All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects

Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects

2013

Measuring Success for English Language Learners from a Multi-dimensional Perspective

Randy Haley
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Measuring Success for English Language Learners

from a Multi-Dimensional Perspective

By

Randy D. Haley

This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

the Educational Doctorate Degree

in Educational Leadership

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

June 2013

Date: June 24, 2013

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

_____

Dr. Julie Carlson, Advisor

_____

Dr. Nancy Drescher, Committee Member

_____

Dr. Teresa Wallace, Committee Member

Abstract

This research study used a sequential mixed methods design to examine the perceptions and assumptions of educators working with ELL students in Southwest Minnesota. The study employed a conceptual lens based in critical education research with the intention that the results can be used to transform ELL education and promote equality for ELL students. The study is grounded in a multi-dimensional perspective for measuring success which incorporates four main constructs: parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of belonging.

The participants in the study included building administrators and ELL teachers working in K-12 public schools in Southwest Minnesota. During the first phase of the study, the participants were invited to complete a survey in which they rated the degree of impact, challenge and success for a series of factors related to ELL achievement. The second phase of the research included in-depth interviews with seven of the participants. The educators participating in this study believed general education teachers do not have sufficient training and the skills necessary to provide quality education for ELL students. A key to success identified in the study is the personal connection between adult mentors and ELL students. Finally, the results supported the assumption that the four constructs utilized in the multi-dimensional perspective all have an important impact on ELL success.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and children who supported me during the writing of the paper. I thank them for sacrificing some of our family time, but most of all for their inspiration and love. In addition, I would like to express gratitude to each member of my examining committee for their time and effort, as well as the advice they offered during the writing of this dissertation. I would like to give a special thanks to my advisor, Julie Carlson, who guided me during this entire project. Without her advice and encouragement, this research study would not have been possible. Finally, I wish to thank the students in my classroom over the years who have taught me so much about language learning and the joy of bilingualism.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I

Introduction

Historically, the United States has been a diverse, multi-cultural society, and this reality has never been more evident than it is in public schools today. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2011) more than 5 million students in U.S. schools are identified with limited proficiency in English. This represents over ten percent of the total enrollment in public schools and continues to grow at a rapid rate. Federal law requires school districts to identify English Language Learners (ELL) and provide services to these students to increase their proficiency in English. Traditionally, ELL students have been highly concentrated in urban areas of a few states. Recent immigration patterns, however, have brought the challenge of educating ELL students to a wide-ranging area of the country (Capps, Fix, Ost, Passel, & Hill, 2005).

The demographics in many rural school districts have changed dramatically in recent years with respect to the population of ELL students. As a result of these changes, many schools and districts with little previous experience educating ELL students are now facing this new challenge. They often do not have the required resources, time and expertise needed to train teachers and transform their instructional programs to address the needs of this student population (Echevarria, Richards-Tutor, Chinn, & Ratleff, 2011; Ortiz & Pagan, 2009). This research study will examine the experience of educators in school communities in Southwest Minnesota as they strive to meet the needs of English Language Learners.

Background of the Research Problem

The number of English Language Learners (ELL) enrolled in U.S. schools has grown from just over 3.5 million in 1998 to more than five million in 2008 (NCELA, 2011). During this same time period, K-12 enrollment for the general school population increased by 7%, while ELL enrollment rose by 51%. These numbers show ELL enrollment is growing at a faster rate than general enrollment; consequently, school personnel can expect to see more and more ELL students in their classrooms. This trend in language diversity necessitates a transformation of the way schools educate and prepare students for success in a multi-cultural society.

Immigration trends in the United States are having a large impact on the number of ELL students in classrooms. Fortuny, Capps, Simms and Chaudry (2009) report 16.4 million children in the U.S. have at least one immigrant parent. This figure represents more than 1 out of every 5 children in the age group 0 to 17 and the numbers are growing. In 1990, children with one immigrant parent represented 13% of all children in the U.S. Moving forward to 2007, the proportion rose to 23%. This increase in immigration numbers, especially among children, demonstrates that schools can expect continued growth in the number of ELL students they serve.

Recent studies show that children of immigrants are dispersing throughout the country into areas that previously have not had large numbers. While states such as California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York and New Jersey continue to account for two thirds of all immigrants, large numbers of the population are spreading to new areas. For example, in the year 2000 in Minnesota, where this study will be conducted, there

were 49,000 students in grades PK to 5th classified as children of immigrants, representing 10% of the children in this age group. For students in grades 6th to 12th, there were 47,000 students representing 9% of the student population. These percentages have increased by 78% and 136% respectively since 1990 (Capps et al., 2005).

In addition to increasing numbers, children of immigrants have been shown to present other risk factors above and beyond their language proficiency. Children of immigrants are more likely to come from families with low socioeconomic status. They often come from homes where one or more of their parents do not have legal citizenship which affects their ability to have access to services. The parents of immigrant children tend to be limited in their own English proficiency and have lower educational levels in general which can affect their involvement in their children's education (Fortuny et al., 2009; Garcia, Jensen & Scribner, 2009). Combined with the challenges of learning a second language, these factors can place children at high-risk for learning challenges in school.

While not all children of immigrants are identified as ELL, the numbers do highlight the trend of cultural and language diversity in schools. Furthermore, they are a call to action for educators who aspire to provide a quality education for all students. There are some schools around the country that have produced impressive results (Montecel & Cortez, 2002), but overall the picture of ELL academic achievement in our country has not been promising.

The results from standardized tests show that there is a significant disparity in achievement levels between ELL students and their native English peers. The National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a nationally representative assessment administered on a periodic basis under the guidance of the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the NAEP is to measure the achievement level of U.S. students and allows for the comparison of results among states and various student populations. Fry (2007) compared the achievement of ELL students in math and reading to other student sub-groups including whites, blacks and Hispanics on the NAEP from 2005. The comparison revealed the ELL sub-group was the furthest behind performing substantially lower in math and reading compared to all the other sub-groups. In addition, this achievement gap between ELL students and their peers was larger in middle school than in elementary school. Fry notes that analyzing the declining scores from 4th to 8th grade is complex because ELL students do not form a stable sub-group. Some students move out of the group as they achieve English proficiency while other students move in to the group as new immigrants arrive to the U.S.

More recent analysis of reading achievement levels for ELL students on the 2009 NAEP revealed that the majority was not meeting basic proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Approximately two out of every three ELL students scored at the lowest category "below basic". Table 1.1 compares the percentage of students who scored at or above "basic" on the reading tests for ELL students and non-ELL students. Looking at the cumulative results for all states, there was a significant gap between the two groups of students. In the case of Minnesota, where this research study will be conducted, a similar disparity in test scores was observed.

Table 1.1

Reading Achievement Levels on National Assessment of Educational Progress 2009

	4th grade students at or above 'Basic'	8th grade students at or above 'Basic'
United States		
Not ELL	69%	76%
ELL	29%	25%
Minnesota		
Not ELL	73%	84%
ELL	30%	39%

The achievement gap can be studied further by analyzing graduation rates for

ELL students. The disparity in graduation rates among different ethnic groups is well

documented (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010); however, it is more difficult to

find complete and accurate data on ELL graduation rates (Ballantyne, Sanderman, &

Levy, 2008). The available data leads to the conclusion that ELL students are graduating

at a substantially lower rate than other groups of their peers. Zehr (2009a) pointed out

that even though NCLB requires states to report graduation rates for ELL students, the

actual rates in some states remain a mystery. In some cases, states do not report the rates

for the ELL sub-group and the accuracy of the rates for those who do report is

questionable. The temporary status of ELL students is a factor that affects how rates are calculated. There is debate among educators as to whether or not former ELL students should be included in the calculated rates. All of these factors contribute to the fact that there is not a complete and precise picture of ELL graduation rates in the country.

In a study of graduation rates in Texas urban school districts, McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Vasquez Heilig (2008) found that 80% of ELL students did not graduate high school within five years. In addition, they found that the high-stakes accountability system actually led to higher dropout rates for at-risk groups of students. Furthermore, as these low achieving students drop out of school, it gives a false impression of rising test scores and graduation rates. The study also questions whether the current accountability system actually encourages administrators to allow low achieving students to leave school to avoid negative consequences resulting from their poor academic performance.

Conceptual Lens

At the start of any research study, it is important to consider the conceptual lens through which the phenomenon will be studied. There are several paradigms of research theory which can act as the conceptual lens which guide the researcher throughout the study. Each paradigm offers a different system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs the research. Mertens (2010a) stated that paradigms "guide researchers in identification and clarification of their beliefs with regard to ethics, reality, knowledge and methodology" (p. 1). This transformative mixed-methods study employed a conceptual lens based on critical educational theory to explore the experience of ELL education from the perspective of educators.

Cohen, Morrison and Manion (2007) described critical educational research as an emerging paradigm that goes beyond the traditional positivist and interpretive frameworks. Researchers using a positivist lens attempt to objectively measure a particular phenomenon by identifying patterns which describe the relationship of variables. In contrast to the positivist perspective, a researcher applying an interpretive lens endeavors to understand and describe the phenomenon by interpreting the relationships among the actors. Critical educational research transcends these traditional paradigms by designing studies which produce knowledge that will not only objectively measure (positivist) or understand (interpretive) the phenomenon, but also aims to transform the situation being studied in order to promote social justice. To accomplish this transformation, critical educational research must take into account the political and ideological context of the relationship between school and society. By uncovering inequalities that exist in certain educational conditions, researchers can reveal how power structures in society are reproduced in schools and perpetuate those inequitable circumstances. The purpose of critical educational research is to contribute knowledge to the field of education which will lead to the emancipation of underserved groups of students.

Critical educational research finds its roots in critical theory, and therefore is heavily influenced by the work of Jurgen Habermas, considered to be one of the primary critical theorists. Habermas (1971) proposed that there are three types of knowledge-technical, practical and emancipatory. Technical knowledge is based in facts which can be proven through observation and measurement similar to a positivist perspective.

Practical knowledge is concerned with understanding and interpreting facts and can be associated with the interpretive paradigm. Critical educational research is grounded in the third type of knowledge described by Habermas, emancipatory knowledge. From this perspective the fundamental purpose of knowledge is to reveal and understand the inequities in society with the end goal of promoting social justice and individual freedom (Cohen, Morrison & Manion, 2007; Merriam, Baumgartner, & Caffarella, 2007).

Critical educational theory provides the conceptual lens through which the information in this research will be studied. By providing a better understanding of the phenomenon of educating ELL students, this research will contribute to the knowledge base needed to transform the experience of ELL students and promote social justice.

Research Problem

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experience of school districts in Southwest Minnesota in educating English Language Learners from the perspective of educators. The study utilized a mixed methods approach to identify and describe the key components which affect the success of English Language Learners (ELL) from a multi-dimensional perspective. The following questions directed the research:

R1: What factors including assumptions, expectations, and beliefs have the greatest impact on the achievement of ELL students in these districts?

R2: What are the most significant challenges faced by school districts in educating ELL students?

R3: What strategies implemented by schools have contributed to success for ELL students?

R4: How do educators view issues of equality and freedom in relation to educating ELL students?

Significance of the Study

The statistics cited earlier regarding the growing number of ELL students and immigration trends in our country show that educators can expect increasing numbers of ELL students in the coming years in places that may not have had as much experience with this population. As educators attempt to deal with the challenges of educating students whose native language is not English, it is important for researchers to study the experience of schools in order to improve the educational opportunities for ELL students (Cortez & Villareal, 2009). By conducting research which reveals a better understanding of the complexities involved in educating ELL students, the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to a more just and equitable education for ELL students.

The achievement gap between ELL students and their peers underscores the significance of the need to improve the quality of instruction for ELL students. In recent years, many rural school districts in Southwest Minnesota have experienced an influx of ELL students. Without a long history of ELL experience, these school communities are laboring to develop quality instructional programs to meet the needs of this growing population.

As school districts aim to meet federal requirements, educators are constantly seeking ways to improve their instructional methods to ensure that all students are able to

demonstrate academic proficiency on standardized tests. NCLB has obliged schools to focus their attention on student achievement as measured by standardized tests. This research study offers an alternative to this one-dimensional approach by examining ELL education from a multi-dimensional perspective to give a more complete interpretation of this complex phenomenon.

Delimitations

This study was limited to the experience of school districts and educators in Southwest Minnesota. It should not be assumed that the findings in this study can be generalized to the experience of all school districts. The researcher chose to explore Southwest Minnesota because this geographic region has experienced a rapid increase in the number of ELL students in recent years.

It is important to note that the constructs which form the basis for the multi-dimensional approach utilized in the study were selected because they are supported by research and represent the perspective from each stakeholder- the student, teacher, parent and school community. The operational definitions for each construct as they relate to ELL students were formulated based on best practice, as well as the researcher's experience working with ELL students. Although each of the constructs is supported by research, there may be additional factors which can be added to provide further understanding of how to measure success for ELL students.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terminology is commonly used when studying the education of English learners:

Bilingual education. The broad term given to a wide range of programs using some degree of native language instruction to teach English Language Learners. The goal of these programs can vary from those that focus on developing bilingual literacy to those that emphasize rapid transition to English (Crawford, 2004).

Dual language. An academic program where the goal is for students to fully develop conversational and academic proficiency in two languages (Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2005).

English Language Learner (ELL). Identification commonly used by educators for a student who has not developed proficiency in English (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006).

English as a Second Language (ESL). Refers to a variety of programs where ELL students are immersed in all-English instruction from the beginning. Programs include pull-out ESL, content ESL and sheltered English. In all these programs instruction is exclusively in English with the goal to develop literacy and to learn to communicate in English (Freeman et al., 2005).

Language minority. Describes a student whose first language is other than English, regardless of their current proficiency in English (Garcia et al., 2009).

Limited English Proficient (LEP). Classification used in federal legislation to refer to students who are not proficient in English (Echevarria et al., 2006).

L1 and L2. L1 refers to a student's first language; usually the language spoken in their home and L2 refers to a second language the student has learned or are in the

process of learning; in the case of ELL students, L2 is English (Genesse,

Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2005).

Parental involvement. Construct based on the level of participation by parents in

their children's education at home and school.

Quality instruction. The basis for this construct is derived from the research in a

number of teacher-related factors including instructional models, teacher

preparation and training, curriculum resources and teacher perceptions and

expectations.

School climate. A construct measured by the degree to which interpersonal

relationships and a shared vision promote a school environment where people feel

socially, emotionally and physically safe.

Sense of belonging. Construct defined by a student's participation in school

activities, positive social relationships with other peers, strong connections with

teachers and the absence of feelings of alienation.

Sheltered instruction. An approach to content instruction using techniques and

strategies allowing students to comprehend the content while at the same time

acquiring language proficiency (Echevarria & Graves, 2007).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This review of literature will cover theories in second language acquisition, historical perspectives on teaching ELL students in the United States, program models for instruction, and issues related to assessment and accountability of ELL students. In addition, a multi-dimensional perspective for measuring success of ELL students is described.

Theoretical Framework for Second Language Acquisition

Theories in second language acquisition attempt to explain the process of how people acquire a second language and the optimum methodologies for teaching second languages. Two of the most commonly cited theories in second language acquisition are those developed by Stephen Krashen and Jim Cummins (see Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Herrell & Jordan, 2004). Their theories have greatly influenced the teaching of second languages and are widely accepted by language educators and researchers. The theoretical framework for this research study is based on the principles from their theories. Following is a review of the main concepts proposed in the theories of these second language experts.

