

A Qualitative Examination of Factors for Success in a Content-Based English Language Learner Classroom

Janet Delgado, Ed.D.

The School District of the City of York

Lorraine T. Benuto, Ph.D.

University of Nevada, Reno

Department of Psychology

Abstract. The dramatic increase of English Language Learners (ELLs) created a sense of urgency across school districts who struggle with efficiently educating students in a manner that facilitates the acquisition of English for ELLs and ensures that testing standards across content areas are met. Content-based sheltered instruction can provide quality education while maintaining the integrity of effective English language practices to a large number of ELLs simultaneously. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to identify and understand the essential attributes and relationships that contribute to the successfulness of content-based sheltered instruction elementary classrooms for English learners in an urban school district in southern Pennsylvania (this school has successfully and effectively accelerated their ELLs' levels of second language acquisition). Utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry Approach, the attributes that maximize the instruction of ELLs across four content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms within one K-8 school were identified. Results revealed that these classrooms were successful when strong interrelationships were evident between language and content learning, efficient organizational structures, as well as a focus on the celebration of culture.

Introduction

Many public school districts across the country require additional resources to educate students who arrive daily from other U.S. cities and countries around the world (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Rumberger, 2008). The vast differences that exist between students across socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic dynamics contribute to students' levels of knowledge upon entering school (Fayden, 2011). These factors create a sense of urgency to accelerate English mastery so as to narrow the achievement gap, meet testing standards (Cosentino de Cohen & Chu Clewell, 2007), and avoid the ramifications of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Unfortunately, this exacerbates an already impoverished learning environment for many (Fayden, 2011).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), or English language learners (ELLs), are among the largest and most disadvantaged subgroups in many school districts (Fortuny, Capps, Simms & Chaudry, 2009). Approximately 17 million culturally and linguistically diverse children live in the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute, 2012). These learners come from home environments where a language other than English is spoken and they are acquiring language and literacy skills in English, regardless of their birth origin (Herrera, 2010). Studying language proficiency is important although other factors (e.g., socioeconomic circumstances) can impact how students perform on high-stakes testing (Fortuny et al., 2009). It is common for members of school organizations to select pedagogical approaches that can directly affect change within students' rate of second language acquisition (Ramos & Krashen, 2011; Starnes, 2010). Unfortunately many ELLs receive content instruction from educators who are not prepared to address their second language development needs (Echevarría, Short & Powers, 2008; Gándara, et al., 2008). Content-based, sheltered classrooms can provide a superior alternative to traditional English-only methods (Thomas & Collier, 2002) as these classrooms are led by dually certified ELL and content educators who deliver grade-level material and focus on English acquisition simultaneously (Genzuk, 2011). In most cases, they incorporate the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2017) as they demonstrate cultural responsiveness and allow native language and English dialogue in a low-anxiety language environment (Herrera, 2010; Taylor, 2010). This pedagogical design was influenced by Thomas and Collier's seminal work, known as the Prism Model (1997), which facilitates the simultaneous development in the academic, cognitive, linguistic and sociocultural domains of ELLs in their native and target languages within their academic environments.

Thomas and Collier (1997) created the Prism model for language acquisition from a large-scale study and the prism model considers multiple areas of linguistic, academic, cognitive and sociocultural development (Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2002). When fostered simultaneously, these areas can determine the academic success for English language learners. In particular, facilitators within schools must encourage the development of language and culture in both the English learners' native and target languages to provide supportive sociocultural environments for students (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Once all the learners' domains are addressed within the school, second language acquisition and acculturation can take place and students can prosper academically (Jang & Jimenez, 2011). Thomas and Collier (2002) were able to reaffirm their positive longitudinal results several years later, supporting the importance of developing the domains presented in the Prism Model for language acquisition within schools.

