in the school. They feel free to come to the classrooms and discuss any issues they may have with the teachers and staff.

The hard work and efforts to respect the home cultures of students' families, has paid off greatly for the teachers and staff at Brown Elementary. Throughout the year the parents are willing to volunteer to help do various activities at the school. Tracy stated, "I've never been in a school where the parents move so freely down the halls in the mornings and stuff. You just see them much more as part of the school. Just as well as their children are" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). The parents are at the school in an effort to help their children achieve academic success, while helping the teachers any way they can. As the group was discussing parental involvement Maria shared, "We just recently had parents actually out of the goodness of their own heart, and it wasn't anything through the PTO, come in and bring their own culture to us by doing a luncheon for the teachers, homemade food" (Focus Groups Session, May 2015). After discussing parental involvement and respecting the home cultures of students, it became very apparent that the parents and teachers work very closely to ensure academic success for all students, regardless of language barrier or limitations.

Bilingual staff and translators. Throughout the conversations I had with the teachers and administrators, the reality of having a bilingual staff and translators on hand was very important to the teachers, staff and parents at Brown Elementary. Dr. Gray shared, "We have made a concerted effort to hire bilingual teachers. Our front office staff (secretaries and administrative assistants) is bilingual. Our parent, Title I coordinator is bilingual, and our paraprofessionals, a lot of them are bilingual" (Interview with Dr. Gray, May 2015). Having the bilingual staff provides a level of comfort for the parents. They feel that they can easily communicate with the teachers and staff and are not afraid to approach anyone at the school. Dr. Gray is also

bilingual, however, she will utilize translators to ensure that dialects are correct and that the language being spoken fits the language the family speaks (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

In addition to having a bilingual staff, another common theme across the data sets was translators. Translators are made available for parent conferences, family nights, and any other instances that a translator may be needed. The administrators have out an agreement with the local high school ROTC to provide volunteer translators when needed.

In addition to translating for meetings and parent nights, the translators also work hard to ensure that all communication that is sent home is in two languages. When discussing the translators Tracy stated, “All documents are sent home in Spanish and English. We send things home on how to help. Read to your child it doesn’t matter if you’re reading in Spanish from a Spanish book” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). The translators have even begun translating state and district surveys for parents who may not be able to read them, while also providing them with computers on which to take the surveys (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Community. Community is extremely important to the teachers and staff at Brown Elementary. They focus on being a part of their community as well as building community within the school and individual classrooms.

During the focus group session with the teachers at Brown Elementary it became abundantly clear that establish a classroom community plays a crucial role in the education of the students. Brown Elementary is located in a high poverty area. Many of the students go home in the evenings and have to raise younger siblings until mom or dad can get home. This leaves very little time to do homework and projects for school. It is because of the home experiences of many of these children that having a classroom community it so crucial for their academic success. When discussing classroom communities Maria shared, “I think community, building

community in the classroom is so huge. It's like the cornerstone that if you don't have it everything falls apart" (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

The classroom communities also allow the students to support one another. When discussing homework, Stephanie stated, "A lot of my kids come to the classroom in the mornings instead of sitting in the hall, and a lot of my kids do their homework here. Simply because they don't have any support at home" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). By working on their homework with other members of their community the students are able to learn from each other and become peer tutors. This helps them gain an even deeper understanding of the material that has been presented, while learning to help one another as community members.

Teachers and students work on building classroom communities that are based on both individual and collective cultures of the students and teachers. When discussing classroom communities Katy stated:

"Classroom communities teach social skills and how to interact with students and other adults. It gives them confidence and wanting to share what they are learning. When ESOL teachers push into the classroom they are helping to keep them in their classroom community and the culture you'll find there is more of a building up. The classroom community is more of a stepping stone for the students." (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Being an inner city school, Brown Elementary is a Title I school with a 100% free and reduced lunch population (Governor's office of Student Achievement, 2011). These three criteria can cause great difficulty for the students of the school. It can cause them to miss out on valuable learning opportunities that could enrich their lives abundantly. In an effort to alleviate

some of the difficulties the school faces, the faculty and staff have reached out to community members and businesses to assist in meeting the needs of the students.

Brown Elementary School has worked diligently to reach out to the local community in order to provide richer experiences for their students. At the time of the study the school has connections with many local businesses that assist with their STEM garden and STEM labs. They have also created a connection with a local bank to provide a way for the students to open bank accounts and to learn about economics and finance. When discussing the various community partners that have shared in the academic success of the ELLs at Brown Elementary, Dr. Gray shared, “We had our end of the year cookout a few days ago and we invited all of our parent volunteers, all of our community volunteers, the teachers were here. We all had a meal together and we recognized everybody” (Semi-Structured Interview, May 2015).

In addition to the STEM garden and the banking opportunities, community members have helped to recreate a reading center that resembles Hogwarts, from the Harry Potter book series. This has helped to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for the kids to read and gain a love of reading. When discussing the community partners and all of their efforts Dr. Gray stated, “They have all been a wonderful community partner” (Semi-Structure Interview, May 2015). All of the learning experiences that are provided by the community partners helped to create an even richer learning environment for all of the students at Brown Elementary. All the students have been given real life opportunities that they can then take back to their families and share these experiences with them.

Safety. When working in a high poverty area safety is extremely important. The safety of the parents, students, and staff are a great priority to everyone at Brown Elementary. Having a

substantial community outreach program has contributed to the level of safety that can be felt at Brown Elementary. When discussing safety Dr. Martin shared:

We really do all that we can to make the school the center of the community. This school was built here ten years ago and this is a historically bad part of town and this school, we don't have graffiti problems for the most part, we don't see gang tags in our bathrooms, we don't see a lot of things you would expect to see in what is basically an inner city, high poverty, high minority school. And I think that's because the parents and the children value this place as a safe place for their kids to learn, and a place where they know we care about them (Interview with Dr. Martin, May 2015).

Much of the safety that the parents feel at Brown Elementary stems from the efforts put forth by the teachers and staff to create a sense of community within the school. Teachers work hard to combine school and home cultures in order to provide a safe learning environment for their students. Peggy stated:

It's a safe environment. Our kids feel safe, I think our parents feel safe with the school system, the school itself, and with the people here. I think the parents feel safe for themselves and for their kids. We even had some that brought their kids here during a big immigration raid years ago. And some of our parents were afraid that they would be taken away. They brought their kids to school because this was a safe place (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Table 3

Open-Codes and Themes in Light of Research Question Number Two

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Home Cultures & Parental Involvement	108	Respect for home cultures

Translators & Bilingual Staff	30	Bilingual Staff and Translators
Community	28	Community
Safe Environment	15	Safety

Note. Open codes were analyzed using cross-case analysis to determine themes.

Research Question Three

I created research question three to evaluate what building level administrators perceive to be obstacles that may hinder the academic success of ELL students. Three themes were identified after a thorough analysis of the data: (a) language barrier, (b) low schooled in native language, (c) lack of experiences.

