

2017

# Elementary Instructional Best Practices for English as Secondary Language Teachers

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Elementary Instructional Best Practices for English as Secondary Language Teachers

by

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MA, Texas Wesleyan University, 2009

BS, Brigham Young University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

A trending national concern is the increasing number of English language learners (ELL) who are being reclassified as long-term English language learners (LTELL) instead of progressing to the general education classroom. This trend is a local problem for the study elementary schools. Guided by sociocultural learning theory that outlined ESL best instructional practices, the purpose of this case study was to examine the instructional practices of elementary ESL teachers. Ten ESL teachers from each grade level from 1st to 5th grades were interviewed and observed. Analysis and organization of the data through its transcription and coding led to the emergence of 5 themes: sociocultural best practices, sociocultural deficiencies, other practices, district ESL program, and teacher needs. Findings included that the district ESL program was not executed with fidelity, there was a need for teacher think-alouds during instruction, and teachers were not consistently implementing decoding strategies with ESL students. A white paper was developed to share the findings with district leaders regarding maintaining fidelity of the ESL program by training teachers, providing necessary resources and other factors related to student success. Increasing the learning and language acquisition of the ESL students within the district may produce an overall positive social impact on society by increasing students' ability to contribute in their communities.

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## Dedication

This research is dedicated to the ESL students and educators in my district. I also dedicate this to my wife and children, who have been stalwart supporters for me. I want to let you know that I have appreciated your love and support, and this would not have been possible without you. I love you all!

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

In the United States, there has been an influx of immigrants, including refugees, over the past decade (Baker & Rytina, 2013). This growing immigrant population has transformed the makeup of the United States and its public schools (Shi & Steen, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). The fastest growing population in the public schools are immigrant children (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011; Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012; Shi & Steen, 2012). Moreover, half of the immigrant children do not proficiently speak English (Calderon et al., 2011, p. 103). According to data from 2010 from the Center for Immigration Studies, 51.6% of immigrants age 5 and older do not proficiently speak English, with many of them expressing that they do not speak English at all (Camarota, 2012). Additionally, The Public Policy Institute of California reported that 53% of immigrants reported not speaking English well with 20% of those individuals reporting that they did not speak English at all (Hill, 2011, para. 1).

Along with the lack of English proficiency among immigrant children, another concern is the linguistic isolation immigrant children have at home compared to their peers (Hill, 2011). The Public Policy Institute of California stated that 28% of immigrant children lack English support with only non-English speakers at home (Hill, 2011, para. 2). Likewise, the Center for Immigration Studies reported that 86.7% of immigrants speak a language other than English at home, and thus, not supporting English language skills taught in school (Camarota, 2012). What this means for public schools is an increase of English language learners (ELLs). The U.S. Department of Education

(USDOE; 2015, para. 1) reported that the ELL student population grew from 4.1 million to 4.4 million between 2002 and 2012.

The concern with this increase of ELL students is that they struggle in American schools because of their lack of English proficiency; this impacts the academic success of many of them (Calderon et al., 2011; Menken et al., 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010). Under ideal conditions, it takes an ELL student between 4 and 7 years to attain English proficiency (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Nevertheless, many ELL students do not experience model conditions that would permit English proficiency in that expected period (Gahungu, Gahungu, & Luseno, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Therefore, many ELL students struggle in their schooling creating an achievement gap between ELL students and their non-ELL peers (Shi & Steen, 2012; Solari et al., 2014; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, et al., 2010). Likewise, the longer ELL students are classified as ELL, the greater their prospect is of struggling in school and the likelihood of their dropping out of school (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012).

To compound the concern, greater numbers of ELL students have been in the United States schools for more than 6 years and still have not gained English proficiency. After this length of time without gaining proficiency, the students are reclassified as long-term English language learners (LTELLS; Maxwell, 2012). These LTELL students are among the lowest academic achieving students and are one of the student populations with the highest dropout rates (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012; Menken et al., 2012;

Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). The increasing and persistent disparities in the academic success and acquisition of English proficiency for ELL students is a national concern, but it also is a local concern for the Constitution School District (CSD), a pseudonym (Calderon et al., 2011; Shi & Steen, 2012).

The director of the Student Placement Center for CSD stated that the LTELL student population at CSD increased 43% between the 2013–2014 school year and the 2014–2015 school year. According to internal, confidential CSD reports, in the 2013–2014 school year the LTELL population was 2,564 and increased to 4,472 during the 2014–2015 school year. The director of the English as a second language (ESL) program for CSD explained that the LTELL population in CSD is following the national trend as the fastest growing population in the district. Therefore, an examination of the instructional practices taking place in the English as a second language (ESL) classrooms was needed. In this study, I identified instructional practices taking place in CSD elementary school ESL classrooms and examined them in relation to a conceptual framework of best practices.

### **Definition of the Problem**

According to internal, confidential CSD reports for 2013–2014 and 2014–2015, there had been a significant increase of LTELL students between the 2013–2014 and the 2014–2015 school years. These internal reports show that there was a 2% increase of ESL students from the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 school years. However, during this time there was a 43% increase of LTELL students.

LTELL is the fastest growing population of students in U.S. public schools (Menken et al., 2012). Menken et al. (2012) stated that LTELL students have been underserved and invisible when it comes to research studies (p. 122). LTELL students are statistically more likely to fall behind in school by scoring the lowest grades in classes and having the highest retention rates (Harris, 2012; Menken et al., 2012). Furthermore, LTELL students have a high risk of dropping out of school as shown by their disproportionate dropout rates (Harris, 2012; Menken et al., 2012). The USDOE (2014) reported that 59% of ELL students graduated as compared to 69% of African Americans, 86% Caucasians, and 72% of economically disadvantaged students. However, there is little research completed on LTELL students (Maxwell, 2012; Menken et al., 2012).

