

A SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

by

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For EVERY English Language Learner in our Schools

I've got your back; and together, we will help you reach for the stars!

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ABSTRACT

Teachers face more challenges in today's classroom than were faced 20 years ago. The rise of English Language Learners (ELLs) in American schools continues to grow, with 21% of the K-12 student population being ELL (NYU, 2018). With this drastic increase, schools are challenged to meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs that these students have. ELL specialists can provide support in these areas; however, the percentage of ELL specialists in most schools is not enough to adequately meet the needs of the ELL population. Because of this factor, ELL students are being primarily served in the mainstream classroom.

These mainstream classroom teachers are struggling to adequately meet the needs of the ELL students they serve daily, mainly because most have not received any type of specialty training or support with this special population. If teachers are to best meet the needs of ALL learners, then action must take place; leaders must identify the primary struggles that teachers are experiencing, and prepare a list of resources and training opportunities to support the needs at their schools.

Keywords: ELL, Mainstream ELL Instruction, ELL Strategies

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teachers face more challenges in today's classroom than were faced 20 years ago. The rise of English Language Learners (ELLs) in American schools continues to grow, with 21% of the K-12 student population being ELL (NYU, 2018). With this drastic increase, schools are challenged to meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs that these students have. ELL specialists can provide support in these areas; however, the percentage of ELL specialists in most schools is not enough to adequately meet the needs of the ELL population. Because of this factor, ELL students are being primarily served in the mainstream classroom.

These mainstream classroom teachers are struggling to adequately meet the needs of the ELL students they serve daily, mainly because most have not received any type of specialty training or support with this special population. If teachers are to best meet the needs of ALL learners, then action must take place; leaders must identify the primary struggles that teachers are experiencing, and prepare a list of resources and training opportunities to support the needs at their schools.

Background

As the population of our education system continues to evolve, as it has drastically since the beginning of the 21st century, teachers more than ever must be flexible in their approach to the change within education and the changes that must occur in their instructional strategies. Throughout the landscape of these across-the-board changes to education is the shift of English Language Learners being served in the mainstream classrooms. Some schools have experienced large influxes of ELL students which cannot be accommodated through preset and yearly budgeting. These schools just were not prepared to adequately meet the needs of the large numbers of students enrolling in their systems through sufficient numbers of ELL specialists, thus leading to the increased number of ELLs being served primarily through the general education or “mainstream” classroom.

The term “general” means overall or not specific. Teachers who have obtained traditional or general elementary or secondary education certifications are only exposed to the overall aspects of the education process. To provide the needed supports and instructional strategies that ELL students need, these teachers are often underprepared. This is not their fault. As these teachers pick up the slack and provide education to the ELL students the majority of the day, they need training to make their job easier and to be able to offer instruction that meets the ELL student wherever he or she is academically.

School systems must look for creative and practical ways to fill the knowledge gap that mainstream classroom teachers have in ELL education. Many of these teachers have master’s level certifications or higher, but often not in the ELL specific area.

Systems should look for ways to provide on-site and virtual coaching to these teachers, depending on their specific needs. Offering these teachers the tools necessary to help properly instruct the ELL students they serve daily will begin the process of filling the learning gap that the ELL population is experiencing.

Ultimately, the long-term goal in educating ELL students is to find creative ways to educate them without adding the extra layer of expense of specialists. Budgets do not have to be the enemy of providing these students with an education that will put them on the pathway to success after high school, trade school, or college. These students need the language and academic skills to help them to become global citizens, future business leaders, and mountain-movers!

Purpose of the Study

Big River School has a large ELL population, limited budgets, and low but improving scores on ELL examinations. This qualitative case study will look at teachers' perceptions of serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom and their professional opinions on how to help the students and themselves. Shifting student populations and limited budgets have contributed to the number of ELL specialists that serve Big River School. With approximately 150 ELL students per specialist's case-load, it makes it nearly impossible to see every student each day or give them the specialized support they may need. Additionally, there is hardly any time to offer professional development to the mainstream classroom teachers that have these ELL students the majority of the day.

Through this qualitative case study process on teacher perception, it is the hope of the researcher to be able to identify some patterns, strategies, and resources that can be

used to design a program to give back to the teachers. While it is difficult for schools and/or districts to hire additional specialists for this rising population, it is reasonable for them to purchase resources or coaching that can fill this gap and vital need. After concluding the study, it is the hope of the researcher to develop a coaching system for ELL students and teachers that can be tailored specifically to the school's, teacher's, and specific student's needs. At the end of the day, it is hopeful that these ELL students will have the opportunity to grow and be productive global citizens.

Statement of the Problem

This study will utilize a qualitative case study design that will examine mainstream classroom teachers' perceptions of teaching ELL students the majority of the school day. This study will seek to understand the gaps that the teachers have in adequately preparing these ELL students for the language and academic skills necessary to be successful in school and beyond.

Research questions considered are:

- (1) What is the strategy at this school for improving teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

Theoretical Framework

Built upon a socio-constructivist learning theory, this study seeks to understand how learning is conceived through social experiences. Crotty also explains that not only is knowledge constructed through our human interactions with the world, but also our understanding and participation within these interactions is defined by our prior

experiences within our culture (1998). Our culture shapes our view and interactions with the world.

In the words of Vygotsky (1978), "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level" (p.57). He believed there is a connection between learning and development.

Understanding an individual's development requires understanding the culture of the individual. Socio-constructivist learning theory guides the understanding of learning and teaching within this study. Vygotsky's socio-constructivist learning theory has direct ties to the classroom because he notes that children are problem-solvers through social interactions. With this idea he presents his idea of the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development refers to the concept of how students can learn through the assistance of an adult and individually.

Instruction refers to how the learner learns and how the teacher can scaffold and support the learner in their journey. As Vygotsky mentions, good instruction always marches ahead of the development and learning within the classroom (1986). Keeping this concept in mind, learning should focus on how the teacher can gently push ahead of the child's development in a way that challenges, but allows the content to remain accessible. Teachers can construct social experiences in which students can learn from him or her, and their peers. This is an active and cyclical process based on student needs and classroom environment. Ball and Forzani acknowledge that this process is not linear, that these interactions and interpretations are happening simultaneously or in a cyclical nature (2007). Consistency is key to this process on the part of the teacher leading the

class and the students interacting. To be successful, the teacher should identify and collect data on how the interactions occur and how to design situations to promote interactions.

The success of the ELL in a mainstream classroom often correlates with a supportive internal and external context. Cummins (2000) suggests that a classroom which focuses on generating knowledge through socio-cultural interactions is extremely beneficial for ELLs. Through these socio-cultural interactions, a classroom environment built on understanding and appreciating language diversity can develop. This environment helps ELLs relax and feel unthreatened, and encourages them to interact in English with the teacher and peers (Dong, 2004; Heath, 1983; Williams, 2001).

For some teachers, the uncertainty or stress related to serving ELLs in the mainstream classroom has resulted in a feeling of being underprepared and frustrated (Cho & Reich, 2008). For many mainstream teachers, neither the preservice training nor current opportunities for professional development are adequate in preparing them to instruct ELLs (Batt, 2008). It is vital that mainstream classroom teachers have the training and knowledge required to best serve the ELLs in their care.

Definition of Terms

(ELL) English Language Learners: These students come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Schools can have a diverse population of ELL students on one campus. A variety of languages and dialects can be represented. These students' first language is not English.

(Mainstream Classroom Teacher): These teachers are known as generalists to some because their degree and certification is for general education, such as K-6 Elementary certification.

(ELL Specialists): These teachers have special certification in ELL instruction. Some have a master's degree with P-12 certification, while others may only have certification through a Praxis examination without the master's.

(Culture of Care): This is a term the researcher will use to define how a school leader or teacher responds to or acts toward others, meaning a genuine level of care. Unofficially when a teacher “*adopts*” his or her students as their own. Evidence is seen when teachers (or leaders) show love and compassion toward others.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of teachers who are providing the majority of their ELLs' daily instruction. The perceptions of teachers were considered throughout the process in order to help identify the needs these teachers, students, and schools face. The researcher's use of a qualitative design was supported with teacher interviews that were carefully designed to obtain the best information possible about what the “root-cause” of the issues of instruction for ELL students primarily in the mainstream classroom really looks like and how to best design an action plan. Additionally, the researcher conducted classroom observations and looked through teacher lesson plans and school plans.

The study addressed two local problems, (1) teachers' perceptions of serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom, and (2) what strategies can help and is there a

connection to what the educators in the classroom have to offer. An action plan will be designed to offer to school leaders and teachers that will seek to address this issue at Big River School and schools that may be experiencing similar issues.

The results will hopefully offer a deeper insight into the root-cause of instructing ELL students in the mainstream classroom, what teachers need, and how to best support the needs of this diverse population of students. The perception data will be used to support the action plan at this school and schools similar in demographics.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This study was limited in both time and scope taking place over the course of one semester. Given such a short time period it is doubtful that a full picture of teacher perception was captured. To fully examine the scope of this issue, one would need to spend a lengthy period of time, possibly up to 1-3 school years to best capture the trends of the ELL population, how teachers evolve through the process, and how leaders respond to the needs of the schools, specifically the mainstream teachers. The instruments used in the process may not have fully captured the robust scope of this issue and the implications of this study.

Moreover, the researcher serves as a mainstream classroom teacher and teacher leader within the building at the school being studied. There is a chance that the potential for the researcher to transition into an assistant principal position within the school in the future may have affected the responses of the participants.

Additionally, this case study was limited to a single elementary school, Big River School, that includes a teacher population of 35, student population of approximately

530, and ELL population hovering around 64% of those students. There are only three ELL specialists who serve this population of ELL students.

It is assumed that the research participants were as honest as possible with the answers during the qualitative interviews, and during the classroom observations and the sharing of their classroom supporting documents, which were both limited due to Covid-19. Additionally, it was assumed that participants had a sincere interest to participate in the study with no motives in place other than contributing to the knowledge base of the work.

Summary

Schools are under a tremendous amount of pressure from district, state, and federal mandates to close the achievement gap for ELL students. With rising populations of ELL students, budget constraints, and a small workforce of specialists, mainstream teachers are struggling. This chapter contains information about the purpose of this study, the research question that will be answered, the theoretical framework and significance the study may provide for education, specifically, those mainstream classroom teachers seeking to give the very best possible education to ELL students.

CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

The increased number of ELLs in the mainstream classroom is due to the growing population of ELLs and their relocation into areas with administrators and educators who have little experience and funding for working with students learning English (Cho & Reich, 2006; Echeverria, 2000). Another major factor causing an increased inclusion of ELLs in the mainstream classroom has been from the shift in federal programs (No Child Left Behind, NCLB; Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA) and the redefinition of academic success. With this legislation, successful students, especially those in the secondary setting, should perform well on state administered content-based examinations, and regularly attend and graduate from high school within four years. For secondary ELLs, this legislation emphasizes content knowledge above the acquisition of English and promotes the inclusion of ELLs into the mainstream content classroom as quickly as possible (Echeverria. 2006; Mantero & McVicker, 2006). In order to provide equitable learning experiences for all, teachers need to make connections between content knowledge and language acquisition.

Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms

The instruction of any inclusive classroom should center on both English language development and content knowledge. Verplaeste and Migliacci offer four key

elements to supporting ELLs in the mainstream classroom, which include the natural ability to learn, comprehensible language input and course content, engagement with content and peers, and cognitively stimulating environment (2008). The relationship between content instruction and language acquisition is often strained or broken in the upper elementary and secondary settings. Short suggests that teachers must have knowledge of English as language, knowledge of content, and knowledge of high quality classroom instruction (1997).

Learning is a Natural Process for All

Student learning is a complex process that involves multiple perspectives and the means of supporting those perspectives. Willingham suggests, “People are naturally curious, but we are not naturally good thinkers; unless the cognitive conditions are right, we will avoid thinking” (2009, p. 3). This further supports the idea that learning is complex and teachers must encourage students to think, a process that is not natural to the human brain. To understand how the brain conceptualizes the learning process, one must also examine how the human sensory system affects student learning. Schunk defines learning as a change in behavior that occurs over time through personal experiences (2016, p. 3). With this belief, one can see how student learning heavily relies on the body’s senses, rather than thought to conceptualize new knowledge.

Knowledge can be demonstrated through what people say, write, and do according to Schunk (2009). Examining how student behavior changes is the first precept to understanding how learning occurs. Since thinking is not natural, change is an essential ingredient because students learn when challenged to do something differently. Students

often use their memory to guide their behavior because when given the opportunity, one does not think (Willingham, 2009). This conclusion resonates with Schunk's idea that learning endures over time (2016). Although, changes in behavior can alter one's state of thinking, true knowledge is developed over an enduring process. This means that students should be engaged in a consistent learning environment that encompasses experiences (Berliner & Caltee, 1997). Learning is interconnected with experiences and curiosity, so the conditions have to be right for thinking to postulate into a learned experience (Willingham, 2009). Students' attitudes toward learning can either be stifled or stimulated, depending on the environmental factors that formulate the thought process.

Behavior and cognitive theories both deduct that environmental factors affect learning. Behavior theories look at how students' background and developmental status affect growth (Schunk, 2016). Cognitive theories also examine environmental factors as influences, but conclude that students must do something with the new information they are presented. Memory serves as a method of refraining from thought (Willingham, 2009). Behavior theory concludes that memory is a response to external stimuli, while cognitive theory sees memory as an organized method of encoding information for future use. Willingham views working memory as an "awareness" of the environment around you, while long-term memory serves as a "storehouse" of factual knowledge (2009). This implies that students' working memory has limited space, so thinking becomes difficult as the working memory space becomes full.

Students will respond consistently to cognitive thought as long as the work poses a moderate challenge and includes breaks (Willingham, 2009). The learning process

involves change, time, and personal experiences, so for students to conceptualize new knowledge, they must be given an opportunity to process the work given through working memory, before rushing to a new concept. Students have limits to their cognitive abilities. For example, a student's background knowledge (long-term memory) can greatly affect how their working memory processes the new information presented by the teacher. While motivation can have a direct impact on students, it depends on the internal goals and needs of each student (Berliner & Caltee, 1997; Willingham, 2009). Students will be naturally curious, but the brain is designed to refrain from thinking. Thinking is slow, so the brain uses memory to navigate through concepts and situations. Learning is a process that involves change, time, and experiences, so instruction may be tailored to the diverse needs of each learner.