Language Barrier. One major obstacle that was discussed by administrators and teachers alike was the language barrier between teachers and students and teachers and parents. It is likely that the language barrier is felt by every school district that works with ELLs and their families. It can prevent communication of important information, as well as keep parents from being able to assist their children at school. When discussing the language barrier Stephanie stated, “The language barrier is hard on them when they first come. And their parents can’t help them at home (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

In addition to the conversational language barrier many ELL students face a barrier when it comes to academic language as well. When discussing academic language Peggy stated, “Academic language is difficult. Even some simple words that we assume all children would know in English they may not have ever heard. Sometimes we draw our own conclusions or assumptions on what we think that they should know but maybe they don’t” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Low schooled in native language. Many ELLs, especially those that are transient, may be low schooled in their native languages. They may also have had little to no exposure to the English language. When discussing the population of Brown Elementary Dr. Gray stated:

In our particular population, those children that we get from other countries tend to be low schooled in their home countries. They come in behind in their native language. Research shows that if a child is on grade level in their native language that transfers and it's easier for them to master the content in their second language (Interview with Dr. Gray, May 2015).

Students are not the only ones that come into the schools with little education in their native languages. Peggy stated:

“A lot of families that don't have the reading, writing skills. They don't have those literacy abilities for helping them at home and that's difficult. So that's kind of a barrier for the kids, but we need to put more focus on those kids and on those families” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Unfortunately a lack of education in their native language is not a barrier that is easily broken down. These students need a great deal of support in their second language to help them overcome the barrier and achieve their academic success.

Lack of experiences. An overwhelming theme that was identified during the focus group session and the interview was the lack of experiences that many ELLs have. This lack of experience can go beyond ELLs to encompass students from a low socioeconomic background as well. Tara stated, “They don't have the experiences that other children have to pull from” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). When discussing background knowledge Jenny stated:

Establishing real world connections. Trying to help the students find something in their culture that can relate to what they are learning in another culture. It's sometimes hard to connect it to their lives and connect it to their home life and their community and everything. That's a big challenge (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

When discussing the background experiences of the ELLs at Brown Elementary Dr. Gray stated:

I think experiences, their lack of experiences. For many of our children going to Wal Mart or the Community Center is about as big an experience as they have. So it's hard for them to have a lot to talk about, think about and say, because they don't have those experiences (Interview with Dr. Gray, May 2015).

The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary have worked diligently to help provide experiences for their students. Maria shared, "We try to think about designing experiences as a school that's where our work is and we have been working on that to provide those experiences that they may not get just at home" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Through the use of the STEM labs and garden, the bank, field trips, and utilizing a museum model for instruction, the teachers and staff are creating experiences that will help the students grow academically and personally. The experiences the students at Brown Elementary will help them to achieve their academic success, through the use of real world experiences and increasing their background knowledge.

Table 4

Open-Codes and Themes in Light of Research Question Number Three

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Language Barrier	8	Language barriers prevent communication

Academic Language & Background Knowledge	11	Lack of background knowledge and language skills create barrier for academic success
Experiences	17	Students have very little experience with the outside world

Note. Open codes were analyzed using cross-case analysis to determine themes.

Composite Structural Description

The development of the composite structural description required an examination of how the teachers viewed working with ELLs on a daily basis. Moustakas (1994) defined the composite description as the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study. The structural description focused on how the participants developed their perceptions of working with English Language Learners.

The seven teacher participants work with a variety of students on a daily basis. Many of those students fall into the category of Hispanic, with a large majority of those students qualifying for assistance through the ESOL Program. Brown Elementary School is located in an inner city, high poverty area. The teachers and staff have had to work hard to establish relationships with families in the community and to overcome many of the barriers that they are faced with on a daily basis.

Even though the teachers at Brown Elementary enjoy working at the school and with the children, they did voice frustration. One of the participants stated that you have to be very flexible to work within the school. She stated that you will be doing things one way and administration will change it and ask you to try something new. Even though there was

frustration, the teachers also stated that if there wasn't any movement or change then they would be stuck in the same routines and the students wouldn't make the progress they need to make.

Previous experiences working with ELLs has given all of the participants an opportunity to gain knowledge of how to effectively work with ELLs. The majority of the teacher participants had worked within the same school district for their entire careers. The few participants that had worked in different districts worked in areas that also had a high level of ELLs. These participants were able to bring experiences and knowledge to Brown Elementary.

Two of the participants had experiences outside of the United States. One participant was born in Mexico and attended school there. She was able to empathize with the parents and students that were new to the country and was able to assist them with the transitions. She was also bilingual and was able to help open lines of communication with the parents. A second participant had been a missionary in another country and was able to speak a second language. Her knowledge of language acquisition allowed her the ability to empathize with the children that are struggling to learn the English Language.

Study participants voiced positive feelings regarding working with and helping ELLs reach their full academic potential. All of the teachers and administrators were willing to do whatever necessary to help build relationships with the families and helping the students reach their academic potential.

Composite Textural – Structural Description

During the course of the focus group sessions and interviews the participants discussed the joys and struggles of working with ELLs. Overall the participants had positive stories and seemed very happy with the way the school was organized.

The teacher participants felt very secure with their administration. Many of the participants voiced that in order for them to be successful, good leadership and support had to come from the top down. When interviewing administrators they felt that the support came from the bottom up. Throughout the school year it was obvious that there was a strong correlation between the teachers, administrators, and parents. Participants stated that they all work together to help the students meet their academic potential.

When discussing hardships, participants continuously referred to the difficulty of the language barrier as well as the students' lack of real world experiences. In an effort to bridge the language barrier, the teachers have utilized translators to help during parent conferences and family nights at the school. The translators also help with translating documents that need to be sent home in Spanish and English. To help develop real world experiences, the staff utilized field trips and assisted the students in gaining knowledge through interactions with the world around them.

Summary

Through surveys, videotaped observations, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews, the nine participants shared stories and perceptions of working with ELLs on a daily basis. They shared the triumphs and struggles they face when helping these students achieve academic success. An analysis of the data revealed several themes: (a) specialized programs, (b) differentiation, (c) hands on learning, (d) high expectations, (e) respect for home cultures, (f) bilingual staff and translators, (g) community, (h) safety, (i) language barrier, (j) low schooled in native language, and (k) lack of experiences. Member checking was used to establish accuracy of themes. The participants reviewed the list of themes in regards to their daily activities to determine correlations.

I reviewed the data related to research question one, the theme of specialized programs was identified from participants' experiences in working with ELLs. They attributed a large portion of student achievement to the use of SIOP strategies as well as Literacy Collaborative. Both of these programs provide students opportunities for differentiation as well as hands on learning.