The problem in CSD is that ELL students are not attaining English proficiency within the 4 to 6-year expected window. Therefore, an increasing number of ELL students are being reclassified as LTELL. The purpose of this study was to identify instructional practices taking place in the elementary school classrooms of ELL students in the CSD. This study sought to determine if the instructional practices the CSD ESL elementary school teachers were incorporating are best practices for ELL students.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

Data retrieved from internal, confidential district documents provided evidence of increased numbers of students being identified as LTELL. As of March 25, 2015, the CSD student population was 86,280, of which 42,843 students have a language other than only English listed on their Home Language Survey. Of those 42,843 students, 27,194



were identified as ELL. From those 27,194 students identified as ELL, 7,810 are in the ESL program. Of the 7,810 students in the ESL program, 4,472 are identified as LTELL. LTELL is defined by CSD as an ELL, who has been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 or more years, has received ESL services, and has not met the exiting criteria for the ESL program. The internal district documents provided the data that during the 2013–2014 school year, the ESL student population was 7,770, with 2,564 of these students identified as LTELL. These numbers show that there has been an increase of only 110 students in the ESL program, yet at the same time there has been a growth of 1,908 students identified as LTELL.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

The United States has a significant number of immigrants, both legal and illegal, coming into the country each year. This unprecedented immigrant population has dramatically shifted the makeup of the United States (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 15). Since the 2000 United States Census, there has been a 20% increase in the immigrant population (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 15). This influx of immigrants has also altered the population of children in United States. Currently, one out of five children in the United States are immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 15), with a projection of this increasing to one out of three by the year 2040 (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, p. 602; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 15). Immigrant children are the fastest growing population of students in American public schools (Calderon et al., 2011, p. 103; Menken et al., 2012, p. 122). Furthermore, half of the immigrant children in the United

States do not proficiently speak English (Calderon et al., 2011, p. 103). The USDOE (2015, para. 3) reported that in 39 of the 50 states ELL students have increased from the school years of 2002–2003 and 2011–2012. Furthermore, the USDOE (2015, para. 1) stated that the ELL student population grew from 4.1 million to 4.4 million during this same period of time.

Proficiency in English is necessary for the success of ELL students (Menken et al., 2012). However, many ELL students struggle in American schools because of their lack of English proficiency (Calderon et al., 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). It takes between 4 and 7 years for an ELL student to attain English proficiency under optimum conditions (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan et al., 2010, p. 614). Conversely, many ELL students do not live in prime conditions to permit English proficiency within the 4 to 7-year window (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Often ELL students come from homes that experience parental separations due to immigrating, high levels of poverty, inconsistent schooling, new social environments, and unfamiliarity with U.S. school systems--all factors that contribute to ELL students being at risk for academic success (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010).

Many ELL students are identified as academically at-risk for lack of school success. Large numbers of ELL students are being classified as LTELL because they have been in United States schools for more than 6 years and still have not gained English proficiency (Maxwell, 2012). These same LTELL students are among the lowest academic achieving students with poor test scores, failing grades, high dropout rates, and

low college acceptance rates (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012; Menken et al., 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). The increasing and insistent “disparities” in the academic success and acquisition of English proficiency for ELL students are a national concern (Calderon et al., 2011, p. 103). Based on the literature, educational practice, and personal experience, there is a very real need for quality instruction and direct interventions to facilitate the acquisition of English for ELL students. My intent with this study was to examine the instructional practices taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms.

### **Definition of Terms**

*English as a second language (ESL)*: ESL is a language program for instructing ELL students (Faltis, 2011). This model uses only English instruction for all subjects taught and may include a full-time teacher or a part-time language only teacher (Faltis, 2011). ESL students may receive language instruction in general education settings (Faltis, 2011).

*English language learner (ELL)*: ELL is a student category of at-risk students whose primary language is other than English (Calderon et al., 2011). By definition, ELL students are in the process of learning English through bilingual education or specifically identified ESL programs (Calderon et al., 2011).

*English proficiency*: In the state of Texas, English proficiency is defined as the attainment of the advanced high descriptor level for reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2011). The measurement tool used

in Texas to rate an ELL student's English proficiency in all four areas is the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TEA, 2011). There are four descriptor levels: beginner, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high (TEA, 2011). In order for a student to achieve the proficient rating of advanced high, an ELL student must have the ability to understand grade appropriate English in both academic and social settings, command English language structures and vocabulary to complete grade-level writing tasks, use English to establish fundamental reading skills, and speak using grade-level English in both academic and social environments all with minimal language support (TEA, 2011).

*Home Language Survey:* The Home Language Survey is a document used by CSD to determine the primary and secondary languages spoken in a household when an individual is first registered with the district. If a language other than English is identified as being used the student is tested according to state regulation to determine if language classification is required (TEA, 2012).

*Long term English language learner:* LTELL indicates an ELL who has been enrolled in United States schools for 6 or more years, has received ESL services, and has not met the exiting criteria for the ESL program in order to be placed in main stream classes (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

In the United States, there are a growing number of ELL students in public schools who are not attaining English proficiency within the 4 to 7-year expected window (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010). The lack of English fluency is transferring into

disparities in their overall academic education as compared to their peers (Calderon et al., 2011). ELL students are less prepared to “participate in mainstream classes” (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 16). Additionally, ELL students are more likely to struggle in school by scoring lower on assessments, failing classes, dropping out of school, and being ill-prepared for the workforce or higher education because of their lack of English language skills (Maxwell, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010).