A Scaffolded, Safe, Learning Environment for All

Vygotsky (1896-1934) a Russian psychologist, conceptualized the sociocultural, or social development theory that is rooted in constructivism. This theory places more focus on the social environment as a facilitator of development and learning. He argues that higher forms of mental function such as attention, memory, logical thought, planning, and problem-solving are uniquely tied to a sociocultural setting (Schunk, 2016). To better understand Vygotsky's position, one must consider the fact that he was a Marxist, and his attempt to apply social change to language and development were inherent of his personal beliefs. The 1917 Russian Revolution that supported strong social change fit well with Vygotsky's sociocultural theoretical framework (Schunk,

2016). Vygotsky's most famous work is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which greatly impacted the educational system of today.

One of the foundational principles of sociocultural theory is the claim that the human mind is mediated. Mediated learning is the subtle social interactions that teachers and learners share to enrich the learner's classroom experiences (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1992). The interpersonal interactions between teachers and students provide children with experiences that foster cognitive growth and reorganize their mental structures. The sociocultural environment offers children tasks and demands that also enhance the learning process. The idea of sociocultural theory constitutes the idea that learning experiences should be meaningful and relevant to students, with the purpose of developing and growing the child as a whole (Burden & Williams, 1997). Learning should be underpinned by a set of beliefs that align with the kind of society that schools wish to support.

Sociocultural theory has a holistic view of learning that opposes the idea of singularly teaching skills and argues that study should occur through experiences, such as unit study (Burden & Williams, 1997). When teachers present the material through a unit study and allow students the opportunity to be an active agent in the learning, they will be able to internalize the task. Tasks that are successfully mediated are those that include scaffolded support for learners. Vygotsky's most important contribution to sociocultural theory is the (ZPD), or the distinction between the child's actual and potential levels of development. The notion of (ZPD) was due to Vygotsky's dissatisfaction with the assessment of a child's intellectual abilities and the evaluation of the instructional

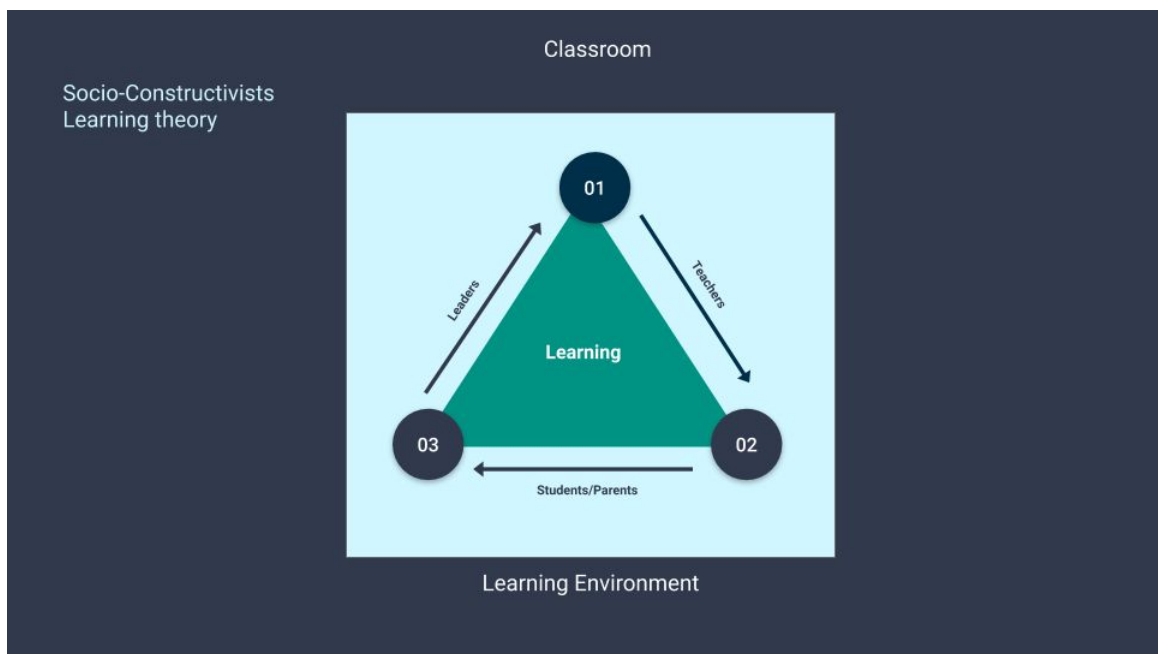
practices (Shayer, 2002). Reflecting back on the first notion, Vygotsky felt that assessment of intellectual abilities did not measure a child's true potential or ability. He felt that psychology should be able to predict a child's future growth. Through this process, Vygotsky developed the (ZPD), or the student's ability to perform independently and his or her potential ability with adult guidance or collaboration (Wertsch, 1985). The (ZPD) also helps to determine a child's mental functions that have not yet matured.

A crucial feature of (ZPD) is that learning awakens internal development that operates only when the student is interacting with his or her environment and in collaboration with peers (Shayer, 2002). When these processes are internalized, they become part of the student's independent development achievement. Instruction should proceed ahead of development and awaken functions that set the stage for maturation according to a student's (ZPD). Shayer suggests that instruction should provide students with the tools needed for thinking and it should always march ahead of and lead child development (2002). Vygotsky did not provide clear lines of "how" (ZPD) should be implemented, but rather left it to practitioners. An issue that arises in the school context are mediation as mentioned above and scaffolding, both concepts of sociocultural theory, but not a formal part of Vygotsky's theory (Schunk, 2016). Mediation is the shaping of a student by offering learning experiences that enrich the whole child (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1992). Scaffolding, a concept that relates to mediation, is a supportive environment in which the student can participate to extend known skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence. Most often, scaffolding is an instructional structure where the teacher models and the students gradually take responsibility for the task. The

idea of scaffolding is very important to an English Language Learner (ELL) classroom because these students need consistent support in their language development, while the teacher gradually releases new skills and knowledge.

Sociocultural theory regards the interactions and environmental factors that support learning. Vygotsky's theory is rooted in constructivism, or the idea of constructing knowledge through life experiences. The main educational implications of sociocultural theory lie in the instruction process, meaning that interactions between teachers and students are foundational to growth. Additionally, collaboration with "expert" peers can support development. Vygotsky's (ZPD) is the notion that students may be able to complete certain tasks independently, while doing additional, more developmentally challenging tasks through collaborations with the teacher and peers (Wertsch, 1985). It is interesting to know how Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was aligned directly with Marxist ideas that supported strong social change. No matter the background, sociocultural theory supports an active classroom full of engaging experiences and differentiated supports for each learner.

Figure 1: Socio-constructivists theory.



Built upon a socio-constructivist learning theory, this study seeks to understand how learning is conceived through social experiences. Crotty also explains that not only is knowledge constructed through our human interactions with the world, but also our understanding and participation within these interactions is defined by our prior experiences within our culture (1998). Our culture shifts our view and interactions with the world. As seen in Figure 2 above, one can note how the classroom (learning environment) is directly impacted by the leadership, teachers, and parents/students. Each party involved in the learning process as seen in the center of Figure 2 has an impact on learning. Learning can occur in a variety of social or environmental places, but is directly related to what the leaders, teachers, parents, and students contribute.

Motivation for Learning, All of the Time for All

Motivation is fundamental to student learning because it influences how students learn and whether or not they achieve goals set forth by themselves or their teacher. Leveraging motivation in the classroom is essential to overall academic growth, but before motivation can occur, a student's basic physiological needs should be met (Schunk, 2016). A key theory in motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which address the physiological needs in individuals.

Maslow has identified five psychological needs that motivate individuals in the workplace. The hierarchy of needs include physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Acevedo suggests that higher needs will not appear in a person's consciousness until lower needs are gratified (2018). As seen in the school setting, staff will not think higher or be open to change until personal needs are met. Individuals contributing to an organization want to feel valued by leaders. They also want to see their contribution to the organization as meaningful and important. Leaders must learn to motivate the mind, before asking individuals to be a part of major organizational change (Acevedo, 2018).

The first four needs in Maslow's Hierarchy are deprivation needs, or needs that produce a lack of satisfaction. These deficiencies motivate people to satisfy them (Schunk, 2016). Physiological needs include air, food, and water. These basic needs are satisfied for most individuals, most of the time. School nutrition programs have helped to ease this basic burden, allowing students to have their basic needs met before coming to class. Secondly, Maslow describes safety needs as basic, but essential to motivation. With

recent incidents of school shootings, leaders have placed additional interest and funding to school safety. When students do not feel safe at school, they will not perform well. When physiological and safety needs are met, belongingness or love becomes important (Schunk, 2016). This can include relationships with groups or close friends. Cultivating belongingness in the classroom can entail collaborative seating arrangements, group projects, or mentoring programs. It is vital for students to feel like they are part of a larger whole. At the fourth level are self-esteem needs that are manifested in high achievement, independence, and recognition from others (Schunk, 2016). Encouraging each other and creating an environment that is conducive to praise will motivate individuals to push ahead. Finally, self-actualization or the need to become everything that one is capable of becoming can be fulfilled when the four deprivation needs are met. When students can achieve the freedom to be all they were made to be, amazing potential can be unlocked.

Motivating students is one of the greatest challenges that a teacher can face because students come from a variety of backgrounds. Looking deeper into Maslow's hierarchical needs will allow educators to empower students by providing basic needs that support greater fulfillment. Learning environments should be conducive to positive motivation and growth.

The Impact of Feedback for All

Learning Targets. Learning targets or learning intentions, as some refer to them as, are the roadmap for student learning. These daily, classroom objectives drive the lesson and give all learners the ability to understand their "why." By helping students to

understand the purpose of their learning, teachers are able to guide, scaffold, and provide formative feedback that ties back into the learning target. William states that learning targets put students at an advantage because it enables students to “know” where they are going (2018). Additionally, learning targets can help students be reflective. This means that as the teacher provides feedback, students can make connections to their goals.

Teaching Students to Understand Feedback. To effectively implement formative feedback into the classroom, teachers should teach students how to receive, interpret, and use the feedback that is given to them (Hattie & Clarke, 2019). There is a common misconception that large amounts of feedback equate student success, but that is simply not true. Feedback that is not heard by the student is of little use, meaning that if students are unable to make meaning out of the feedback they receive from the teacher, they will simply dismiss it. To help students know how to understand feedback, teachers should strive to shift the mindset of students by demonstrating a positive classroom climate, laying out the benefits of feedback to students, and scaffolding supports to help students grow.

The Impact of Feedback on Achievement. Common knowledge among educators is that feedback helps to increase student achievement. Reeves (2016) examines some of Hattie’s (2009) work on the effect-size of feedback on student achievement, and his findings indicated a (0.73) effect size. In statistical research, an effect size of (0.40) or greater indicates a substantive initiative. Reeves also considers four key elements of effective feedback that include fairness, accuracy, specificity, and timeliness. Fair feedback does not look at gender, race, socioeconomic status, or any

other characteristic that can influence the type of feedback that teachers give.

Additionally, accurate and specific feedback refers to feedback that is connected back to the learning target and is specific to student needs. Finally, timely feedback simply refers to feedback that is given to students at a time that can improve their performance.

Formative Assessments. The formative assessment “process” refers to a series of events that lead up to a goal. Popham offers five applications for formative assessments that include immediate instructional adjustments, near-future instructional adjustments, last-chance instructional adjustments, learning tactic adjustments, and classroom climate (2011). When teachers think of “formative” they often think of a process that is ongoing or daily. Formative assessment feedback can help teachers make immediate instructional shifts. This helps the teacher to differentiate and scaffold instruction to meet individual student needs. Formative assessment feedback can also affect near-future and last-chance instructional adjustments, meaning that teachers can use the feedback to improve future practices or help alter the course of a student who is near failure. Finally, formative assessment feedback can shift learning strategies and the classroom climate.

Using Assessments to Drive Instruction: SIOP Model. The Sheltered Instruction Operational Protocol (SIOP) offers a synergetic approach for making content accessible to students by consistently focusing on academic language development. Many states use the SIOP model strategies to help close the gap between traditional learners and their non-native English speaking counterparts. The SIOP model incorporates many features recommended for high quality instruction for all students, including cooperative learning, reading comprehension strategies, emphasis on the writing process, and

differentiated instruction (Luster, 2012). The model contains 30 key ideas that are grouped into eight main components for assisting ELL instruction. The eight SIOP components are lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, lesson strategies, student-teacher interaction, student practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Echevarria, 2008; Echeverria & Short, 2010).

Using the SIOP protocol, teachers can benefit from an observational rating instrument, a lesson planning process tool, a research tool for measuring fidelity, and a model that can be used to assist with district planning (Luster, 2012). By building an assessment that is tailored from the SIOP model, the assessment could include features such as the assessment of reading and writing; graphic support such as bolded key words; and text elaboration and simplification that are all tailored around the assessment recommendations for ELL students.

By creating assessments that are modeled after the SIOP model, teachers are able to build content knowledge of language and test capacity that will support ELLs through assessments (Echevarria & Short, 2010). If an assessment is created using the SIOP model, one would also need to consider other factors including language, educational background, varying degrees of formal education, and exposure to testing.

Assessments for ELLs should be planned with thoughtfulness and clarity. These assessments should include key elements such as test purpose, test construction, content, connection to the standards, and overall ELL friendliness (Pitoniak, M.J., John W. Young, Martiniello, M, King, Buteux, A, and Ginsburgh 2009). Assessments based upon

the SIOP model should be meaningful to the ELL student and the improvement of ELL instruction in the mainstream classroom.

Meaningful Collaboration

Helping schools to develop meaningful collaboration for ELLs is key, especially in rural areas because many rural schools may only have one grade level teacher or one teacher per subject area. This can be especially challenging preparing quality instruction for ELLs. Collaboration may look different in a rural setting, but it can only be successful if the participating teachers are engaged and focused on the right work (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Mainstream teachers of ELLs can partner with a PLC group to support the overall needs of the ELLs represented. Every teacher has something to offer to a PLC and will feel valued when their expertise can be a part of a meaningful collaboration. By valuing each member of the team, leaders can help to bring teams together in order to leverage strengths. Students must always be the priority.

Collaboration can birth new ideas for learning for all ELLs.

The format of the PLC collaborations can be different from school to school, but there are several non-negotiables that each collaboration must have. These non-negotiables include a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a results oriented mindset (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). By following a proven format, mainstream teachers and ELL specialists can make the most out of their planning time and the process in which collaborations occur.