In addition to the specialized programs and differentiation, hands-on learning was another major theme that was identified in regards to the first research question. The teachers and administrators expressed the joys of having STEM accessibility for their students. Participants discussed how the STEM projects have helped to bridge the gap between home and school, while helping the students develop the ability to transfer their learning from one subject area to another. In addition to STEM the participants expressed great enthusiasm for the museum model approach. They felt that it provided a boost in self-esteem as well as pride for their students and parents.

I identified the final them in regards to research question one as high expectations. While the participants referred to the high expectations of the students, it was evident that administrators had high expectations for their teachers and staff. Students were taught with a sense of urgency. The participants stated that they are to teach like that is the only day they will have with their students. This sense of urgency helps hold the students, as well as teachers accountable to the high expectations set forth by administrators. The overall attitude at Brown Elementary is that every child can learn regardless of limitation or disability, and they will do whatever is necessary to help them reach their academic success.

When analyzing the data for research question two the first theme that I identified was respect for home culture. The teachers and staff have the utmost respect for the parents of their

students. They will do whatever they can to ensure that home cultures are represented positively in the classroom as well as throughout the school. The parents have started to reciprocate this respect by hosting dinners for the teachers and staff and by volunteering at the school.

Another theme I identified is the utilization of translators and having a bilingual staff. Not everyone at Brown Elementary is bilingual, nor is that a requirement to teach at the school. Dr. Gray makes a conscious effort to hire people who are able to communicate with the families represented at the school. Translators are provided for parent conferences and family nights when needed. Translators also help ensure that every document sent home is in English and in Spanish.

I identified community as another theme when analyzing the data for research question number two. Two separate types of community were discussed in detail classroom/school community, and community outreach. The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary work together to build classroom communities that represent the different cultures within the school. They allow the students learning opportunities in which they can work together and build their social skills. The school itself has worked very hard to reach out to the local community and build relationships with businesses, churches, and local organizations. This community outreach has helped to provide many of the real world experiences that these students may not get otherwise.

The final theme I identified in regards to research question two was safety. The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary have worked exceptionally hard to ensure that the school is a safe place in an otherwise dangerous neighborhood. During the focus group session the participants shared a story about an immigration raid that happened within the community. The parents felt that their children would be safer at school than in the midst of the raid and made sure that their

children were in school that day. Brown Elementary is an inner city school and is exposed to gangs and other issues. The school has built a relationship of safety and security for its teachers, staff, students, and families.

Research question three focused on the thoughts and feelings of the administrators. The first theme I identified in regards to question number three was the language barrier. While this seems like an obvious barrier when working with ELLs, it is extremely important when you work with students from multiple countries. At any time the teachers at Brown may have students from as many as four different countries, who speak four different languages. This becomes an issue even for the bilingual staff within the school. Participants stated that they have to find other ways to communicate with these parents and students.

A second theme I identified was that many of the students who come from other countries are low schooled in their native languages. This can cause them to have difficulty learning the second language and getting to their respective grade levels. It was discussed that often if students can fluently read and write in their native languages they will have an easier time with second language acquisition. If they are low schooled in their native languages the transition to English can take longer and be more difficult for them.

The final theme I identified when analyzing data for research question three was the lack of experiences that ELLs, and low income students, possess. Often ELLs do not have the financial ability to go to museums or on elaborate vacations. This can make the writing process difficult because the children feel that they have nothing to write about. The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary are trying to correct this problem by taking students on multiple field trips and providing experiences ELLs may not otherwise have. One example of this is the partnership with the bank. Because of citizenship status many families do not have bank accounts and

therefore cannot teach their children about savings accounts and investments. Through community outreach the school has established a relationship with a local bank that allows the students to open savings accounts and learn about saving money at the same time.

In the next chapter, a summary of the findings will be presented along with a discussion of the themes as they relate to the theoretical framework of the study. In addition, a discussion of the implications of the study, recommendations for future research, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

English Language Learners are becoming more and more prevalent within public schools, and these students are bringing with them new languages, a lack of experiences, and their own native cultures and heritages (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). According to Verdugo and Flores (2007) since the inception of the public education in America the challenge of educating immigrants has been a significant challenge. Despite the challenges created when trying to educate immigrants and ELLs, it is the duty of mainstream classroom teachers to provide a quality education for these children while meeting academic standards and trying to overcome the language barrier that so many of these children face.

According to McCardle and Leung (2006) the U.S. Department of Commerce acknowledged that nearly one out of every five Americans speak a language other than English in the home, with Spanish being the most common language. Teachers all over the United States face the challenge of educating ELLs on a daily basis. The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary School have worked diligently to find ways to educate their ELLs and help them reach their full academic potential.

The purpose of this study was to determine effective teaching strategies for working with ELLs on a daily basis. Knowledge gained from hearing the collective responses of teachers and administrators that work directly with ELL students and their families on a daily basis may benefit other teachers and administrators that are struggling to help their ELLs meet their academic potential.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What teaching strategies do administrators and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?
2. How does the culture of the classroom and school impact English Language Learners' academic success?
3. What are building level administrators perceptions of obstacles that hinder ELL students' academic success?

These research questions were answered with data gathered through the use of videotaped observations of classroom instruction, focus group session with teacher participants, and a semi-structured interview with building level administrators. After the data was transcribed, organized, coded, and analyzed, significant statements were found and themes identified. In Chapter Four, the themes were reported and reported in detail, along with the composite textural, composite and composite textural analysis. The narrative in chapter four discussed the lived experiences of the nine participants.

In this chapter, a brief summary of the findings will be presented followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and relevant literature. In this chapter I will discuss the implications of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, and finally recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

An analysis of the data identified multiple themes that directly related to the academic success of ELLs: (a) specialized programs, (b) differentiation, (c) hands on learning, (d) high expectations, (e) respect for home culture, (f) bilingual staff and translators, (g) community, (h) safety, (i) language barrier, (j) low schooled in native language, (k) lack of experiences.

The first research question sought to determine and understand teaching strategies that administrators, as well as teachers, perceive to have the most positive impact on student learning in regards to ELLs. The data analysis revealed the usage of two specialized programs, SIOP and Literacy Collaborative. Throughout the focus group and interview sessions it became very clear that SIOP and Literacy Collaborative provided a framework for the teachers to utilize in all subject areas. These two programs also helped to provide differentiation and hands on learning for all students. The fluidity of Literacy Collaborative allows students to move up or down within their groups based on their individual needs.

Research question number two investigated how the culture of the classroom and school impacted the academic success of ELLs. Throughout our conversations it became very clear that the school culture is one in which every child can learn, regardless of limitations. This culture stretched into the classrooms and created a classroom community that incorporated students' home cultures as well as the school culture to create collaborative classrooms in which all students felt respected. This helped the students feel comfortable in their surroundings and allowed them to learn from one another as well as their teachers.

Research question number three focused on the administrators perceptions of obstacles that hinder the academic success of ELL students. The overwhelming obstacle that the ELLs face is the language barrier. Even though Brown Elementary has bilingual teachers and staff there are still many languages that are represented within the school.