Krashen's second language hypotheses. In his book, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Krashen (1982) presented five hypotheses for second language acquisition. The theory made an important distinction between language *learning* and language *acquisition.*

Acquisition Hypothesis. The Acquisition Hypothesis is the first of five hypotheses Krashen proposed and is the foundation for his conceptual framework. According to his acquisition hypothesis, people acquire a second language in a similar fashion to the process of acquiring their first language. It is a natural, subconscious process that develops through meaningful interaction in the target language. Language learning, on the other hand, is the conscious act of studying the vocabulary, rules and grammar of a second language. It is based on developing skills through repetition and studying *about* a language. In Krashen's theory (1982), an instructional approach centered on second language acquisition will be more successful and meaningful than an approach based on second language learning. Teachers who use this theory will design lessons which facilitate language acquisition through meaningful activities which engage students in interactive communication. As the students engage in the activity, they acquire language in a natural way and develop a feel for the language, much like children developing their first language.

Monitor Hypothesis. A further distinction between learning and acquiring a language is found in the Monitor Hypothesis. According to Krashen (1982), language acquisition is responsible for the students' fluency; whereas the students' learned language acts as an internal monitor of their language production. The students' monitor functions as their editor, checking their language production based on the rules they have learned. Their acquisition system would tell them if the language sounds or feels right, and the learned system, or monitor, would answer the question, Does it follow the rules I have learned for this language? Some students will overuse their monitor and be

overwhelmed by excessive concern for correctness. Other students will underuse their

monitor because they have not learned the necessary rules or prefer not to use them.

Teachers should strive to have their students become optimal users of their monitors by

learning to apply the rules in appropriate situations, such as formal writing or preparing

for a job interview. At the same time, they should encourage students to not become

overwhelmed by a desire to produce perfect language in situations where simple

communication is the objective.

    ***Natural Order Hypothesis*.** A third hypothesis in Krashen's theory (1982) of

acquisition is that of Natural Order. This hypothesis proposes that there is a natural order

to the progression of acquiring the grammatical structure for a particular language. Some

of these structures are acquired early for a specific language while others emerge later.

As an example, the progressive *ing* (e.g. She is work*ing*.) and the plural /*s*/ (e.g. two car*s*)

are structures that emerge early for the English language. On the other hand, the

possessive /*s*/ (e.g. the boy*'s* book) and the third person singular /s/ (e.g. He like*s* cake.)

take longer to be acquired. The natural order is not the same for different languages, but

the order does remain constant for students of one particular language. While this

hypothesis helps to explain the order in which students acquire grammatical structures,

Krashen points out it should not be used as the basis for sequencing instruction.

    ***Input Hypothesis*.** Building on the theory of language acquisition, the Input

Hypothesis is focused on the concept of comprehensible input. Krashen (1982) proposed

students will acquire language and move along the natural order of acquisition if they are

exposed to language which engages them in a way that challenges their abilities one level

above their current level. Students who are at *Level i* should be given instruction at *Level i + 1*. In this manner, the students' abilities are challenged, but at the same time there is enough comprehensible input for them to make sense of the task. As the students work to make sense of the input and respond appropriately, they continue to move along the continuum of language acquisition.

  ***Affective Filter Hypothesis*.** The final hypothesis in Krashen's theory (1982) is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. There are several emotional variables which affect a person's ability to acquire a second language including motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Individuals with low motivation, low self-confidence and/or high anxiety will have a more difficult time acquiring a second language because their affective filter will hinder their ability to process language. Teachers need to be aware of these variables and create a classroom environment where students feel safe and comfortable in order to lower the students' affective filters. This may include providing time for a *silent period* as students develop their comprehension skills. During the silent period, students are processing language internally, but have still not developed the confidence to produce language themselves. The length of the silent period will vary depending on the students' affective filter.

  In later works, Krashen (2003, 2008) revisited some of his original theories and concluded that they continue to hold true today. In his more recent writing, he used the term Comprehension Hypothesis to embody the main ideas of his original five hypotheses. In the past, language education has been based on the Skills Building Hypothesis, or language learning, where students repeat grammar exercises and

vocabulary drills until they become automatic. Still today many second language

textbooks are designed based on grammar driven theory of language learning. He noted

that while progress has been made in language education, his hope for the future is that

the teaching profession will take full advantage of the Comprehension Hypothesis.

Cummins' theories on second language acquisition. Another major

contribution to the theory of second language acquisition comes from the work of Jim

Cummins. Two important concepts proposed by Cummins (1999, 2000) are the

distinction between conversational language versus academic language and the manner in

which skills in the students' first language support their acquisition of the second

language.

*Conversational and academic language***.** Cummins (1999) proposed an important

distinction between how students acquire conversational language versus academic

language. He referred to conversational language using the acronym BICS or Basic

Interpersonal Communication Skills, and referred to academic language as CALP or

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. The acronyms have been commonly used by

practitioners in the second language teaching community.

BICS embodies those language skills used in informal social situations, such as a

conversation with a friend or meeting a new classmate. Cummins (1999) explained that

in these situations, there are many non-verbal cues the person can use to comprehend the

language. In other words, the meaning is contextually embedded with gestures, body

language and physical objects in a setting familiar to that person. In addition, BICS are

usually associated with situations requiring primarily the use of the person's listening and

speaking skills. It takes two to three years for a person to develop fluency with these basic communication skills.

According to Cummins (1999), CALP refers to language skills used in formal academic situations requiring cognitive processing, such as taking a test or evaluating an article. For these tasks, the student is required to use more demanding language skills in a less familiar situation that is not embedded with the same degree of context. Instead of utilizing primarily listening and speaking skills, the student is required to use reading and writing skills to process and produce academic language, a task requiring far more demanding cognitive skills. It can take anywhere from five to seven years for a person to develop academic proficiency in their second language.

The distinction between BICS and CALP can be depicted in a situation where the teacher observes the students' conversational abilities in English are well advanced. The students have progressed quickly in developing fluency in the second language, and the teacher believes they are ready to work on par with native speakers. Afterword, the teacher is disappointed to realize the students are performing poorly on academic tests. Even though the students had developed proficiency in basic interpersonal communication, they had not reached the level of proficiency in academic language required to perform well on more demanding tasks.

BICS and CALP continuum. Cummins (2000) elaborated on the differences between BICS and CALP by presenting a graphic representation of the distinction using two intersecting continua. The horizontal continuum represented the degree to which language is embedded with context from high (context embedded) to low (context

reduced). The vertical continuum measured the degree of cognitive language skills

required for a particular task from high cognitive demand to low cognitive demand. The

intersecting continua produce four quadrants to describe the language demands of a

particular task in regards to context and cognitive demand. Figure 1 is a visual

representation of this elaboration.

Low Cognitive Demand

BICS

Context embedded   A | B   **Context reduced**

C | D

CALP

High Cognitive Demand
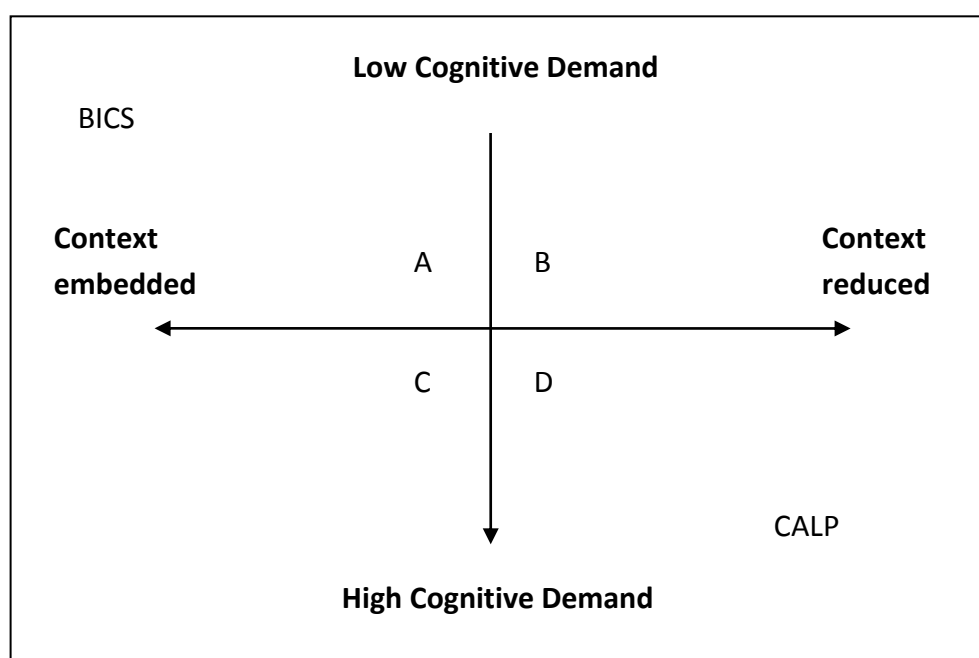
Figure 1 BICS and CALP continuum (based on Cummins, 2000)

The less demanding language activities would fall in Quadrant A because they

require less cognitive abilities and are highly embedded in context. The most demanding

language activities would fall in Quadrant D because they have reduced context and are

highly demanding in cognitive skills. Language activities falling in Quadrant A require

the student to use BICS and activities in Quadrant D require CALP. Quadrants B and C would fall in the middle. From a classroom perspective, an activity such as interviewing a classmate about their family would fall in Quadrant A, whereas taking a standardized test would fall in Quadrant D. The quadrants also show how BICS and CALP are not completely unrelated. Some basic conversations can become quite demanding if the student has little or no background knowledge. At the same time, there are academic activities which are rich in context or rely heavily on interpersonal communication.

Based on Cummins' theories (1999, 2000), teachers should be careful to develop activities which provide contextual support to their students to make language comprehensible. The use of visual aids, schematic maps, gestures, and building background knowledge will help the student comprehend and become actively involved in the task at hand. In addition, teachers must be aware of the academic language and cognitive processes needed for a particular task and support the language learners by deliberately teaching the academic vocabulary and concepts necessary for the activity.

Common Underlying Proficiency. Cummins (2000) explained another important component of the theory of second language acquisition with the concept of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). The central premise behind CUP is that knowledge learned in the students' native language (L1) will transfer to the second language (L2) once the students acquire the language skills necessary to apply that knowledge. For example, students who learn about adjectives in L1 will not need to relearn that concept in L2 because the skill will transfer once they develop language fluency. Furthermore, there are certain meta-linguistic abilities that people learn in L1 and can be applied to L2.

For example, although phonemic systems are not the same for all languages, the concept of phonemic awareness (the relation of sounds to phonemes) learned in L1 will support students in learning the phonemic system of L2.

These common proficiencies have important implications for the second language practitioners. Developing students' native language skills will support their acquisition of the second language by providing proficiencies which give a foundation to build literacy skills. Other research has supported this concept, finding that formal schooling in the students' first language is the strongest indicator of success in their second language (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

The principles presented by Krashen (1982, 2003, 2008) and Cummins (1999, 2000) have guided second language practitioners to develop instructional methods which provide for the optimal learning environment for students. Their theories provide a framework for researchers to design studies which will improve the understanding of how students acquire a second language. These theories shed light on the many variables that affect second language acquisition and inform each of the constructs included in the multi-dimensional perspective used in this research.

Historical Perspective

From the beginning, the United States has been a linguistically-diverse country. Over the years, people from many different countries have immigrated to the United States in search of a better life for their family. In most cases, these immigrants and their children have struggled to learn English in order to assimilate to their new communities. Parents have encouraged their children to learn English in school as an opportunity to

find success in their new country; however, there is also a history of bilingual education and instruction in other languages .

Freeman et al. (2005) gave a historical perspective for bilingual education to show how instruction in languages other than English goes back to early times in the United States. During the 1800s when waves of immigrants were arriving from many parts of Europe, there were schools teaching in German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Polish, Italian, Czech, French and Spanish. Some of these schools used both the heritage language and English, an early example of bilingual education in this country. Although these schools set the historical precedence for bilingual education and language diversity in our country, instruction in languages other than English has never been the norm.

Over the last century, there have been several court cases and legislative measures affecting how schools provide instruction to ELL students. One of the first court cases regarding language instruction to go to the U.S. Supreme Court occurred in 1923, *Meyer v. Nebraska*. The court overturned a Nebraska law prohibiting language instruction in any language other than English. In 1947, *Mendez v. Westminster*, courts prohibited schools in Orange County, California from segregating Mexican and Mexican-American students because of deficiency in English. The families of the students claimed the segregation actually caused the Spanish-speaking students to fall further behind in English. The court upheld the claim and the decision laid the groundwork for the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and the racial desegregation laws for K-12 schools (Zehr, 2009b).

The most notable ruling regarding language minority students came in 1974 with the ruling of *Lau v. Nichols*. Basing their claim on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the parents of Chinese-speaking students brought the case against San Francisco schools claiming their children were not given equal access to education because instruction was given in English only. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the schools were in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which prohibits exclusion from federally funded programs based on race, color or national origin. The school district use of English-only instruction essentially excluded non-English speaking students from equal access to the curriculum. While the ruling did not mandate a specific solution, it did require schools to provide accommodations for English Language Learners which would give them the same opportunity to learn (Gandara, Moran & Garcia, 2004). It is noted by Moran (2005) that the Lau decision extended the protections of the Civil Rights Act to include language rights and freedom from discriminatory effects regardless of the intent of the actions.

Gandara et al. (2004) described how the interpretation of the ruling has changed over the years, and asserted that the legacy of the decision has been undermined by language policy in the country. Many interpreted the Lau decision as a directive to provide bilingual education, while others believed the goal was to provide native language support until a student could be transitioned to mainstream classrooms.

The Bilingual Education Act, enacted in 1968 as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), funded programs to assist English Language Learners. The ESEA has gone through several reauthorizations which have modified the language and scope of the Bilingual Education Act, gradually removing the language of

bilingual education and in its place focusing on the development of English proficiency. The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), replaced the Bilingual Education Act with the English Language Acquisition Act. The emphasis for ELL students under this reauthorization is specialized instruction in English until the students acquire the necessary proficiency to transition to general English only education (Gandara et al, 2004). The specific goals and requirements for instruction of ELL students under NCLB is discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

These examples of court cases and legislation confirm that the education of students whose native language is not English has been an issue in education for many years in the United States. The debate over bilingual education, English-only instruction and language diversity in our country continues today, and it is likely that more court cases and legislation will be forthcoming as leaders make decisions on these important issues.

Program Models

Federal guidelines under NCLB require schools to identify ELL students, provide instructional support, and assess their progress; however, the decision of what specific program design to use for instruction is left to the states. There are a number of different program models implemented to provide instruction to ELL students. They range from English-only immersion where students are immersed in English classrooms with little or no support, to developmental bilingual programs, where the goal is for the student to become fully literate in both languages. Cortez and Villareal (2009) pointed out there are three states that have adopted English-only policies prohibiting the use of a student's

native language to provide instruction (Arizona, California, and Massachusetts), while other states have mandated instructional support in the student's native language. In between these two ends of the spectrum, there is a range of programs that use different amounts of native language instruction and English language support to provide services to students identified as ELL (Freeman et al., 2005; Lara-Alacio, Galloway, Irby, Rodriguez & Gomez, 2004).