The education of ELL students is critical for local communities, such as CSD, and the United States as a whole based on its current and projected demographic make-up. Currently, one out of five students is an immigrant and it is projected that by 2040 that number will exceed one out of three students (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010, p. 15). The CSD community has a population of 47.7% of individuals who do not speak English at home or are limited in English according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015). Likewise, one out of five adults in the CSD community cannot read on a fourth grade level, with another 28% of the population being underemployed because of the lack of reading skills necessary to earn sufficient income to support a household (Learning Center of North Texas, n.d.). Therefore, when ELL students do not attain English proficiency, it contributes to their inability to succeed in school and be prepared to contribute to the workforce (Calderon et al., 2011; Faltis, 2011). It is important for the economic growth and global competitiveness of the United States to ensure its entire populous is educated and prepared for the workforce (Faltis, 2011, p. 81). Consequently, quality instruction is of the upmost importance for ELL students (Calderon et al., 2011).

The significance of this study is that it contributed to finding potential factors leading to the increased number of LTELL students in the CSD. The results of this study provided information regarding the ESL pedagogy taking place in the elementary schools of CSD. These practices directly impact the learning and acquisition of the English language for ELL students. The insights from this study could assist ESL teachers with instructional practices that result in ELL students attaining proficiency in English and not being reclassified as a LTELL within CSD. Additionally, the study should assist other ESL programs in southwestern states and throughout the nation in understanding the ESL instructional practices taking place in their elementary school ESL classrooms.

### **Research Question(s)**

To guide the study, I developed one encompassing research question (RQ) and four subquestions (SQs). The RQ and SQs were guided by the conceptual framework of ELL instructional practices as defined by practices within sociocultural learning theory. The main RQ and SQs for this study were:

RQ: What instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classroom to increase English proficiency for the ELL students?

SQ1: What direct instruction practices are used during ESL instruction in elementary schools in CSD?

SQ2: What formative assessment is taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms within CSD?

SQ3: What are elementary ESL teachers doing to help ELL students exit from the ESL program and become reclassified as regular program students?

SQ4: What do elementary school ESL teachers at CSD perceive to be their greatest needs in order to provide quality instruction to their ELL students?

CSD currently has an influx of LTELL students, and the ESL instruction is not meeting the students' needs for acquiring English proficiency. There is a gap in LTELL research and, therefore, studying this problem may be useful to the CSD by providing data regarding the instructional practices that the elementary school ESL teachers are using in the ESL classrooms to increase English proficiency for the ELL students.

### **Review of the Literature**

I organized the review of literature around three different focuses. In the first section for this review of literature, I focused on the literature that made up the conceptual framework for this study. The second focus of literature review was embedded in additional at-risk factors for ELL students outside the classroom. In the final section of the literature review, I transitioned from the identification and definition of the study to the review of the broader problem. In this section, I looked at the recent studies focused on the LTELL problem and the data collected and analyzed by these researchers.

I conducted a search of existing literature through EBSCO Host by gathering articles from ERIC, PsycINFO, and Sage Journals. Additionally, searches over the Internet were conducted using the same search words used in EBSCO Host. The key words used in the search were: *long term English learners*, *long term English language learners*, *long term English as a second language*, *English language learners*, *English as*

*a second language, EL self-concept, ELL self-concept, ESL self-concept, EL risk factors, ELL risk factors, and ESL risk factors.* The literature that I gathered and reviewed using these search terms provided the studies referenced for the conceptual framework, the context, and the review of the broader problem.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on ESL instructional practices outlined by sociocultural learning theory. Sociocultural learning theory states that the acquisition of a language is constructed in a social setting, and learning is a social interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2009) and Walqui and van Lier (2010), ESL instruction should take into consideration that one's social environment influences the process of learning for individuals and their cognitive development. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1962) theorized that learning precedes development and a child's culture is a key factor in one's construction of knowledge. Building from this concept, Lantolf and Thorne and Walqui and van Lier stated that ESL students learn from their interactions with others including teachers and peers.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on best ESL instructional practices. There are eight primary ESL best practices that make up the framework. These consist of scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, metacognition, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, using formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students. The conceptual framework and its instructional practices



connect and are related to the study and the research question by providing researched best practices for the instruction of ELL students.

**Scaffolding.** Many researchers state that a key instructional practice for ESL students' learning and language acquisition are the interactions between teacher and student (Barr, Zohreh, & Joshi, 2012; Cummins et al., 2012; Heritage et al., 2012; Kim, 2010; Shin, 2010). Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a student's range for learning based on what he or she can do independently and what he or she can accomplish with teacher guidance (Barr et al., 2012; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). Bruner (1978) extended the work of Vygotsky's ZPD with a pedagogical method of scaffolding. Bruner stated that other people should help children learn skills by providing them with tasks that offer practice with the skills being sought. Scaffolding is the breaking down of the task into several steps and the adult lending support with aspects of the tasks that the child is unable to complete independently, while allowing the child to complete the steps he or she is capable of independently (Bruner, 1978). The purpose of the support is for the child to concentrate on a specific skill to be learned within the whole of the task without the other steps in the process causing an impasse for learning (Bruner, 1978). Scaffolding allows children to practice the skills being taught while receiving modeling and guidance for the other steps in the process that the child is unable to complete independently (Bruner, 1978). The strategy of scaffolding is the support provided a learner from a teacher to optimize a learner's gains (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Included in scaffolding is the gradual handover of a learning task from teacher to learner as the learner gains greater understanding and experience from the support

(Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Many researchers believe that scaffolding is an ESL instructional practice that fosters language acquisition (Barr et al., 2012; Cummins et al., 2012; Heritage et al., 2012; Kim, 2010; Shin, 2010). Social interaction as a best practice for ESL students extends beyond teacher scaffolding; it includes peer collaboration and cooperative learning (Adesope et al., 2011; Alvarez et al., 2014; Barr et al., 2012; Calderon et al., 2011).