Although Thomas and Collier (1997; 2002) stressed the importance of bilingual education, they proposed models of language instruction in English only that correlated closely to the areas of the Prism Model of second language acquisition. Specifically content-based ESL programs, featuring sheltered instruction, proved to be the most effective alternative to bilingual education

(Clark, 2009) when compared to other forms of subtractive schooling (Garza & Crawford, 2005), such as English immersion and/or pull-out services. Content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms operate through an instructional delivery approach that is focused on teaching English through content via explicit and scaffolded language experiences to assist students in reaching grade-level content expectations in English (Echevarría, Richards-Tutor, Canges & Francis, 2011).

Many school districts experience rapid increases in the enrollment of English learners and are required to implement English-only instructional practices to educate them (Calderón, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011). However, school districts must offer English language instruction that amalgamates the learners' academic needs with appropriate personnel and resources without compromising the second language development of English language learners in the school setting (Herrera, 2016; Thomas & Collier, 1997). One such means by which school districts can achieve this is via the implementation of content-based sheltered instruction ELL classrooms (Short, Fidelman & Louguit, 2012). Content-based sheltered instruction classrooms provide learning environments that allow learners to acquire English as they benefit from grade-level content and language instruction designed specifically for ELLs. Not only do they accelerate the learners' rate of English acquisition, they make it possible for educators to differentiate their instruction as their goal is to narrow the achievement gap between English language learners and their monolingual peers within their school districts as quickly as possible (Genzuek, 2011). However, this sheltered instruction ELL classroom model is underutilized because of the negative perceptions that allude to the segregation of students (Gándara & Orfield, 2010), as well as the perceived overwhelming concentration on English language skills in these classrooms (Clark, 2009). Thus the problem addressed in this study was that the increasing need for educating large populations of ELLs efficiently continues to be a national challenge (García, Jensen & Scribner, 2009) and while content-based sheltered instruction was effective, it was unclear what factors contribute to the successfulness of content-based sheltered instruction elementary classrooms for English. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to identify the essential attributes and relationships (Yin, 2014) that contributed to the successfulness of content-based, sheltered instruction elementary classrooms for English language learners in an urban school district in southern Pennsylvania. Because data was collected from multiple sources in multiple forms (and for the purpose of organization and clarity), the information about the materials and participants is consolidated here under this section.

Methodology

Research tools

Individual Interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with administrators. The interview questions were pilot tested with one administrator and one district support personnel. The interview questions were revised based on the feedback provided. Participants in the individual interview portion of this study consisted of three administrators, including one

ELL reading specialist. They were selected because of their administrative roles, expertise and support (Lauckner, Patterson & Krupa, 2012) at the onset of the school's implementation of sheltered ELL classrooms for a duration of at least five years. Additional study participants included seven educators certified in both elementary education and ELL. A variety of viewpoints based on teaching experiences were represented as three of the seven educators had taught as ELL pull-out teachers, as well as grade-level content teachers.

Research tools for Observations. Four classroom observations were conducted and data was collected using the Danielson's *A Framework for Teaching* protocol (2007) and the SIOP Protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017). See Table 1 for information about participants.

Table 1

Classroom Observation Characteristics

Classrooms	Grade	Content Area	Group	ELL Service	ELLs in Class
Classroom 1	6 th	math	full class	integrated	57%
Classroom 2	3 rd	science	full class	integrated	68%
Classroom 3	1 st	language arts	full class	integrated	63%
Classroom 4	3 rd	language arts	full class	integrated	68%

A Framework for Teaching protocol (Danielson, 2007). The classroom environment scale from the Danielson's *A Framework for Teaching* protocol (2007) is a professional practice performance scale utilized by administrators to evaluate teachers' performance. It was used to examine sociocultural attributes within each of the ELL classrooms to provide a context for the observations. Specifically, Doman 2 focused on classroom culture and climate, procedures and physical environment.