The main idea within the PLC format is a focus on learning. Shouldn't this be the focus anyway? It is kind of ironic that "a focus on learning" would have to be presented

to staff that are hired to promote quality learning. High expectations of learning should be the driving force behind a focus on learning. As teams collaborate with each other, they should strive to ensure that learning is occurring at all levels, which includes among teachers, too.

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos suggests that the main purpose of the PLC collaboration process is to ensure the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of each unit are met with efficiency and high expectations (2016). As collaborations between mainstream teachers and ELL specialists evolve, team leaders need to ensure that the plans being created ensure knowledge and skills that ELLs need to be able to “access” the learning. A focus on learning should always be met with the notion of “accessibility.” When ELL students are able to access the learning, they will be more successful.

Collaborations between mainstream teachers and ELL specialists should be ongoing and learning should be evolving through collective responsibility (Dufour et al., 2016). Using phrase words such as, “our students” and not “my students” is the first main hurdle toward establishing a healthy collaboration through collective responsibility. Although it may seem optional to some, working collaboratively and sharing the collective goals is an expectation of the job as an educator. Teachers, especially mainstream teachers of ELL students, should not be working in “silos.” Collaborations must occur. Each team member should work interdependently to achieve common goals through mutual accountability (Dufour et al., 2016). This means that teachers should each contribute something to the common goal of a focus on learning. Each team member has something unique to present to the planning process. For example, if a teacher is really

good at teaching writing instruction, then he or she should be preparing writing materials. It is vital to meet the teachers where they are and build the team from a giftedness standpoint first. After identifying each team member's giftedness, the lead facilitator can begin to support the team in developing their talents and sharing the responsibility.

Following a focus on learning through collective responsibility, ELL/mainstream PLC teams should look for results. If each step in the PLC process is accomplished through fidelity, then growth should occur (Dufour et al., 2016). Evidence of student learning should be used to inform decisions within the PLC team. Using data to drive instruction is a cyclical process involving gathering data, developing strategies, implementing those strategies, analyzing the impact, and applying new knowledge. Dufour et al., believe that measurable results will support the team in their efforts in developing strategic plans and workable goals for learning for ALL (2016).

Cultural Competency in the Classroom. Cultural competency in the classroom is the idea that culturally competent teaching and pedagogy can empower ethnically diverse students through success in academics, identity, and personal efficacy (Gay, 2002). This knowledge and ideas should be made accessible to students through low floors, wide walls, and breakable ceilings.

Knowledge paired with cultural competency should rest within the interests and aspirations of the student through support from the teacher (Gay, 2002). The teacher's personal cultural competency can have an impact on these students' progress. Howard states that students feel that the relationship with their teacher sets the climate for learning, through the teacher's compassion and care (2001). The climate is also affected

by the way the teacher identifies and supports student success, respect, and overall nurturing of the learner, a whole-child approach. Modifications in instruction that help to support the cultural climate of learning will better meet the needs of ELL students.

Culturally competent teachers lay the groundwork for instruction by making connections between instruction, the social context, powerful relationships, and environmental factors that lie quietly within the classroom culture (McKinley, 2004). Through this process, students should feel connected with their classroom as a “valuable” part of the whole.

McKinley identified several strategies that culturally competent teachers used in their instruction to forge healthy relationships with ELL students (2004). Two foundational categories were included, (1) curriculum and instructional design variables, and (2) teacher-student social interactions. These strategies included alignment to the curriculum paired with authentic assessments, carefully planning instructional content, multicultural approaches, interdisciplinary lessons, frequent teacher-student interactions, cooperative grouping, high expectations, social variables, classroom climate, student engagement, and compassion (McKinley, 2004).

Mindful instruction and scaffolding are important when considering and implementing these strategies. Variances will occur throughout the instructional improvement process. Reeves (2000) “90,90,90 case study” identified some similarities to McKinley’s work, such as a focus on a whole community approach to academic achievement; strong curriculum; frequent, formative assessments; an emphasis on writing; and holistic scoring. The students were taking ownership of their education, meaning they held their success and was a “valuable” part of the process.

Although these strategies are useful for supporting culturally competent instruction, Reeves (2000) found that resources were scarce because up to ninety-five percent of the instruction that “worked” was tied back to a textbook somehow. There is something to say about structure and cohesiveness within the instructional process that a quality textbook can provide. Most of the textbooks within the study were European-American publishers. To alleviate the textbooks from their biases, the schools in Reeves’ study supplemented the instruction with culturally competent texts and trade books. Students were also encouraged to conduct guided research. As with the implementation of any strategy, such as McKinley’s (2004) as seen similarly through Reeves (2000) case study, teachers should take the suggestions provided and tailor it to their context.

Communication within the ELL Community. Communication is either the strength or weakness of any organization. It is the lifeblood of schools. LeRoux says that education cannot take place without interpersonal communication (2002). This is essential. Communication, especially on behalf of mainstream classroom teachers and ELL specialists, can either make or break the success of a school’s ELL population. Cross-cultural communication was a vital portion of Valdes’ ethnography, “Con Respeto” where children’s education was examined against the impact of communication between the school and their Hispanic families (1996). Throughout the study it was noted that communication between the school and families improved the students’ success at school. If schools are expecting parents to be involved in the education process, then leaders and teachers alike should take a purposeful and proactive approach to reaching

out to parents. As with many diverse cultures, it may not be inherent on the parents' behalf to interact with the school, so the teachers and leaders of the school must set that precedence.

ELL parents, and sometimes parents in general, may not know how to interpret test scores, reports cards, projects, or any type of work their children are doing at school. When parents are left in the dark, they are more likely to not cooperate with the school or will forget about helping out, whether with their child at home or through volunteerism. When schools fail to support their school-to-parent line of communication, parents will often feel as though they are not part of the process.

LeRoux presented several strategies to address the issue of school to parent communication with an emphasis on improving cross-cultural communication (2002). These strategies include respecting individuals from other cultures, being empathetic towards diverse viewpoints, being open to learning, being flexible, being humorous, tolerating ambiguity, acknowledging prejudices, being open, being genuine, and seeing differences as opportunities (LeRoux, 2002). Communication can also be non-verbal, which includes eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and gestures. These non-verbal cues can have either a negative or positive impact on parent-school communication.

Culture among ELL parents must be respected and appreciated to foster healthy school-parent relationships. Igoa placed a high value on teachers and leaders of schools to interact and value the home culture in order to keep open a positive line of communication (1995). When schools value the home culture, a level of worth is

established that carries weight. Parents felt as if they were actually contributing to the educational experience. As the landscape of education continually shifts, school leaders and teachers should strive to open and keep open lines of communication between all parents, but especially vulnerable populations, such as the ELL community. These parents and children have something to offer to the school and community. In an effort to shift a school to a community school, leaders should implement and foster these strategies and changes for communication.

Conclusion

This literature review seeks to answer the big picture question of how teachers can best serve the ELL population that is being primarily served through the mainstream education classroom. The review examines learning theories, techniques for engaging learners through quality, researched-based instruction, assessments and feedback, professional learning for teachers, collaboration, cultural competency, and school-parent communication. Thus, the hope of this study and literature review is to examine a holistic, whole-child, community-based education that can prepare ELL students, and really all students, through engaging, high quality education that is founded on high expectations and open lines of communication.

CHAPTER III:
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This section discusses the methodology used for this research. Creswell (2009) offers the term “worldview” to describe a researcher’s “general orientation about the world and the nature of research” (p.6). My research is built upon the social-constructivist theory. My belief is that people attempt to make meaning from, or interpret, their worlds; and, these interpretations are subjective because they are shaped by the context of both the situation and the individual’s past experiences and interactions with others (Creswell, 2009).

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to help identify how mainstream teachers of ELL students do the work they do daily. Investigations looked at teachers’ perceptions of serving these students in their mainstream classrooms, strategies and ideas teachers currently use, and their opinions of what can be done to help. The perception data was used to develop a comprehensive plan for addressing this issue. This case study

investigated the perceptions of ten mainstream teachers and observations of the ELLs they instruct daily.

Research Design and Procedure

Role of the Researcher

During this study, I served as a sixth grade mainstream classroom teacher serving ELLs. Additionally, my background in ELL (Master's degree with Alabama ELL Certification) affects my view on this study. At the school level, I work closely with the teachers in my building, serving as the technology coordinator and interacting with teachers on a regular basis, serving on numerous advisory committees. For this reason, I felt like an insider while I conducted this research, which helped to support healthy relationships with participants, meaning that I was able to gather important and true data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

This position within the school ensured that I was an “insider” while conducting this research, which was an asset as far as providing access to the participants and establishing the relationships needed to gather rich data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, this position of an insider also came with its own set of biases. Because of my background and research in ELL, I do have several biases, including my opinion of what should be done and my passion for ELLs. Because of these concerns, I repeatedly ensured the participants within the study that the information that they chose to share with me was confidential and did not influence their continued participation in any other classes. Exposing these biases at the beginning of the study was important to help me establish credibility as a researcher (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). Aside

from my biases, I also have biases regarding the instruction of ELLs in the mainstream. These biases are shaped by my own experiences as a mainstream teacher and by the stories of my students. A final bias that has shaped my research is my empathy for the language learner.

Participants

Mainstream Teachers

For this study, ten carefully selected mainstream teachers of English Language Learners were asked to participate. The teachers all fell into the category of grades K-6. Some of the teachers selected had advanced degrees and ELL certification, while others did not. The main priority of the selection process was to find teachers who served ELL students the majority of the day in their regular classrooms. Each participant worked at the same school in a rural area in the southeastern United States.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Due to Covid-19, also known as Coronavirus, that struck the United States in early 2020, my data collection methods were modified. After IRB approval, it was decided that participant interviews would be the primary source of data collected. Data from the interviews was analyzed and used to tell the teachers' perception of serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Limited classroom observations and sharing of classroom documents occurred before school closures.

Trustworthiness

Research which intervenes in individuals' lives should be considered trustworthy. There are concepts of validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity which are

used to measure the trustworthiness of a study. Because qualitative research is generated from a different paradigm, trustworthiness is assured through the rigor with which a study was conducted. Merriam (2009) discusses credibility, consistency and transferability.

Consistency

The extent to which research findings can be replicated is considered consistency. Most qualitative researchers reject the idea of replication, because it requires intentional manipulation as a means of causing events. Qualitative researchers seek to understand phenomena as they happen naturally. For this case study then, consistency refers to the idea that the findings of my study are consistent with the data that I have collected (Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure consistency, I used many of the same methods, which helps ensure credibility.

Summary

In summary, this single qualitative case study was designed to understand the ways in which both the mainstream teacher and the ELLs being served experience the mainstream classroom. In the following section, I will present my findings and discuss whether or not ELLs are being served adequately in the context in which I investigated.

CHAPTER IV:
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter contains an analysis of the data collected from the elementary teachers that participated in the study. Participants in the study were purposefully selected to include teachers who serve English Language Learners primarily in the mainstream classroom. The participants had a variety of academic backgrounds including bachelor's and master's degrees. Two participants in the study have Alabama State Certification in P-12 ELL.

Demographic Information and Survey Instruments

The ten teachers (participants) have a variety of degrees, certification, and years of experience. The participants also represent a variety of grade levels from kindergarten through sixth grade. The setting includes a rural Alabama school which is experiencing high poverty (with 46% directly certified for free or reduced priced meals, and 100% receiving free breakfast and lunch under the community eligibility grant due to community poverty) and an ELL population at Big River School of 64% Pre-K through 12th grade. Table 1 identifies the degree levels, certifications, grade levels, and years of experience of the participants.

Table 1: Teacher Demographics and Participation

Teacher	Bachelor's	Master's	ELL Cert.	Grade	Yrs of Exp.
A	1	1	1	K	11
B	1			K	6
C	1			5	4
D	1			K	13
E	1	1		K	20
F	1			6	11
G	1	1	1	2	20
H	1	1		6	28
I	1			5	3
J	1			5	14

The participants in the study gave thoughtful answers to the interview questions. The depth of thought put into each response noted some vital information that ties directly to the research questions and follow up questions. The follow up questions that support the research questions are included in Table 2:

Table 2: Supporting Interview Questions

B-1: What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
B-2: What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
B-3: What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
B-4: What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
B-5: What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
B-6: What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
C-1: How do you go about assessing whether ELLs grasp the material you present in class?
C-2: What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
C-3: How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
D-1: Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus.
D-2: Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here?
D-3: What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
D-4: What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)
D-5: How frequently do you attend such programs?
D-6: How are these programs advertised to faculty?

These support questions helped to solidify the connections made from the interviews to the literature. Each supporting question brings insight into the study.

Qualitative Data and Coding

The researcher chose ten elementary school teachers who serve English Language Learner students primarily in the mainstream classroom to work with during the qualitative portion of the study. The researcher sought to tell the stories of these teachers' experiences through interview and follow up questions. Teaching ELL students in the mainstream classroom can be challenging

Between March 30 and April 30, the researcher conducted interviews that adhered to the guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control's suggestions for Covid-19. The information collected was coded and put into categories below.

Highlights from Interviews

Each participant below brought a unique perspective to the research study. While most responses were similar in nature, leading to the themes mentioned in the discussion section, several isolated ideas emerged, specifically related to the teachers who hold P-12 ELL certification. It was evident that the instruction going on in those classrooms is directly affected by the training that those teachers received. The ideas that emerged are specifically related to how these certified teachers document and design instruction to meet the diverse needs of ELL learners. After each case is presented below, discussion of codes and themes from participants will be examined.

Transcripts

Teacher A

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher A has been an employee at Big River School for eleven years, serving in her current position for nine years. She holds a master's degree with ELL certification and an undergraduate degree in elementary education. Teacher A is a graduate of Big River School, and this is evident in her love for the school and each student she serves. She goes above and beyond in everything that she does.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

-Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher A:** I am a Kindergarten teacher. As an educator I have attended one SAMUEL training, as well as a year long training with various sessions led by Dr. Maria Trejo on teaching ELLs. Both of these training sessions helped to improve my knowledge of ELLs and how to better serve these students. I obtained a Master's Degree in ELL/Differentiated Instruction from UAH. This program helped to further improve my classroom teaching of ELL students. I was also chosen as the Kindergarten representative to be trained on Ellevation and turned the program training around to the other Kindergarten teachers. In my classroom, I use various strategies for improving the learning and assessment for ELLs. I use the Can-Do Descriptors listed in the student's IELP to guide instruction based on

their language level. These descriptors are handy in assessment as well and guide what accommodations the student needs to proficiently perform on the assessment with their given level of language development. Ellevation is a program that is useful to me. Student info, ACCESS scores, meeting notes, etc. can be found in one area that also includes proper accommodations as well as activities that are appropriate for language development in the main content areas. Students are pulled out to be served in the ELL classroom based on their assessment scores/individual needs.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher A:** Teachers are allowed to request approval for professional development to help improve their teaching and assessment. The district will also bring in professional development opportunities throughout the year. The ELL teacher that serves my students is a valuable resource as well.
- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher A:** I am not aware of any awards given to faculty.
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher A:** With the large number of ELL students at my school, I feel like teachers have been/are realizing that appropriately serving these students MUST

happen, rather than letting ELLs “fall through the crack” or simply passing them on to another grade. I know just in the 9 years that I have been teaching Kindergarten, I have learned how to document, accommodate, and meet with families at appropriate times if I feel that a student is at risk for needing an additional year of Kindergarten (and language is not the concern).