There are several characteristics to consider when describing the program models used in ELL instruction including the language of instruction, the amount of time spent in the instructional setting, and the degree of English support given to the students. One of the difficulties with defining the program models is the overlaying characteristics among the designs. In the following paragraphs, the central attributes of the most commonly used programs will be reviewed. The first group of programs discussed is those which provide instruction in English, and that is followed by a review of bilingual programs.

Instructional models in English. In English as a Second Language, or ESL programs, students typically are placed in general education classrooms for the majority of the day. Students are pulled out during a specified time of the day to receive specialized instruction to develop their English proficiency. During this pull-out time the focus is on English grammar, vocabulary and communication skills, but does not include instruction in content areas (Crawford, 2004). The organization of the pull-out ESL classes can vary greatly depending on numerous factors including the amount of time dedicated to ESL instruction, the number of students in the class and the proficiency level of the students (Freeman et al., 2005). As an example, one school may group the ESL

students by grade level and provide instruction for one hour a day. Another school may have a multi-grade level ESL class where students are grouped by their English proficiency for 30 minutes a day. The specific design of the ESL classes is a local decision based on each school's own unique situation; however, the common quality in ESL programs is separate instruction for a specific period of time focusing on English language development.

Structured English Immersion (SEI) refers to programs where students are immersed in English-only classes. Students are placed in a classroom with only ELL students and the teacher adapts instruction to the proficiency level of the students. In its ideal design, teachers are trained in immersion strategies and may be able to provide clarification in the student's native language. The goal of the program is for the student to acquire sufficient English proficiency to transition to mainstream classrooms within one to three years (Crawford, 2004). The degree of support the student receives within the SEI classroom can vary greatly depending on numerous factors including the placement of the ELL students, policies adopted by the school and the teacher's preparation and knowledge regarding second language instruction (Adams & Jones, 2006).

Sheltered English Instruction is an approach to ELL instruction based on techniques the teacher uses to make academic content accessible to the student. In some parts of the country, this model is referred to as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English. In content courses such as science, social studies or mathematics the teacher uses strategies including multiple visual aids, gestures, manipulatives, and targeted

academic vocabulary to provide a contextual framework which makes the content comprehensible to the student. The goal is for students to learn the academic content while at the same time developing their language proficiency. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was developed to provide a formal model for implementing this type of instruction (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). The SIOP consists of 30 effective features of sheltered instruction divided into three categories- Preparation, Instruction, and Review/Assessment. Some examples of the features of effective instruction included in the SIOP are providing comprehensible input, teaching academic vocabulary and making connections to the students' background. The SIOP has been adopted by many schools throughout the country as a means of formalizing effective teaching practices for ELL students.

Instructional models for bilingual education. Bilingual education is a broad term which encompasses many different teaching models for instruction in multiple languages. Mora, Wink and Wink (2001) classified different models of bilingual programs into two categories: compensatory or enrichment. Compensatory programs see second language learning as a problem to overcome, while a program classified as enrichment views second language learning as a benefit which should be developed leading to higher academic achievement and greater opportunities. Thomas and Collier (2003) used the terms enrichment and remedial to differentiate between programs which view bilingual education as an academic strength and programs which view it as a problem needing remediation. Here follows a description of the three most commonly implemented bilingual programs.

The goal of Transitional Bilingual Education is to provide native language instruction for a period of time, usually two to three years, until the student is ready to transition to an all-English classroom. Students are able to learn academic content in their native language, so they do not fall behind while acquiring English. These programs are sometimes called Early Exit bilingual programs because the goal is for the student to learn English as quickly as possible and integrate in to general education classes (Freeman et al., 2005). Some researchers view this model of bilingual education in the same light as English-only programs. As mentioned earlier, they are considered to be remedial or compensatory models because the emphasis is on learning English, and the native language is used only to maintain academic skills until the student is ready for the transition to English (Crawford, 2004).

Developmental Bilingual Education (DBE), on the other hand, is considered an enrichment model because the purpose is on developing literacy in both languages. These programs are sometimes referred to as Late Exit bilingual programs since the student remains in the program for a longer amount of time, usually 5-6 years. Students are taught literacy in their native language (L1) first, and English is gradually added from year to year, allowing the students sufficient time to acquire academic language skills in English (L2). While L1 is maintained in DBE programs, the ultimate goal is for the students to become biliterate and thus ready to tackle the challenge of academic content in English (Crawford, 2004; Freeman et al., 2005).

Another enrichment model for bilingual education is Dual Immersion, sometimes called Dual Language. In this model, English Language Learners are grouped together

with native English speakers and instruction is delivered in two languages, English and the native language of the English learners. The model is also called two-way immersion because there are two groups of students with each group learning their own native language and a second language with the goal of becoming bilingual and biliterate. An advantage to these two-way programs is that students can serve as models for other learners in their native language. Since this model requires a group of ELL students who all speak the same language, it has been implemented most commonly in Spanish, but there are programs in many different languages throughout the country. In addition to the languages taught, there are other variations to the design of the programs including characteristics such as the amount of time spent in each language, the manner in which the languages are divided and student characteristics. The common strand among all the variations is content instruction in two languages leading to proficiency in both languages for both groups of students (Estrada, Gomez, & Ruiz-Escalante, 2009; Freeman et al., 2005).

Newcomer Programs are used to assist students who are newly arrived to the United States during their first year of school. Typically, these programs are designed to give the students one year of intensive instruction in English to develop basic skills to function in the classroom. In addition to supporting academic and language needs of newcomers, these programs can aid in the transition to the school culture and life in the United States. The programs can vary greatly depending on their design and the language resources available (Crawford, 2004). Once the year is complete the student is

transitioned to one of the other programs described above, depending on which program the school is implementing.

Long Term Student Success

There are a number of factors which affect the decision of which program to implement in a school community. Student achievement should be the highest priority, but often times factors such as the number of ELL students, the availability of qualified staff, and the accountability requirements imposed by state and federal regulations affect the decision. If student achievement were the only factor considered, then the enrichment models which provide bilingual support should be the selection made by decision makers. Numerous research studies have shown that in regards to long-term student success, bilingual programs have achieved the most success (Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

In a recent study of Latino students enrolled in dual language programs, Lindholm-Leary and Hernandez (2011) found these students achieved higher outcomes than their peers enrolled in mainstream English classrooms. The students in the study included ELL students, as well as Latino students who were proficient in English or previously identified as ELL.

Estrada et al. (2009) proposed that it is time to advocate for dual language programs. By developing cognitive skills in both languages, educators take advantage of the students' native language as an asset which enhances their overall cognitive ability. In addition to improving academic outcomes, dual language programs have shown to improve student motivation and enthusiasm. They summarized the enrichment

perspective offered through dual language by stating, "How much better it would be if teachers viewed languages other than English as an empowering resource for bringing all student biliteracy and bilingualism, providing both ELLs and English-dominant students an advantage in a high-tech, global society" (p.58).

Assessment and Accountability

In recent years, the level of accountability in relation to standardized test scores has risen dramatically for all students, including English Language Learners. The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has had a significant impact on how schools provide instruction to ELL students. NCLB requires states to identify ELL students, provide instruction to improve their English and assess their proficiency on an annual basis. In addition to the proficiency assessments, ELL students must participate in the same content area testing as native English students. The results from all of these assessments on English proficiency and academic content must be reported in school district's Annual Yearly Progress (Abedi, 2008; Menken, 2010). Schools that do not achieve an acceptable level of progress each year are penalized which makes these tests high stakes for all involved.

Menken (2010) argued that the accountability measures in NCLB are based on misguided assumptions. First, it is impossible to separate the students' proficiency in English and their content knowledge if the standardized tests are administered in English. When ELL students take a math or science test in English, the results do not give a valid measurement of their academic knowledge in these subjects because their English proficiency is a mitigating variable. For these reasons, it should not be a surprise that

ELL students do not do well on linguistically complex tests in a language they are still learning. In spite of this fact, NCLB requires that the test results are used to evaluate students and schools and to make high-stakes decisions. Schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress are subjected to negative consequences and in some states the results are used as graduation requirements for students. The high stakes nature of these tests leads to lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates and an overemphasis on preparing students to take the exams.

There are many perspectives on the effects NCLB has had on ELL instruction. Wright (2006) pointed out stress the high stakes testing places on teachers and students. Wright determined that it was common for teachers to observe students complaining they couldn't understand the test, filling in answers without reading the questions, becoming visibly upset and even physically ill. The consequences of not meeting AYP can also create bad feelings at schools as the consequences of the ELL sub-group are felt school-wide. In most states, students are required to pass high school exit exams to receive a diploma. As ELL students struggle to overcome the language obstacles to pass these exams, their feelings of frustration can contribute to higher dropout rates (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008)

Another problem that arises with the ELL sub-category is the fact that it is not a stable group for AYP reporting, and this puts schools in a difficult situation when it comes to reporting progress (Abedi, 2004, Fry, 2007). As students acquire English and reach proficiency, they are moved out of the ELL category. At the same time, newcomers arrive with little-to-no English proficiency and move in to the sub-group.

Consequently, the sub-group is constantly changing members and the English proficiency of the group remains in flux, making it difficult to demonstrate growth on AYP.

In spite of all these difficulties, the emphasis on accountability has brought ELL education into the spotlight and brought attention to learners' needs which may ultimately lead to improvement in programs and instruction (Capps et al., 2005). Cosentino & Chu (2007) reported that although NCLB has created problems for ELL students, the overall effect has been positive for three reasons. It has brought more attention to the needs of ELL students, increased expectations for achievement and placed emphasis on aligning curriculum, instruction, professional development and assessment.

In this atmosphere of accountability, the assessment of ELL success is focused almost exclusively on standardized test scores. As an alternative to this one-dimensional viewpoint, this research study implements an approach to measure success for ELL students from a multi-dimensional perspective.

Multi-Dimensional Perspective on ELL Success

A central premise of this study is that success in educating ELL students should be assessed from a number of different perspectives. Instead of focusing exclusively on standardized test scores as the only measure of achievement, four constructs will be used for evaluating success with the ELL population- parental involvement, students' sense of belonging, quality instruction and school climate.

Parental involvement. When reviewing the literature on parental involvement, it can be concluded that research supports the concept that active participation by parents in their children's education has a positive impact on student achievement. Another aspect

of parental involvement explained in the literature relates to describing the construct by identifying different types of involvement and the degree to which each impacts student achievement.

Fan and Chen (2001) set out to determine the empirical relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. Noting the lack of quantitative data on this subject, their meta-analysis included only the 25 identified studies which met their criteria for empirical data. The findings concluded that parental involvement has a meaningful influence on the educational outcomes of students. Of all the different components related to parental involvement studied, the strongest relationship was found in parental aspirations and expectations.

More recently, Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 studies to examine the effect parental involvement has on students in an urban secondary school setting. The parental involvement variables used in the study included parental expectations, attendance, participation, communication, homework and parenting style. The overall conclusion drawn from the study supports the assumption that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on student achievement. This positive correlation held true for a variety of academic variables including grades, test scores and student attitudes. In addition, the positive effects were equally apparent for minority students and the general population. Similar to other studies, parent expectations had the greatest effect size on student achievement.

Based on this positive correlation between parental involvement and student success, schools are attempting to improve the participation of all parents in schools.

When it comes to linguistically diverse families, schools face a number of obstacles. In addition to the obvious language barrier, there are other factors which cause communication gaps between parents and educators. Cultural differences, low parental education, a negative school climate, and logistical issues are some of the factors which deter parental involvement for ELL students (Azzam, 2009; Good, Masewicz & Vogel, 2010). It is natural for parents who do not speak English to have inhibitions when it comes to participating in school and communicating with teachers, therefore, it is important for educators to establish a personal relationship with parents which break though these inhibitions. A variety of recommendations are offered in the literature for bridging the communication between schools and ELL parents. In order for parents to feel connected to the school community, educators must express an interest in the culture of the families and invite parents into the classroom for relevant teaching. Effective communication can be provided through special orientation meetings and workshops offered in the parents' native languages (Araujo, 2009; Good et al., 2010; Ramirez & Soto-Hinman, 2009).

Teachers' perceptions and assumptions about parents affect the level of parental participation at school. In some situations, teachers and administrators make the assumption that ELL parents do not care or are disinterested in becoming involved in their children's education when they do not attend school events, show little input on decisions and do not respond to communications sent home. These assumptions by educators are made based on their own cultural backgrounds, when in fact the assumed disinterest can be attributed to cultural and communication barriers. Different cultures

have distinct views on the role parents have at school and in many cultures parents defer educational decisions to the educator.   Although the teachers make good faith efforts to send communications home in the native language, the parents still may not feel the personal connection needed to build the relationship that leads to improved communication and involvement (Alford & Niño, 2011).

In a comparison study of outlier schools, McCoach et al. (2010) found that the most significant difference between over- and under-achieving schools was the perception teachers and administrators held toward parents. Educators at the over-achieving schools held positive perceptions and attitudes towards parents in their school which supports the conclusion that educators' perceptions about parents and parental involvement are key variables in explaining school success.

Sense of belonging. Maslow (1970) included a sense of belonging in his hierarchy of basic human needs. The basic need of belonging involves feelings of acceptance and connection which can be fulfilled though personal relationships or membership in social organizations within a community. For educators, knowing that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need underscores the importance of providing students with the opportunities to become involved and connected in the school community. Through relationships with peers, teachers and other staff members, students develop a sense of attachment to the school community which promotes the higher levels of human development and self-actualization.

Several research studies have examined the influence this sense of belonging has on the educational outcomes of students. These studies have found that attachment in the

classroom and school belonging have a positive relationship with academic performance (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; McMahon, Parnes, Keys & Viola, 2008; Sanchez, Colon & Esparza, 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence that the positive effects of belonging appear to have an even greater influence on higher risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic minorities and low achieving groups (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In addition to the correlation to academic performance, a sense of belonging is also associated with other positive psychological and emotional outcomes. Students with a high sense of belonging have higher motivation and aspirations and lower absenteeism (Sanchez et al., 2005). School belonging, especially secure student-teacher relationships as perceived by the student, enhances the emotional well-being of the student (Ruus et al., 2007).

Little (2004) provided a personal narrative describing the importance belongingness played in her early education as an ELL student. She described her feelings of fear and the confusion of being "caught between two worlds" (p. 82) and how she uses those experiences now as a teacher with her own ELL students. Washburn (2008) explained that the first steps to belonging for an ELL student is to avoid confusion, frustration and alienation that are often associated with the experience of ELL students. Educators can promote feelings of belonging by helping ELL students know the school environment, feel membership in the classroom and relate the curriculum to their cultural background. Once the students feel connected, the teacher can turn the focus to understanding and comprehension in the academic content.

Quality instruction. ELL students are faced with a two-folded challenge in school. They are working to acquire the English language skills needed to function in school and simultaneously attempting to keep pace with their abilities in the content areas. For ELL students to be successful in school, they must be provided with quality instruction which promotes their acquisition of English, while at the same time develops their academic skills and content knowledge (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006; Ortiz & Pagan, 2009). Quality instruction for ELL students is a construct which is affected by several teacher-related variables including teacher preparation and training, instructional methodologies, curriculum resources and teacher perceptions and expectations.

With the rapidly increasing number of ELL students in the country, schools are having a difficult time finding certified ELL teachers to fill positions. In addition, teachers working with ELL students report they have not had sufficient training to prepare them for the special instructional needs of this population (Flynn & Hill, 2005). This deficit in professional preparation is important because, as noted by Karathanos (2010), teachers with specific training in ELL instruction are more likely to use those practices in their classroom.