SIOP Protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017). The instructional content of each classroom was observed and data was measured accessing a tool specifically created for ELL sheltered instruction (Short, Echevarría, et al., 2011). The *SIOP* protocol evaluates the categories of lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, learning strategies, interaction opportunities, application experiences and assessment options (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017) within sheltered instruction lessons. The *SIOP* observation tool (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017) provided rich data that was already present during content instruction within each elementary ELL classroom. The observation tool was utilized during English language arts or a specific content area lesson of the classroom teachers' choice as it increased the opportunity for the educators to demonstrate a variety of practices implemented across content areas. This valid and reliable instrument was organized as a 5-point Likert scale (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008) and demonstrated the degree to which educators followed the lesson preparation and delivery protocol with fidelity. At the

conclusion of each observation, a brief post-observation interview with the teacher was conducted to clarify and/or extend conversation regarding what was observed during the session.

Focus Groups. Six students from grades three or six were also included via focus groups (see Table 2 for demographic details), so that the data collected represented varied perspectives (Yin, 2014) of content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms (see Table 3 for a breakdown of demographics). At the outset of the focus group interview, the purpose and protocol was introduced after initial questions about educator experiences were discussed in a whole group session format. The protocol established the procedures for creating a visual representation of their group's conversations, an Affinity diagram. The Affinity diagram is created by members of a group (Abilla, 2010), and provides a visual structure that organizes a large amount of data into themes based on their connections and relationships (National School Reform Faculty, 2012).

Table 2

Student Focus Group Demographics

Student	Sex	Grade	Yrs. at School	Home Language(s)	Family Origin
Student 1	male	three	2	Spanish	Puerto Rico/ Dominican Republic
Student 2	female	three	3	Spanish/English	Puerto Rico
Student 3	male	three	3	Khmer/English	Cambodia
Student 4	female	three	3	Spanish	Puerto Rico
Student 5	male	six	6	Spanish/English	Puerto Rico
Student 6	male	six	3	Spanish	Puerto Rico

Data Collection

An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach is a method of inquiry that focuses on the positive attributes of an organization (Gaddis & Williams, 2009). The main components included in an AI approach are discovery, dream, design and delivery/destiny (Bushe, 2011) and these provided a procedural focus for this study inquiry (Bushe, 2011; Cantore & Cooperrider, 2013; Stevenson, 2011).

Data Processing and Analysis

A case study database was necessary to capture large amounts of language data across multiple settings that visually represented commonalities in the data and assisted in the compilation of each case record (Patton, 2002) utilizing Atlas.ti7. Adhering to an inductive process (Schutt, 2012); code identification, revision, as well as data reduction (Johnson, Christensen & Turner, 2014) was necessary to focus a large amount of language data into manageable components (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). To determine elements of significance and relationships across the multiple sources of data,

additional analysis led to the identification of the context of each assigned code frequency (Miles et al., 2013). Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of the frequency of codes by data source and was utilized as the first layer of analysis (Friese, 2012) as to arrive at themes that exemplify the successfulness of content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms at Wilson K-8 School.

Table 3
Code Families by Data Source

Code Family	Individual Interviews	Classroom Observations	Focus Groups	Total
Academic Language	26	90	7	123
Class Community	19	46	24	89
School Characteristics	43	15	33	91
School Culture and Climate	36	17	30	83
School Supports and Resources	32	9	25	66
Student Achievement	23	6	5	34
Instructional Practices	76	27	212	315
Teacher Behavior and Beliefs	41	16	25	82
Totals	296	411	176	883

Results

RQ1. The first research question was: *How are content-based, sheltered instruction classrooms maximizing the instruction of ELLs in an elementary setting with large populations of ELLs?* . The data from the four content-based, sheltered classroom observations revealed that multiple explicit instructional practices within positive and engaging classroom communities, in conjunction, maximized the instruction of ELLs. These classrooms consistently provided safe and supportive conditions for learning by all students, including English language learners, so as to accelerate their progress academically and linguistically (Jang & Jimenez, 2011). Evidence of successful student talk and active engagement were described within each classroom observation. Academic/language instruction was infused within all of the described grade-level content lessons. However, additional data was needed to identify specific practices and strategies as evident within the lessons, as well as from the perspectives of the students themselves. The following two sub-questions led to more precise information as the triangulation of the data (Shutt, 2012; Yin, 2014) from multiple sources i.e., the SIOP observation protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017) and the student focus group interviews.