Discussion and Implications Related to the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study included the works of Krashen (1985, 1994), Vygotsky (1981, 1986), and Chomsky (1976, 1980). The framework is included here to

demonstrate the connections between theories that have been utilized throughout education and their implications when working with ELLs, as well as other students. The following will provide more details regarding the three theories, as well as how the data collected during the focus groups, interviews, and video observations supports the findings of these theories.

The theoretical framework for this research study was comprised of three theories that work together, as well as stand-alone. The first theory used was Krashen's (1985, 1994) second language acquisition theory (SLA). According to Juffs (2011) second language acquisition investigates the abilities of children and adults to affectively acquire a second language. SLA has a direct impact on how ELL and immigrant students acquire the English language while attempting to acquire their academic knowledge. The teachers at Brown Elementary have the task of helping ELLs acquire second languages on a daily basis. The strategies that they utilize will help other schools begin closing the language gap, while helping students reach their full potential.

Along with SLA, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was also used as a framework of this study. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) discusses that socioculturalism is the philosophical approach which assists in understanding how individuals learn and behave in social contexts. All ELL and immigrant students face the difficulties of entering a new culture and therefore need the assistance of others from the same cultural background. The social setting that school provides for ELLs allows them the opportunity to learn from their peers, as well as their teachers. The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary work diligently to create communities in their classrooms that allow the students opportunities to socialize and learn from one another.

The final theory utilized was Chomsky's nativist theory. Nativist theory discusses the innate ability that everyone is able to learn a new language (Chomsky, 1976, 1980). Coldwell

(2006) continues the discussion of language acquisition by stating that Language Acquisition Devices that all children have assist them in language learning and is activated by verbal stimulation found within the environment. This theory directly impacts second language learners and their academic success. By providing non English speakers the opportunity to work with a peer translator, the teachers are providing instruction in English, while the peer tutor translates to ensure understanding of the assignment. Overall, participants acknowledged the use of peer translators were effective for ELLs.

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second language acquisition theory looks at all the theories related to, and in conjunction with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Krashen's (1985, 1994) theory states that second language acquisition is language that is understandable to the learner although just outside the realm of current linguistic abilities of learners (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). SLA is a scaffolded learning process in which students acquire the second language by receiving comprehensible messages through the use of various strategies, pictures, graphic organizers and other teaching strategies (Ariza & Hancock, 2003).

The teacher participants work directly with students that are at various stages of their second language acquisition. Some students are at the beginning stages and know little English. These students require more rigorous instruction and also benefit from the use of labeling in dual languages. While the state of Georgia requires all instruction to be in English, the teachers have labeled various items in their classrooms with the English words as well as the Spanish, or other necessary languages, to help the students learn the translations.

Three of the study participants are bilingual. This allows them the opportunity to empathize with the students that are in the process of learning a new language. According to

Van der Wait (2003) the beliefs that a teacher holds in regards to SLA will have a tremendous impact on the type of instruction used in the classroom. The teachers at Brown Elementary that are not bilingual have developed a greater respect for their students and families as they have watched them struggle to learn a new language. They have helped their students through the process of SLA by providing scaffolded instruction, realia (real life objects), and large amounts of visual aids, and hands on learning. The participants stated that they felt these strategies are crucial for acquiring the English Language, but also for the academic language necessary for them to be successful in school.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1981, 1986) sociocultural theory is an approach that assists in the understanding of how individuals learn and behave within social contexts (McInerney, et al., 2011). The sociocultural philosophy explores how social, contextual and individual issues can impact the human activities of behavior and learning (McInerney, et al., 2011). In addition to the social aspect of this theory, it also examines the culture of the learning environment and the students. According to Miller (2011) culture cannot be separated from the mind, and culture can influence and shape the learning process for children.

The teacher participants expressed that a majority of the learning that takes place is done using groups. This provides the students the ability to work together, and learn from one another. The teachers also utilize peer tutoring, or buddies, to help the students gain knowledge. By allowing the students to work in a social context they are able to develop consciousness and behavior, while gaining academic knowledge.

Culture is evident throughout Brown Elementary School. The teacher participants expressed that the cultures of the students and families plays a critical role in instruction and

learning. The teachers work hard to create a classroom culture that incorporates home cultures with school cultures. Overall the participants discussed the value of binders that include, information regarding the students' native culture, language, educational background, and teaching strategies for the teachers to use with the students. These notebooks are used in the classroom so that teachers can gain a deeper understanding of the students' native culture and what to expect in regards to behaviors. When creating groups within the classrooms many teachers try to pair students with those of similar backgrounds to help build social context.

Chomsky's Nativist Theory

Chomsky (1976, 1980) stated that humans are born with an innate system name Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that assists language learning and is enacted by verbal stimulation found within the child's environment. According to nativist theory children need to encounter the input language within a limited number of examples in order to arrive at the necessary language rules (Abbeduto & Bourdreau, 2004). When acquiring a second language children already possess the implicit knowledge of common properties of a language. This knowledge will assist the child in making necessary connections between their native language and their second language (Abbeduto & Bourdreau, 2004). Hawkins (2007) discovered that everyone has a natural ability that allows them to learn new languages when they receive exposure to the new language.

The teacher participants are required to teach in English. Georgia does not permit bilingual instruction. However, the teachers at Brown Elementary have labels in their classrooms in dual languages. This helps students build bridges between their native language and their new language. Many teachers also have bilingual books that allow students to see the story in different languages.

Dr. Gray stated that many students come to school having never been exposed to the English language (Semi-structured Interview, May 2015). The area in which Brown Elementary is located is largely Hispanic. They have Spanish doctors, newspapers, television, and radio. Since most families speak Spanish in the home it is entirely possible that the students are exposed very little to the English language prior to entering preschool. The preschool teachers have the difficult task of helping expose the students to the English language. They do so through the use of books, realia, and hands on learning. The ESOL teachers also provide intense instruction in English. This helps to provide the students with an extra boost of language learning while allowing them a chance to work in small groups to build social and cultural interactions with other students who speak the same language.

Discussion and Implications Related to the Literature

When reviewing the relevant literature for this study, four different themes were identified that mirrored the themes identified during the data analysis: (a) effective strategies for teaching ELLs, (b) challenges regarding the education of ELLs, (c) cultural aspects of educating ELLs, (d) the role of administrators in the education of ELLs. The participants addressed all four of these themes during the course of the semi-structured interview and focus group sessions. Below is a description of how the themes that were identified during the data analysis match those identified during the review of literature.

Effective Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

During the semi-structured interview (2015) Dr. Gray stated, “There is no magic bullet, it’s hard work and you have to do it with fidelity, all the time you have to be really invested in the resources”. Throughout the data analysis effective teaching strategies was a very common

theme. The data analysis revealed that the participants used specialized programs such as SIOP, Literacy Collaborative, and Reading Recovery to teach their students. In addition the teachers also utilize a great deal of hands-on-learning and conversations with their students.