There are a number of instructional programs for teaching ELL students as noted earlier; however, regardless of the delivery model being used there are a number of strategies that all teachers working with ELL students should know and implement. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model is a researched based instructional design developed at the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, a national research center funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The

SIOP model incorporates research-based strategies to provide teachers with an instructional design to meet the academic and linguistic needs of ELL students (Echevarria & Graves, 2007).

In addition to receiving the appropriate training on instructional strategies, teachers must be aware of how their expectations and assumptions influence student learning. Ajayi (2011) conducted a survey of ELL teachers to determine how their ethnic and social backgrounds affected their instructional practices. The findings indicated that a teacher's personal history affected their instructional decisions, as well as their perceived role in the classroom. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) shed further light on this distinction by explaining how the U.S. culture is based on an individualistic orientation, while many cultures represented in the ELL population have a collectivistic orientation. It is important for teachers to be aware of these differences in perspective and how their own personal backgrounds play a role in their teaching.

Another important teacher dynamic is the expectations teachers have for their students. In a comparison study, Rubie-Davies (2010) found a positive correlation between high teacher expectations and student motivation, school relationships and home support. Alford and Niño (2011) explained how teacher expectations can be negatively influenced by deficit thinking. This happens when a teacher assumes that a student is having trouble in school due to their own social and cultural experiences. This type of thinking shifts the weight of responsibility for learning difficulties from the teacher to the student and lowers expectations. To counteract this process, educators must avoid the notion that ELL students have a problem and view their bilingualism as an asset. These

conclusions reinforce the premise that high teacher expectations are an essential part of quality instruction to support student learning.

School climate. The construct of school climate has been a topic of study in education for many years. Researchers acknowledge the complex nature of the construct because of all the variables involved which makes it difficult to define and measure. On the other hand, there is little debate on the positive impact school climate has on student achievement (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009; Zullig, Koopman, Patton & Ubbes, 2010).

Cohen et al. (2009) defined school climate as "the quality and character of school life" which "reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structure" (p. 182). They also noted that school climate is a group phenomenon resulting from a shared vision of all members in the school community. In their review of empirical research, they observed a significant association between positive school climate and academic success. In view of this relationship, it should be considered a social injustice that current education policy and practice is narrowly focused on accountability through standardized tests while ignoring the importance of school climate parameters.

In an attempt to create a current, operational definition for school climate and develop a measurement tool, Zullig et al. (2010) reviewed current literature on the topic. They identified five common domains found in the literature on school climate. Next, they analyzed current tools utilized to assess this construct and compared them to these five domains in order to develop their own instrument to measure school climate from a

student perspective. Table 2.1 shows a comparison of the five historically common

domains found in the literature and the eight domains used in the final instrument.

Table 2.1

School climate domains (Zullig et al., 2010)

Domains identified in literature	Domains used in final instrument
Order, safety & discipline	Positive student-teacher relationships
Academic outcomes	School connectedness
Social relationships	Academic support
School facilities	Order and discipline
School connectedness	School physical environment
	School social environment
	Perceived exclusion/privilege
	Academic satisfaction

All five of the historical domains are incorporated into the list used in the final

measurement; however, the new list provides further distinction for some of the areas

which may be helpful for schools attempting to pinpoint the areas for improvement.

In addition to establishing a functioning definition for the construct of school

climate, researchers are also interested in assessing the impact school climate has on

students. Recent studies have established an important link between a positive school

climate and student achievement (Cohen et al., 2009; McCoach et al., 2010). It is

significant to note that the degree of impact appears to be even greater for at risk student populations (McMahon et al., 2008).

Summary

In summary, the education of English Language Learners is a challenge schools have faced throughout the history of the United States. In order for educators to meet these challenges, they must be familiar with theories of second language acquisition and implement these theories in their classrooms. Krashen's hypotheses (1982) on second language acquisition make an important distinction between language learning and language acquisition. Too often schools base their instructional strategies on language learning focusing on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Schools would be more successful if the foundation of ELL instruction were based on language acquisition by providing students with meaningful interaction in English at the level which is comprehensible to the student and at the same time develops their English skills in a natural manner. Educational practices with ELL students must take into consideration the time needed to acquire a second language. Students can pick up interpersonal communication skills quickly, in one to two years, but it takes five to seven years of quality instruction to reach academic proficiency.

As a nation of immigrants, the issue of teaching English to linguistically diverse students is a challenge faced by leaders in the U.S. since the very beginning of our country. The topic has been debated not only in school districts, but in legislatures and courtrooms throughout history. Educational policies have been adopted at the state and

national level in an attempt to provide a fair and equal education for all students, including those whose native language is not English. Current education policy and practice is driven by the accountability measures established by the No Child Left Behind Act. ELL students are required to take the same standardized tests in English as all other students, and schools are subjected to punitive consequences if the ELL sub-group does not make adequate progress. This focus on test accountability has brought needed attention to how ELL students are educated; however, it has also led to an over-emphasis on test scores and feelings of frustration for educators and students alike.

A multi-dimensional approach to assessing progress with ELL students provides a better understanding of this complex phenomenon. As teachers and administrators look to improve the education they provide to ELL students, they may have a more complete understanding if they evaluate their educational practices through the following four constructs- parental involvement, students' sense of belonging, quality instruction and school climate. Each of these constructs has been proven through research to positively affect the outcomes for all students and especially at-risk groups such as English Language Learners.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experience of school districts in Southwest Minnesota in educating English Language Learners from the perspective of educators. The study utilized a mixed methods approach to identify and describe the key components which affect the success of English Language Learners (ELL) from a multi-dimensional perspective. The following questions directed the research:

R1: What factors including assumptions, expectations, and beliefs have the greatest impact on the achievement of ELL students in these districts?

R2: What are the most significant challenges faced by school districts in educating ELL students?

R3: What strategies implemented by schools have contributed to success for ELL students?

R4: How do educators view issues of equality and freedom in relation to educating ELL students?

The study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a better understanding of this complex phenomenon. The results from the initial quantitative survey were explored at an in-depth level through qualitative interviews to better address the research purpose and questions.

Overview of the Methodology

Although relatively new, mixed methods research design has become a commonly-used approach in social and human sciences. The mixed methods approach combines both the philosophical assumptions and the methods of qualitative and quantitative approaches in one study (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010b). Drawing from the benefits of each individual method, the researcher is able to construct a more complete picture of the research problem. Creswell (2009) described several advantages to using a mixed method approach including neutralizing the biases from each individual method and providing a means to verify data using different perspectives. In addition, one method can be used to help develop and explain the other. For these reasons, mixed methods has become an important design for researchers working to solve complex problems in educational settings (Mertens, 2010b).

With the emergence of mixed methods as an accepted and commonly used methodology, researchers have developed terminology to describe the various strategies and procedures implemented in this type of study. Creswell (2009) described three distinct strategies that can be applied in a mixed methods study- sequential, concurrent and transformative. A sequential mixed methods design involves the collection of data in stages. One type of data is collected in the first stage, either qualitative or quantitative, and this data is subsequently used to inform and develop the next stage. During the second stage, the other methodology is used to elaborate or explain the results from the first stage.

A concurrent mixed methods design is characterized by the collection of both types of data simultaneously. The qualitative and quantitative data is merged for interpretation and the overall results are based on the convergence of the data.

The design of the transformative mixed methods study can be either sequential or concurrent, but is distinguished from the others because of its transformative nature. In this design, the researcher uses a theoretical lens (such as critical or feminist theory) to apply an advocacy perspective to the research problem. Mertens (2010b) explained that a transformative framework uses mixed methods to promote social change for under-represented or marginalized populations.

The current study implemented a sequential mixed methods design incorporating many of the criteria from the transformative framework. Sweetman, Badiee and Creswell (2010) identified several key criteria a researcher can use to apply a transformative framework to a mixed methods study. In this study, the research problem is directly relevant to an under-represented and marginalized group, specifically ELL students. While the participants in this study were the educators (not a marginalized group), the benefactors of the results are the ELL students themselves who are a marginalized group as is evident by low graduation rates and the gap in achievement between ELL students and the general population. The study applied a critical theory perspective by arguing that the current focus on accountability in education places an unjust amount of emphasis on standardized test scores. In contrast, this research study utilized an alternative framework for evaluating success when working with ELL students.

Participants

The participants in this study were 176 educators including building administrators and certified ELL teachers in Southwest Minnesota K-12 public schools. The boundaries for the study were defined as the southwest region of the Minnesota Association of Elementary School Principals (MAESP) and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). The southwest region is comprised of approximately 80 school districts and 200 schools. The majority of these districts are rural and range in size from 50 to 5,000 students. The survey portion of the research was sent to all administrators and ELL teachers in the defined region. From this larger population, a smaller sample was selected to participate in the qualitative interviews. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Seven educators volunteered to be interviewed for the qualitative stage of the study. Four of the volunteers were ELL teachers and three were administrators which provided responses from both perspectives. The selection of participants was grounded in the belief that educators actively working in schools with ELL students will have the most in-depth knowledge of the challenges and the strategies that lead to success for ELL students.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

In the first phase of the research, principals and certified ELL teachers in southwest Minnesota were invited by email to complete an online survey. The instrument is described below and is attached in Appendix A. The email invitation explained that the goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of the

challenges and the factors that lead to success for ELL education in southern Minnesota. The request was framed in this manner to encourage the educators to be more willing and open to participate. Two reminders were sent to non-responders before the survey closed. At the end of the online survey, participants were asked if they were willing to take part in a follow-up interview.

Once the data had been collected in stage one, a preliminary analysis was conducted to select the participants and frame the questions for the qualitative phase. The goals for the second stage of data collection were to provide a comprehensive explanation of the responses given in the first stage and to develop an understanding of the factors that impact success for ELL students. The interviews were conducted at the school site of the participant and were recorded for accuracy. Semi-structured interview questions were utilized to allow the participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions of the research problem. A list of the semi-structured questions is included in Appendix B.

Variables. A central premise of this study is that success for educating ELL students should be assessed from a number of different perspectives. In the current atmosphere of school accountability, success is usually defined by student performance on standardized tests. Instead of focusing exclusively on these test scores as a measure of achievement, this study examined other variables for evaluating success with the ELL population. The constructs for these variables are described below and summarized in Figure 2.

Parental involvement. Research has shown that increased parental involvement has a positive impact on achievement for all students (Jeynes, 2007) and is especially important for at-risk groups such as ELL students (McCoach, et al. 2010; Panferov, 2010). Involving ELL parents is especially challenging because of the language and cultural barriers that exist between the school community and parents (Azzam, 2009). For the purposes of this study, the degree of parental involvement is defined by the amount of participation by parents in their children's education. This participation includes attending school meetings and conferences, support given at home, and involvement in school activities. In addition, it takes into consideration the school's efforts to integrate ELL parents into the school community, such as providing interpreters, translated documents and making deliberate efforts to reach out to the families of ELL students.

Sense of belonging. Since Maslow (1970) presented his theory of self-actualization, a sense of belonging has been acknowledged as a basic human need. Given this fact, educators have applied the theory in school settings to demonstrate the relationship between a student's sense of belonging and academic achievement (Little, 2004; Washburn, 2008). Studies show there is a direct and positive relationship between students' sense of belonging and their emotional well-being and academic success (Ruus et al. 2007; Sanchez et al., 2005). In addition, the effects of the influence are even greater with at-risk students (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; McMahon et al., 2008). For this study, a sense of belonging is defined by a student's participation in school activities, positive

social relationships with other peers, strong connections with teachers and the absence of feelings of alienation.

Quality instruction. The basis for this construct is derived from the research in a number of teacher-related factors including instructional models, teacher preparation and training, curriculum resources and teacher perceptions and expectations. Teachers who receive preparation in effective instructional strategies for ELL students are more likely to use these strategies (Karathanos, 2010) and see higher academic achievement for their students (Echevarria et al., 2006). Instructional models that support a student's native language are more effective than subtractive models which promote an English-only approach (Thomas & Collier, 2002). The teacher's perceptions of a particular group of students affect his/her expectations which can play an important role in the student's learning experience (Rodriguez et al., 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2010).

School climate. Researchers have proven that a supportive school climate directly affects students' academic achievement (Cohen et al., 2009; Ruus et al. 2007). According to Cohen et al. (2009), school climate involves the interpersonal relationships and a shared vision that promotes an environment where people feel socially, emotionally and physically safe. For the purposes of this study, a supportive school climate for ELL students is defined by an inclusive culture where all staff members recognize their responsibilities for all students. General classroom teachers are trained to work with ELL students and work in cooperation with ELL teachers to meet the needs of students. School administrators are knowledgeable about the special needs of ELL students and provide the necessary support and resources to meet these needs. Personal interactions

within the school community are characterized by respect, professionalism and a positive

outlook.

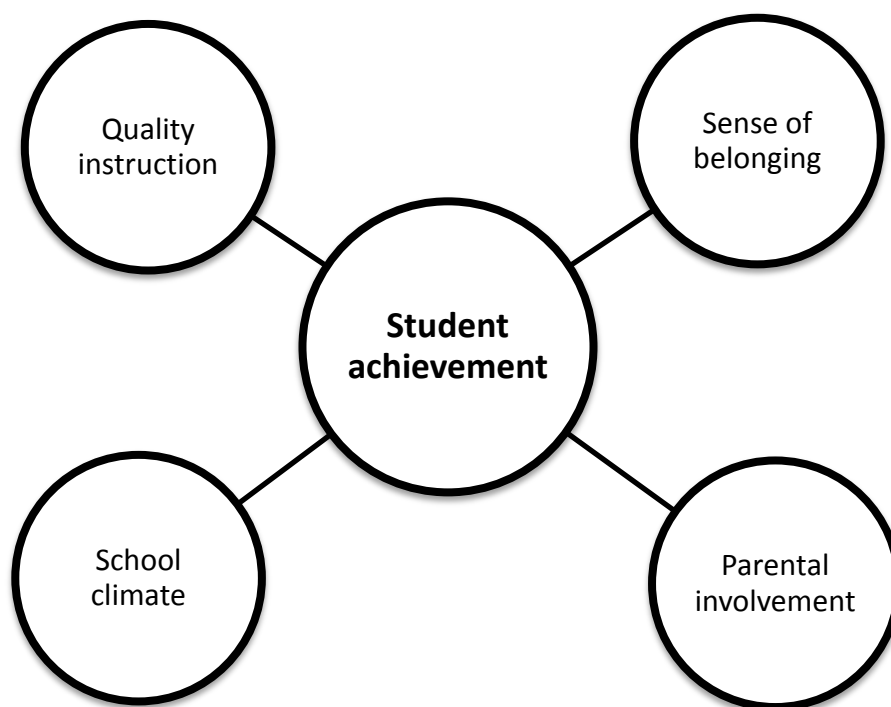*Figure 2* Variables for measuring success for ELL students

Instrumentation. These variables of student success formed the basis for the

quantitative survey that was developed for this study (see Appendix A). The survey

instrument was designed to measure the educators' assumptions, expectations and beliefs

regarding the factors that impact the education of ELL students (research question 1 and

4). The survey included items to identify the challenges (research question 2) and the

degree of success achieved (research question 3) in relation to each of the variables and

the achievement of ELL students.