SQ1. The first sub-question derived from research question 1 was: *What instructional practices take place in content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classroom that makes them effective for English language learners?* Two current and retired administrators were asked what positive attributes were evident, relating to instructional practices, when they entered and/or observed content-based,

sheltered instruction ELL classrooms on a regular basis. Although a minimum of eight specific examples were provided by each participant, they discussed topics and referred to examples of instructional practices throughout the interviews. When the language data was compiled from the individual interviews, the overarching categories of instructional practices most identified are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Categories of Instructional Practices Witnessed in ELL Classrooms

Instructional Practices	Frequency
Explicit academic/language instruction	23
Bilingual support	12
Differentiated instruction and participation	23
Levels of support throughout lessons	14
Multisensory teaching and learning	13

Explicit academic/language instruction, bilingual support, differentiated instruction and participation, levels of support throughout lessons and multisensory teaching and learning were the instructional practices identified as effective for the English language learners in the ELL classrooms. These observation teaching behaviors were documented on the SIOP to indicate the elements of effective sheltered instruction for each observed classroom and were reported. Although all categories were identified within each lesson, the following, in particular supported the instructional practices mentioned above: comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application and delivery. These categories measured the effectiveness in content delivery, the variety of multisensory experiences, explicit strategies, as well as student/peer engagement and support and were noted on the Likert scale (1-not evident to 4-highly evident) as “3-evident or 4-highly evident” within each lesson observed at Wilson K-8 School. The data triangulated, or analyzed from multiple sources, was necessary to ensure validity of the results (Yin, 2014) throughout the qualitative study. Particularly to respond to this sub-question, it was accomplished via the classroom observations and the results from the SIOP protocol. The results support the effective practices of explicit academic/language instruction, bilingual support, differentiated instruction and participation, levels of support throughout lessons and multisensory teaching and learning as essential to the success of content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms.

SQ2. From the perspectives of learners, what strategies increase their learning and their use of academic language?

The English language learner participants at Wilson K-8 identified several practices that increase their learning and use of academic language within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms (see Tables 5 and 6 for details). Students confirmed that working collaboratively within peer configurations (partners or groups) naturally elevates the levels of student

engagement and support during explicit content and strategy instruction. Additionally, the classroom observation data supports the ELLs' statements and expanded on the examples of academic language techniques used in the classroom, such as cognate instruction and teacher elaboration of vocabulary and student responses. In fact, within the classroom observation data, the instructional practices and academic language code families displayed two strongest occurrences: teacher practices and academic language. Table 6 indicates the specific codes within the academic language family displayed during the four non-participatory classroom observations of the ELL classrooms. The trend was reaffirmed that in order to increase content learning, as well as academic language, intentional opportunities for student engagement, experimentation and discussion among peers were essential in the successful operation of content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms.

Table 5

Instructional Practices that Increase Learning and Academic Language

Instructional Practices	Student Response Frequency
Collaborative peer groups (partners included)	9
Explicit content and strategy instruction	6
Multisensory teaching and learning	6
Student engagement in lessons	4
Students receive sufficient support	4

Table 6

Academic Language Code List

Components of Academic Language	Frequency within Classroom Observations
Explicit academic and language Instruction (cognates included)	11
English language practice and experimentation	52
Teacher elaboration of vocabulary and student responses	37
Vocabulary instruction	34

Q2. How are successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms supported within their school? Data, specific to this question, was analyzed from two sources within the multiple-case study. Data was collected from individual interviews and the teacher focus group interview. Both sources were necessary as to reveal the evidence derived from multifaceted perspectives through triangulation (Lauckner et al., 2012). Within the individual interviews,

as well as the teacher focus groups, the participants were asked to reflect on the unique attributes of the school and in what ways are the ELL classrooms supported from the school/district level. Ultimately, they both affirmed the necessity of support available of varying degrees within the school structure.