Specialized programs such as SIOP, Literacy Collaborative, and Reading Recovery, provide teachers with a framework and strategies that benefit all students, not just ELLs. This provides quality instruction and makes the information accessible for all students. SIOP combines good teaching practices with instruction that has been specially designed to meet the educational and linguistic needs of ELLs (Hanson-Thomas, 2008). Dr. Gray stated that Literacy Collaborative and Reading Recovery are both designed to be instructional frameworks that help teachers determine the literacy needs of their students, while allowing the students to move fluidly within their groups based on their learning needs (Semi-structured interview, May 2015).

Along with specialized programs another theme that was identified in the data analysis was hands-on-learning. The participants stated that they utilize a museum model in which the students participate in different projects and then the work is displayed for parents and other students to see (Focus Group Session, May 2015). This type of learning allows the students to demonstrate their learning through various methods and provides them the opportunity to share their learning, thus boosting self-esteem.

Another type of hands on learning that is utilized at Brown Elementary is STEM. The teachers and community members have worked hard to provide the students with STEM labs, a greenhouse, and an orchard. According to Ku (2013) STEM engages students in discussions to seek definitions of the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math separately and then use that knowledge in other areas. STEM also allows students the opportunity to think outside the box and seek new ways to find answers (Ku, 2013).

Grant and Sleeter (2007) state that interactive classrooms are highly effective for ELLs. The interactions that the students have allow them the opportunity to communicate with one another while gaining knowledge. Teacher participants discussed that they utilize buddies and peer tutoring. They have found this to be very effective. If the students are non-speakers this provides them opportunities to have the content translated by their peers, while allowing them to hear them in both languages. Peggy stated, “The students love learning and being the teacher” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Differentiation of learning plays a critical role in the education of ELLs and was also an identified theme during the data analysis of this study. Watts-Taffe, et al (2012) states that differentiating instruction demonstrates a respect for student diversity. The overall goal of differentiation is to allow all students access to the curriculum, by providing various avenues, which are tailored to the students’ needs (Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012). Throughout the videotaped observations, as well as the focus group sessions the teacher participants demonstrated and discussed the various ways that they utilized differentiated instruction within their classrooms. When discussing some of the specialized programs being used at Brown Elementary, Peggy stated that they use flexible groups in reading and writing and that instruction is individualized based on enhancing and reinforcing the needs that might be present (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Challenges Regarding the Education of English Language Learners

According to Dasilva-Iddings and Rose (2012) within the past 15 years the enrollment rates of Hispanic school age students has grown at a faster rate than those of monolingual students. These ELLs bring a variety of challenges into the classroom. These challenges can

include language barriers, being low schooled in their native languages, and lacking real world experiences.

I identified language-barrier as a theme during the data-analysis process and according to Lee (2012) the language barrier creates difficulty for not only the students, but the teachers as well. ELLs develop social English quickly, however they need four to seven years to develop the academic language that is necessary to graduate from high school with the traditional four year time frame (Lee, 2012). Stephanie stated “The language barrier is hard on them when they first come. And their parents can’t help at home” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). The language barrier extends beyond basic conversations with teachers and staff in the school. The language barrier affects the academic language as well. Peggy stated:

“Academic language is difficult. Even some simple words that we assume all children would know in English they may not have ever heard. Sometimes we draw our own conclusions or own assumptions on what we think that they should know but maybe they don’t” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Another obstacle that was identified is the students’ lack of experiences. Many immigrant students come from families that are migrant farmers. These students may not have the opportunities to visit museums or go on vacations. According to Nunez and Gildersleeve (2014) migrant students’ struggles with education exist in that they are limited in educational and real world opportunities. Jenny stated “Trying to help the students find something in their culture that can relate to what they are learning in another culture. It’s sometimes hard to connect it to their lives and connect it to their home life and their community and everything. That’s a big challenge” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

The faculty and staff at Brown Elementary have worked hard to help create real world experience for their students to aid in their learning. Maria stated “We try to think about designing experiences as a school that’s where our work is and we have been working on that to provide those experiences that they may not get just at home” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Along with the help of teachers and community leaders the students at Brown Elementary have the ability to open bank accounts, visit museums, and take multiple field trips to enhance their learning.

Cultural Aspects of Educating English Language Learners

According to Zhu, Devos, and Li (2011) culture influences the social behaviors, interests and interactions with others. When immigrant students enter the schools they bring with them their native language and their native cultures. Even though many of the students discussed by the participants are born in the United States, many of them have little exposure to American cultures. They are immersed in the native cultures and languages of their home culture. Many teachers have difficulty combining the cultures of the immigrant students with the cultures of the other students in the classroom. During the focus group session and interviews the themes that were identified were specialized programs, language barrier, lack of experiences, community, parental involvement, and the use of translators or bilingual staff.

Many times when immigrant students enter the public school system they may reject their home cultures in an attempt to fit into the cultural norms (Baecher et al., 2012). Dr. Grey stated “When you lose your language you lose a huge chunk of your culture and who you are” (Semi-Structured Interview, May 2015). The teachers and staff at Brown Elementary work hard to ensure that the home cultures of their students are respected. They provide their students

opportunities to share how they celebrate various holidays at home and allow the students to share their traditions in the classroom.

Parental involvement plays a critical role in all school systems. When there is effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities schools can develop mutual understandings and partnerships that ultimately benefit the students and help them reach their academic potential (Good, et al., 2010). Tracy shared “Parent involvement activities and assignments are sent home so the families are able to work together to create something, knowing that we are going to display it for the families and kids to see and be recognized” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). The efforts of the faculty and staff has paid off. The parents have hosted lunches for the teachers and are always in the school willing to help and learn alongside their children.

Another theme identified during the data analysis was the importance of having a bilingual staff or using translators. For schools to demonstrate respect for cultures and education of ELLs is to establish connections with the families (Will, 1986). The language barrier can make this very difficult for many teachers. Tracy stated, “We’re going to do whatever, we can or have to do in order to make sure we have good communication with the families” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Many of the teachers at the school are bilingual and the secretaries are also bilingual. This creates a welcoming environment for the parents when they come into the school.

In addition to the bilingual staff, Brown Elementary also utilizes translators. According to Lee (2012) teachers need to build on students’ backgrounds and languages instead of disregarding their languages and cultures. Peggy stated, “All documents are sent home in Spanish and English” (Focus Group Session, May 2015). This helps the parents that are unable

to read documents in English to still access the information. Translators are also provided during parent conferences in order to help the parents feel a level of comfort and that they are an important part of their child's education.