**Collaboration and cooperative learning.** Collaboration and cooperative learning are the establishment of small groups of students of varying ability levels teaching, exploring, and discussing content after a teacher has introduced a lesson (Adesope et al., 2011; Barr et al., 2012; Calderon et al., 2011). Collaborative and cooperative work groups are founded on the understanding that children learn in social settings (Adesope et al., 2011; Alvarez et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2014; Brown, 2011; Bruner, 1978; Calderon et al., 2011; Guccione, 2011; Navarro, 2010; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Reading with peers enhances comprehension and language development for ELL students through the discussions derived from the activities (Adesope et al., 2011). Alvarez et al. (2014) explained that proficiency in language discourse, syntax, and vocabulary are developed through group projects, collaborative research, and other collaborative work. Baker et al. (2014) highlighted the use of oral conversation among peers in the classroom to foster the learning of English for ELL students. Calderon et al. (2011) expressed the need for the instructional practice of cooperative learning in order to increase the long-term acquisition of English vocabulary before, during, and after reading.

Peer collaboration and cooperative work has been shown to be an effective ESL teaching strategy in elementary schools (Calderon et al., 2011). Calderon et al. (2011) referenced four studies that all examined collaboration among elementary school ELL students. All four of the studies showed positive student achievement for ELL students when collaboration and cooperative learning were used (Calderon et al., 2011). The ELL best practice of social interactions moves children from the social aspect of learning into a self-regulatory reconstruction of the verbal, and guided assistance from their teachers moves them to inner-speech and the emergence of their own understanding and thinking (Iwai, 2011; Vygotsky, 1962).

**Metacognition.** Inner-speech, or self-talk, facilitates metacognition, or one's own knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and abilities (Iwai, 2011). Some theorists believe that when ESL teachers model and teach strategies for metacognition, it allows ELL students to take ownership of their learning (Ferlazzo, 2012; Iwai, 2011; Vygotsky, 1962). Iwai (2011) stated that ESL teachers can support their students by regularly teaching students how to implement metacognitive strategies, such as inner speech. Iwai also indicated that teaching metacognitive reading strategies through inner speech, such as previewing reading material, activating prior knowledge, making connections with text, and summarizing, helps ESL student's learning processes and builds reading comprehension and language development. Iwai further expressed that the instructional practices of using graphic organizers, modeling metacognitive strategies, and teaching metacognitive strategies explicitly assist ELL students with the acquisition of English. Additionally, Iwai and Ferlazzo (2012) encouraged metacognitive skills, such

as self-monitoring, to enhance English language proficiency for ELL students. Iwai declared that metacognitive strategies should be taught along with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD model. Many of these metacognitive skills develop through collaborative and cooperative work groups within the classroom (Adesope et al., 2011; Alvarez, et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2014; Navarro, 2010; Calderon et al., 2011).

**Questioning.** Some researchers expressed the belief that the instructional practice of questioning is a component of other ELL best practices, such as helping students attain metacognition (Barr et al., 2012; Calderon et al., 2011; Cummins et al., 2012; Kim, 2010; Navarro, 2010). They conveyed the idea that questioning allows teachers to interact with students in order to establish a dialog related to a specific content (Calderon et al., 2011; Cummins et al., 2012; Kim, 2010; Navarro, 2010). According to some researchers, the use of the dialog promotes conversation and oral practice with vocabulary and academic language (Calderon et al., 2011; Cummins et al., 2012; Kim, 2010).

Kim (2010) stated that there are three different types of questions used to promote language learning for ELL students: coaching questions, facilitating questions, and collaborating questions. Coaching questions are those that establish classroom community and learning goals (Kim, 2010, p. 123). Facilitating questions are used to increase language skills, overall communication, and text comprehension (Kim, 2010, p. 123). Collaborating questions are those used to establish dialogue with students to understand their learning and allow them to express personal experiences (Kim, 2010, p. 123).

**Establishment of background knowledge.** Questioning is also one method of establishing background knowledge. The establishment of background knowledge is a practice that involves the collaborative efforts between teacher and students in understanding the current schema that exists with students (Calderon et al., 2011; Cummins et al., 2012; Ferlazzo, 2012; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Ferlazzo (2012) stated that background knowledge is a catalyst for learning and the process should be interactive between teacher and student. Some researchers believed that the establishment of background knowledge uses metacognitive skills with respect to the students thinking about their own cognition (Ferlazzo, 2012; Iwai, 2011; Vygotsky, 1962).

According to Cummins et al. (2012) and Ferlazzo (2012), establishing background knowledge for ELL students is a best practice for ESL teachers because it allows the students to connect personally with what is being taught. Additionally, Ferlazzo stated that accessing prior knowledge promotes intrinsic learning motivation for ELL students (p. 46). Likewise, Ferlazzo extended that by doing so, ELL students become more engaged in what is being taught and that the practice fosters academic vocabulary (p. 46).

**Building vocabulary.** Many ELL students lack vocabulary skills that directly affect their learning, text comprehension, and language development (Barr et al., 2012). According to Calderon et al. (2011), ESL teachers should explicitly teach vocabulary across the subjects and do so before, during, and after reading. Barr et al. (2012) and Calderon et al. both supported that vocabulary should be taught through various experiences, such as in context, through idioms, and through the semantics of words.

Additionally, Barr et al. claimed that the use of “personal content-related” dictionaries for ELL students fosters the acquisition of English for ELL students (p. 112). The assessment of a student’s vocabulary is a common practice in elementary schools; however, assessment itself is seldom associated as an instructional practice for ELL students.

**Formative assessments.** The use of formative assessments, feedback from student performance used by a teacher to adjust instruction , to support English language attainment is a practice that is currently being promoted because of the success it has had for ELL students (Alvarez et al., 2014; Heritage et al., 2012; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). Formative assessments allow students to show their understanding not only in the traditional paper to pencil manner, but in an oral conversation (Alvarez et al., 2014; Heritage et al., 2012). Furthermore, formal assessments include conversations among teacher and students in order to probe deeper for the students’ language and academic understanding and development (Alvarez et al., 2014). Lantolf and Poehner (2011) and Heritage et al. (2012) stated that formative assessments should incorporate the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) for students and provide data that drives the instruction for each student. These types of assessments require teachers who have developed relationships of trust with their students.