The individual interview participants who consisted of past and current personnel within administrative positions at Wilson K-8 School, as well as the teachers involved in the teacher focus group interview, presented similar elements considered as essential academic support systems within the school. Flexibility within scheduling and curriculum allows for additional personnel to assist with small group and/or explicit instruction based on the students' individual needs, as well as the administration encouraging teacher discretion on the depth and breadth of content/language delivery necessary for each classroom within a flexible schedule and curriculum. Both sources reported that the self-contained student configuration created an entire system of support within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms. Although the specific school's climate and climate was mentioned as a support system that overlapped the essential components, this area will be discussed in greater detail within its corresponding sub-question.

SQ3. How are educators maintaining a culturally sensitive environment that promotes the efforts of ELLs? The language data compiled from interviews, classroom observations and focus groups offered insight on how educators maintain an environment that facilitates the development of their ELLs among their peers within content-based, sheltered instruction classrooms. The triangulation of the data (Yin, 2014) indicated that the grade-level ELL teachers and their students consistently work on ensuring a positive, classroom community as to encourage all learners to feel they are part of a unit and that they are capable of excelling in academics similar to their peers. Although the code frequencies across the language data were mostly found in the classroom community and teacher's behaviors and beliefs code families, instructional considerations also contributed to their successful environments.

Data collected from classroom observations and from their teachers, in particular, indicated that a sense of community was created when the students realized that collaborative peer groups were expected. Encouragement and the respect of differences in individuals' cultures, personality traits and language skill sets were essential to build the class environment. "We are a family. Helping out comes naturally to many of our students."

From the evidence analyzed from the language data from the multiple sources, as well as from the Danielson's classroom observation tool (2007), educators maintain a culturally sensitive environment that promotes the efforts of ELLs within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms. They achieve this by delivering sound, effective instructional opportunities that intentionally demonstrate to the English language learners that they are capable of academic achievement similar to that of their peers. These opportunities must also be provided within the context of positive classroom environments for all students.

SQ4. In what ways can school climate and culture support content-based, sheltered instruction classrooms? The school's climate and culture is

categorized as caring, supportive and knowledgeable, according to the individual interview participants. Although 10 out of the 21 faculty members worked at the school for at least seven years, the current administrator observed the school's unique qualities within her first year working at the school. "We have a nurturing culture here at Wilson K-8. Teachers here go above and beyond the four walls to support our students. I would say it is way more than what I have seen at other buildings that I have worked in. Teachers support the students who have language needs. The teachers are experienced in reading students where they are and move them forward. There is compassion for what students are going through in their everyday lives." Table 7 demonstrates the holistic distribution of occurrences within the school culture family code across the three sources of data. One interview participant noted that as a result of the school community, the relationships between teachers, students and their families were why many ELL families request building transfers to remain or to enter this school specifically from within the school district.

Table 7

Components of the School Community

School Culture Primary Codes	Overall Frequency
Community among staff	9
Described as family	9
Parent participation and events	8
School community	33
Teacher and student academic advancement	20

The belief that all individuals can learn and work toward academic advancement among students and teachers contributed to the successful climate and culture of Wilson K-8. Not only was bilingualism viewed as a positive attribute within students to accelerate students along academically, the teachers at Wilson K-8, were also viewed as professional learners. The teachers were knowledgeable as over 50% were ELL certified, as well as within their content area. However, the teachers were learning effective strategies from each other. One administrator explained professional development opportunities that occurred among colleagues. "The ELL classrooms often, many of them, became models I could refer teachers to go visit. If they wanted to see how a particular teaching/learning strategy was used, I could send them to observe a classroom....We had a lot of strong teaching models, and teachers were learners. They didn't stop learning. They learned from each other in professional learning communities (PLCs). In their PLCs, they could learn from each other, they could observe each other, and that was one of the strongest benefits that I think we had in our building because there was such a wealth of good teaching in that building and people were willing to try new things."