The survey instrument was divided into four sections. The first section gathered

basic demographic data including the name of the school district, size of the district, size

of the ELL population, type of school, as well as the gender and job title of the

respondent. The second section of the instrument was designed to measure the

respondent's perception of the degree of impact for each of the four specified variables as

it relates to ELL students. For each variable, the respondent was asked to rate a set of

statements on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "no impact" to "great impact". The

next section of the survey measured the degree of challenge each variable has on the

achievement of ELL students. Again, a 4-point Likert scale will be used to rate the

indicators for each variable from "not challenging" to "extremely challenging". In the

next section of the survey, the participants were asked to give their view of the level of

success their school has achieved for each of the specified variables. The results from the

survey were analyzed to identify participants and frame questions for the qualitative

portion of the study.

The statements used as indicators in the survey were aligned to the constructs

being studied. In some cases, a statement was considered to be an indicator for more than

one construct. The indicators used in the survey and their corresponding alignment to the

constructs are displayed in Figure 3.

	Sense of Belonging	Parental Involvement	Quality instruction	School Climate
Indicators for Impact Survey Ratings				
ELL student's relationship with teachers	x			x
Parent's or caregiver's involvement in school activities		x		
Specific training for teachers in ELL strategies			x	
Positive school climate				x
ELL student's involvement in extra-curricular activities	x			
Parent's or caregiver's commitment to helping the student at home		x		
Teacher's expectations for ELL students			x	x
Administration's commitment to ELL students				x
ELL student's relationship with peers	x			x
Instructional support for ELL students			x	
Indicators for Challenging Survey Ratings				
Parents or caregivers of ELL students attend teacher conferences and other events at the school		x		
Training is provided for all teachers in ELL instructional strategies			x	
All staff members take responsibility for all students	x			x
ELL students are involved in extra-curricular activities at school	x			
Parents or caregivers of ELL students provide support at home to their students		x		
ELL students build positive relationships with peers who are not ELL students	x			x
All teachers incorporate strategies to assist ELL students			x	
Parents or caregivers are provided with interpreters and translations		x		x
Teachers have high expectations for ELL students			x	x
Instructional support is provided to meet the needs of ELL students			x	

Figure 3 Construct alignment for indicators used on survey

In the qualitative phase of the study, the semi-structured interview questions were designed based on the research questions (see Appendix B). There were four strands of inquiry to address each of the research questions- the challenges, the impact, the success and the equality issues related to the education of ELL students. Within each strand, there were opportunities for the participant to elaborate on each of the variables that were the framework for this study (see Figure 2). The preliminary results from the quantitative survey provided a guide for the semi-structured interviews. The implementation of the semi-structured, emergent approach during the qualitative stage provided for a deeper explanation of the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected in the quantitative phase of the study was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet so that it could be examined and coded for analysis. First, the responses were analyzed to identify data that needed to be excluded. There were two respondents who indicated they had no ELL students at their school and their responses were removed from the analysis. Next, responses to the demographic questions were coded using numeric values to facilitate the statistical analysis. In some cases, narrative responses were changed to numeric values for the same purpose. A data management log was maintained to track all the edits made to the data.

Once the responses were cleaned and coded appropriately, the data was uploaded into the SPSS program for statistical analysis. Subsequently, descriptive statistics were calculated for each item on the survey including both the demographic data and the individual ratings for impact, challenge and success. The mean and standard deviation

were calculated for each individual indicator rating. The mean ratings for the indicators were then ranked from highest to lowest (ie. highest impact to lowest impact, or most challenging to least challenging).

Next, a composite score was created for each construct by combining the ratings aligned to parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense of belonging. The mean rating for the composite scores were used to rank the constructs in each area- impact, challenge and success. Finally, a *t* test of independent means was conducted to compare the responses on the composite scores between teachers and administrators.

For the qualitative data, the participants consented to have the interviews recorded so that they could be transcribed accurately. The completed interview transcripts were sent to the participants by email for the purpose of member checking. The participants were given the opportunity to read the transcript and make any changes or clarifications that they believed provided a more accurate explanation. After this verification step, the transcripts were coded using three types of coding- descriptive, topical and analytical (Richards, 2009).   The use of multiple levels of coding allowed for a thorough analysis of the interview transcripts.

First, descriptive coding was used to identify the demographic data for each interview participant and the schools where they work. This data included information such as gender, years of experience, position and school size. Next, the interview responses were coded by topic based on the four constructs being studied: parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense of belonging. The

interview responses related to each construct were then compiled onto one chart and a second level of coding was used in order to analyze the emerging themes. As an example, all of the statements related to parental involvement were recorded on one chart to facilitate the analytical coding. Using this same method, patterns were revealed for each of the four constructs. Once the themes within each construct were identified, these themes were aligned to the original four research questions.

Following the steps for best practice in mixed methods research, the final stage in data analysis was to merge the qualitative and quantitative data. The merging of the data was accomplished by using a side-by-side comparative analysis (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The major findings for each research question from the quantitative phase of the study were listed on one side of a comparative analysis chart. Then the major findings from the qualitative phase were listed alongside the quantitative findings. The results were analyzed to determine if the data from each phase supported the other (convergent) or if there were differences in the data (divergent).

Summary

This chapter described the research methods utilized in each phase of this sequential mixed methods study. The research was conducted in two stages beginning with a quantitative survey sent to ELL educators followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with seven of the educators. The participants in the both phases of the study were ELL teachers and building administrators working in K-12 public schools in Southwest Minnesota. On the survey, the participants were asked to rate the degree of impact, challenge and success for a series of indicators related to ELL education. Both

the survey and the qualitative interview questions were based on a multi-dimensional

framework for measuring success for ELL students incorporating four essential

constructs: parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense

of belonging. The detailed quantitative and qualitative results are described in the

following chapter.

Chapter IV

Results

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of educators

working with English Language Learners (ELL) in Southwest Minnesota. The research

design used a sequential mixed method approach to understand the factors that presented

the greatest challenges and impact for the success of ELL students. The study examined

ELL education from a multi-dimensional perspective grounded in the following four

constructs: parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense

of belonging. In the first stage, quantitative data was collected through a survey, in order

to obtain a wide range of responses from educators working in school districts in

Southwest Minnesota. In the second stage, qualitative data was gathered through

interviews to build on the quantitative data by providing a rich description of the

experiences of educators who are working with ELL students on a daily basis. The

results presented in this chapter are organized into three sections: Quantitative Results,

Qualitative Results and Merging the Data.

Quantitative Results

The first phase of this study was the collection of quantitative data through a

survey sent to all administrators and ELL teachers working in K-12 public schools in

Southwest Minnesota. On the survey, each construct is represented by a series of

indicators for which the participants were asked to give their rating in three areas:

- Degree of Impact (i.e., How much impact does this indicator have on ELL student
  achievement?)

- Degree of Challenge (i.e., How challenging is it to accomplish?)

- Degree of Success (i.e., How much success has your school had in this area?)

The quantitative data obtained from the survey are presented in the following order. First, the demographic data are summarized to give a description of the participants in the quantitative portion of the study. Next, the results for each research question are summarized including any findings from the statistical analysis.

Demographic Data

Survey invitations were sent to 176 educators working in 55 school districts in Southwest Minnesota. A total of 74 educators responded to the survey, however, two participants indicated they had no ELL students in their school. These two participants were removed, resulting in the final number of responses analyzed in the study (N = 72). Of these participants, 33 indicted they were teachers of ELL students and 39 indicated they were administrators. The gender breakdown for the survey participants was 26 male, 45 female and one not reported.

The educators participating in the survey had a high level of experience in the field of education. The mean number of years of experience working in the field of education was 19.27 (SD = 9.13). There was a range from 1 year to 40 years; however, 85% of the participants had more than 10 years of experience.

For the teachers, responses were analyzed to determine the number of ELL students to whom they provided direct services. There was a large range of responses for the number of students from 1 to 100. The mean number of students for whom the teachers provided direct services was 31.19 (SD = 15.56).

Finally, the survey asked the participants to provide information about the size of their school district. The majority of the school districts in Southwest Minnesota are small districts located in mostly rural areas. In fact, 46% of the participants indicated they worked in a school district with less than 1,000 total students and 76% work in school districts with less than 2,000 students.

Research Question 1

What factors including assumptions, expectations, and beliefs have the greatest impact on the achievement of ELL students in these districts?

The first research question attempted to identify the factors that educators felt had the greatest impact on ELL achievement. The educators were asked to use a 4-point Likert scale to rate the indicators from "no impact" to "great impact". Table 4.1 shows the indicators in order with the items with the highest mean rating at the top. Each indicator is linked to one of the four constructs being analyzed in this study. As discussed in Chapter III, some of the statements could be considered indicators for more than one construct. In this table, the primary construct is listed in the final column. The highest rated impact factor was "Instructional support for ELL students" (M =3.74), however, all of the indicators had a relatively high mean rating which demonstrates that educators believe each of these factors has a high impact on ELL achievement. The majority of the factors received a mean rating above 3.5 on a 4-point Likert scale. Even the lowest mean for "ELL student's involvement in extracurricular activities" (M = 2.98) received a mean rating representing moderate impact. This leads to the conclusion that educators believe all of these factors have an important impact on ELL achievement.

Table 4.1

Mean Ratings for Impact Indicators (on a scale of 1-4)

Indicator	Mean (SD)	Construct alignment
Instructional support for ELL students	3.74 (0.44)	Quality instruction
ELL student's relationship with teachers	3.73 (0.52)	Sense of belonging
Teacher's expectations for ELL students	3.72 (0.49)	Quality instruction
Positive school climate	3.64 (0.52)	School climate
Administration's commitment to ELL students	3.61 (0.59))	School climate
Specific training for teachers in ELL strategies	3.54 (0.74)	Quality instruction
Parent or caregiver's commitment to helping the student at home	3.43 (0.72)	Parental involvement
ELL student's relationship with peers	3.35 (0.52)	Sense of belonging
Parent or caregiver's involvement in school activities	3.28 (0.82)	Parental involvement
ELL student's involvement in extra-curricular activities	2.98 (0.70)	Sense of belonging

Likert scale: 4 = great impact; 3 = moderate impact; 2 = low impact; 1 = no impact

For the next step in analysis, the indicators were grouped by construct, and one composite mean was calculated for the impact of parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense of belonging. For this analysis, statements which are considered indicators for more than one construct were computed in the composite score for both constructs. Table 4.2 shows the mean impact ratings for each construct's composite score.

Table 4.2

Impact Composite Ratings

Construct	Mean (SD)
Quality instruction	3.67 (0.58)
School climate	3.61 (0.54)
Sense of belonging	3.36 (0.66)
Parental involvement	3.35 (0.77)

Likert scale: 4 = great impact; 3 = moderate impact; 2 = low impact; 1 = no impact

While there is some difference in the mean scores, all of the constructs have high impact ratings, again supporting the assumption that educators believe all of the constructs have high impact on ELL achievement. The two constructs with the highest mean rating were quality instruction and school climate. Considering the fact that the participants were educators, it is not surprising that these two constructs, which are the ones mostly in control of the teacher or administrator, received the highest rating.

The final step in analyzing the data for research question 1 was to run a *t* test of

independent means to compare the responses between teachers and administrators for each composite score. The results found on Table 4.3 show that there was one significant difference in the responses between teachers and administrators.

Table 4.3

Comparison of impact ratings between teachers and administrators

Construct	Teachers Mean (SD)	Administrators Mean (SD)	t score
Quality instruction	3.71 (0.48)	3.62 (0.66)	1.030
School climate	3.64 (0.51)	3.58 (0.57)	1.044
Sense of belonging	3.34 (0.64)	3.37 (0.68)	-0.338
Parental involvement	3.50 (0.70)	3.21 (0.81)	2.110*

Likert scale: 4 = great impact; 3 = moderate impact; 2 = low impact; 1 = no impact
p < .05

Teachers rated the impact of parental involvement higher than administrators at a statistically significant level ($t_{(120)} = 2.11$, p < .05). While the comparison of teachers and administrators is not the goal of this study, the results do help to shed light on how educators view the impact of the constructs being studied. The higher ratings given by teachers may indicate that teachers observe the direct impact of parent involvement more clearly. Teachers develop a close relationship with their students and have a more

intimate knowledge of the students' personal lives. They see first-hand the impact parents and caregivers can have on their children's achievement in school.

Research Question 2

What are the most significant challenges faced by school districts in educating ELL students?

While the first research question examined the factors that impact ELL achievement, the second research question seeks to identify which factors educators find to be the most challenging. Once more, the educators were asked to use a 4-point Likert scale to rate the indicators from "not challenging at all" to "extremely challenging". The results displayed on Table 4.4 list the mean challenge ratings in order beginning with the most challenging. All of the mean ratings fell between 2 (somewhat challenging) and 3 (moderately challenging) on the Likert scale.

Two of the top three indicators which ranked as the most challenging were aligned to the construct of quality instruction: "Training is provided for all teachers in ELL instructional strategies" ($M = 2.98$) and "All teachers incorporate strategies to assist ELL students" ($M = 2.93$). The high challenge rating for these two indicators shows the difficulty schools face as they attempt to train general education teachers so that they have the knowledge and skills needed to modify lessons to meet the needs of ELL students. The lowest ranked indicator was related to providing interpreters and translators for parents and caregivers. While this may be taken as a good sign that school districts are providing this important service, the rating is still above 2 showing that this is still a somewhat challenging task.

Table 4.4

Mean Ratings for Challenge Indicators (on a scale of 1-4)

Indicator	Mean (SD)	Construct alignment
Training is provided for all teachers in ELL instructional strategies.	2.98 (0.83)	Quality instruction
Parents or caregivers of ELL students provide support at home to their students.	2.97 (0.84)	Parental involvement
All teachers incorporate strategies to assist ELL students.	2.93 (0.76)	Quality instruction
Parents or caregivers of ELL students attend teacher conferences and other events at the school.	2.67 (0.94)	Parental involvement
All staff members take responsibility for all students.	2.67 (1.00)	School climate
ELL students are involved in extra-curricular activities at school.	2.62 (0.89)	Sense of belonging
Instructional support is provided to meet the needs of ELL students.	2.46 (0.84)	Quality instruction
Teachers have high expectations for ELL students.	2.32 (0.79)	School climate
ELL students build positive Relationships with peers who are not ELL students.	2.22 (0.90)	Sense of belonging
Parents or caregivers are provided with interpreters and translations.	2.07 (0.86)	Parental involvement

Likert scale: 4 = extremely challenging; 3 = moderately challenging; 2 = somewhat challenging; 1 = not challenging

Next, the challenge ratings were grouped by construct to obtain the mean composite score for each one. These results are shown on Table 4.5. The mean composite scores are relatively similar for each construct with all of them falling somewhere between "somewhat challenging" and "moderately challenging".

Table 4.5

Challenge Composite Ratings

Construct	Mean (SD)
Quality instruction	2.68 (0.85)
Parental involvement	2.57 (0.96)
Sense of belonging	2.50 (0.95)
School climate	2.32 (0.92)

Likert scale: 4 = extremely challenging; 3 = moderately challenging; 2 = somewhat challenging; 1 = not challenging

The highest challenge ranking was received by quality instruction (M = 2.68) and the lowest challenge ranking was school climate (M = 2.32). There are two interesting observations to note here. First, all of the constructs have a mean challenge rating which reveals how difficult it is for schools to access the power of these constructs to support ELL achievement. Secondly, quality instruction was the highest ranked construct for impact and now also is ranked highest for challenge. Educators recognize that the quality of their instruction is one of the most important factors effecting student achievement, but at the same time acknowledge that it is a difficult undertaking when it comes to ELL students.