**Establishment of relationship.** According to Cummins et al. (2012) and Ferlazzo (2012), the key to a sociocultural classroom that fosters language acquisition for ELL students is one that is founded in relationships. Ferlazzo stated that it is paramount for educators to gain insight into the lives of their students in order to make the learning meaningful to them. Cummins et al. further expressed the need for teachers to connect

learning to their students' lives. Cummins et al. and Ferlazzo both promoted the establishment of relationships through the sharing of one's background, culture, and self between teacher and student allows for learning to be relevant and meaningful for students.

### **ELL At-Risk Factors**

Many ELL students struggle in school because they lack English proficiency. Unfortunately, many ELL students do not live in home environments that promote English proficiency (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). There are many contributing factors that could affect the academic success of ELL students (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). The families of many ELL students suffer from poverty which has been shown to inhibit the behavior regulation of students in the areas of attention, following one-step and multistep directions with distractors present and control of a natural response in favor of more appropriate ones (Wanless, McClelland, Tominey, & Acock, 2011). Poverty has been shown to be a significant factor in ELL students being behind their peers academically throughout their formal education (Winsler et al., 2012; Winsler, Kim, & Richard, 2014). Additionally, many immigrant ELL students have diverse educational experiences that included inconsistent schooling (Roy-Campbell, 2012) that can leave them 2 or more year behind their peers (Lee, 2012, p. 66).

Furthermore, sociocultural differences are often challenges and risk factors for the language development of ELL students (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Kim, 2011). ELL families' beliefs about literacy can influence the development of ELL students' English (Shi, 2012,

p. 234). As well, the general self-perceptions of ELL students greatly impacts their language achievement and level of proficiency (Kim, 2011; Niehaus & Adelson, 2013; Winsler et al., 2014). Additionally, an ELLs' unfamiliarity of their environment, separation from other family members, and a lack of knowledge regarding the American school systems are all contributing factors for ELL students potentially being at risk of academic success (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle., 2010).

### **Literature Addressing the Broader Problem**

Gwynne, Pareja, Ehrlich, and Allensworth (2012) studied the growing number of LTELL students in Chicago schools, focusing on the Hispanic population because it was significantly the largest ELL population within the Chicago public school system. Gwynne et al. found that the academic challenges facing ELL students in secondary schools resulted in lower Grade Point Averages (GPA), attendance, course failure, and dropout rates. Gwynne et al. study found that Hispanic LTELL students as compared to all other Hispanic student populations, including newly identified ELL students, had the lowest course performance and graduation rates. They found that LTELL Hispanic students failed nearly three classes a year (p. 50), missed an average of 9 days a semester (p. 50), had an average GPA of a C- (p. 50), only had 55% of students on track for graduation at the completion of their ninth grade year (p. 21), and had only 52% of the students graduate within four years (p. 33). Gwynne et al.'s summarized that LTELL students were less likely to graduate than other students with similar grades and attendance. Furthermore, they claimed that LTELL students primarily attend the lower



performing schools with the weakest course performance (Gwynne et al., 2012).

Additionally, the researchers concluded that LTELL Hispanic students were less prepared for educational opportunities beyond high school compared to their more successful ELL counterparts.

Estrada and Wang (2013) reported on the first year of a 4-year longitudinal mixed methods study focused on third through ninth grade students in California public schools. The researchers themes that contributed to students being reclassified as LTELL versus not beings reclassified to a regular program were teacher recommendation, lack of quality instruction and needed professional development. Many students were not being exited from ELL programs because of teacher recommendations for retention, even when the students met the criteria for advancement. Sometimes these recommendations were based on philosophical beliefs about isolating ELL students from non ELL students until the demonstration of academic language mastery. Conversely, other ELL teachers believed that students become stagnant in the ELL programs and that once they have met the other criteria for promotion from an ELL program, they should join the regular program students to enhance their academic language and motivation with their peers. As well, the researchers found that high stakes testing was the emphasis for many classrooms creating a lacked of alignment between language goals and the actual curriculum. Furthermore, the researchers found that many teachers lacked training and professional development in order to provide quality instruction for ELL students (Estrada & Wang, 2013).

Likewise, Velasquez's (2014) research showed that professional development was needed in order to support teachers in teaching ELL students. The researcher reported

that teachers wanted research-based training in strategies to help them meet the needs of their LTELL students. Further, educators conveyed the lack of motivation of many ELL students to improve their language acquisition. As well, it was reported that LTELL students missed parental involvement and support necessary to enhance their English development (Velasquez, 2014).

Cohen (2014) found that students supported the belief expressed in the study by Velasquez (2014) that parents did not support LTELL students. Cohen expressed that LTELL students had a negative view on their overall academic performance and language acquisition and that their discouragement lead to many LTELL students giving up in school. LTELL students struggle with exiting from ELL programs because of their lack of understanding the requirement to be reclassified, English grades, and their GPA (Cohen, 2014).

Contrary to Cohen (2014), Kim and Garcia (2014) found LTELL students' perceptions of their learning experience was positive and that they considered themselves motivated and active learners. However, these students did identify areas they needed to improve mainly academic language and vocabulary. Many LTELL students felt they had developed English language skills necessary to be successful in school and postsecondary education despite the challenges they faced. The researchers reported that many of the secondary LTELL students received little to no language services because of the lack of systematic high quality language development programs in the schools that fostered rigorous academic instruction. The researchers also reported that in some instances schools focused more on new ELL students while overlooking the LTELL students'

needs. Many LTELL students' schooling experiences, as related to their English instruction and overall learning, did not deter their perceptions and dreams of their future (Kim & Garcia, 2014).