Data from this multiple-case study provides the manners in which school climate and culture support content-based, sheltered instruction ELL

classrooms. As a result of their close professional relationships, the teachers and other personnel at the school assist each other so that they can support the academic advancement of their students. Because they are knowledgeable and compassionate about the students' family and cultural biographies, they problem-solve together to provide what ELLs and their families need to achieve personally and academically.

Inductive reasoning and analysis was conducted to identify the themes present across the various sources of data within the multiple-case study. Six themes emerged through memo-ing and examining the frequency and correlations between codes and within code families. These themes were identified below (see Table 8) and are presented as equally vital to the success of content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms. Although the following themes are representative and validated throughout all of the questions posed during the multiple-case study, the themes are discussed in order of the main research questions and their corresponding sub-questions. The overarching concepts all relate to the members of the organization understanding their population and addressing their students' needs within their academic, linguistic and sociocultural development as suggested by Thomas & Collier (1997; 2002).

Table 8

Emerging Themes

Classroom configurations in language and learning
Explicit instruction by knowledgeable personnel
Student engagement for students of all language levels
Academic and structural flexibility
Celebration of culture, language, and learning
Functionality of its members as a support unit

Discussion

This descriptive multiple-case study was an analysis of factors present in successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms within an urban K-8 school educating high populations of English language learners at the elementary level. Data collected from individual interviews, classroom observations and focus groups addressed the research questions. The findings contribute to the affirmations presented within the theoretical framework of the Prism model of language acquisition within schools (Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2002). Although the selected school did not demonstrate effective bilingual education practices as recommended in the Prism model; the content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms were established in efforts to move students academically within similar language communities. They exhibit components that support students academically, linguistically and cognitively within socioculturally supportive environments (Herrera, 2016; Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2002). The implications from the findings of this study are discussed below.

Classroom configurations in language and learning. The results from this study support the notion that content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms maximize instruction by creating specially designed classroom environments in which educators can provide explicit instructional practices that unify academic and language objectives throughout all grade appropriate content delivery necessary for English language learners (Clark, 2009; Short & Echevarría, 2016; Genzuk, 2011). They address the importance of solid core instruction within Tier 1 of the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework (Echevarría & Hasbrouck, 2009) through the implementation of explicit instruction utilizing the SIOP protocol designed specifically for these learners (Echevarría, Vogt, et al., 2017). Findings from this study indicate that classroom configurations within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms may reduce the amount of ELLs in need of intervention at a more intense level as their core instruction is designed specifically for their learner populations and not of the traditional structure intended for the majority culture. These findings are consistent with the extant research (Chang, 2008; Gándara et al., 2008).

Explicit instruction by knowledgeable personnel. Explicit academic/language instruction, bilingual support, differentiated instruction and participation, levels of support throughout lessons (Echevarría, Frey & Fisher, 2015) and multisensory teaching and learning were identified as the effective instructional practices provided by ELL certified grade-level teachers across content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms (Chang, 2008) observed during the study. Administrators stated there was a specific advantage to the high number of certified grade-level ELL teachers with these skills so as to provide consistency of effective instruction from year to year from kindergarten to sixth grade within one school. Multiple years within the program was viewed as vital to accelerating students academically and linguistically (Cosentino de Cohen & Chu Clewell, 2007) as language proficiency is multi-directional and unique for each student (Herrera, 2016).

Student engagement for students of all language levels. From the learners' perspectives, students confirmed that working with partners and/or groups engages and provides natural support during explicit content, strategy, and/or language instruction (Swain, 2000). Regardless of English language levels, all students benefit from additional time to negotiate for meaning (Short, Echevarría, et al., 2011), experimenting with language within their own zones of learning (Min, 2006), as well as working through new academic content with others. By facilitating total student participation within lessons (which is recommended by Herrera [2016] and Himmele and Himmele [2012]) ELLs feel empowered and a sense of belonging within their learning communities (Washburn, 2008).