Community plays a crucial role in the education of the students at Brown Elementary School. Goodlad's pedagogy (as noted by Seo & Hoover, 2009) poses that all educators have the responsibility to provide a learning environment that values each student, while encouraging learning and compensating for student interest, developmental needs and overall wellbeing. Teacher participants discussed creating classroom communities to promote learning among the students. When discussing classroom communities Kathy stated, "Classroom communities teach social skills and how to interact with students and other adults. It gives them confidence and wanting to share what they are learning" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). In addition to promoting learning the classroom communities provide students with the opportunities to gain social English as well as work on their academic language.

The Role of Administrators in the Education of English Language Learners

Diligent school leaders constantly endeavor to lead their schools, teachers, and students to success (Msila, 2013). When discussing the success of Brown Elementary, Stephanie stated, "Well, I really think it has to come from the top down" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). While Dr. Martin stated that the success of their students can be acquired from the bottom up (Focus Group Session, May 2015). Dr. Martin stated, "One thing I've learned from Dr. Grey is to let teachers take the lead. I don't feel that I have a need to be the person that has every detail mapped out in my brain" (Semi-Structured Interview, May 2015).

Administrators hold a position of influence over the areas that are concerned with the teaching and learning process (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). When discussing the encouragement or

discouragement of incorporating cultures into the classroom, Peggy stated, “Oh, it’s highly encouraged. Our administration is wonderful towards it” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Msila (2013) explains that if school leaders want to reshape the culture of their school they need to evaluate the climate within their school. Dr. Martin and Dr. Grey have worked hard to create an inviting culture within their school. Their goal is for parents to feel welcome to come in and speak to the teachers and be actively involved in their child’s education. The administrators at Brown Elementary are highly respected by their teachers. Kathy stated, “Our administrators are fabulous! I never want to leave” (Focus Group Session, May 2015).

Implications of the Study

Immigrant students are the fastest-growing student population in United States schools today, with over half of them that do not speak English fluently and receive the label of English Language Learners (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Due to this rapid growth it is more important that teachers and administrators have strategies and skills necessary to help these students reach their full academic potential. Based on personal experience in the school setting the academic rigor that has been imposed with a state mandated curriculum has added more stress to the teachers.

Throughout the study one concept that I found interesting was the specialized programs. SIOP, and Literacy Collaborative are programs that can provide teachers with strategies that are effective for all students, not just English Language Learners. With the push for differentiation in the schools these two programs provide teachers the ability and flexibility to adjust the content for their students based on their academic needs. The programs also allow the students to move within their groups so that they do not get bored and become a behavior issue.

Another theme that was discovered in the literature is the importance of stable leadership within the school. The administrators at Brown Elementary have been in their positions for over 10 years, they were also administrators at other schools prior to their current assignments. This stability has allowed the administrators to learn the demographics of the school and how to place educators within their school who can meet the needs of the students and their families. The stability has also allowed them the opportunities to implement different programs with fidelity to determine their effectiveness. The administrators have been able to establish relationships that demonstrate great respect between the administrators and the teachers. It was very evident during the discussions with the participants that the teachers and administrators have a great deal of respect for one another and are willing to do whatever is necessary to help students reach their full academic potential.

A third theme of the data analysis that I found crucial to the success of Brown Elementary School is the unwavering respect for the culture of the students and their families. The teachers and staff do not attempt to force the students to give up their native cultures. They do everything they can to incorporate the students' cultures into the culture of the school. As Kathy stated during the focus group session, "You can learn a great deal from allowing the students the opportunity to talk" (Focus Group Session, May 2015). This is true of their academic learning and just getting to know the students. By allowing the students to talk and have those conversations the teachers are demonstrating a respect for the students as individuals and not just bodies in a classroom. By allowing them to share their native cultures the students feel valued and are more willing to participate in class and reach their academic potential.

A fourth theme of the data analysis that was accountable to the success of Brown Elementary are the high expectations that have been set forth by the administrators. The belief

that every child can learn regardless of language barrier or disability, encourages the children to try harder. The teachers and staff are empathetic to the needs of the students and work hard to help the students with whatever academic needs they have. However, they believe that with the right support and attitude the children can overcome their limitations and become successful.

Finally, the amount of community and parental involvement that can be found at Brown Elementary School attributes to the success of the school as well as the students. Being an inner city school, the administrators and teachers have worked very hard to make their school a safe place within the community. Their goal is for the parents to see the school as a safe place for them and their children. By creating this welcoming environment the parents have been able to feel comfortable coming in and being part of the school. Family nights allow the students an opportunity to share their learning with their families and friends, while allowing the parents to feel like they are a major part of their child's education. The community partnerships that the administrators and teachers have worked so hard to obtain have provided the students with learning opportunities they may not otherwise be able to receive. Through the use of community partners they have been able to provide their students with field trips, chances to open bank accounts, and ways to incorporate STEM lessons into their education.

Limitations

According to Sumerson (2013) every study has limitations, these can be features that threaten the validity or quality of the study. In this study several limitations existed. First, the sample size of nine participants was small. Though this sample size was acceptable for the methodology utilized, it provided a very small view of how all the teachers at Brown Elementary felt in regards to the questions asked during the focus group session. Additionally the study was

limited to a few grade levels. The thoughts and feelings of teachers in Kindergarten, third, and fifth grades were represented. Due to the number of participants I was not able to determine the perceptions of teachers in all grade levels.

Another limitation of the study is that all of the teachers at Brown Elementary school hold ESOL certifications. Due to the number of immigrant students within the school system, ESOL certification is provided to all teachers. This provides them with extra training that many other teachers may not be able to receive.

A third limitation of this study is the demographics of Brown Elementary School. Due to the location of the school, 97% of the students are immigrant or speak languages other than English in the home. Due to these demographics, administrators and teachers have had to learn creative ways to reach their students and their families. Schools with a smaller population of ELLs may not have adequate resources, and may not have the need to alter their schools' culture completely.

A final limitation of this study is the transient population of many schools. Many ELLs fall under the category of transient student as well as ELL student. These students move from school to school as their parents travel for work. While this phenomenon can be found in most areas, it is more common in agricultural regions. These students might be making great progress in school, then move in the middle of the school year due to the seasonal changes. The issues come in when the schools all teach differently. Even though school curriculum is driven by the state mandated curriculum, schools still utilize different programs and teaching styles. These changes force the students to learn new strategies, as well as a new language. Brown Elementary does not currently face a transient problem. The vast majority of students stay at Brown from preschool through fifth grade. Schools that have a larger transient population may not have the

same results as Brown Elementary, nor have access to the same programs that are utilized at Brown.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several areas should be considered for future research. Because many schools in rural areas do not have such a large ELL population, one area of future research would be to determine how those schools close the achievement gap between ELLs and other students. The teacher participants in this study lack the experiences of teaching students in schools with a lower ELL population.

A second area for future research would be to look at the effectiveness of SIOP and Literacy Collaborative in schools with a mixed diversity of students. The participants have found the programs to be effective for their students and provide the flexibility that their students need. However, the limitation of the demographics of the school shows only the effectiveness in a setting with a large population of ELLs. Future research could examine the effectiveness of the programs individually, as well as when used in conjunction with one another.