Diaz-Zamora's (2014) qualitative study focused on strategies that effectively taught literacy in English to LTELL students. The researcher stated that many ELL students were not getting the services they are entitled to per the law and that this neglect is contributing to the LTELL problem in American public schools. The data from this study supported the view that LTELL students wanted to learn. The research found four strategies that LTELL students stated helped them learn English and supported their overall learning. The strategies of modeling steps for a task first, one-on-one assistance, collaborative work groups, and reading and writing everyday increased LTELL students' English proficiency. However, the data suggested that collaborative work groups should not include groupings with friends to allow for the focus of the lesson's integrity to remain intact during the collaboration (Diaz-Zamora, 2014).

The review of literature of the broader problem shows that there is a recent concern with the increased number of LTELL students in the public school systems. There are many studies related to ELL students and programs; however, there is a lack of research specific to LTELL students. In this study, I hope to contribute to the new branch of research on LTELL while addressing the same local problem of increased numbers of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL.

## **Implications**

One of my goals for this study was to inform ELL teachers and school administrators of practices taking place in elementary ELL classrooms. Furthermore, the study could directly affect students based on how ELL teachers and school administrators use the data in addressing ELL instructional practices. The findings of the study may be important to administrators and teachers because it provides data regarding the actual ELL best practices being or not being implemented in the elementary ELL classrooms.

Based on the data collection and its analysis, the project I chose for this study was a white paper report. The context of the white paper report was based on the data analysis. The implications could impact the ESL and professional development departments of CSD, as well as campus administrators and their practices for classroom walkthroughs. Another possible project that was considered was the creation of professional development; however, professional development on its own did not address all the findings. Therefore, professional development as the project was not selected. The purpose for choosing a white paper report was to present the best way of resolving the concern of ELL students failing to exit the ESL program and being reclassified as LTELL based on the data and its analysis. The impact of the study could address the problem of ELL students failing to exit the ESL program and being reclassified as LTELL. Furthermore, this study could be shared with the educational community worldwide to provide further insight into similar local situations in which increasing numbers of ELL students are being reclassified LTELL. Likewise, it could impact the understanding of what ESL best practices are or are not taking place in ESL classrooms based on the

contextual framework of the eight ESL best practices of this study. Additionally, this study could lead to changes in ESL teacher professional development, administrator classroom observation focuses, and districts' curriculums regarding ESL pedagogy practices.

### **Summary**

The U.S. demographic is changing with an increase of immigrants who are affecting the makeup of not only the nation but its public school systems with the growing nonfluent English speaking student populations (Calderon et al., 2011; Menken et al., 2012). Because of the lack of English proficiency, many ELL students typically struggle in school and many are being reclassified as LTELL (Calderon et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). The increasing number of LTELL students is a national concern, as well as a local concern for the CSD (Calderon et al., 2011).

According to district internal and confidential documents, CSD's LTELL population increased 43% between the 2013–2014 school year and the 2014–2015 school year. The LTELL population is the fastest growing population in the CSD. Therefore, in this study, I looked to examine the instructional practices in elementary school ESL classroom. The purpose of this study was to identify instructional practices taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms within the CSD in order to create professional development based on the data in an effort to improve professional practices and student achievement.

The problem identified by this study was the increased number of ESL students being reclassified as LTELL. The nature of the problem was explored through the research question: What instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classroom to increase English proficiency for the ELL students? In addition to the research question there were four additional secondary questions that guided the study.

In the review of literature, I explored the best practices for instructing ELL students. The instructional practices for teaching ELL students were what made up the conceptual framework for the study. The literature details the practices of scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative groups, metacognitive skills, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through varying methods, formative assessment, and the establishing and fostering of relationships. Further, in the review of literature, I addressed at-risk factors of many ELL students and the broader problem of the increased number of LTELL students in the public school systems.

Through this study I sought to determine if the instructional practices of ESL elementary school teachers in the CSD incorporated ELL best practices in the ESL classrooms in order to address the problem in that higher numbers of ELL students are not attaining English proficiency within the 4 to 6-year expected window and are being reclassified as LTELL. In Section 2, I will detail the qualitative case study methodology, the participants, the data collection and the measurement instruments used in the study, the data analysis, and the results of the data analysis.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

In Section 1 of this study, I established the national and local increase of LTELL students and the necessity for ESL teachers to implement ELL best practices into the classroom in order to assist ELL students in the acquisition of English proficiency. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ELL instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms within CSD. In Section 2, I will describe the design and approach for the study. Section 2 also includes justification for the sample, the measurement tools for the data collection and analysis, ethical treatment of human participants, and the data analysis results.

### **Research Design and Approach**

The research design I selected for this study was a qualitative case study. A case study was appropriate to examine the research problem for this study as it was able to answer the research questions and address the problem of the increasing number of LTELL students within the CSD. A case study provided the opportunity for an in-depth examination (Creswell, 2012) of the instructional practices taking place in elementary school ESL classrooms. Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative research promotes a deep understanding of social settings from the participants' perspective. Furthermore, case studies allow for the empirical inquiry of a phenomenon in a bounded system within a real-life context (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Creswell noted that a case study allows for an in-depth examination of an activity or process. In addition, Creswell explained that a case study focuses on illuminating specific issues, such as the increase of

LTELL students within CSD. Additionally, researchers have used case studies to investigate a program and the program participants (Creswell, 2012) as I did with the ESL program and ESL teachers within the CSD.