Academic and structural flexibility. Flexibility within the school organization became the overarching theme for how the classrooms in the current study operate successfully within their school communities. Successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms are supported within the school organization by facilitating academic and structural flexibility within all aspects so as to tailor their instruction to the specific needs of their ELLs. Not only is there educational autonomy with regards to essential content and scheduling, educators make decisions to create appropriate matches between the

ELL service types available and the linguistic, academic and acculturation experiences of the students. Echevarría and Hasbrouck (2009) placed a high priority on the ability for schools to be able to make decisions based on their ELLs' individual cultural biographies (Herrera, 2016) within the core structure of the school.

Celebration of culture, language, and learning. The student participants embraced their sense of home within their content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms and among the school. In order to achieve this, educators must maintain culturally sensitive environments that promote the efforts of ELLs by facilitating instructional opportunities that reassure ELLs that they can see themselves in their learning (Taylor, 2010). Particularly within the contexts of positive classroom environments, English language learners' levels of language proficiency in L1 and L2 and their own life experiences (Dong, 2013) are showcased and utilized intentionally throughout content lessons. Although sociocultural theory remains prevalent within this theme, Cummin's contextual interaction theory (1996) justified the connection between the relationships of successful language input, a supportive affective environment, as well as the status associated within culture and language among peers and teachers (Lavadenz, 2011). Content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms become a center for individual motivation through the celebration of culture, language and learning.

Functionality of its members as a support unit. The school climate and culture at Wilson K-8 supports the success within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms by establishing a cohesiveness that is understood and accepted by all (Rodriguez, Ringler, O'Neal & Bunn, 2009). A high level of support was noted as one of the key elements of success for these classrooms as the strong-knit relationships between among administrators, teachers, students and their families maintain a positive learning environment that flexes and problem-solves to understand their learners (Washburn, 2008)). Social capital theory substantiates the benefits of human relationships and the power to achieve more through collective actions (Bourdieu, 1985). Essentially, the functionality of the schools' members as a support unit provides the context and conditions for excellence among elementary level English language learners at this school.

Future Directions

The first recommendation for educational application is for schools to expand on the variety of ELL service options available within a school within increasing student populations of ELLs. This is necessary so that knowledgeable, certified educators can appropriately match students of different cultural biographies with optimal instructional and school climate conditions specific to their needs (Pray & Monhardt, 2009). Content-based, sheltered instruction self-contained and ELL integrated classrooms can provide classroom environments that balance the academic, linguistic and sociocultural needs of specific students as supported by the Prism model (Thomas & Collier 1997; 2002). Many of the administrators and teachers who participated in this study stated the importance of placing elementary students in classrooms that

allow for explicit instruction and classroom engagement experiences that match the specific academic, language and sociocultural needs of the students (Jang & Jimenez, 2011; Murry, 2012). However, continuous professional development opportunities that include the most recent research-based strategies within explicit instruction, second language acquisition and instruction and the SIOP model (Echevarría, Short, et al., 2008) must remain at the forefront as schools in need must establish an effective educational framework for the influx of English language learners (Genzuk, 2011; Reeves, 2009; Taylor, 2010).

The second recommendation is that a team, consisting of a school administrator and ELL personnel could be assembled within the schools. Their focus would be to assist with the academic, structural and sociocultural flexibility necessary to appropriately screen and monitor the large populations of ELLs (Brown & Sanford, 2011) through collaboration, instructional planning, and/or direct student support in efforts to continue to make measurable gains in English language proficiency (Anderson & Dufford-Melendez, 2011). Ultimately, the ELL support team could work alongside a school's RTI team (Brown & Sanford, 2011; Calderón, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011; Echevarría & Hasbrouck, 2009) to maintain solid core instruction while increasing the sociocultural experiences by way of strong interrelationships between teachers, students and their families (Good et al., 2011).