Finally, using an independent samples *t* test the challenge ratings for teachers and administrators were compared for each of the constructs. The results displayed on Table 4.6 reveal one significant difference.

Table 4.6

Comparison of challenge ratings between teachers and administrators

Construct	Teachers Mean (SD)	Administrators Mean (SD)	*t* score
Quality instruction	2.80 (0.76)	2.55 (0.92)	2.314*
School climate	2.35 (0.90)	2.28 (0.93)	0.602
Sense of belonging	2.52 (0.89)	2.48 (1.01)	0.235
Parental involvement	2.67 (0.97)	2.47 (0.94)	1.392

Likert scale: 4 = extremely challenging; 3 = moderately challenging; 2 = somewhat challenging; 1 = not challenging
p < .05

Teachers gave a higher challenge rating for quality instruction when compared to the administrators ($t_{(238)} = 2.314$, p < .05). It is not unexpected that the ELL teachers who are striving every day to provide the best instruction possible for ELL students are more aware with how challenging this can be.

Research Question 3

What strategies implemented by schools have contributed to success for ELL students?

The last research question addressed in the quantitative phase of the study was related to success. In order to address this question, first it was necessary to determine the degree of success educators have experienced within each construct. Educators were asked to rate on a 4-point Likert scale the degree of success their school had achieved in the four constructs being studied from "no success" to "extremely successful". Next, the survey included an open-ended question asking the participants to share additional details about their successful experiences. These open-ended answers were coded and tabulated to convert them to quantitative data. The mean results for the success ratings are displayed in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Mean Success Ratings

Construct	Mean (SD)
Positive school climate	3.08 (0.68)
The ELL student's sense of belonging	2.97 (0.72)
Quality instruction which meets the needs of ELL students	2.80 (0.58)
Parental involvement of ELL students	2.34 (0.71)

Likert scale: 4 = extremely successful; 3 = moderately successful; 2 = somewhat successful; 1 = no success

The highest mean rating for success was given to positive school climate (M = 3.08). This result suggests that the participants in the study feel they have been able to implement strategies that promote an environment at their school which is conducive to ELL achievement. In the open-ended responses, several participants described their success with community connections, family involvement and an appreciation for diversity. All of these strategies promote the development of a positive school climate to support ELL students.

Another way to interpret the data in this section is to analyze the construct that obtained the lowest success rating, thus indicating it may be the most challenging. From this perspective, parental involvement was given the lowest success rating (M = 2.34). In spite of having the lowest mean rating, three participants noted success in this area through the open-ended responses. They described how they have been able to improve parental involvement using strategies that include the organization of Family Nights for parents and having a bilingual parent liaison on staff.

An independent t test was conducted to compare the success ratings between teachers and administrators, however, no significant differences were found. The responses given by teachers and administrators for success ratings were similar.

Qualitative Results

In the second phase of the study, qualitative interviews were conducted in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the research questions. The purpose of the interviews was to expand upon the quantitative results by hearing directly from the

educators working with ELL students on a daily basis. The semi-structured questions

used for the qualitative interviews are listed below.

- What factors do you believe have the greatest impact on the academic progress of

  ELL students?

- In your experience, what have been the most challenging aspects of educating

  ELL students?

- Please describe any successful experiences you have had in your district related to

  ELL students?

- Do you believe ELL students have equal opportunities to a fair and equitable

  education which gives them the freedom to realize their full potential?

The first three questions correspond directly with the questions addressed in the survey

during the quantitative stage of the study. The fourth question coincides directly with

Research Question 4 and was only addressed in the qualitative stage of the study.

The transcripts from the interviews were analyzed using three types of coding:

descriptive, topical and analytical (Richards, 2008).   The descriptive coding identified

important demographic characteristics of the participants and the schools where they

worked including: gender, position, years of experience and school size. This

demographic data is presented in the following section.

Next, the data were coded by topic according to the four constructs which are the

basis for the study: parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's

sense of belonging. Subsequently, each set of topic codes were analyzed in order to

identify sub-categories within the constructs, which in turn were combined to identify

emergent themes. The themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in the sections following the demographic data below.

Finally, the sub-categories and themes were aligned to the four research questions. The results of this alignment are presented with a corresponding alignment of the quantitative data within Figure 2 under the heading, *Merging the Data*, in this chapter.

Demographic Data

Seven educators who completed the survey from the first phase of the study, volunteered to participate in the interviews. Four of the interviews were conducted with ELL teachers and three with school administrators. The group of three administrators included two working at the elementary level and one at the high school level. The four teachers who participated included two at the high school level, one at the elementary level and one teacher who worked K-12 in the district. All the teachers were female and the gender breakdown for the administrators was two female and one male. Similar to the entire group of survey participants, the interview participants had a high amount of experience working in the field of education. Their years of experience ranged from 8 to 40 years. The interview participants worked in five different school districts and the size of their school districts was representative of the area with most of the participants working in small districts with less than 2,000 students. Two of the teachers interviewed worked in a medium-sized district with more than 2,000 students.

Parental Involvement

All of the participants commented on parental involvement during the course of the interviews. After coding the data for this construct, the sub-categories were grouped and three different themes emerged.

The interviewees consistently stated that parental involvement greatly impacts the success of ELL students. Interview participants pointed out that "school readiness" and "family literacy" are key foundations established by parents that lead to student success. ELL students who do not have these skills are at an even greater disadvantage because not only do they need to learn a second language, but also develop emergent literacy skills. One interview participant explained that a nurturing and supportive parent who reads to their children at home in any language has a "huge" impact on student achievement.

Parents cared greatly about their children's achievement in school; however, they felt they could not help their children and had misconceptions about language acquisition. One high school teacher commented, "I know our families really get that education is the key to success. And they really want their kids to be successful in school. I don't think they understand the difficulties and I think they think…..six months in ESL classes and then they should be in all regular education". Participants perceived that parents want their children to learn fast and don't understand how long it takes to acquire academic proficiency. The participants also believed parents also believe that their lack of English language skills prevents them from helping their children with homework and English acquisition.

When schools have implemented specific plans to involve ELL parents, they have been successful. The last theme associated with parental involvement was related to the positive response schools have received from their parent outreach efforts. Interviewees mentioned the success they had with Parent Circles, district family liaisons and other parent communication groups. Two interviewees described successful campaigns where teaching staff went door to door to meet with families before the beginning of the school year or to announce upcoming events. At another school, staff went to the work location in town where many of the ELL parents were employed. They delivered the message to the parents, "We are the school. We are not scary. We are here to communicate with you. Do you have questions?" These types of outreach efforts to involve parents have resulted in positive outcomes that increase parental involvement and ultimately improve student achievement.

School Climate

During the interviews, several topics related to school climate were discussed. When the sub-categories were identified, there were two main themes which occurred in the participants' responses.

Student groups and staff development activities which promote diversity and cultural appreciations are important and have been successful in schools. Student-led groups which work to develop a positive environment for all cultural backgrounds such as "Shine Club" or "Respecters of Diversity" were identified as highpoints of success in this area. One administrator described the mission of one such group as "to look out for everybody" and to encourage under-represented groups to join extra-curricular activities.

The purpose of the group was to make sure "students aren't sitting alone at lunch" and to "create an accepting environment" at the school. From the staff development standpoint, another administrator described her success using a program called "Cultural Proficiencies" with adult staff members to analyze their own attitudes toward culture and appropriate ways to incorporate culture in the building. When participants were asked to identify an area of success, these efforts to promote positive school climate were readily identified by the interview participants.

School staff's willingness to take responsibility for the achievement of ELL students varies from individual to individual. A second theme which emerged under the construct of school climate was shared responsibility. A positive school climate for ELL students can be described as a place where every teacher, paraprofessional and staff member takes responsibility for the learning of all students including ELLs. In the interviews, the participants were eager to share stories about wonderful teachers in the general education classrooms who were more than willing to accept responsibility for ELL students. At the same time, they pointed out that this idea of shared responsibility varied from teacher to teacher.

One administrator stated some general education teachers "assume that the ELL teacher is going to fix that, instead of thinking WE need to teach" the ELL students. When commenting on shared responsibility, one of the teachers interviewed explained, "There are some [teachers] that still have that feeling of…he's your responsibility". A high school administrator summarized it in this manner:

Everybody has to take responsibility for that. Content area teachers, general

education teachers need to understand that students are *their* students. They are

all our students. It's not, it can never work when any sort of teacher thinks,

"Well, I'll take you as far as I can get you but you know once we hit a road block

you are going to the ELL room or for that matter you're going to the SPED room

or the gifted room". That never works.

Overall, the participants interviewed for the study felt that their schools were making

good progress towards an attitude of shared responsibility for ELL students; however,

there were still some general education teachers who did not feel they had the knowledge

necessary to provide appropriate instruction. This theme will be addressed in the next

section on quality instruction.

Quality Instruction

Of all the themes emerging from the interviews, the ones that were most clearly

and candidly portrayed were found in topics related to quality instruction. As the coded

data was organized into sub-categories, three themes emerged.

General education teachers don't have the training, skills and knowledge

necessary to provide quality instruction for the ELL students in their general education

classrooms. This same message came from all the ELL teachers and administrators at

both the elementary and secondary level. Following are selected comments that support

this theme:

- *Specifically, I don't think they are trained to meet the exact needs of ELL*
  students.

- *I don't think in the university they get a lot of that.*

- *The regular education teachers who don't know what to do with them when they first come in their classroom.*

- *There could be more direct, explicit instruction for the staff.*

- *The younger ones, you need to give them a lot of support because they are not getting any training in colleges.*

- *They are not even close in terms of knowing enough and knowing what to do and what materials they should use and what materials there are.*

Clearly, the interview participants believe that school districts and universities need to do more to provide general education teachers with the training and skills necessary to deliver quality instruction that meets the needs of ELL students.

  Budget and time constraints present a serious challenge to schools striving to provide quality education for ELL students. Administrators and teachers acknowledged that the number of ELL professionals in the district was not adequate to provide quality instruction to the ELL students. One administrator noted, "Next year, we are going to one full-time ELL person here which will be much better. We could use three, but that's what we have." Another described a similar situation as, "Our biggest challenge is that our EL provider for this school is here for 90 minutes a day and then she …is flying out the door heading to one of the elementary schools". Teachers also felt strained by the time and budget constraints as demonstrated by the following excerpts from the interviews:

- *I think it's a gigantic task and we are so limited with budget.*

- *I think it's because there is not enough funding, so small schools are stuck between a rock and a hard place.*

- *When I first came here we had five ELL teachers. And then we were down to one for a long time and now it is just 1.8.*

- *Ideally they should be getting extra support....They need more.*

Limited time and budget resources have always been a common difficulty which poses a serious challenge for all areas of public education. Often it is the at-risk populations such as ELL students, who need the most support, who absorb the greatest impact of these constraints.

   Student's background knowledge and literacy in their first language (L1) has great impact on their achievement in English. When asked what factor has the greatest impact on ELL achievement, the interview participants responded with "previous education", "education background", "native language instruction", "good background knowledge", and "if they are literate in their first language". Native language literacy can come from a variety of sources. Some ELL students have had formal education in their home country while others develop L1 literacy skills from a supportive parent who teaches their child's native language skills at home. It is well documented, as revealed in Chapter II, that these skills in their native language support their acquisition of English. Unfortunately, there are few schools that take advantage of this resource by teaching literacy skills in the student's native language. Closely connected to these literacy skills in L1, is the student's general background knowledge. Interview participants described

these skills as the experiences students have had in their home country or outside of the classroom that provide knowledge about a wide range of topics. ELL students who have this background will make connections to the English vocabulary and academic texts they are reading. On the other hand, those who lack the background knowledge struggle to make connections or as one teacher noted, "minus the mental Velcro, it just slides right out".

Sense of Belonging

Interestingly, the themes that came out of the analysis for student's sense of belonging drew the most emotional responses. Based on the interviews, the following three themes were identified.

The educators believe that a personal connection with an adult mentor at school can prove to be the critical factor leading to success for ELL students. A high school teacher explained what she felt has the greatest impact on ELL students. "First off, there has to be a connection. They have to feel some trust and make some sort of a connection with the teacher, understand expectations." One of the administrators interviewed shared an anecdote about a high school coach who had a special gift for making connections to ELL students. "He can turn around kids like you wouldn't believe. He can take the kids on the edge and bring them in". She went on to explain, "He looks you in the eye. Calls you by your name and he remembers it. And you are important to him". Another teacher described a special relationship she had developed with an ELL student from a migrant family that traveled back and forth from Texas to Minnesota. She described simple things she did to make the student feel important and

valued which allowed her to have a special influence on the student's academic success. Eventually, she helped him to enroll into a post-secondary program where he finished his bachelor's degree in business and now works for a major company. She summarized the key to success by stating, "So I really think it is when any student can connect with somebody outside their family….to an adult."

Extra-curricular activities such as sports and band have a positive influence on ELL achievement. Teachers indicated that it was challenging to get ELL students involved in extra-curricular activities due to cultural barriers as well as other obstacles such as transportation and communication. However, when these barriers are overcome and ELL students join extra-curricular activities, it has a positive impact on their English acquisition and achievement in school. One teacher explained that their ELL students who have joined athletic teams "feel more connected to the school" and "end up a lot more concerned about their school work". She then went on to share an anecdote about an ELL soccer player who participated in a homecoming contest in front of the student body. The entire junior class was chanting the student's name in unison and the teacher couldn't help but think how "cool" it was to see the student's connection to his class and the school.

Interview participants believe there are negative consequences to grouping or tracking ELL students which decreases their sense of belonging in the school community. The last theme reoccurring in the area of student's sense of belonging was related to instructional models implemented for ELL students. Several of the interview participants noted that when ELL students are "tracked" or "pulled-out" it has a negative

effect on their sense of belonging. A teacher explained, "it pulls them away from their

English language speaking peers and is not giving them some of that cohesion or even the

collaboration feeling of being...a member of the classroom". Another teacher indicated

that many of her ELL students felt isolated in the school community. She explained that

it takes years sometimes for them to "start branching out and meeting friends". From a

different perspective, an administrator indicated that her biggest success came from an

experience where she "pushed out the homogeneous grouping and integrated those

students into all groups, all classes". She explained that it was more important for

students to share culture with each other than to have the ELL students grouped in one

classroom. The benefits gained from improving the student's sense of belonging in the

school community outweighed any instructional benefits gained from having the ELL

students grouped together.

Equal Opportunities

The final research question related to the equity of ELL education was addressed

only in the qualitative phase of the research study. The interviewees were asked the

following question, "Do you believe ELL students have equal opportunities to a fair and

equitable education which gives them the freedom to realize their full potential?" The

most common response to this question was a long pause and then a comment similar to

"Wow" or "That's a hard one". Overall, the educators interviewed for the study had very

positive outlooks about their mission to achieve the best education possible for ELL

students. This led to the interpretation that they had a strong desire to say "Yes!" to this

question because they are working extremely hard to achieve equality for ELL students.

At the same time, they hesitated because they are realistic in recognizing that this mission is not yet complete.