I considered a phenomenological approach for this study because these approaches are used to explore individuals' experiences in order to determine meaning of the phenomena of interest (Maxwell, 2013) in this case, the instructional practices of elementary ESL teachers. However, a phenomenological approach was rejected because it requires a broader description of the collective experiences of all the individuals than deemed appropriate for the research question (Maxwell, 2013). Similarly, a grounded theory approach was also considered for this study because with the research question I looked to explore the instructional practices within elementary ESL classrooms and the processes and interactions of this topic are the basis of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Yet, grounded theory looks to discover a new theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007); rather, this study looks to understand the practices taking place within the bounded system of elementary ESL classrooms and not generate a new theory. Finally, I also deliberated on an ethnographic approach for this study because the study looked at the cultural group of elementary school ESL teachers (Wolcott, 2008). However, this approach was rejected because the goal of the study was not to interpret the social or cultural group of elementary school ESL teachers (Wolcott, 2008). Additionally, an ethnographic study was deemed not appropriate because this study did not use extended periods of time or the manner of fieldwork as are typically used ethnographic studies (Wolcott, 2008).



## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

In order to explore the instructional practices of elementary school ESL teachers within the CSD, I used a purposeful, homogenous sampling strategy in this study. Purposeful, homogenous sampling was appropriate in order to attain a deep understanding of the phenomenon based on related characteristics and backgrounds of the participants related to the research question (Creswell 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 1998). The participants in this study were elementary school ESL teachers working within the CSD school district. The purpose for selecting the elementary school ESL teachers was because they had a firsthand knowledge of the instructional practices taking place in the ESL classrooms. Purposeful, homogenous sampling allowed me to select the participants with the background of teaching in ESL classrooms (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) stated that in order to create a purposeful sample, criteria must be established based on the research question. The criterion for the sample of this study was that all participants had to be certified ESL elementary school teachers within the CSD.

### **Justification of Participants**

The participants for this project study consisted of two teachers from each grade level from first grade through fifth grade ( $N = 10$ ). The participants were all certified ESL teachers at one of three elementary schools within the CSD. The justification for using two from each grade level was to ensure that there was data to analyze both vertically among grades and within each grade level.

The participants were ESL teachers from three elementary schools within the CSD that were within 15 miles of my campus. I did not select any teachers from the school in which I am the principal due to the requirements for conducting ethical research (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The number of ESL teachers within these three schools was limited because of other language programs on the campuses. All three schools did not have multiple ESL teachers per grade level; therefore the use of three different schools was needed in order to attain two teachers per grade level in first through fifth grades. Therefore, two teachers total for each grade level first through fifth grade were attained and provided the detailed data sought for this study.

Based on these criteria for participation, I recruited 10 participants, out of the 24 possible certified ESL teachers in CSD, for this study. The 10 participants' years of experience teaching and their years of experience teaching ESL varied from participant to participant. The range of overall teaching experience of the 10 participants is 28+ years (between 2 and 30+ years). The range of ESL teaching experience of the 10 participants is 17 years (between 2 and 19 years).

Table 1

*Teacher Demographics*

Participant	School	Years Teaching	Years Teaching ESL	Grade
Participant 1	School 1	11	11	2nd
Participant 2	School 3	19	19	3rd
Participant 3	School 3	23	18	2nd
Participant 4	School 3	15	7	5th
Participant 5	School 2	19	19	4th
Participant 6	School 2	14	14	3rd
Participant 7	School 2	7	3	1st
Participant 8	School 1	28	18+	5th
Participant 9	School 3	2	2	4th
Participant 10	School 1	30+	8	1st

*Note.* The years teaching that include a + indicates that the participant could not remember the exact years but that it was at least that many years.

### **Gaining Access to Participants and Establishing Working Relationship**

CSD has a research study approval process in order to conduct research within the district and to gain access to participants. I began the process began by developing a research proposal and then presenting the proposal before the research approval board. The district approved my study and I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). My Walden University IRB approval number for my study was 02-25-16-0407040. From there, I contacted the principals of the three schools

in person and provided them each with a letter requesting permission and access to their individual campus and their ESL teachers in order to conduct the interviews and classroom observations. With the approval of the district and each school's administration, I proceeded to select the ESL elementary school teacher participants for the study.

With permission from the school administrators, I initially established a researcher-participant relationship with each participant through personal contact at the teachers' schools. I sat down with each individual face-to-face. As part of the establishment of the working relationship, I shared with the potential participants that the study was part of my doctoral program and not related to my role as a district employee. I explained to each potential participant the research topic and study. I clarified my role as the data collector and that they were the working experts from whom I would be collecting data regarding the ESL instructional practices taking place in the classrooms. I answered any questions the potential participants had related to the study. Furthermore, I reviewed with the participants the measures taken for protecting them, and I obtained informed consent signatures prior to beginning the interviews and observations.

### **Measures for Protecting the Rights of Participants**

The first measure of participant protection for the study was securing written approval for the study by Walden University's IRB to ensure correct measures were in place to protect the participant's rights. After completing this step, I provided the participants with informed consent forms (see Appendix B), which were completed and signed by each participant. The informed consent consisted of an explanation of the

procedures and risks involved in the study as well as the voluntary nature of the study and participants' right to withdraw from the study without threat of penalty at any time (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The participants selected a location for the interviews that was comfortable and convenient to them to aid in the elimination of the potential risk of anxiety from the interview. Finally, I made sure teachers knew that their confidentiality was protected through my coding of each participant as Participant 1 through Participant 10 (Lodico et al., 2010).

## **Data Collection**

### **Description and Justification of Data Collection**

During this case study, I collected data from a sample of certified ESL teachers within the CSD via interviews and classroom observations, regarding the instructional practices taking place in their ESL classrooms. Interviews allowed me to gather detailed information that was personal to the interviewee that may not be observable (Creswell, 2012). Conducting interviews also provided me the opportunity to elicit the information being sought through the questions asked (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

I conducted one face-to-face interview with each of the 10 ESL teachers during the 2015–2016 school year for a total of 10 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and occurred in a location that was convenient and comfortable for each teacher. I recorded the interviews with permission from the participants, and they were transcribed by me within 24 hours of the interview. The interviews were semistructured with open-ended questions.