Recommendations for further research. Future studies could be performed to expand on the factors for success within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms. The first recommendation could be to replicate this study, but data from observations could be collected throughout a longer period of time during one school year as it would provide longitudinal data that could represent a more accurate depiction (Cozby, 2014) of the effective instructional practices and classroom environments of each classroom. Additionally, an increase in the number of ELL classrooms observed could also contribute data in the same manner within the multiple-case study.

The second recommendation for further research could add an additional student focus group interview session of current students who have participated in content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms, but have provisionally exited out of ELL services as they have accomplished academic and linguistic proficiency at their grade-level. This could increase the depth into the students' perspectives of their experiences (regarding instructional practices and their classroom environments within their previous content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms at Wilson K-8 School). Most importantly, they could offer additional insight into the program's success overall as the students participated since the beginning of their journey towards English language proficiency within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms within the schoolwide model (Kang, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2009).

Finally, the last recommendation could examine the difference between the mission of this school's content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classroom model and their classroom configurations to include integrated and self-contained and establish clear definitions of the expectations and achievements when comparing the existing English-only models. Further research analysis of existing ELL classrooms to the classrooms highlighted within this study may

lead to additional contributing factors for success that may have been overlooked in this study.

Conclusions

A qualitative multiple-case study was conducted to identify the essential attributes and relationships (Yin, 2014) that contributed to the successfulness of content-based, sheltered instruction elementary classrooms. Minimal research exists of ELL classroom models with similar characteristics addressing the needs of large populations of ELLs efficiently and utilizing English as the language of instruction within one school. In addition to the urging pressures of upcoming achievement standards (Alberti, 2013; Schmidt & Burroughs, 2013) and new teacher evaluation tools (Danielson, 2012; Marzano, 2012), school districts across the nation struggle to identify effective solutions to educate new, large populations of ELLs (Guccione, 2011) effectively in the quickest amount of time without providing bilingual education. The findings of this study establish attributes of successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms that can serve as a viable method for many school districts in need of solutions.

Six themes emerged from the triangulation of the data collected from interviews, observations and focus groups which answered the research questions: 1) classroom configurations in language and learning; 2) explicit instruction by knowledgeable personnel; 3) student engagement for students of all language levels; 4) academic and structural flexibility; 5) celebration of culture, language and learning; and 6) functionality of its members as a support unit. The implications were organized and presented by the themes that arose from the findings of the multiple-case study. However, these relationships indicated within the study mirror the areas of development necessary for English language proficiency in schools as indicated by Thomas and Collier (1997; 2002). Thus, the fundamental implication of this qualitative, multiple-case study is that all attributes and relationships must interact and depend on each other so as to create successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms for its students.

The two recommendations for application based on the findings of the study have been discussed through the perspective of improving the quality of services English language learners receive in school districts with rising ELL populations, in particular. School districts must develop their ELL programs so several models are available within each school with a large population of ELLs in the elementary grades. Because ELLs obtain their own unique cultural biographies (Murry, 2012) that include academic experiences in their native language, the type of instructional service and classroom environment must also vary so as to meet these learners' needs efficiently. An ELL team of professionals within each building can assist with these student cases and offer professional development, instructional strategies, as well as hands-on support in the classroom.

Further investigation of successful content-based, sheltered instruction ELL classrooms is suggested to increase the validity and reliability of the results of this study. It is recommended that the study be conducted on a larger scale to include classroom observation within content-based, sheltered instruction ELL

classrooms multiple times throughout the school year. Longitudinal research could provide a deeper holistic perspective of the instructional practices and positive classroom elements. Future researchers may wish to include students who have provisionally exited the ELL program and attend classes in mainstream grade-level classrooms in an additional student focus group interview session. Finally, a study examining the attributes and expectations of other ELL classrooms within the existing literature compared to this study's findings would allow school districts to select content-based, sheltered instruction classrooms as described in the study as the ideal ELL service model when bilingual education is not available to address many ELLs at once. Ultimately, school districts may invest additional resources and ethical support for the learners on the path to academic and English language success within their school organizations.

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