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher A:** Frequent assessment--both formative and summative. I feel like I constantly assess in Kindergarten. Most of the time I can easily tell if my students are grasping what has been taught or if I should reteach or pull the student back for 1:1 time at my table.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher A:** Most of my assessments in Kindergarten are 1:1. We are assessing letters, numbers, counting, etc. as well as language arts/comprehension. I enjoy that time with my students and feel that it gives me greater insight into their learning. I am not a fan of iPad assessments for my age of students, but I understand and accept that it is a necessary portion of state/local assessments. I have just seen the frustration firsthand from my Newcomers especially, but also my other ELL students when it comes to summative assessments that are given on the iPad.

- *Me:* How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? School-wide?.....district-wide?
- *Teacher A:* PLC and Data meetings give grade levels throughout the school an opportunity to look at student data and see where our ELLs are at achievement wise. Administrators attend district wide meetings well.

D. Teaching and Learning

- *Me:* Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus.
- *Teacher A:* I feel like the opportunity to ASK for PD or resources in these areas has improved as well as the amount of technology purchased by the local school. I can speak from my classroom and say that the use of a Promethean Board as well as a greater amount of student devices has been a huge asset for my kindergarten students. The Promethean board has allowed my students to be hands-on during math calendar time and actually manipulate patterns, complete number stories by moving pictures, etc.; and that was not easy to accomplish without technology. The devices add to center time as well as provide opportunities for the students to work on programs such as Moby Max. I think our ELL teachers on campus do an excellent job helping us know what types of assessments are best for our ELL students and how to appropriately accommodate those assessments. Speaking from my Kindergarten experience, the ELL teacher who serves my students has actually looked at my paper/pencil/crayon work that

we use for center activities and helped to choose the activities that she feels will best aid the ELL students in practicing the content for the week.

- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here?
- **Teacher A:** Absolutely. Teachers are ‘assessed’ through both formal and informal walkthroughs/observations. Those observations always include criteria such as differentiated instruction, equitable access to learning, and student assessment.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher A:** My students the past couple of years have really enjoyed sharing out to their peers, whether it be an art activity they completed or group work that goes along with a comprehension lesson. This wasn’t a practice that I widely used when I began teaching. However, it allows the students to practice so many standards as well as improve their speaking and listening. This ‘show and tell’ time also allows me to teach proper questioning and how to make eye contact with the speaker.
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)
- **Teacher A:** Older grade levels--book study on “No More Low Expectations for ELLs” Kindergarten--Heggerty--Phonemic Awareness that so many students,

including ELLs are missing when they enter Kindergarten. I think professional development in the area of teaching/learning of ELLs is extremely important. I know I learned a lot during a work day training where someone from the State Department came to our campus and went over different information on ELLs. It brought back a lot of general ELL information that I learned during Graduate classes.

- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher A:** I attend as often as the programs are provided during my planning period and anytime administration chooses me to attend a special training off campus.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher A:** Email, Messenger, Remind App, Word of Mouth, Text Message

Teacher A is well-versed in ELL education, holding a master's degree in ELL education with state certification. She is a leader among her co-workers and her training is evident in how she describes ELL student success. She has received additional training in SAMUEL, Ellevation, and vocabulary training. In the classroom, Teacher A implements can-do descriptors, language strategies, and IELP strategies to support her ELL students. Collaborations with the kindergarten ELL specialist have been very meaningful for Teacher A and her ability to reach and move her ELL mainstream students.

She states that the teachers in her school have realized the importance of reaching these ELL students being served in the mainstream classrooms because to help this population advance will help the overall school advance due to the large percentage (64%) of ELL students in grades PreK-12. Understanding how vital this population is has helped make their instruction and well-being a priority. Together, we shall rise, according to Teacher A.

Assessments in Teacher A's classroom are very similar to assessments that the other kindergarten teachers have mentioned. The implementation of both formative and summative differentiated assessments allow Teacher A to paint a good picture of where her ELL students currently are and how to best serve their needs. She primarily uses 1:1 style assessments because she wants to really understand the depth of knowledge that her ELL students know.

Collaborations through PLCs are vital to Teacher A's success. She said that through PLCs, teaching and learning has improved dramatically at Big River School. Each teacher has something to offer and the students have everything to gain. Technology, such as an interactive whiteboard, has helped Teacher A bring learning to life for these students who need everything they can get to make sense of what is going on.

Teacher B

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher B has been an employee at Big River School for six years, serving in her current position for four of those years. She is a graduate of Big River School and holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education. Teacher B is one class away from obtaining her master's degree in elementary education. She does not hold ELL certification. Her passion for her school is evident in how she interacts with her students and treats them like her own children.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher B:** A few strategies provided for the school would be having a translator on campus the majority of the time, providing additional resources and training for teachers with hands-on strategies to implement daily.
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher B:** The strategies that are most frequently used would be providing pictures for all concepts being taught across the curriculum, checking for comprehension frequently using activities such as turn and talks, exit tickets, etc. to help provide clarification when needed. In my classroom, especially in the beginning with kindergarteners, we use these strategies for all students and provide multiple partner and peer learning activities to improve their learning. ELL students are also serviced by EL teachers where they are pulled for small group instruction specific to their EL needs.

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher B:** 1:1 administering of assessments along with frequent breaks when needed. Again, this is a strategy I would use with all students in my kindergarten class.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher B:** SAMUEL training and resources available through the website, access to WIDA standards and CAN-DO descriptors, Ellevation website, PLC meetings that include EL teachers and other grade level teachers.
- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher B:** N/A
- **Me:** -Probe: Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher B:** As I mentioned previously, many of the strategies used for EL are used for the benefit of all students in kindergarten.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?

- **Teacher B:** Instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations must be made based on their levels and English Proficiency test scores.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher B:** If appropriate at the time.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning? -Probe: What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher B:** 1:1 Oral assessments with accommodations such as pictures, pointing to answers rather than given response, simplified language, etc.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher B:** All of the above

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus.
- **Teacher B:** We are continuously trying to learn new techniques, hands-on instruction, add resources, and attend training, and discuss with fellow colleagues on what works best or ideas to make it better for all.
- **Me: -Probe:** How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher B:** Student data the teacher accumulates themselves is the best data. State assessments are not accurate.

- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher B:** Yes, because everything is data driven and compared to other teachers, schools, etc.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher B:** Ongoing formal and informal assessments of each standard taught, completed bi-weekly at the least, to show growth and/or lack of skills and concepts taught and grasped.
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary)
- **Teacher B:** We have many PLC meetings and discussions regarding all of the above.
- **Me:** -Probes: What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher B:** When I believe it is feasible for my specific grade level and beneficial to my students.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher B:** Depends on how they are offered and why.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?

- **Teacher B:** When the county is offering to send or pay for trainings, money has been raised for specific opportunities, etc. at that point, I am not sure of the rhyme or reason for the randomness of who may or may not get to attend.

Teacher B is pleased with how Big River School has supported her in reaching out to her ELL students being served in the mainstream classroom. There are many challenges in reaching kindergarten ELL students, but through plenty of professional learning opportunities and a love for her students, Teacher B has made the connections. She credits the on-campus translator for much of the success in reaching out to parents and making her kindergarten students feel comfortable and safe. As far as instruction goes, she uses pictures, videos, peer tutors, and small group tiered instruction. The ELL specialist for kindergarten is a huge help in reaching the students.

Teacher B uses instructional accommodations, such as pictures, videos, and oral type assessments to assess her kindergarten ELL students. She has seen much progress in her students. Through collaborations with the ELL specialist, she is able to differentiate assessments. These collaborations not only support assessments, they also benefit all areas of the ELL learner's experience. PLCs have just been "fully" implemented this year. As a grade level group, Teacher B states they have made huge strides in reaching the ELL students they serve in the mainstream classrooms. From assessments to instructional strategies, the kindergarten PLC team is showing success. When asked about off-campus training, Teacher B states that there is no rhyme or reason to who goes

or why. She states that at least that's the side of the story that teachers know because they are not told otherwise.

Teacher C

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher C has been an employee at Big River School for four years, serving in her current position for two years and the previous two years as an ELL specialist. She holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education.

B. Institutional Perspective

- *Me:* What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- *Teacher C:* WIDA, Ellevation program, modifications, IELPs, and we work closely with EL teachers
- *Me:* What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- *Teacher C:* Small group testing with EL teacher, modifications on test. Yes, it seems to be working.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- *Me:* What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- *Teacher C:* Ellevation, EL teachers, WIDA
- *Me:* What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?

- **Teacher C:** We do not receive rewards.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher C:** Yes
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher C:** EL teachers are working closely with EL students and monitoring them closely.
- **Me: -Probe:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher C:** EL students are showing improvement and/or exiting the program.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher C:** Summative and formative assessments
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher C:** Yes
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning? **-Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher C:** I think they show understanding better with summative assessments.

- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher C:** If they do poorly we reteach, EL testing, Global Scholar, and state tests

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus. -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher C:** Students are showing improvement and testing out of the ELL program.
- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher C:** Yes, EL teachers work closely with EL students and prepare an IELP on each student- therefore the classroom teacher knows how to better serve them.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher C:** Tier II and Tier III instruction, Ellevation, modification
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary)
- **Teacher C:** Our principal has incorporated ELL training into our weekly PLCs. We have completed a book study on ELs.
- **Me:** -Probes: What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?

- **Teacher C:** To help students exceed in learning.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher C:** I attend the programs when they are available and provided.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher C:** By administration
- **Me:** We've talked about a lot of things today, concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- **Teacher C:** No

Teacher C states that her experience serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom has been positive. She uses a number of different strategies including WIDA, Ellevation, and partnerships with the ELL specialists. The primary form of accommodations that she uses in her classroom are general ELL accommodations to daily instruction. These can include a peer partner, tiered small group instruction, and audio/visuals. The number one, low stress option that she provides to her students is her “help table.” This area is a low stress place that students can gather for tiered instruction from their peers or Teacher C. The success of the “help table” has even earned her recognition from district leaders because of the tone that she sets that makes students feel comfortable.

One of the main highlights of Teacher C’s classroom is the improvements that her students have made on their assessments. Through partnerships with other grade level

teachers at PLC meetings, collaborations with the ELL specialists, and implementation of ELL strategies provided by Ellevation, SIOP, and the vocabulary training provided. She states that Big River School and the district have been good to provide resources and training to support teachers' instruction of ELL students in the mainstream classroom.

Teacher D

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher D has been an employee at Big River School for thirteen years, serving in her current role for the entire time she has been employed. She holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education. Although Teacher D is not a graduate of Big River School, one would not be able to tell it. She fits right in with the community, just like a school graduate would. This sets her apart from the rest because she teaches like it is her ministry.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching, learning, and assessments for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher D:** I have participated in many training sessions concerning best practices in instructing ELs. Our EL teacher also works closely with the teachers to answer any questions and will provide input on assignments that benefit the EL population the most. We have many accommodations that are provided by our EL teacher, that are laid specifically for each individual student to best meet their

needs in the classroom. In Kindergarten, most of the assessments are given individually. With this I am able to better provide the accommodations that each individual student needs while assessing. As far as the state assessment goes, it is highly inaccurate for all kindergarten students, not just the ELs. The questions are multiple choice so they are often just guessed and the questions are not based on Kindergarten standards only, so it basically is not giving the students information that has been covered or that will ever be covered in the kindergarten classroom and is very confusing for the students.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher D:** Collaboration with our ELL teacher to accommodate individual students, EL pull out and push in for academic success, and PST meetings with EL teachers are a few that are offered. Also if requested by the teacher and funds are available, PD concerning EL topics.
- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher D:** As far as I know, there are not any rewards given.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

- **Teacher D:** I honestly do not know how you can teach EL students without the use of the strategies. I know kindergarten is different, but the strategies given for the EL students work for EVERY student. So why not use the strategies daily for all?
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher D:** I believe more hands on activities are being implemented. Students are not assessed only by paper and pencil so teachers are able to see more of what a student can do. Students have multiple opportunities to show their learning in the classroom.
- **Me:** -Probe: What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher D:** I honestly do not have an answer for this question.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class? -Probe: Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher D:** In daily work assignments that the students turn in, also in small groups we go over what was taught in the whole group setting. From there I can see which students “get it” and which do not. Our EL teacher will also share with us during her pull out time which students struggled or celebrated, and finally from assessments given at the end of the week.

- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher D:** Anything hands on that the student can show me the answer instead of having to say the answer. If that is not an option, limiting the answer choices or allowing students to answer in Spanish (for simple things like naming colors, numbers, counting). In my experience these have been the most helpful strategies. I do feel like the classroom environment plays a big role in this as well. Students have to trust their teacher and know what is expected of them.
- **Me: -Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher D:** Once again, anything hands on that the student doesn't necessarily have to give an answer but can show their answer.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher D:** As always, I want to see what my students are learning and if they aren't grasping a concept then I need to find a better, more effective way to present the material. We will discuss these things in our PLC meetings and will work as a kindergarten team to discuss what worked best and will implement others ideas if necessary.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus. -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)

- **Teacher D:** I feel like most teachers have been given the opportunity to attend PD concerning EL students. There are always things to learn. I believe the movement of more hands-on activities and learning looking different than it always has, is making a big difference with the EL population as well as the rest of the students. Students have more confidence and are not afraid to answer or participate in activities. We are having more students test out of EL, our EL students are performing better on assessments, and we are holding back less EL students than before.
- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher D:** Yes, I believe so. Our principal is a data driven person and she pushes for assessments. She is also open to whatever we see working so student growth is of major importance.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher D:** In the last 3 years, we have started putting motions with letter sounds. It has been AMAZING at how fast our EL students have learned their sounds. Vast improvement from years past. Our EL teacher showed us techniques for learning sight words that she learned from Orton-Gillingham Training. Students tap their arms when spelling the words. Also writing the word 3 times over a bumpy surface and then going back and tracing over it with their finger. We have not been able to attend the OG training yet but will be soon.

- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary)
- **Teacher D:** I have attended OGAP Math training, LETRS training, and OG training soon.
- **Me: -Probes:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher D:** I want what is best for my students. If it is beneficial for them then I want to learn!
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher D:** I have been able to attend many training sessions over the last years. I would say yearly over the past 5 years.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher D:** I am usually sent an email saying that I will be attending the training. It is difficult to “turn around” training. I wish every teacher could attend.

Teacher D has participated in many training sessions concerning the education of ELL students in the mainstream classroom. She credits a close working relationship with the kindergarten ELL specialist as a lifeline for supporting her ELL students. For kindergarten at Big River School, the ELL specialist has extra time to support the teachers and works closely in supporting instruction and assessments. In kindergarten,

Teacher D states that most of the assessments are given individually, so she is better able to provide accommodations to meet diverse student needs. She states that a move toward increased collaboration through PLC meetings has helped to prepare her to best reach her ELL students.

Teacher D states that one cannot teach ELL students in the mainstream classroom if they fail to use ELL strategies. ELL strategies work for every learner according to Teacher D. This is supported by research as well. Insight into many of these new ELL strategies have led Teacher D to implement more hands-on activities. Students have multiple opportunities to show what they have learned in the classroom. Teacher D says that paper and pencil are good, but real world experiences, even for kindergarten are even better.

Assessments occur in Teacher D's classroom through daily assignments that ALL students turn in, teacher observations from tiered instruction, and interactive type games that help students review. She demonstrates the need for ELL learners to be able to "show" their answer in a way that makes sense for them, not necessarily the "traditional" ways that are common to kindergarten. She sees a shift toward a more meaningful, holistic style of kindergarten education that encompasses both the needs of ELL students and the ever-changing needs to help students, even in kindergarten, become global learners.

She states that professional development opportunities are available at Big River School. The difference among teachers within the school is how much they put into making the most of the learning. Teacher D tries her best to make the most out of the

professional learning opportunities that she is given. She concludes the interview by giving much credit to Orton-Gillingham training as the driving force behind much of her kindergarten ELL students' success.

Teacher E

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher E has spent 20 years in education with the last nine years being at Big River School, and the last two in her current position. She holds an Ed.S degree in elementary education, but she does not have ELL certification. Teacher E was given the opportunity to transfer grade levels when she moved two years ago to the grade that makes her the most happy. Her happiness is evident in her work.

B. Institutional Perspective

- *Me:* What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- *Teacher E:* All teachers are provided PD with the following methods. We use the WIDA Model at our school using the Accommodations Framework. We also utilize the Ellevation – A web-based program specifically designed for educators. A few years ago, all teachers at the school participated in SIOP training to give educators proven strategies for teaching ELL students. Reading Coaches and several teachers have participated in LETRS training. We have two elementary EL teachers who provide services and assist elementary teachers.

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

- **Teacher E:** Teachers are provided with the frameworks mentioned above.

Students who struggle can be provided pull-out and inclusion support. We allow students more time to answer questions both verbally and on assignments. For example, in kindergarten the EL teachers provide extra lessons on the letter/sound of the week. Students are encouraged to talk with each other. For example, turn-and-talk activities are encouraged. Students can retake assessments. Vocabulary instruction strategies are taught regularly. Tiered Instruction in the classroom is given as well. Two years ago, several teachers also attended EL training sessions in which they provided turn-around training to the other grade level teachers.

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?

- **Teacher E:** In kindergarten students are given more time to respond. Most of the testing is verbal. They are given extra practice with an EL teacher. In kindergarten the EL students usually progress with the same strategies for struggling students. They learn through song, hands-on activities, and daily activities. These activities work for a lot of our EL students. However, it seems that students who have not had any exposure to the English language before the first day of school struggle more. We have several PLC meetings that address EL concerns. When I taught

fourth grade students were able to retake tests. An EL teacher also studied with them.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher E:** Proven intervention strategies have been provided to the educators at the school. EL teachers offer assistance and ideas to reach struggling students.

Regular education teachers often share strategies that they have found.

- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs? -Probe: Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher E:** Recognition at grade level meetings or emails. Use of EL strategies are highly encouraged at our school.
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school? -Probe: What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher E:** Updated strategies are given to teachers as they are encountered.

Curriculum changes are often made with our EL students in mind. Teachers often look for and share ideas. Many of the strategies not only assist our EL population, but all students. The district provided the SIOP training and brought in some EL specialists who taught strategies for language arts.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher E:** Since I teach kindergarten most of my assessments are through daily conversations and answer and question opportunities. During small group is where I really get to know my students and their needs.
- **Me:** -Probe: Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher E:** Evidence in my classroom consists of written observations, individual report card and mid-term testing, independent center work, journals, MobyMax reports, Benchmark, Performance Series, and phonemic awareness assessments.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher E:** In kindergarten the best assessment techniques have been individual testing measures. It gives a truer picture of what the students can do, whereas some of the computer measures we use allow students to guess.
- **Me:** -Probe: What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher E:** We recently started testing individual phonemic awareness. While it takes a lot of class time, it really gives teachers a clear view of where they stand. For math the individual testing is key as well.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? School-wide?.....district-wide?

- **Teacher E:** Grade levels meet weekly and discuss where their students are. We see if we need to cover the standards again or if students are ready to move on. School-wide we have regular PLC meetings where data and strategies are discussed. District-wide assessments are used to basically rank schools. They look at which schools have shown the most growth.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus. -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher E:** A variety of strategies are shared with teachers. If a teacher finds a method that they think will assist students, it is brought up in meetings and discussed. The school has been pretty open for new ideas. I know this because I have found different curriculum ideas or activities and they have been supported.
- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher E:** Assessment of teaching and learning is a major focus of attention and discussion. It is talked about at almost every meeting.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher E:** This year after attending LETRS training and researching some on my own, I learned that students from other countries have trouble hearing all of the sounds in the English language. Many of our students speak a dialect and do not have these sounds in their language. I have several students who have had no

English language experiences before coming to kindergarten. They were scoring very low on phonemic awareness activities and assessments. I found some vocabulary pictures/word cards that rhyme in Spanish. To assist students with understanding the rhyming concept I provide lessons that rhyme in Spanish in hopes that they will hear all of the sounds and then be able to transfer the rhyming concept to the English language. My students were showing gains in the classroom before we had to close school for COVID-19.

- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)
- **Teacher E:** PLCs are often focused on strategies and training of new curriculum to assist all students. I believe this is something we will see in the future as well.
- **Me: -Probes:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher E:** The instructional development on campus is usually a requirement.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher E:** We participate in PLC's usually once a week to once every other week. We have had mandatory training for example when we completed the SIOP training. It was several years ago.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher E:** They are advertised to faculty through emails and at PLC meetings.

- **Me:** We've talked about a lot of things today. Concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- **Teacher E:** I feel like our teachers are the heart of the school. They want our students to succeed. We love all of our students and most will do whatever they can to help students achieve success. Sometimes it can be overwhelming when test scores are compared to other schools. I think that there needs to be a consistency with quality reading and math programs given throughout the county. I like that we can incorporate our own strategies and lessons (for example what I am doing with rhyming) however, we need a strong curriculum base that will provide quality strategies, activities, and lessons.

Teacher E states that all teachers are provided PD with the following methods. She says they use the WIDA Model at Big River School using the *Accommodations Framework*. They also utilize the Ellevation – a web-based program specifically designed for educators. A few years ago, all teachers at the school participated in SIOP training to give educators proven strategies for teaching ELL students. Reading Coaches and several teachers have participated in LETRS training. She also states that EL specialists are helpful in designing meaningful lessons that are differentiated. Teachers are provided with the frameworks mentioned above. Students who struggle can be provided pull-out and inclusion support.

Teacher E allows students more time to answer questions both verbally and on assignments. For example, in kindergarten the EL teachers provide extra lessons on the

letter/sound of the week. Students are encouraged to talk with each other. For example, turn-and-talk activities are encouraged. Students can retake assessments. Vocabulary instruction strategies are taught regularly. Tiered Instruction in the classroom is given as well. Two years ago, several teachers also attended an EL training session in which they provided turn-around training to the other grade level teachers.

Some assessment strategies used in Teacher E's classroom include extra practice with an EL teacher, visual supports, and offering a safe environment. In kindergarten the EL students usually progress with the same strategies for struggling students. They learn through song, hands-on activities, and daily activities. These activities work for a lot of our EL students. Teacher E states that students who have not had any exposure to the English language before the first day of school struggle more.

Teacher E states that ELL students and professional development for teachers serving ELL students at Big River School are prioritized. School level and district funds have provided training in Ellevation, SIOP, vocabulary development, and ELL strategies. Teachers communicate and support each other through the PLC process and overall. Teacher E states that the teachers at Big River School really put their hearts into helping all students, but especially the ELL students being served in their mainstream classrooms.

Teacher F

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher F has not spent much time at Big River School (one semester leave), but she has eleven years of classroom experience. She holds an undergraduate degree in early

childhood education, but does not have ELL certification. From the time the first data was collected for this study to the time of final revisions, Teacher F was hired full time at Big River School.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching and learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher F:** The school is providing multiple professional development opportunities in the instruction of ELL students.
- **Me:** What strategies do this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher F:** In the short time I have been at the school I have witnessed evidence of scores improvement. I believe it is working and the staff and faculty will continue to learn new strategies and incorporate these strategies into their every day instruction.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher F:** The ELL teachers are always available to offer ideas and strategies to the rest of the staff. They also have developed very close relationships with the students and are willing to provide insight into the personalities and helpful background information that can be shared.

- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher F:** I am not aware of any rewards other than the satisfaction of seeing the child succeed, but is that not the greatest reward?

- **Me: -Probe:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher F:** Yes, I definitely see a movement toward increased use of strategies in the mainstream classroom.

- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher F:** The changes I have witnessed include additional training, encouragement in trying new strategies such as use of visual aids, pairing students who also speak that language to make the student feel more comfortable sharing information and thoughts of higher order thinking. Focus on content vocabulary and background knowledge. The strategies shared with faculty when implemented will help ELL students with confidence and increased understanding of subjects which in turn will raise assessment scores.

- **Me: -Probe:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher F:** Six weeks in the classroom before the Coronavirus forced schools to become virtual did not give me the opportunity to personally witness what has been accomplished. I have witnessed the willingness of the faculty to learn

strategies to improve learning and the confidence of not only ELL students but all students.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher F:** I use formative assessments during and after instruction of a lesson. I also observe the students during the lessons and small group projects to check for understanding. Projects and assignments are usually constructed in a manner the students use graphics, art work, writing or construction of a model. These projects also reflect what a student has learned or has not learned.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher F:** Yes, based on the evidence I know who and usually to what degree the students understood the concepts taught. I use that information to plan small groups with the teacher lessons, small group projects, or to reteach the lesson in a different format to enable the students to have a better grasp of the material.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher F:** I believe formative assessments such as Four Corners, hand signals, and Think- Pair- Share are all good techniques for checking for understanding in a safe way because the ELLs feel comfortable, as do all the students. Summative assessments are vital, however, use of formative assessments help to guide future

lessons to help those who do not grasp the concept before summative assessments are given to the students.

- **Me: -Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher F:** Formative and summative assessments are both needed to capture what students are learning. One of most useful types of assessments I have found is a project. A multi- strategy project is given to the students that encompasses small groups working together on individual projects. The project involves a student-created model with a writing and art/graphic component. The students are given a rubric which includes a self-evaluation.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher F:** Discussion of assessment results among the teachers in a grade level have resulted in brainstorming new strategies to be used with the instruction. School-wide professional development has been added based on the results of the assessment scores in the areas of need to improve the students' understanding. I am unsure of how the district-wide decisions have been made.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus. -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher F:** In the short amount of time in this leave position I have witnessed that teachers are attending training and then using what they have learned to

incorporate new strategies to support the ELL population. Teachers have been encouraged to use even more formative assessments to check for understanding with the students. In a PLC meeting in February, data from the school- wide, mid-year assessments were shared by the principal and the Instructional Coach. Areas of improvements were shared as well as areas to be focused on.

- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher F:** Yes, I believe the assessment of teaching and learning are a major focus at the school. I have attended several meetings where the topic of discussion was our ELL population. How best to serve the students and also their families. In serving the families, and instructional needs of the students, the student's learning and retention of the knowledge will increase. The staff and faculty genuinely care about the students and their families.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher F:** I have incorporated sensory supports such as graphic organizers, made up jingles (music) to go with content vocabulary, and sentence frames. In regards to assessments I have incorporated hand signals for the class as well as other formative assessments that make the students feel safe to answer and/or show they may not have grasped the concept taught.
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school

that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)

- **Teacher F:** In PLC Meetings, we did a book study of the book, *No More Low Expectations for English Learners*, by Julie Nora and Jana Echevarria. The authors of the book maintain not only educating the ELL population in the mainstream classroom but also high expectations for all students. The authors offer many strategies with examples to provide the instruction needed to help ELLs accomplish achievement.
- **Me: -Probes:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher F:** For me personally what motivates me for the instructional development programs is the students themselves.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher F:** In the brief time I have been at this school I have attended one Professional Development workshop on the subject of ELL students and then the PLC meetings that have dealt with the book study on 3 occasions. I plan on following up with training from Ellevation.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher F:** The principals have sent emails with the information about meetings, as well as PD opportunities. One of the ELL teachers also did a Zoom meeting

explaining opportunities with Elevation for more professional development working with ELL students.

- **Me:** We've talked about a lot of things today. Concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- **Teacher F:** I have witnessed the genuine love the faculty and staff at this school have for the whole student body. The student body of this school sixty percent, roughly, is of Hispanic descent. The staff and faculty are dedicated to all students of the school.

Teacher F is new to her position in Alabama, but has previous tenure as a Tennessee teacher. From her short time at Big River School, Teacher F has gained a wealth of knowledge from her co-workers and administration. Since she began at Big River School, Teacher F has been presented with multiple professional learning sessions that specifically focuses on ELL professional development. In her short time at the school, she has witnessed increases in ELL scores and believes that the rise in scores can be attributed to an open-minded and hard working staff that continue to learn new strategies and actually use the newly learned strategies.