Parental involvement plays a large role in the successful education of the ELLs at Brown Elementary. Teacher participants attributed a great deal of the parental involvement to the success of their family night programs. A third recommendation for future research would be to examine the effectiveness of family night/PTA meetings to see if the format of the family night contributes to the success of the endeavor and it leading to increased parental involvement. The teacher participants stated that when the format of their family nights shifted from an academic focus to a showcase of student work and achievement, they noticed that their family nights

became standing room only. Future research could determine if this works in schools with a larger diversity, or in schools with very little parental involvement.

Finally, future research could be conducted to determine the strategies used and the academic success of ELLs in schools that have a smaller population of ELLs. The strategies that have been found to be successful at Brown Elementary may not prove to be as successful in settings with fewer ELLs. These schools may have determined other teaching strategies that have worked within their school. As noted by study participants there is no magic way to teach ELLs. Other schools may have found various strategies or teaching methods that are as effective in helping ELLs achieve their academic success. Future research could reveal that the strategies used by Brown may or may not be effective when used in an effort to close the achievement gap between ELLs and monolingual students.

Summary

Using Mann's second language acquisition theory, Vygotsky's socioculturalism, and Chomsky's nativist theory as a theoretical framework, this study sought to investigate effective teaching practices for English Language Learners. Through the use of videotaped observations, focus group sessions, and semi-structured interviews, an analysis of the data revealed several significant findings. First, specialized programs and/or services are used to help ELLs reach their full academic potential. Through the use of SIOP and Literacy Collaborative teachers are provided with a framework of best practices strategies that they can utilize to help their students meet their academic needs.

In addition to the specialized programs the teachers also provided opportunities to learn through groups and buddies. This allowed for differentiation of the material being presented and

allowed the children opportunities for conversation. Through the use of the flexible groups the children can change groups as their academic needs change. The time allowed for conversations provides the students the opportunity to build their conversational English as well as the chance to work on building their academic language. Also by allowing the children a chance to have conversations, teachers were able to hear their learning instead of just seeing the evidence on paper.

One major finding in regards to research question number one were the high expectations that the administrators and teachers have for their students. When students are held to higher expectations they will strive to meet those expectations. However, when the attitude of the school is that the students are pitiful due to the barriers they must overcome, they will see this as a crutch and will not work as hard to meet the expectations that have been set for them. The participants in the study have the expectation that all students can learn regardless of barriers or disabilities. They express this expectation to their students and work very hard to help their students in whatever way necessary to meet that expectation.

When addressing the cultural aspects of working with ELLs, one finding was home cultures and parental involvement for the families. It is important for the parents to feel that they are a valuable piece of their child's education. By working hard to make the parents feel comfortable and respecting the home cultures of the parents and students, the participants have been able to establish a relationship between the school and the parents. This relationship has helped the students achieve their academic potential and also helped the parents, which speak little to no English, learn a new language and ways to help their children at home.

Another finding of the study that attributes to the academic success of ELLs is the fact that Brown Elementary utilizes translators and has several members of their staff that are

bilingual. Those that are bilingual have the ability to empathize with the students that are going through a second language acquisition. They understand the difficulties that these students are facing on a daily basis and are able to help them through the transition. The bilingual staff also helps to provide another level of comfort for the parents. When they walk in the school building they are greeted by someone who speaks their language and can easily help them with their needs. Translators help to bridge the language gap between monolingual teachers and the parents. When parent conferences are scheduled with families that do not speak English, the administrators provide a translator to assist in the conference. Translators are also utilized to assist with the translation of documents that need to be sent home. All documents are sent home in Spanish and English so that parents have access to the information.

Community within the classroom, and community outreach are major findings of this study. Being in a low socioeconomic area community outreach has helped to provide the students with experiences they may not otherwise have. The community outreach has also helped to provide STEM materials and labs for their students. In addition to community outreach, community within the school and classrooms is just as important. The teachers have worked very hard to create classroom communities that celebrate the diverse cultures of their students and help to merge the cultures with the American culture. Building the classroom communities allows the students the ability to grow socially and academically.

When working with ELLs, no matter if it is a large or a small population, there will always be obstacles. One major finding in the way of obstacles is the language barrier. Even though this seems an obvious barrier when referring to ELLs, it goes beyond being able to communicate. The language barrier extends to academic language as well. Teachers who are not bilingual face the difficulty of having conversations with their students who don't speak

English. However, the participants have been able to provide their non-English speaking students with buddies who can assist them with the translations. As the students begin working together they work with guidelines that they must start incorporating English into their conversations. Teacher participants expressed that by allowing the students to work with buddies and translators they are able to make the transition to the English language at a faster pace.

The lack of academic backgrounds that the children possess was yet another major finding of the study. Many of the students that enter the school from another country are low schooled in their native language. This can cause difficulty for those students to reach their academic potential. The teachers are faced with an even more difficult challenge of helping the students get on grade level. When students are low schooled in their native language it is also safe to presume that the parents are also low schooled. This prevents the parents from helping their students with their school work at home. In turn, the students have to rely on older siblings or peers to help them with any school work that they may not understand or cannot accomplish independently.

A final finding of the study is the lack of experiences that ELLs have. This is not just a problem for ELLs, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds also face the challenge of not having many experiences outside of school. Without these experiences the students have very little background knowledge and have difficulty writing or understanding what they have read. It is crucial to the students' success that they are allotted opportunities to gain experiences. Unfortunately this burden falls on the school systems to provide learning experiences for these students. The faculty and staff at Brown Elementary have worked hard to provide these experiences for their students. They provide field trips, and various experiences for their

students. These opportunities help to broaden the experiences and the background knowledge of students.

As I listened to the participants share their experiences of working with ELLs, I was overwhelmed with excitement to begin implementing their strategies within my own classroom. I gained a great deal of knowledge of how to help my students achieve their academic potential. While I am not able to implement all the aspects of Literacy Collaborative, as it is a purchased program, I am able to implement strategies from the SIOP program. Working in a school with a large ELL population I was able to see how each of the strategies and methods that were discussed by the study participants can be beneficial to my students. The knowledge I have gained from this research study will be shared with my building level administrators in hopes that we can begin increasing our parental involvement, community outreach, and closing the achievement gap between our ELLs and our monolingual students.