Of the seven educators interviewed, only one gave an affirmative answer to this question about equity, however, that response was qualified with a comment. "I feel they do, but I am looking at it from a narrow perspective, my own." All the other interview participants indicated to varying degrees that ELL students do not have equal access to a quality education. Two of the three administrators cited the limited staff and time for instructional support as the reason why ELL students do not have equal access to quality education. The third administrator tied the reason to integration stating ELL students "are not part of our mainstream system yet". From the teachers' point of view, equal opportunities often depended upon with whom the child came into contact with. The quality of education depended upon the teacher, school and resources available. In all cases, the message from the educators was that they are doing the best they can with available resources. Educational opportunities for ELL students are improving, but there is certainly more work to be done to achieve equality. As one of the interviewees stated, "We are not there yet".

Merging the Data

An essential step in a mixed methods study is merging the quantitative and qualitative data in a manner consistent with the mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano, 2011). After collection and analysis, the quantitative and qualitative data was merged in order to obtain a full and robust analysis of the research questions. A side-by-side approach was implemented and the most important findings from each phase of the

study are displayed in Figure 2.

Research questions	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings

R1- Impact of Assumptions, Expectations, and Beliefs	All indicators received a rating confirming a moderate to great impact on ELL achievement.
	
	The three indicators with highest impact ratings:
	  1st - Instructional support for ELL students
	  2nd - ELL student's relationship with teachers
	  3rd - Teacher's expectations for ELL students
		All four constructs (parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of belonging) were described as having great impact on ELL achievement.

R2- Most Significant Challenges	The indicators with the highest challenge rating:
	  1st - Training is provided for all teachers in ELL instructional strategies
	  2nd - Parents or caregivers of ELL students provide support at home to their students
	  3rd - All teachers incorporate strategies to assist ELL students.
		General education teachers do not have the training, skills and knowledge necessary to provide quality instruction for the ELL students in their general education classrooms

R3- Strategies for Success	Highest rated constructs for success:
	  1st – School climate
	  2nd – Sense of belonging
		A personal connection with an adult mentor at school can prove to be the critical factor leading to success for ELL students

R4- Issues of Educational Equality	This question was not addressed in the quantitative phase of the study.	Progress is being made, but there is still much that needs to be done to achieve equality in education for ELL students.

Figure 2 Side-by-side comparison of the data

Next, the findings and themes were compared to determine if and how the quantitative and qualitative data were convergent. The first notable convergence of data is found in the challenge section. Both the quantitative data and the qualitative data indicated that educators believe more training is needed to prepare general education teachers to work with ELL students.

Secondly, the data converges to support the belief that a positive adult role model at the school leads to a strong sense of belonging and student achievement. This theme clearly emerged in the qualitative interviews when educators were asked to share a success story and was supported by the quantitative data where student's sense of belonging received the second highest ranking for success.

Finally, the side-by-side analysis supported the underlying assumption of this research study which posits that all four constructs play an important role in the education of ELL students. The survey results for the impact ratings showed that educators believe all of the indicators have a moderate to great impact on ELL achievement. The interviews confirmed this assumption, as each one of the constructs was mentioned by the participants as having an influential impact on achievement.

Summary

The results of this sequential mixed methods study revealed important information about ELL education from the perspective of the teachers and administrators working in public schools in Southwest Minnesota. The quantitative results were aligned with three of the research questions pertaining to the assumptions, expectations, and beliefs of these educators. Although all of the constructs being studied received high

mean ratings for both impact and degree of challenge, quality instruction received the

highest mean rating in both areas. In the qualitative analysis, several themes were

identified and presented under the main constructs from the framework of the study:

parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of

belonging. The next chapter will provide in-depth interpretation of the merged data. It

will also address the implications of these results and recommendations for the future.

Chapter V

Conclusions

This research study explored the experiences and perceptions of educators working with ELL students in order to gain knowledge and understanding which in turn can be used to improve educational opportunities for ELL students. The research was guided by a conceptual lens based in critical education research, a paradigm which seeks to produce knowledge which will transform the circumstances being studied in order to promote social justice. The insights provided by the educators in this research study indirectly provided a voice for the ELL students who continue to struggle to reach their full academic potential.

Interpretation of Merged Data

The sequential mixed-methods design of this study accessed the advantages from both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. The quantitative phase of the study allowed input from a larger population (all ELL teachers and administrators in Southwest Minnesota) and provided opportunities to use descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The qualitative phase of the study provided the opportunity to gain a rich, in-depth description of the factors which affect ELL education from the educators' perspectives. Merging the major findings from each of these phases established a more thorough interpretation and validated the findings.

A holistic interpretation of the merged data led to several key conclusions. First, the ELL educators participating in this study have a positive perception regarding the education of ELL students, but at the same time acknowledge the inequalities that exist

for this population. The positive outlook is evidenced by the success ratings in the quantitative data. In spite of the challenges, the educators indicated they have achieved a degree of success in parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense of belonging. This assumption was supported by the qualitative interviews, as the participants shared a variety of examples in each of the four areas where they have been successful. Notwithstanding these examples, the educators recognized that much work still needs to be done to achieve equity in education for ELL students. Specifically, the educators acknowledged the inequalities that exist due to limited staff and lack of training for general education teachers. In addition, the participants described the negative effects of instructional models that marginalize the students by decreasing their sense of belonging.

Secondly, the results of the study confirmed the underlying premise of the research which posits that success for ELL students should be measured from a multi-dimensional perspective. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data supported the assumption that ELL education is greatly impacted by parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of belonging. All of the indicators in the survey received high ratings for impact supporting the notion that all of these constructs impact the academic success of ELL students. In addition, the analysis of the qualitative data revealed similar results. All of the participants recognized the importance of each of the four constructs. Even more importantly, the interviews recognized the overlying characteristics for the four constructs and described the power that can be gained by using strategies that access multiple constructs simultaneously.

This leads to a third finding from the holistic interpretation. The most successful and transformational strategies for ELL students are those that address multiple constructs. As an example, one of the ELL teachers interviewed shared a successful experience related to co-teaching. She described an instance where she planned a lesson with the science teacher and delivered the lesson together. The ELL teacher focused on the language objectives and the science teacher focused on the content objectives. This co-teaching experience resulted in a higher quality instruction for all students, ELLs and general education students. At the same time, it built the ELL students' sense of belonging by allowing them to stay in the classroom and participate with the whole class community. It built a positive school climate by supporting the idea that the general education teachers and the ELL teachers have a shared responsibility for all students. Consequently, the strategy of co-teaching with ELL teachers and general education teachers is uniquely powerful because of the intersecting constructs being addressed (quality instruction, sense of belonging and school climate).

To illustrate another example of the power of intersecting constructs found in the qualitative interviews, a teacher shared a lesson she taught called "postcards to home". ELL students were asked to complete an authentic writing assignment by composing a postcard that was mailed to a family member. A few days after the lesson, a student came to the teacher excited to share the news that her grandmother had received the postcard. This authentic writing lesson touches multiple constructs by providing quality instruction that involves the students' parents or caregivers. In addition, it promotes a

positive school climate by respecting and acknowledging the importance of the student's

home culture and builds connections between the school community and home.

Based on this finding, a revised model for measuring success for ELL student

from a multi-dimensional perspective is shown in Figure 4. This revised model is similar

to the multi-dimensional framework presented at the beginning of the study representing

the impact of parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's

sense of belonging on the achievement of ELL students. However, the revised model

shows the four constructs as intersecting circles to demonstrate the overlying nature of

the constructs and the power that can be found through strategies which access multiple
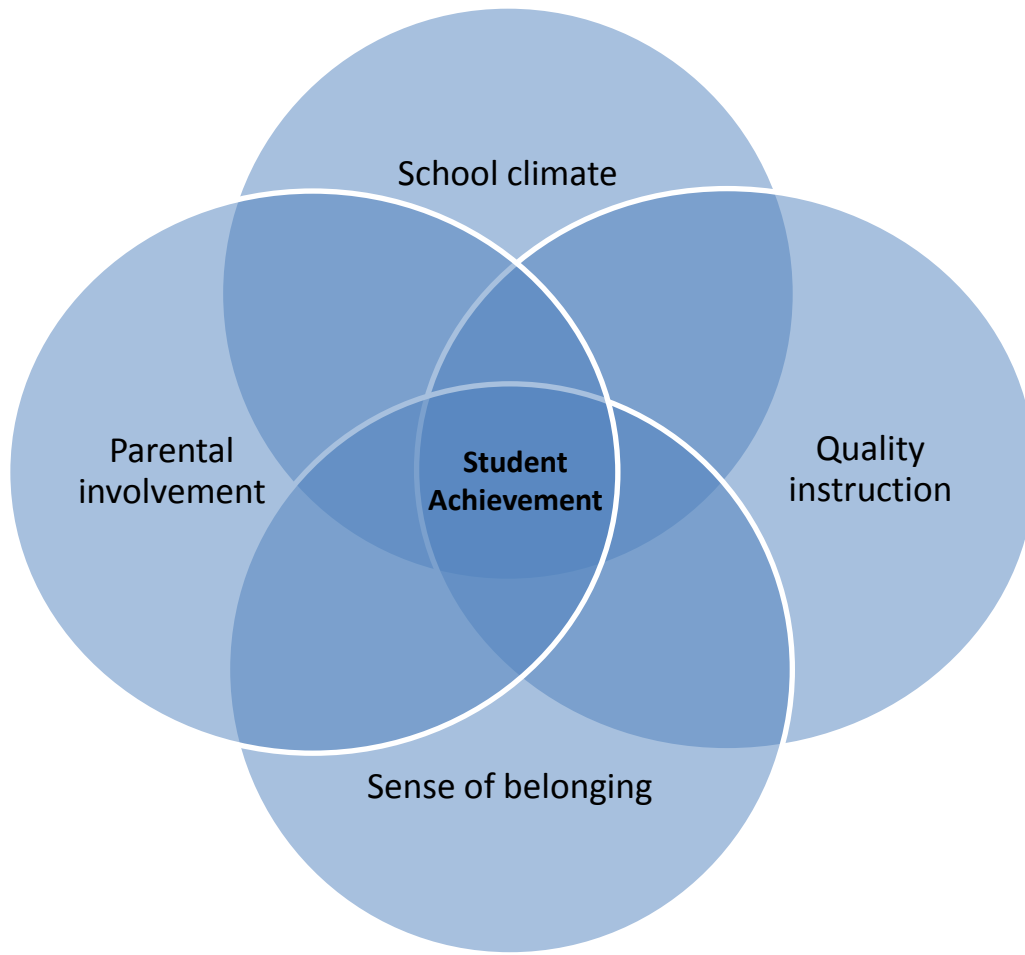
constructs simultaneously.

Figure 4 Multi-dimensional perspective for measuring ELL success

This model can be used by education professionals working to improve ELL education in

a number of ways. At the school or district level, the model can be used when

developing ELL education programs to ensure that a comprehensive plan is implemented.

In order to design a comprehensive ELL education plan, educators must consider how

they will access the influence gained from each one of these constructs. The model can also be used as a framework to evaluate and improve current ELL education plans. Rather than focusing exclusively on test data, schools can evaluate their ELL programs by examining how they are addressing parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of belonging. When looking to improve on elements of their current plan, educators should search for ways to access multiple constructs with the same strategy.

At the classroom level, teachers should identify and practice strategies which build on the assets of parental involvement, quality instruction, school climate and student's sense of belonging. In addition, strategies should be evaluated based on the degree to which they address these constructs. A great lesson which promotes quality instruction can have even greater impact by incorporating other aspects to address student's sense of belonging or parental involvement.

Implications

Due to the growth of the ELL population in K-12 public schools, it is essential for education professionals to gain a better understanding of the factors which impact the achievement of ELL students, as well as the challenges which must be overcome. This information can be used by teachers, administrators, universities and others working to improve educational opportunities for ELL students. Based on the data obtained in this study, the following recommendations are believed to be key components to improve educational opportunities for ELL students.

Implications for Teachers

Develop ELL teachers as a knowledge resource. One of the major conclusions drawn from the merged data indicates that teachers in general education classrooms do not have the knowledge and skills needed to work with ELL students. One way to address this problem is to have certified ELL teachers model instructional strategies and train general education teachers on how to use appropriate methods. In addition, there needs to be time for ELL and general education teachers to communicate regarding the instructional needs of ELL students. The ELL teachers have the knowledge and training to address the issues facing ELL students and given the opportunity can be a valuable resource to the other teachers at the school.

Implement co-teaching and push-in models. There are many benefits achieved when the certified ELL teacher is integrated into the general education classroom to co-teach a class. The general education teacher is able to observe how the ELL teacher modifies the lesson to assist all students. The ELL students' sense of belonging is supported because they are not pulled-out of the classroom, but instead integrated into the school community. The collaboration between the teaching team leverages the skills of both teachers for the benefit of all students and creates a climate of shared responsibility.

Promote personal connections to students. One of the keys to success for ELL students is making a personal connection with an adult mentor at school. These relationships build the student's sense of belonging in the school community, help them to learn the culture of the school and facilitate their acquisition of English. Teachers,

coaches, and school staff from all areas need to make every effort to reach out to ELL

students to make them feel comfortable at school. It is not just the ELL teachers that will

make these connections which transform a student's school experience. The ELL

population is diverse and each student is searching for different connections at school.

For one student it may be a coach; for another it may be an art teacher; and another might

make a connection to a playground supervisor. The key is that every student develops a

positive relationship with an adult mentor who will work to build their sense of belonging

in the school community.

Personal connections between teachers and students often happen naturally,

however, in the case of at-risk populations, such as ELL students, teachers cannot afford

to wait and see if a connection happens naturally. It is important to make a deliberate

plan of action to foster these connections. These plans need to be in place from the first

day the ELL students comes to the classroom in order to build their sense of belonging

from the start.

Implications for School Administrators

Provide professional development opportunities to general education teachers

which give specific training on ELL instructional strategies. The findings from the study

clearly indicate that more training must be provided for general education teachers.

Administrators must dedicate time and resources to developing the knowledge and skills

of the entire teaching staff. First, a successful professional development plan for ELL

education needs to begin by building a foundation of knowledge related to second

language acquisition. There are many misconceptions about learning a second language

which can curtail professional develop opportunities. The entire instructional staff needs to be familiar with the key aspects of second language acquisition for a training program to be successful. Once this knowledge base is developed, the professional development plan must include specific training on ELL instructional strategies for all teachers.

Create a school climate of shared responsibility. As school leaders, administrators must set the tone for shared responsibility for all students. All staff must recognize that ELL students are everyone's responsibility. Administrators can promote a climate of shared responsibility by demonstrating the importance of ELL education through their actions. By dedicating professional development time for ELL instructional methods, they are communicating their own commitment to shared responsibility, but at the same time providing general education teachers with the skills they need to follow through and deliver quality instruction to ELL students.

When ELL teachers are isolated in separate classrooms and do not have time to communicate with the general education teacher, it builds obstacles to share responsibility. Administrators can remove these obstacles by scheduling consistent time for ELL teachers to communicate with general education teachers about the ELL students in their classrooms. In a period of limited time and resources, how administrators utilize these resources speaks of their commitment to shared responsibility for all students.

Implement consistent efforts to involve parents. Parents care deeply about their children's education and want them to be successful in English. Their lack of involvement should not be viewed as lack of caring. Often times there are language and cultural barriers that are obstacles to be directly involved in their children's education.

There are a number of ways that administrators can plan events which overcome these barriers that have been used successfully in other schools. Parent meetings designed specifically for ELL parents are an important strategy that can be used to deliver information to families about school procedures, events and policies, however, these "one and done" events cannot be the only strategy. There needs to be consistent and deliberate efforts to communicate with parents to educate them on how they can support their children at home.