She states that the ELL specialists have been readily available to assist her with instructional strategies and general encouragement as she seeks to give her ELL students the very best possible education. The close relationships that she has developed with her students offer her a rare insight into their personalities that can support her instruction. The changes that Teacher F has witnessed include additional training, encouragement in

trying new strategies, such as visual aids, pairing students with students who can translate, and a focus on rich, academic vocabulary instruction.

Teacher F states that she uses formative assessments during and after instruction to check for understanding. These quick assessments can be differentiated exit tickets, learning review games, and projects. Evidence of student learning in Teacher F's classroom included teacher observations, small group tiered instruction, and reteaching strategies. She states that teachers are open to new strategies and are willing to do what it takes to help their ELL students. Out of all of the professional development sessions that Teacher F has attended, she mentions training on Ellevation the most.

Teacher G

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher G has served Big River School in her current position for 20 years. She is also a high school graduate of Big River School. She holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education and master's degree in ELL education with P-12 certification.

Teacher G is the only teacher in the elementary school to have all of her students meet gains goals the previous year.

B. Institutional Perspective

- *Me:* What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

- **Teacher G:** Our faculty went through training on SIOP about 10 years ago. I had already had the training through my degree. Several teachers, including myself, went through training on Ellevation. This site offers teaching resources and strategies that can be used for all EL students. Many teachers have recently gone through another training for teaching ELL students. However, I was not a part of this training.
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher G:** The school tries to keep the teacher/student ratio lower in the primary grades. The school also encourages small group lessons within the classroom that include language objectives.
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher G:** The school provides professional development opportunities and book studies to help teachers improve assessment for EL students.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher G:** The school provides technology resources to help improve our assessment of EL students. For example, our reading program offers online reading assessments that can be accomodated. I am able to add videos to build background knowledge within the story, number paragraphs, limit answer

choices, edit questions, add picture clues, etc. I have loved these assessments for reading and have seen improvement. My entire class made their gains goal last year. Unfortunately, the school is changing to a new reading program that does not offer these technology resources. Teachers may also use Ellevation as a resource. Our EL teachers are also a resource to the mainstream teacher. They are willing to help in any way that we need them.

- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher G:** Nothing specific
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher G:** I do in the elementary classrooms.
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher G:** I feel that years ago teachers didn't think they could teach grade level content standards to EL students. That is changing. Teachers have realized that if they provide the appropriate support to their EL students, grade level content standards can be taught. Teachers had to learn how to support the students.
- **Me: -Probe:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher G:** Teachers are learning how to support ELL students' language needs and content needs through various training sessions.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher G:** I use summative and formative assessments. I also evaluate how I assess them before determining whether they grasped a concept. Did I provide the appropriate accommodations?
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher G:** Yes, they can do in various ways, weekly tests, drawings, discussions, pictures, etc...
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher G:** It depends on the language level of the student and what they are being assessed on.
- **Me: -Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher G:** I feel like drawings and writing tells a lot of what ELLs are learning.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher G:** Grade level-The data from assessments help the teachers as a grade level know what remediation students need as well as what language support they need to be successful. School-wide-The school uses the data from assessments to

find our strengths and weaknesses as a school. What areas are we strong in, and how can we keep growing in those areas? What are our weakest areas, and how can we provide support in those areas? District-wide - I feel the data from the assessments shows the district the need for EL support.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus. -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher G:** I feel that teachers are better trained to teach and assess our EL population than what we were twenty years ago. We are offered a lot of EL training and teachers have a better understanding of how to accommodate ELL students in the classroom. The success of our students, the data from our various assessments, graduation rate.
- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here? -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher G:** Yes, we are constantly being observed teaching and given feedback. We have PLCs and data meetings that focus on improving our teaching and student learning.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher G:** SIOP model-This model of instruction is not only good for EL students but all students. This isn't new to my classroom, but I do try to improve on it each year. In the more recent years, I have tried to encourage more

discussion within the classroom between the students. I want to provide an environment where all my students feel safe taking risks with language and other aspects of learning.

- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)
- **Teacher G:** We are currently completing a book study on not lowering our expectations for EL students within our PLC. I feel that EL strategies will always be a discussion in our PLCs and drive our professional development because we have such a large EL population.
- **Me:** -Probes: What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher G:** My students! I want to offer them the best education possible, and to do that, I must always try to learn what strategies work best. I know for my students to improve that I can never stop learning.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher G:** All through the year through PLCs and other training opportunities
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher G:** Email, Remind, Messenger

Teacher G stated that she went through SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) training about ten years ago. She is master's level certified in P-12 ELL in the

State of Alabama. As mentioned by several other interviewees, Teacher G has been trained in Ellevation. She states that the school administration tries to keep the teacher-student ratios low in the primary grades to encourage small group, tiered instruction for ELL students that include language objectives.

For professional learning opportunities, the school provides professional development that is off-site, as well as PLC-based PD, in addition to book studies in PLC groups. Teacher G states that technology resources provided by the school are used to help aid ELL students in assessments. She gives an example where the reading program offers online reading assessments that can be differentiated to accommodate diverse needs among ELL students. She is able to add videos, images, numbered paragraphs, and other ELL-type accommodations to these online assessments. She states that she finds it unfortunate the district is moving to a reading program that doesn't have this online availability. She states that her entire class, ELL and non- ELL students made gains in reading last year.

According to Teacher G, change is inevitable, and she has found that ELL strategies work for ALL learners, not just ELL students. Teacher G said she now feels more confident teaching ELL students content standards because she has learned how to support her ELL students in the mainstream classroom to the point that they, too, can have success. Assessments drive her daily instruction, and she feels that teachers at Big River School are more prepared now, than ever before at handling ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Challenges do arise, but Big River School, in Teacher G's opinion, is making huge progress.

Teacher H

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher H has 28 years of experience in education, with one year at Big River School. She holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees in elementary education. While some may feel like she may not be at the top of her game due to her years in, she is exactly the opposite. Teacher H works to stay on top of educational changes and advancements.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why?
- **Teacher H:** The ELL teachers are available to come to the classroom and assist when a major test is administered. They will also pull the students and administer the tests in their ELL classroom. The students and teachers are very comfortable with this strategy and benefit from using it in the classroom. The teachers work together to gather new strategies and welcome any new ideas created on project-based trials.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

- **Teacher H:** The faculty and administrators participate in professional development and book studies to improve techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?

- **Teacher H:** The greatest reward to the faculty is the results of the assessments the children take. The administrators praise their teachers and students highly when goals are accomplished and reward them with recognizing them locally.

Examples: Announcement on school marquee, at sporting events, and morning announcements.

- **Me: -Probe:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

- **Teacher H:** Yes, I do. Our administrators are always searching for new ways to improve our students' education and providing our teachers with the most current materials and professional development sessions.

- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?

- **Teacher H:** Teachers are continually motivated to try new strategies and seek different forms of data to measure our student's progress. The school is seeking more parental involvement by holding parent nights regularly and scheduling family night activities that involve parents, teachers, students and siblings.

- **Me: -Probe:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher H:** Teachers are becoming more educated through professional development days and visiting other schools and school systems with similar demographics.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher H:** Small group meetings are used daily with all students to assess their understanding of skills. Peer discussions are often held while reading novels and learning basic skills. If the comprehension is being assessed, I will begin with translating the assessment to the student's native language and then translate their answers back to English. This is done in rare circumstances.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher H:** Classroom strategies are used based on the evidence of the student's learning. If the classroom strategies are not effective, they aren't used for following instruction.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher H:** Kinds of assessments used vary for each student. I have found that many students can relate their knowledge through art, educational games, or working with peers.

- **Me: -Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher H:** Informal assessments such as teacher observations and educational games through technology-based learning and assessment.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher H:** Teachers modify their teaching styles, pace, and assessment used. Teachers meet in multi-grade level PLCs to evaluate the assessment being given and prepare future assessments. Communication is made between teachers through faculty meetings and professional development held both school-wide and district-wide.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus.
- **Teacher H:** Teaching, learning, and assessment practice for ELLs are improving on this campus due to the trust between faculty, parents, and students. There are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation ELLs that attend this campus. The multi-generation existence on this campus has been the building blocks the student body needed to acquire the trust and exposure they need to become successful.
- **Me: -Probe:** How do you know? (criteria, evidence)

- **Teacher H:** The students at this school welcome the chance to learn. The teachers and students built a trust between each other and from that trust and respect there is evidence in conversation with the students that learning is occurring. Students' work is displayed throughout the school and recognized by fellow students, teachers, and other visitors. Many students enter both district and state competitions to display their knowledge.
- **Me:** Is the assessment of teaching and learning a major focus of attention and discussion here?
- **Teacher H:** Yes, teaching and learning are the main focuses of our campus. All people involved take pride in their work and strive to become the best at their endeavors.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher H:** Technology has been one of the greatest, successful tools that I have used in both teaching and assessment.
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging on at your school that focus on teaching?
- **Teacher H:** I see many more technology-based learning strategies being implemented. We have several teachers that are motivated by technology use in the classroom. Our district is on base with the growth of technology and will

provide PD for all of their teachers. Online Intervention could be a new service to be implemented.

- **Me: -Probes:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher H:** I am eager to learn new strategies and focus on the education of our children. Technology is an amazing tool that I enjoy learning and strive to learn more about using it to teach and assess my students.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher H:** I attend these type programs at least once a grading period.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher H:** These programs are advertised to faculty through email, Facebook Messenger, and Remind.
- **Me:** We've talked about a lot of things today. Concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- **Teacher H:** I think that ELLs would benefit from an online intervention program that could be implemented in the classroom or at home. There are many avenues that could be traveled through online intervention.

Teacher H states that the ELL specialists are available to assist mainstream teachers teaching ELL students primarily in the mainstream classroom. She states that through PLC meetings, the administrator who has a background and certification in ELL and the ELL specialist will prepare informational training sessions on how to best serve

these students. The PLC team has celebrated many victories when ELL testing data is disseminated. She states that her administrative team is continuously seeking ways to improve learning conditions and opportunities for ELL students. Teachers are also motivated to find new strategies for reaching the ELL population.

For assessments within her classroom, Teacher H uses small group meetings, peer discussions, and translation of material when necessary. She uses the assessment data collected to make instructional changes, often connecting what is learned in the classroom with real life. To lighten the mood, Teacher H implements game-style formative assessments and Nearpod presentations into her instruction to help all learners, but especially her ELL students.

Teacher H has indicated that ELL instructional practices are improving on this campus due to the trust that has been developed between administration, teachers, students, and parents. She states that the students at Big River School are eager to learn new things, reach for new opportunities, and strive to have better success than their family members. Teacher H indicates that Big River School is like a family; and, family sticks together, no matter what. That is why she feels the ELL students being served in the mainstream classrooms at Big River School are so successful.

Teacher I

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher I has been employed in her current position for three years at Big River School. She holds an undergraduate degree in elementary education. Teacher I is creative

in her approach to instruction, and she works diligently to provide rich experiences for her students.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher I:** One of the main strategies that we implement as a school is the use of the program, Ellevation. This program provides different activities and strategies that connect directly to the level of each ELL students' proficiency in English. Ellevation is a great resource when planning instruction directed toward ELL students. Our administration has also begun incorporating more training focused on ELL education. I feel that this has really helped improve our instructional strategies.
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher I:** Our focus on academic vocabulary within the past few years has helped improve student learning. Teachers are using visual models and strategies from training and Ellevation that are also helping improve student understanding.
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? -Probes: Is it working? Why or why not?
- **Teacher I:** I would say that we strongly focus on academic vocabulary to improve assessments. Tiered groups and collaboration with our ELL teachers are also crucial when it comes to preparation for assessments. I think we are making

progress and seeking out the training resources to improve our assessments and scores.

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher I:** Our school has recently incorporated more training focused on our ELL needs. Ellevation is our go-to program to use for ELL instructional strategies. We are currently reading a book focused on high expectations for ELL students. I think this has been very beneficial to our staff.
- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher I:** N/A ?
- **Me:** -Probe: Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher I:** Yes, we are definitely making great progress with our ELL instructional strategies. Our administrators have provided much-needed professional development that has greatly improved our strategies just within the past few years.
- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher I:** Teachers are getting the professional development needed to provide essential instruction for our ELL students. I think that by just being more aware of

our ELL students' needs and abilities has helped our teachers evolve and improve our instruction.

- **Me: -Probe:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher I:** We have higher expectations for our ELL students, which results in improved learning for our ELL population.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher I:** I use informal assessments such as monitoring and exit slips. I also assess students daily in a small group setting. Most of my informal assessments are verbal probing to see what each student understands.
- **Me: -Probe:** Do you use evidence of student learning in your assessment of classroom strategies?
- **Teacher I:** Yes, reflection on student success helps me decide what strategies work best for my instruction.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher I:** I would say informal assessments, like those mentioned above, are the quickest and easiest ways to assess ELL students. I also use data from formal assessments to decide what learning gaps I need to work on while in small groups.
- **Me: -Probe:** What kinds of assessment most accurately capture what ELL students are learning?

- **Teacher I:** Verbal and multiple choice assessments seem to be the most useful. Students can easily communicate their thinking on these types of assessments. They are also less likely to be stressed and confused.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher I:** We use our data to reflect on our best strategies. We discuss this in our weekly PLC meetings. We also collaborate with our grade level to find solutions to some of our issues with ELL instruction.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** Describe how teaching, learning, and assessment practices for ELLs are improving on this campus.
- **Teacher I:** Our school is reaching out to ELL parents and students to better understand their needs. We are also incorporating more professional development training to improve our knowledge of strategies and proficiency expectations of our ELL students. Collaboration has also improved between our classroom teachers and ELL professionals.
- **Me:** -Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)
- **Teacher I:** I can see the collaboration amongst our faculty. I have also noticed an improvement in parent involvement of the Latino population. Students are also more confident in their learning and feel more empowered to accomplish their goals.

- **Me:** -Probe: Why or why not? (reasons, influences)
- **Teacher I:** We are definitely making improvements and progress in our instructional strategies and assessments to increase ELL proficiency in our school through professional development and other resources.
- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher I:** Most of my assessments are accommodated based on the needs of each student. I always read the directions to my students to prevent any confusion or additional frustration. I recently have focused more on academic vocabulary in my instruction and on assessments. Some of my accommodations include limited answer choices, multiple choice, translated answers, and verbal responses.
- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary)
- **Teacher I:** We normally have one ELL focused PLC a month. Our ELL teacher is present for this meeting. We collaborate and share strategies. Teachers share professional development experiences. We also had ELL professional development multiple times throughout the school year.
- **Me:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?