The knowledge I gained from conducting this research study has already begun to impact my own teaching practices. During the focus group session the participants discussed using parent projects in an effort to showcase students and their families. Since concluding the study I have adopted the use of these parent projects within my own classroom. The first few were my class only, after other teachers began to see the excitement from the students as they hung their family projects in the hallway, they began participating in the projects as well. It is my sincere hope that small project will begin spreading throughout the school, and our parents will begin to see how valuable they are to their child's education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Consent Forms

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
2/10/15 to 2/9/16
Protocol # 2020.021015

ADMINISTRATOR PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Qualitative Phenomenological Study Exploring Instructional Practices that Contribute to
Academic Success for Public Elementary School English Language Learners
Mechelle M. Champion
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of effective instructional practices for English Language Learners. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experience, and success in working with ELLs. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Mechelle M. Champion, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore instructional practices that contribute to the academic success of ELLs. This study seeks to determine the teaching strategies that teachers and administrators feel have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students. The study also seeks to explore the school and classroom cultures, and how they influence academic success of ELLs. And finally the study seeks to determine any obstacles that administrators feel will hinder the academic success of ELLs within a public school system.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in an audio recorded semi-structured interview, the interview should last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. During the interview you will be asked questions concerning instructional practices, obstacles faced by ELL students, and other questions pertaining to the education of ELLs.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study has minimal risk. The risks involved with this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to society are that you will be able to provide other educators with the skill set, strategies, and information necessary to assist ELLs in reaching their full academic potential. Once students reach their academic potential they will be able to enter college or a career with confidence in knowing that their education was substantial and that they are prepared. Your participation will also assist administrators that may be unfamiliar with how to best incorporate the needs of ELLs within their school. The information provided during the interview will assist future administrators to ensure that their teachers and staff are equipped with the knowledge and strategies necessary to help ELLs reach their full academic potential.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
2/10/15 to 2/9/16
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The benefits to society are that you will be able to provide other educators with the skill set, strategies, and information necessary to assist ELLs in reaching their full academic potential. Once students reach their academic potential they will be able to enter college or a career with confidence in knowing that their education was substantial and that they are prepared. Your participation will also assist administrators that may be unfamiliar with how to best incorporate the needs of ELLs within their school. The information provided during the interview will assist future administrators to ensure that their teachers and staff are equipped with the knowledge and strategies necessary to help ELLs reach their full academic potential.

Appendix B: Blank Field Notes Page

Field Notes Observation Form (Videotaped Lessons)

Date:

Time:

Setting:

Teacher Name:

Observation #:

Lens:

Thick description of the Classroom Environment:

Observations of the Classroom Environment:

Thick description of the classroom culture:

Observations of the classroom culture:

Student/student interactions:

Student/teacher interactions:

Instructional Strategies utilized during the lesson:

Differentiation utilized during the lesson:

Appendix C: Focus Group Prompts

- 1) Research conducted by Friend, Most and McCrary (2009) discusses the importance of school and classroom cultures on the academic success of students. Thinking about the culture of your school, how would you say that culture impacts the academic success of your students?
- 2) Karabenick and Noda (2004) stated that when teachers possess the knowledge of how to integrate students' cultures into the curriculum, this can lead to reduced apprehension towards teaching ELLs. Thinking about the culture of your classroom, how have you incorporated the cultures of your students into your classroom?
- 3) Thinking about the school culture, what positive and/or negative impacts would you say it has on the academic success of your ELLs?
- 4) Thinking about your individual classroom cultures, what positive and/or negative impacts would you say it has on the academic success of your ELLs?
- 5) Rodriquez, Ringler, O'Neal and Bunn (2009) found that many teachers complain that not having adequate skills for teaching ELLs was their biggest challenge. Thinking about teaching your ELLs, what would you say is your biggest challenge in working with the students? Why do you feel that way?
- 6) Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that successful school leadership has the power to positively change the mindsets of teachers and staff. How do your building level administrators encourage/discourage the incorporation of ELL's cultures into the school?
- 7) Nevarez-La Torre (2011) states that it is critical for mainstream educators to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to effectively teach ELLs. Is professional development in the area of educating ELLs a priority within your school? If so what types of things

does the professional development incorporate? If not, what would you like to see in the form of professional development?

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Research conducted by Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that building level administrators set the tone for their teachers in regards to valuing or devaluing cultural and linguistic differences of ELLs. What do you feel you have done within your own building to set the tone for teachers in regards to English Language Learners?
2. Lewis, Maerten-Rivera, Adamson, and Lee (2011) found that when educating ELLs teacher face many challenges such as not possessing adequate instructional strategies, and linguistic or cultural differences of the students. What additional resources do you feel would positively impact the academic success of ELL students in your school? What can be done to incorporate these resources into your school?
3. Sleeter (2008) discovered that teachers desire to provide a democratic learning environment that will encompass the needs of all students, however, they are often forced to submit to the pressures of covering the necessary material. What are your perceptions of obstacles that prevent ELLs' academic success?
4. According to research conducted by Thoeharis and O'Toole (2011) one critical attribute of an effective school when it comes to educating ELLs is strong school leadership. Based on Standardized testing data for your school the majority of ELLs either meet or exceed standards on the CRCT tests. In your opinion what have you done and/or incorporated within your school to help your ELLs be so successful?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about ELLs, instructional strategies for ELLs, or academic success of ELLs?

Appendix E: Permission to Conduct Research



February 3, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

Mechelle Champion has been granted permission [redacted] Schools and [redacted] School to conduct research at [redacted] School. This permission includes recruiting participants, videoing three lessons by participants, and conducting semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions as outlined in Liberty University's IRB documents.

Please feel free to contact me if there are any questions.

Sincerely,

1

[redacted]
Lisa M. Goode, Ed.D.
Principal

Appendix F: Organization of Themes

Research Question #1: What teaching strategies do administrators and teachers perceive to have the most positive impact on learning for ELL students?

Strategies	Number of times occurred throughout interviews, observations, and focus groups	Themes
SIOP – Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol	23	Specialized programs and or services that the school district uses as a whole. All teachers are ESOL Endorsed to have additional strategies.
Literacy Collaborative	22	
Reading Recovery	13	
ESOL Endorsement	15	
Groups	17	Teachers use a lot of differentiation between groups, styles of teaching, and flexibility within their classrooms.
Buddies	11	
Differentiation	17	
Conversation	17	Teachers use STEM, Museum Models, Projects, and Communication in small groups and whole group for teaching purposes. They allow for hands on learning each chance they get.
Hands on Learning	46	
High Expectations	29	Throughout the school the teachers and administrators have set high expectations for academics as well as behavior. The teachers are very clear about their expectations and know that every child can learn.

Appendix G: Teacher Survey

Name:

What is your current position?

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

How many years have you been teaching in the Dalton City School System?

On average how many English Language Learners do you work with on a daily basis?

Do you currently hold ESOL certification?

Have you found some teaching strategies to be more effective than others when working with English Language Learners? If so, what strategies have you found to be most effective?

Would you be willing to participate in a research study investigating effective teaching strategies for English Language Learners?

Appendix H: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 10, 2015

Mechelle Marie Champion
 IRB Approval 2020.021015: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Exploring Instructional Practices That Contribute to Academic Success for Public Elementary School English Language Learners

Dear Mechelle,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Fernanda Garzon, Psy.D.
 Professor, IRB Chair
 Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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