Implications for Universities

Redesign teacher preparation programs to incorporate ELL instruction. Universities must include curricula in their teacher preparation programs that directly prepare pre-service teachers at all levels and subjects to work with ELL students. While more courses may not be possible, college professionals should examine their current programs to find ways to integrate ELL instructional methods into all courses. In addition to incorporating these methods into content coursework, it is essential to include field experience opportunities directed specifically at ELL students. These field experience opportunities will allow pre-service teachers to observe ELL student learning, ELL program design and instructional delivery from experienced ELL teachers.

Provide training for current teachers on ELL strategies. Universities can assist school districts in closing the training gap that may exist for their current teaching staff. Teachers who have been in the field for a number of years may not have had sufficient preparation in ELL instructional methods in their college programs. By offering continuing education for experienced teachers, universities can address this problem.

Universities should reach out to local school districts to develop cooperative relationships to benefit both parties. School districts can provide the ELL students for practical experiences and universities can provide the knowledge base in second language acquisition and the training for ELL instructional strategies.

Recommendations for Further Research

The multi-dimensional perspective presented at the outset of this research and revised earlier in this chapter offers an alternative method for measuring success for ELL programs and student achievement. Additional research is needed to further understand how each one of these constructs uniquely affects ELL achievement. It is well established that all four variables (parental involvement, school climate, quality instruction and student's sense of belonging) have a profound impact on all students. For each of these constructs, researchers need to examine how the nuances of the construct have distinctive meanings when applied to ELL students. How is sense of belonging different for ELL students compared to the general student population? What types of parental involvement are most beneficial for ELL students? What instructional methods are most successful? How do ELL students view the current school climate? The answers to these questions will assist researchers and educators to build a better understanding of how to provide equal educational opportunities to ELL students.

As previously mentioned, this research set out to be a transformative study to improve ELL education. The perspective of the educators obtained in this research is a first step in transforming ELL education, however, in order to provide a truly transformative viewpoint, the perspective of the ELL students and parents must be

examined. Researchers need to design studies which explore the students and parents'
viewpoint in order to provide a voice to these marginalized populations.

Of the four constructs studied in this research, student's sense of belonging is the
one that generally has the least amount of empirical knowledge. Even less research can
be found which specifically addresses ELL students and sense of belonging. This lack of
empirical evidence is a major weakness considering the fact that personal connections
with adults were identified as one of the keys to success for ELL students in this current
study. Although a more in-depth understanding is needed for each of the four constructs,
sense of belonging may be the one with the greatest opportunity for new research which
leads to transformative knowledge for ELL education.   The language barriers faced by
ELL students create a major obstacle for them in developing personal relationships and
social connections in the school community. Establishing the importance of these
connections and how it affects students' achievement is a first step in accessing the
transformative power that lies within a student's sense of belonging. Once this link is
fully understood, researchers and educators can make it a priority to find the methods to
break down the barriers so ELL students can feel they belong in their school community.

In closing, ELL students are one of the most marginalized groups of students in
public schools today. They struggle to keep up academically while at the same time
learning English as a second language. These language barriers have a profound impact
on their academic and social development. In recent years, important strides have been
made to bring attention to ELL education through data-driven accountability. The
increased focus on standardized test performance has provided much needed attention for

ELL education; however, it is important that educators keep a multi-dimensional perspective for measuring the success of ELL education. The multi-dimensional model established in this research study provides a more complete perspective to ensure that English Language Learners receive equal opportunities to reach their full academic potential.

References

Abedi, J. (2004). The no child left behind act and English language learners: Assessment and accountability issues. *Educational Researcher, 33*(1), 4-14. doi:10.3102/0013189X033001004

Abedi, J. (2008). Measuring students' level of English proficiency: Educational significance and assessment requirements. *Educational Assessment, 13*(2), 193-214. doi:10.1080/10627190802394404

Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion. *Radical Teacher,* (75), 16-21.

Ajayi, L. (2011). Exploring how ESL teachers relate their ethnic and social backgrounds to practice. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 14*(2), 253-275. doi:10.1080/13613324.2010.488900

Alford, B. J., & Niño, M. C. (2011). *Leading academic achievement for English language learners: A guide for principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Araujo, B. E. (2009). Best practices in working with linguistically diverse families. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 45*(2), 116-123. doi:10.1177/1053451209340221

Azzam, A. M. (2009). Getting parents -- and a system -- on board. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 92-93.

Ballantyne, K. G., Sanderman, A., & Levy, J. (2008). *Educating English language learners: Building teacher capacity.* Washington D.C.: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.

Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review, 21*(2), 141-170. doi:10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0

Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwantoro, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the no child left behind act.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Chapman, C., Laird, J., & KewalRamani, A. (2010). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 1972–2008.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1), 180-213.

Cohen, L., Morrison, K., & Manion, L. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). London: Routledge.

Cortez, A., & Villarreal, A. (2009). *Education of English language learners in U.S. and Texas schools: Where we are, what we have learned and where we need to go from here.* San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association.

Cosentino De Cohen, C., & Chu Clewell, B. (2007). *Putting English language learners on the educational map.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Crawford, J. (2004). *Educating English learners: Language diversity in the classroom* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Educational Services.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J. (1999). *BICS and CALP: Clarifying the distinction*. Retrieved November 10, 2010 from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED438551.pdf

DeCapua, A., & Marshall, H. W. (2010). Reaching ELLs at risk: Instruction for students with limited or interrupted formal education. *Preventing School Failure, 55*(1), 35-41.

Echevarria, J., & Graves, A. W. (2007). *Sheltered content instruction: Teaching English language learners with diverse abilities* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

Echevarria, J., Short, D., & Powers, K. (2006). School reform and standards-based education: A model for English-language learners. *Journal of Educational Research, 99*(4), 195-210.

Estrada, V. L., Gómez, L., & Ruiz-Escalante, J. (2009). Let's make dual language the norm. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 54-58.

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 13*(1), 1-22.

Flynn, K., & Hill, J. (2005). *English language learners: A growing population [policy brief]*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Fortuny, K., Capps, R., Simms, M., Chaudry, A., & Abedi, J. (2009). *Children of immigrants: National and state characteristics.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E. (2009). *Academic language for English language learners and struggling readers: How to help students succeed across content areas*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Freeman, Y. S., Freeman, D. E., & Mercuri, S. (2005). *Dual language essentials for teachers and administrators*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fry, R. (2007). *How far behind in math and reading are English language learners?*. Washington, D.C: Pew Hispanic Center.

Gándara, P., Moran, R., & Garcia, E. (2004). Legacy of Brown: Lau and language policy in the United States. *Review of Research in Education, 28*, 27-46.

García, E. E., Jensen, B. T., & Scribner, K. P. (2009). The demographic imperative. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 8-13.

Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., & Christian, D. (2005). English language learners in U.S. schools: An overview of research findings. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 10*(4), 363-386. doi:10.1207/s15327671espr1004_2

Good, M. E., Masewicz, S., & Vogel, L. (2010). Latino English language learners: Bridging achievement and cultural gaps between schools and families. *Journal of Latinos & Education, 9*(4), 321-339. doi:10.1080/15348431.2010.491048

Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests* [Erkenntnis und Interesse. English]. Boston: Beacon Press.

Herrell, A. L., & Jordan, M. (2004). *Fifty strategies for teaching English language learners* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 42*(1), 82-110.

Karathanos, K. A. (2010). Teaching English language learner students in U.S. mainstream schools: Intersections of language, pedagogy, and power. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(1), 49-65. doi:10.1080/13603110802504127

Krashen, S. (2003). *Explorations in language acquisition and use: The Tapei lectures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Krashen, S. (2008). Language education: Past, present and future. *RELC Journal, 39*, 178-187.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition* (1st ed.). Oxford: Pergamon.

Lara-Alecio, R., Galloway, M., Irby, B. J., Rodríguez, L., & Gómez, L. (2004). Two-way immersion bilingual programs in Texas. *Bilingual Research Journal, 28*(1), 35-54.

Lindholm-Leary, K., & Hernández, A. (2011). Achievement and language proficiency of Latino students in dual language programmes: Native English speakers, fluent English/previous ELLs, and current ELLs. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development, 32*(6), 531-545. doi:10.1080/01434632.2011.611596

Little, C. (2004). A journey toward belonging. *Educational Leadership, 62*(4), 82-83.

Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2d ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

McCoach, D. B., Goldstein, J., Behuniak, P., Reis, S. M., Black, A. C., Sullivan, E. E., & Rambo, K. (2010). Examining the unexpected: Outlier analyses of factors affecting student achievement. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 21*(3), 426-468.

McMahon, S. D., Parnes, A. L., Keys, C. B., & Viola, J. J. (2008). School belonging among low-income urban youth with disabilities: Testing a theoretical model. *Psychology in the Schools, 45*(5), 387-401. doi:10.1002/pits.20304

McNeil, L., Coppola, E., Radigan, J., & Vasquez Heilig, J. (2008). Avoidable losses: High-stakes accountability and the dropout crisis. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 16*(3). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/28/154

Menken, K. (2010). NCLB and English language learners: Challenges and consequences. *Theory into Practice, 49*(2), 121-128. doi:10.1080/00405841003626619

Merriam, S. B., Baumgartner, L., & Caffarella, R. S. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (2010a). Transformative mixed methods research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(6), 469-474. doi:10.1177/1077800410364612

Mertens, D. M. (2010b). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Montecel, M. R., & Cortez, J. D. (2002). Successful bilingual education programs: Development and the dissemination of criteria to identify promising and exemplary

practices in bilingual education at the national level. *Bilingual Research Journal, 26*(1), 1.

Mora, J. K., Wink, J., & Wink, D. (2001). Dueling models of dual language instruction: A critical review of the literature and program implementation guide. *Bilingual Research Journal, 25*(4), 435.

Moran, R. F. (2005). Undone by law: The uncertain legacy of Lau v. Nichols. *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal, 16*(1), 1-10.

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (2011). *The growing numbers of limited English proficient students: 1998/99-2008/09.* Washington, D.C.: Office of English Language Acquisition, U.S. Department of Education.

Ortiz, T., & Pagan, M. (2009). *Closing the ELL achievement gap.* New York: International Center for Leadership in Education.

Panferov, S. (2010). Increasing ELL parental involvement in our schools: Learning from the parents. *Theory into Practice, 49*(2), 106-112. doi:10.1080/00405841003626551

Ramirez, A. Y., & Soto-Hinman, I. (2009). A place for all families. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 79-82.

Richards, L. (2008). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. London Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Rolstad, K., Mahoney, K., & Glass, G. V. (2005). The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners. *Educational Policy, 19*(4), 572-594. doi:10.1177/0895904805278067

Rubie-Davies, C. (2010). Teacher expectations and perceptions of student attributes: Is there a relationship? *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*(1), 121-135.

Ruus, V., Veisson, M., Leino, M., Ots, L., Pallas, L., Sarv, E., & Veisson, A. (2007). Students' well-being, coping, academic success, and school climate. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal, 35*(7), 919-936.

Sánchez, B., Colón, Y., & Esparza, P. (2005). The role of sense of school belonging and gender in the academic adjustment of Latino adolescents. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 34*(6), 619-628. doi:10.1007/s10964-005-8950-4

Sweetman, D., Badiee, M., & Creswell, J. W. (2010). Use of the transformative framework in mixed methods studies. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(6), 441-454. doi:10.1177/1077800410364610

Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.

Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2003). The multiple benefits of dual language. *Educational Leadership, 61*(2), 61-64.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *National assessment of educational progress (NAEP), 2009 reading assessment.* Retrieved November 1, 2011, from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata

Washburn, G. N. (2008). Alone, confused, and frustrated: Developing empathy and strategies for working with English language learners. *Clearing House, 81*(6), 247-250.

Wright, W. E. (2006). A catch - 22 for language learners. *Educational Leadership, 64*(3), 22-27.

Zehr, M. A. (2009a). Graduation rates on ELLs a mystery. *Education Week, 29*(3), 1-21.

Zehr, M. (2009b). ELLs and the law: Statutes, precedents. *Education Week, 28*(17), 8-9.

Zullig, K. J., Koopman, T. M., Patton, J. M., & Ubbes, V. A. (2010). School climate: Historical review, instrument development, and school assessment. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 28*(2), 139-152.

Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Measuring Success for English Language Learners (ELL)

You are invited to participate in this research survey about English Language Learners.

The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and responses will be kept confidential. You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. Please click on the Start Survey button to begin.

1. Are you male or female?

○ Male

○ Female

2. Which of the following categories best describes your employment position?

○ Certified teacher for English Language Learners

○ District level administrator

○ School level administrator

○ Other, please specify

[ ]

3. How many years of experience do you have in the field of education?

4. For how many ELL students do you provide direct services?

5. What type of instructional model does your school/district use for ELL students?
(Check all that apply.)
ESL classes- separate instruction
Native language instruction

Structured English Immersion

Bilingual education

Newcomers program

Sheltered English Instruction

Other, please specify

6. Please indicate the approximate size of the school district where you work.

0-500 students

501-1,000 students

1,001-1,500 students

1,501-2,000

more than 2,000

7. Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 indicates the item greatly impacts ELL achievement and 1 indicates no impact.

(1= no impact; 2= low impact; 3= moderate impact; 4= great impact)

ELL student's relationship with teachers

Parent's or caregiver's involvement in school activities

Specific training for teachers in ELL strategies

Positive school climate

ELL student's involvement in extra-curricular activities

Parent's or caregiver's commitment to helping the student at home

Teacher's expectations for ELL students

Administration's commitment to ELL students

ELL student's relationship with peers

Instructional support for ELL students

8. Please mention any other factor not listed above that you believe greatly impacts the achievement of ELL students.

9. Based on your experience in working with ELL students at your school, please rate each of the following items on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 indicates the item is extremely challenging and 1 indicates not challenging at all.

(1= not challenging; 2= somewhat challenging; 3= moderately challenging; 4= extremely challenging)

Parents or caregivers of ELL students attend teacher conferences and other events at the school

Training is provided for all teachers in ELL instructional strategies

All staff members take responsibility for all students

ELL students are involved in extra-curricular activities at school

Parents or caregivers of ELL students provide support at home to their students

ELL students build positive relationships with peers who are not ELL students

All teachers incorporate strategies to assist ELL students

Parents or caregivers are provided with interpreters and translations

Teachers have high expectations for ELL students

Instructional support is provided to meet the needs of ELL students

10. Please mention any other factor which you have found to be challenging when working with ELL students.

11. Please rate the level of success your school has achieved in the following areas as it relates to ELL students where 4 represents highly successful and 1 represents no success.

(1= no success; 2= somewhat successful; 3= moderately successful; 4= extremely successful)

 The ELL student's sense of belonging in the school community

Parental involvement of ELL students

Positive school climate

Quality instruction which meets the needs of ELL students

12. If applicable, please provide any details you wish to share regarding your school's success with ELL students.

13. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview regarding this topic, please provide your name and contact information (email or telephone number).

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Strand 1: Impact

What factors do you believe have the greatest impact on the academic progress of ELL

students?

Strand 2: Challenges

In your experience, what have been the most challenging aspects of educating ELL

students?

Strand 3: Success

Please describe any successful experiences you have had in your district related to ELL

students?

Strand 4: Equality

Do you believe ELL students have equal opportunities to a fair and equitable education

which gives them the freedom to realize their full potential?