- **Teacher I:** I want to be able to help my ELL students be successful. At times it can be frustrating when you don't understand your student's first language. I feel like these programs and training help alleviate some of that stress. My goal is to be knowledgeable and help my ELL students succeed with strategies that work for them.
- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher I:** At least, one or two times a year.
- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher I:** These programs are usually mandatory and offered during or after school hours.
- **Me:** We've talked about a lot of things today. Concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- **Teacher I:** No

Teacher I is well versed in what is expected of her and what is available to assist her ELL students that she serves daily. She mentions programs such as Ellevation that help her to provide unique learning opportunities and strategies. She states that her administration has begun incorporating more ELL focused training, and she states that this training has helped her confidence level immensely. Her focus on academic vocabulary instruction, paired with visual models, has helped improve understanding among her ELL students. In addition to vocabulary instruction and models, Teacher I has incorporated tiered groups and collaborations with the ELL specialist to prepare

assessments that are differentiated and fair. These assessments, along with formative classroom assessments have helped Teacher I improve assessment scores and basic understanding.

Teacher I states that the school has recently incorporated additional ELL training that has taught her how to set reachable, but high expectations for her ELL students. Through increased professional development funding being spent on ELL-type needs, teacher I is seeing an impact.

As far as assessments go, Teacher I uses exit tickets, verbal assessments, and small group tiered monitoring to ensure that her ELL students are seeing gains. The data she gains from her formative and summative assessments is used to make instructional shifts, to design tiered groups, and to help her reflect on how to differentiate overall instruction. According to Teacher I, teachers, students, and parents are more aware of what is expected when it comes to serving ELL students on the campus. Collaboration has increased and improvements are being made as it concerns the ELL students being primarily served in a mainstream classroom. Teacher I is excited and hopeful for her ELL students.

Teacher J

A. Interviewee Background

Teacher J has been an employee at Big River School for 14 years, and in her current position for the majority of that time. She holds an undergraduate

degree in elementary education. She loves her students and works daily to make them feel comfortable in her classroom.

B. Institutional Perspective

- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving teaching for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher J:** Vocabulary development
- **Me:** What strategies does this school use for improving learning for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher J:** Class arrangements, students are placed together

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

- **Me:** What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching and assessment techniques for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher J:** We have some old reading manuals from a retired program, but nothing specific has been purchased for our ELLs.
- **Me:** What rewards do faculty receive from the school for engaging in innovative teaching/learning and assessment strategies for ELLs?
- **Teacher J:** Above and beyond? Why do that? There are not any incentives for us.
- **Me:** Do you see a movement toward increased use of strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
- **Teacher J:** Last year, some of our teachers attended an ELL training, and they told me that turn-around training would occur, but I have not seen anything yet.

- **Me:** What is changing about teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs at this school?
- **Teacher J:** Not much is changing at all. We need change, and I would like to be a part of change for our ELL students.
- **Me:** What is being accomplished through school-based or district-based ELL initiatives?
- **Teacher J:** We lack direction in this district and school for our ELL population.

C. Assessment

- **Me:** How do you go about assessing whether ELL students grasp the material you present in class?
- **Teacher J:** Most of the time I read it to them or provide modifications, but mostly just like students are normally tested. They go to the ELL teacher for tests too.
- **Me:** What kinds of assessment techniques do you think tell the most about what ELL students are learning?
- **Teacher J:** Language rich, native language or tests that look for knowledge of material.
- **Me:** How is the assessment of student learning used to improve teaching/learning in your grade level? school-wide?.....district-wide?
- **Teacher J:** It's not used much at all.

D. Teaching and Learning

- **Me:** What specific new teaching or assessment practices for ELLs have you implemented in your classes?
- **Teacher J:** Just normal assessment modifications, such as extra time or reduced answer choices.

- **Me:** What types of professional development opportunities or Professional Learning Community (PLC) opportunities do you see emerging at your school that focus on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs in the mainstream classroom? (Institutional or disciplinary?)
- **Teacher J:** Some of the teachers went to the ExCell ELL training, but I was not able to go, only select teachers. Professional learning opportunities at the beginning of the year during inservice.

- **Me:** What motivates you to participate in instructional development programs on campus?
- **Teacher J:** To better my knowledge of helping my students, but not much other incentive is given.

- **Me:** How frequently do you attend such programs?
- **Teacher J:** Once per year, mostly at the beginning of the school year during inservice. Infrequently.

- **Me:** How are these programs advertised to faculty?
- **Teacher J:** Our principal normally sends us an email, but this does not occur much at all. I would like to have more opportunities to attend professional development.

- *Me:* We've talked about a lot of things today. Concerning ELLs, is there anything else that you would like to add or things that I should know?
- *Teacher J:* I love my school, and I would like to do more to help my ELL students if I had help from my school admin.

Teacher J gave a unique perspective on the experience of teaching English Language Learner students in the mainstream classroom. As with any school, teachers can have a variety of perspectives on what is appropriate or adequate for the learning experience. This teacher feels like she does not have current or research-based materials. This can be frustrating, but what exactly determines the correct materials? What is better? A good teacher that is well trained to use whatever type of materials are available or a decent teacher with the very best of materials?

I know that the frustration level can be daunting, as teacher J demonstrates. She feels like she is lacking in professional development opportunities that she needs to make the most out of the resources that she has to use with her ELL students. From the interview questions that she answered above, it does appear that Teacher J has a foundation in ELL differentiated instruction, but lacks the training that will give her the confidence needed to truly succeed.

Coding

Initial coding was completed for Big River School collected responses from the ten teachers serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Responses from interviews revealed 30 codes in open coding, as shown in Table 3, followed by axial and

selective coding, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. Responses revealed five major themes within the interviews as seen in the tables below.

Table 3: Open Codes

1. leadership	7. hope	13. funding	19. goals	25. language
2. collaboration	8. love	14. open minds	20. feedback	26. technology
3. teams	9. culture	15. resources	21. differentiation	27. games
4. PLCs	10. climate	16. certification	22. Ellevation	28. energy
5. training	11. professionalism	17. visual aids	23. WIDA	29. parents
6. translator	12. trust	18. bilingualism	24. assessments	30. vision

Table 4: Axial Coding Codes

1. PLC	5. culture	9. specialists	13. assessment
2. leadership	6. love	10. feedback	14. trust
3. collaboration	7. training	11. differentiation	15. safe
4. climate	8. funding	12. goals	16. hope

Table 5: Selective Coding (Themes)

1. strong leadership (leadership, climate, goals, professionalism)
2. professional development (funding, resources, training, certification)
3. Culture of Care (hope, safe, trust, love)
4. PLCs (culture, collaboration, teams, PLCs, differentiation)
5. ELL specialist (specialists, certification, energy, resources)

Analysis of Qualitative Findings (Themes)

Strong Leadership

Throughout each of the interviews conducted, one key theme emerged: strong leadership. The term, “strong leadership” based on the interviews conducted can be summed up as a school leader or leadership team that is actively engaged with the teachers and students in his or her building. This concept is woven throughout the interviews and is evident in the responses collected. For example, the leadership at Big River School had a presence in the development and implementation of the ELL strategies. Teacher H states that “our principal is data-driven, and she pushes for assessments. She is open to whatever we (the teachers) see working, so student growth is of major importance.” The ELL population at Big River School is a major factor in school planning and goals. The leadership takes a strong role within this area to ensure success on behalf of the teachers and the students they serve.

Additionally, strong leadership is evident in the funding allocations for external and in-house professional development for teachers. Leadership involvement in PLC

meetings helps the teachers value and trust what is trying to be accomplished. If it means something be present, the leadership at Big River School sets the tone for how the education of ELL students in the mainstream classroom should go.

Professional Development

Another key theme that emerged from the interviews is professional development. Professional learning opportunities are ample at Big River School. As mentioned above, the leadership has allocated funding for external and in-house training on how to best serve the needs of ELL students in the mainstream classroom. The external training opportunities include Ex-Cell ELL vocabulary training, SAMUEL training, LETRS training, Orton-Gillingham training, Ellevation, and off-site school observation visits. In house training opportunities include can-do descriptors, learning targets, using WIDA effectively, high expectations for ELLs, PLCs for ELLs, and mini sessions from the ELL specialists on daily instructional and assessment strategies for ELLs.

Although teachers can be overwhelmed with training and “things to do,” the teachers interviewed have bought into the need for ELL training and the importance of the training. Teacher E states that “training sessions help improve my knowledge of ELLs and how to better serve these students.” These teachers have a love for all of their students and are willing to go the extra mile to make sure these kids have a bright future ahead of them. Their love for these kids has made the difference in how the professional learning from training opportunities has been implemented. The teachers are well-versed in the material and share “how” the strategies are used to benefit the students, as is evident in the interviews.

Culture of Care

School culture is the root of all other activities that occur on a school campus and the teachers interviewed have demonstrated the importance of school culture and specifically what the researcher calls a “*culture of care*.” A “*culture of care*” occurs when a teacher unofficially adopts the students they serve. This is very evident in the interviews. Teacher C states that “I feel like our teachers are the heart of the school because they want our students to succeed. We love all of our students and most will do whatever they can to help students achieve success.” These teachers genuinely care about the students they serve, especially the ELL students who can often be left behind. They see the ELL students as their own children and want a good life for them. This is a key theme in these interviews because the love these teachers have for their students is the driving force behind the actions the teachers take in preparing, both in knowledge and instruction to meet the diverse needs of these students.

The “*culture of care*” begins when the school leadership sets the tone for the campus in teacher and student expectations. Holding high expectations for teachers and students can be the backbone of success at the school. These high expectations for all must be supported from the school leader, as is evident from the interviews. The leadership team has dedicated time, energy, and resources into the lives of the teachers and ELL students at Big River School. A “*culture of care*” exists because better is possible for students and teachers. Just like students’ basic needs should be met for optimum success, teachers basic needs should also be met. Teachers crave love, care, and attention.

PLCs

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have played a vital role in the interviewees' (teachers') success with ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Each concept or idea that the teachers have mentioned can be traced back to information shared or presented in a PLC meeting. These collaborations have been beneficial to the overall success that Big River School is having with their ELL population. A variety of training and case study style discussions occur. Teachers may collect data on a particular student or small group and bring their findings to the PLC meeting for discussion and to prepare a learning plan.

Through PLC meetings, teachers also do not feel left out or isolated in this great, but challenging journey of educating ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Teacher C states that "teachers meet in multi-grade level PLC meetings to evaluate assessments given and prepare for future instruction." The teachers involved in the PLC process are working as evident from observations of the process by the researcher and the elements discussed during the interview process as mentioned above. Teachers are looking at assessments and making instructional shifts. They are also celebrating and supporting each other. Being able to share celebrations or struggles with someone who can listen and offer support is a contributing factor to the "culture of care" for teachers. Feeling safe and encouraged can go a long way in a teacher's journey to success in the classroom, especially with a diverse group of students that need additional support and care in order for them to find success. The burden of the task at hand is shared among many, not just one, so the outcome is even greater success for the teacher and ELL students. This is

related to a growing body of research concerning collective responsibility, which is teachers' beliefs about the extent to which all teachers in the school take responsibility for student learning and the extent to which they take responsibility themselves (LoGerfo and Goddard, 2008).

ELL Specialists

Each teacher that participated in the interview process acknowledged the importance of the school ELL specialists in the overall success of their ELL students in the mainstream classroom. The ELL specialists spend only a small portion of time each day or a few days a week with the ELL students, leaving the vast majority of instruction to occur in the mainstream classrooms. Although this is the case, these specialists offer insight and daily support to the mainstream teachers. The teachers interviewed give much credit to these specialists in the overall success of the ELL students being served.

Tying back to the presence of strong leadership, PLCs, a culture of care, and professional development, these ELL specialists are woven throughout the process, enabling Big River School great successes with their ELL population. Teacher D states that “collaboration with our ELL specialists help us to accommodate individual student needs. ELL specialists push into our rooms or pull students some to reach their diverse needs.” This is evident of the impact that ELL specialists have had on teachers, especially through the PLC process. All of these emerging themes have a place individually and cohesively. Ultimately, the goal is to provide good customer service to the ELL students being served in the mainstream classrooms, while helping them to develop the skills necessary for a good life after graduation.

Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative methodology used in this study indicated that there were common themes that resulted in the successes the teachers experienced with their ELL students. Alone, these themes play a role, but without each other woven together, the success this school is seeing as referenced in the teacher interviews may not be able to be replicated. This specific formula of ELL education focuses on strong leadership, professional development, a culture of care, PLCs, and ELL specialists. Although there were some slight variations in the accounts that the teachers provided the consistency among all ten interviewees helps me to understand the value and importance of these themes in future success of ELL students being served in the mainstream classrooms.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The emerging concepts in this study from the coding processes of raw data collected allowed the researcher to see what it takes to support ELL students in the mainstream classroom, based off of this single, qualitative case study. The themes that emerged from this study could be applied to a similar setting and could be the basis of study for a leadership team hoping to address this issue at a school with similar demographics. Through these themes, a school or district leader could begin to address some of the highlighted areas that could impact the overall goal of providing a quality education to ELL students. To reach ELL students being served in the mainstream classroom, the entire school team from leadership to teachers and specialists should be engaged and willing to work hard. Woven through the interviews conducted was love for these students as seen in a “culture of care” and hope for a better tomorrow. The

implications of the findings of this study are discussed in detail in Chapter V along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to help identify how mainstream teachers of ELL students do the work they do daily. Investigations looked at teacher perception of serving these students in their mainstream classroom, strategies and ideas teachers currently use, and their opinions of what can be done to help. The perception data was used to develop comprehensive action steps for addressing this issue. This case study investigated the perceptions of ten mainstream teachers. Through open, axial, and selective coding procedures, the researcher was able to identify five key themes which can be translated into action steps for a school similar in demographics to Big River School. These five key themes were the core values that were woven together to support the overall success that the teachers identified.

Findings

Qualitative data was gathered from ten elementary school teachers who serve ELL students in their mainstream classrooms. Through three phases of coding, five

themes emerged that supported the successes that the teachers identified and aligned with much research connected to ELL instruction. These themes were supporting ideas of the research question.

Question One: What is the strategy at this school for improving teaching, learning, and assessment for ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

Big River School has made significant progress according to the teachers interviewed over the last five years. The teachers credit much of their success to the leadership that has stood behind them and encouraged them to expect more. Teacher A states that because her principal has been where they are currently, she knows what it takes to educate ELL students in mainstream classrooms operate successfully. This empathetic component of leadership is a key trait of a strong leader who is willing to do what it takes to help make the teachers' and ELL students' experiences positive. Strong leadership is the core of successfully educating ELL students in the mainstream classroom. A strong leader recognizes the need for quality professional development inside a PLC setting and outside as well. Budgeting for and demonstrating the importance of professional learning opportunities is key. Finally, a strong leader knows the importance of hiring and supporting an ELL specialist that knows how to support ELL students and the teachers who are their primary source of daily instruction.

Discussion of Findings

Teaching, Learning, and Assessments. The teaching and learning that occurs at Big River School is student-centered, as is evident by the interview responses that the ten

teachers interviewed provided. The nature of the processes described in the interviews indicate that school leadership has offered the teachers and students a strong foundation in teaching and learning. Examples of the types of teaching and learning for ELL students in the mainstream classroom include differentiated instruction, implementation of ELL strategies, and collaboration through *PLCs*

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have played a vital role in the success that the teachers at Big River School have experienced. The implementation of the PLC process has not been easy at this school, due to its infancy, but the teachers are beginning to see the profound benefits of collaboration and shared ownership of every student. This buy-in has been a key component of the success of PLCs. Not all teachers are going to buy-into the PLC process at first. Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos discuss the idea that leaders should focus on the human, meaning the teacher, rather than the statistical consequences, in an effort to push for change (2016). As the school leader, one would need to see what some of the underlying reasons for this frustration are and how to best address them. At times the leader may need to be firm, but at other times, he or she may need to look at the talent among his or her staff and seek ways to best motivate the teachers who are reluctant to the PLC process.

Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in the mainstream classroom is not an easy task for teachers, but through the support of their peers, the ELL specialists, and school leaders, the PLC process has given them a reason and an avenue to have rich discussions and really examine issues that arise and how to address them. PLCs at Big River School occur weekly, and the teachers put their entire focus on student progress

and well-being. Assessments and lessons are created with the end in mind during the planning processes, and teachers discuss ways to scaffold instruction for the ELLs. Reflection on assessment pieces helps the teachers to rethink assignments or push for more rigorous content for the following lessons.

Assessments. The assessment component of teaching ELL students in the mainstream classroom looks different across the grade levels interviewed. All of the teachers interviewed have a common goal in mind to support ELL students and help them access as much grade level content as possible. Considering this goal, teachers implement a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure growth and achievement. For Kindergarten, Teacher A implements oral assessments paired with visuals to reach her ELL learners, while Teacher J in upper elementary has used peer partners, translation, and project-style assessments to measure what her ELL students know and can do.

A Culture of Care. Woven throughout each interview conducted was evidence of a culture of care. The passion that the teachers at Big River School have for all of their students, but especially their ELL students, shined throughout their interviews. It is one thing to walk into a school and teach, but it is a whole different mindset to walk into a school and care. The ELL students struggle daily with instruction because they have to navigate the content and the English language. When stress is added by teachers who really do not sympathize with them, additional stress becomes a barrier for learning.

While a “culture of care” can be explicitly examined under the concept of teacher-student relationships, it can also mean how school leadership interacts and cares for the teachers in his or her building. This idea is vital to the overall success of

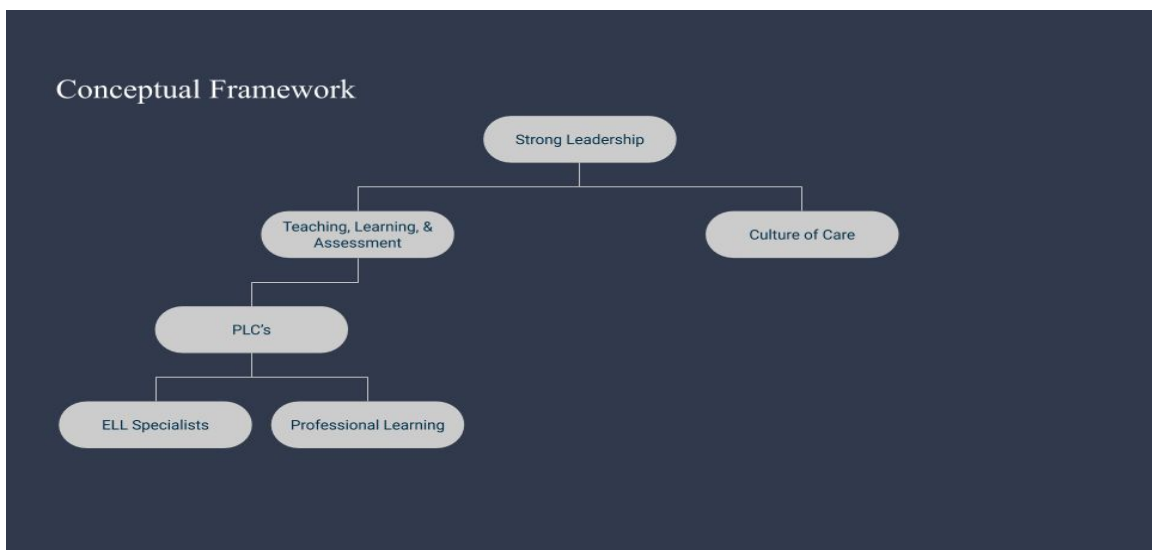
leader-teacher relationships which are passed down to the students. For example, when teacher B says, “that she feels that the teachers are the heart of the school,” she is speaking directly to how teachers have been treated as well. When the teachers are treated well by leadership, that good feeling is most always passed down. Reeves states that good leadership seeks to understand teachers before making some type of decision or to be empathetic (2016). The basic needs of teachers need to be met by the leader as an effort to support the overall climate of the school.

Strong Leadership. Strong leadership, meaning leaders who had boots on the ground and were actively involved in the learning process with teachers, played a noticeable role in the success that the teachers at Big River School have experienced. When the school administrator is willing to break down the barrier of supervisor and teacher only, and work alongside teachers, unbridled success can happen. Teachers want to feel valued and supported. They want their administrator to walk alongside them. This is evident at this school. The interviewees stated that school leadership has provided needed resources, opportunities for ELL training, and support through PLCs. Strong leadership leads, not watches.

This is evident when Teacher D discusses that her principal is working with teachers and PLC groups as much as possible to ensure that she knows what is going on and how to best support her teachers. This approach to being in the trenches with the teachers, as evident from the interviews is vital to the success of leadership. Leaders are wanted in the classrooms, helping as much as possible, according to the interviews of the Big River School staff. With the daily challenges of the role of school leader, being

available to teachers may be difficult, but the outcomes are even greater. When the teachers within a school feel supported, they are able to do some really great things that impact student growth and achievement. Below is Figure 2 which is a conceptual framework of the work that has been done for this study and how each theme can be replicated based upon the level of importance that interviewees indicated at Big River School. As seen in Figure 2, one can note the importance that leadership plays as seen at the top of the graph. The teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA) cluster is equivalent to “culture of care” while PLCs remain a subset of the TLA cluster. Within the scope of the PLCs process, one can see how ELL specialists impact teachers through professional learning. It is important to note that the ELL specialists are primarily supporting teachers, but they do support students individually. This is the reason it is under the TLA cluster. For the context of this study, the participants primarily focused on the role the ELL specialists provided learning opportunities to them through PLCs.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework



Limitations

As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, there were several limitations to this study. The research portion of this study was conducted during the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic. The climate of the classroom and the world in general were abnormal to say the least. Teachers and school administrators were scrambling to close school, and did close school in the middle of the data collection process. Through technology-based applications, I was able to continue collecting my interview data and complete the data collection portion of the study. From my role as the researcher, I did not see any major differences in the data collected prior to and during the pandemic. The answers from the teachers seemed genuine and consistent.

Additionally, the results of the study can be tied directly to a rural, northeast Alabama school. While the themes and results can be adapted to similar schools, it does have limitations due to the specific nature of the demographics. Big River School is also unique itself because of the relaxed “old school” style of atmosphere. Speaking specifically to this school, the climate is not anything that I have ever seen before, but it works beautifully.

While passion and a love for the topic is the reason that the researcher chose to study English Language Learners, it is important to note that there may be some bias in the writing of this dissertation. After closely analyzing the writing it is apparent that the researcher displayed his passion for this work. While results should not be hindered, it is noted here.

Practical Implications

There are numerous practical implications from this study that can be applied to similar situations that teachers and administrators may be facing. The five core values or themes found in this study include strong leadership, professional learning opportunities, PLCs, a culture of care, and the impact of ELL specialists. These key values are flexible in nature, meaning that all of the elements of each component could be implemented in a similar situation. It is the researcher's personal belief that the combination of the five key themes has the greatest impact on serving ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Based off of the interviews, each component is interlocked, supporting each theme. Figure 2 presents a graphic depiction of this theme analysis.

Figure 3: Theme Analysis

Theme	Interview Quote	Research	Practical Implication
1. Strong Leadership	“Our principal is data-driven, and she pushes for assessments. She is open to whatever we (the teachers) see working, so student growth is of major importance.”	Leaders must learn to motivate the mind, before asking individuals to be a part of major organizational change (Acevedo, 2018).	If the educational leader does not support the teachers in their efforts to reach ELL students, then it will be almost impossible to support them in the way the ELL population should be supported.
2. Professional Learning	“Training sessions help to improve my knowledge of ELLs and how to better serve these students.”	Schunk defines learning as a change in behavior that occurs over time through personal experiences (2016, p. 3).	Professional learning opportunities allow teachers to add to their toolbox of skills that will make educating ELL students more manageable, giving these students everything they need to be successful.
3. Culture of Care	“I feel like our teachers are the heart of the school. They want our students to succeed. We love all of our students and most will do whatever they can to help students achieve success.”	Leveraging motivation in the classroom is essential to overall academic growth, but before motivation can occur, a student’s basic physiological needs should be met (Schunk, 2016).	If a school leader or teacher does not first love these students, they will not be able to teach them. To teach them, love them first.
4. PLCs	“Teachers meet in multi-grade level PLC meetings to evaluate assessments given and prepare for future instruction.”	Collaborations between mainstream teachers and ELL specialists should be ongoing and learning should be evolving through collective responsibility (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).	PLC meetings have not always been the top priority at Big River School, but a recent push for PLC meetings has changed the landscape and opinions of collaboration among teachers. Teachers are realizing they can do more by working together.
5. ELL Specialists	“Collaboration with our EL teacher helps us to accommodate individual students. EL teachers (specialists) push into our rooms or pull students some to reach their diverse needs.”	Collaborations between mainstream teachers and ELL specialists should be ongoing and learning should be evolving through collective responsibility (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).	If the district provides ELL specialists, take advantage of their expertise. Allow them to collaborate with the mainstream teachers in the PLC process.

As seen in Figure 3, each core theme is woven together to make educating ELL students in the mainstream classroom manageable, while providing these students the best possible opportunities that allow them to be successful in the classroom and beyond. The overall goal of educators who serve ELL students is to help them access the academic content while building English language skills. The acquisition of academic content and English language skills will give the ELL student the foundation needed to be successful academically and linguistically.

Helping ELL students reach these goals is a challenge and an opportunity. Lack of resources or leadership that knows how to make the best out of what is available can make the challenge worse. The leaders and teachers of Big River School have experience working with ELL students in the mainstream classroom, which in the researcher's opinion is a must for schools with similar demographics. That strong leadership component that is mentioned in the interviews, such as the leadership allowing teachers the autonomy to "find what works" as long as the strategy aligns with the data and goals for the individual students or class.

According to teacher A, having an administrator that "relies on the data and works to help teachers making meaningful decisions" is key to the success of reaching this population. This is why leadership is the core of the five key themes found within the data of this research. Teacher D also notes that the administration also "participates in professional development and book club studies." This is powerful on the part of the administrator because it shows the teacher that it "means enough for me to spend my time

too.” Strong leaders are not afraid to do whatever it takes to get the job done because it is for the kids.

Finally, a look at professional learning through PLCs with the aid of the ELL specialists will help paint a clearer picture of the successes that Big River School are having with their ELL students. A combination of professional learning on and off of campus with weekly PLC meetings and collaborations with the ELL specialists create a perfect recipe for success. Teacher C states that the ELL specialists “push in or pull students out of their classes” in addition to helping the mainstream teachers create differentiated instructional plans to best meet the students’ needs.

As one can see, Big River School is experiencing successes with their ELL population due to a combination of core values that include strong leadership, professional learning (continued learning), a culture of care, PLCs, and influential ELL specialists. For this population at Big River School, this combination works. It can be assumed that the same combination could work for a school with similar demographics, but each school should be examined to see what areas need improvement and exactly what the root cause of the issue is for their ELL students. As with many schools, more and more mainstream classroom teachers are teaching ELL students the majority of the school day. Because of this shift, teachers are having to be better equipped with the tools and knowledge to reach these students and help them become successful.

Future Research

This study looks specifically at teachers’ perception of teaching ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Five key themes or values emerged from this study including

strong leadership, professional learning, PLCs, a culture of care, and the impact of ELL specialists. Each value described above could be transformed into its own research dissertation. For example, someone could track the impact of PLC meetings on reaching ELL students in the mainstream classroom and go deeper into that area. A researcher could also examine the impact of collective responsibility or “shared responsibility” on how ELL students are being served in the mainstream classroom. If this area of study were conducted, one could look at how shared ownership of student success is really shared and are teachers really willing to let go and work together?

Conclusion

This study has been exciting to conduct. To see the passion that the teachers at Big River School have for this population of students trying to make a better life for themselves is truly rewarding. It is the hope of the researcher to continue educating teachers, leaders, and community members on the importance of ELL education and doing it right. These students do not deserve to be left behind, they deserve to be given every tool and strategy necessary to help them cross the mountain of a language barrier and into the land of opportunity. These ELL kids will warm your heart and cause you to do the unthinkable, try every new strategy, and do what it takes to give them what you already have - a chance to learn, speak, and live well.

The findings in this study are consistent with what the literature is saying, including the importance of PLCs, leadership, and a culture of care. As indicated by the interviews conducted and the investigation process of this study, the researcher has concluded that strong leadership is the defining value that “connects” the other areas of

the study. The leadership that is present at Big River School has put structures in place that have led to success in the theme areas mentioned in this study. For example the interviewees have discussed how the school leader has allocated resources for professional learning, showed what it takes to care for teachers and students, walked teachers through the infancy of the PLC process, and given autonomy to the ELL specialists, so they can do their best work. Leadership is a defining factor of the success of Big River School as indicated by the data collected.

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