Observations provided me with firsthand data by observing the research site and the actual behaviors of interests that were relevant to the study (Creswell, 2012). I conducted one observation for each of the 10 participants. Observations lasted approximately 1 hour and took place in each of the ESL teachers' classrooms. An observational protocol was used to record the observational data and my thoughts regarding the observations (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Furthermore, I reviewed the observational field notes within 24 hours to ensure the accuracy of its analysis.

Both interviews and observations were appropriate instruments in gathering data to answer the research question regarding what instructional practices elementary school ESL teachers used in the ESL classroom to increase English proficiency for the ELL students. Data collection helped me measure the instructional practices taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms in CSD. The interviews provided the elementary ESL teachers the opportunity to convey their perspectives on the different instructional practices taking place in their classrooms. The observations permitted me the ability to record the instructional practices that I observed during the ESL time in each teacher's classroom. I analyzed the data collected in an open coding tradition in order for the themes, patterns, and relationships to emerge naturally (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). The data collected from this study provided me with a detailed understanding of the instruction occurring in the CSD, and the themed analysis helped determine if these practices aligned with ESL best practices supported by the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2012).

### **Sources of Data, System for Tracking, and Securing Data**

The interview questions and protocol (see Appendix C), observation protocol and field notes (see Appendix D) were produced by me to ensure that they directly addressed the research question (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The data were tracked through a research log that was completed partially by hand and partially on my computer. The data were protected by being locked in a filing cabinet in my home. Further, my computer is password protected and is in the same locked filing cabinet in my home when not in use. All data were secured to ensure participant confidentiality (Lodico et al., 2010). The audio recordings of the interviews remain locked in a file cabinet in my home along with the field notes. I transcribed all interview notes onto my computer.

### **Data Collection Access and Researcher Role**

My role as researcher in the data collection process was as the sole conductor of both the interviews and the classroom observations. All participants were aware this study was part of my requirements as a doctoral student and not as a district employee. I had no past or current professional role at the three settings for my study. Furthermore, I had no professional relationship with any of the participants. I had no supervisory capacity over the teachers who were a part of the study. Additionally, I had no supervisor role of any type within the ESL department of the school district. My role in the CSD is that of an elementary school administrator; however, I am an administrator on a different campus and I had no current or former teachers working at any of the three school

settings for my study. Therefore, there should have been no potential threat to the participants or internal threat of biases (Lodico et al., 2010).

### **Researchers Experiences and Biases**

I am currently an administrator at an elementary school that has an ESL program. One of my roles on my campus is overseeing our ESL program. During the past 2 years while attending trainings from the CSD language department, I learned of the district's concern over LTELL students. I began searching for best practices for instructing ESL students to implement in the ESL classrooms on my campus. From this inquiry I was led to query about the ESL instructional practices taking place in the elementary schools within the CSD. From the trainings that I attended, and my role as a school administrator, I believed that research based ESL best practices, such as those outlined in the contextual framework of this proposal, should be implemented by elementary school ESL classroom teachers. These best practices can best assist ESL students in achieving English proficiency and prevent them from being reclassified as LTELL. Though the district did not assign me to improve the ESL program in my district, I saw a need and opportunity to study the issue. In order to check for my personal bias, I incorporated member checks for the transcribed interview notes. Further, I included the ESL best practices from the conceptual framework on my observation field note forms that assisted as I completed the classroom observations.



### **Data Analysis**

According to Lodico et al. (2010), the purpose of data analysis in case study research is to discover meaning and understanding of the individuals and their situation in which they are involved (p. 269). Lodico et al. explained that data analysis includes the processes of organizing the data, followed by the exploration of the data, the coding of the data, constructing detailed descriptions of the participants and the settings, building themes, and interpreting the data. The organization of the data included the transcription of the interviews, which took place within 24 hours of each interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). The transcribed data and the data from the classroom observations were coded utilizing the standard qualitative methodology detailed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Creswell (2012). This standard qualitative methodology consisted of initially reading the transcriptions carefully and marking the margins with ideas from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Next, each document was read with the purpose of answering the question of what the person was talking about to identify underlying meanings and then I marked this in the margin with two or three words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Following this step, text segments were assigned code words or phrases that described the meaning accurately (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). After coding the text, I made a list of all the code words and codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). All redundant codes were grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Finally, the list of codes was reduced to arrive at five themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). This coding took place once all data were collected to help in the prevention of researcher biases (Lodico et al., 2010).

This process involved finding and detailing patterns and themes in the data to answer the research question of what ESL instructional practices are taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms within the CSD (Creswell, 2012).

During the analysis process five categories were found in order to identify the each theme (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I sorted the descriptive data into the coded categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). The process of sorting the descriptive data continued until saturation was achieved (Creswell, 2012). The interpretation of the data analysis consisted of reflecting on the data from the study and the literature in order to answer the research question (Creswell, 2012). The data analysis was completed by hand and not computer software. A graphic organizer with a column for each theme was used to input the data for interpretation (Creswell, 2012).

## **Data Analysis Results**

### **Findings**

The problem investigated through this study was the increase of ELL students reclassified as LTELL students. Through my study, I identified instructional practices taking place in the elementary school classrooms of ELL students in the CSD in order to determine if the instructional practices the CSD ESL elementary school teachers are incorporating best practices for ELL students. The RQ guiding the study asked what instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classrooms to increase English proficiency for the ELL students. The findings were compared with the eight best practices outlined in the review of literature based on the conceptual framework outlined by sociocultural learning theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky,

1962, 1978; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). These best practices consist of scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, metacognition, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, using formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students (Alvarez et al., 2014; Barr et al., 2012; Ferlazzo, 2012; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

Additionally, the findings were directly connected to the RQ and the four SQs.

### **Themes Supported by Data Aligned with Research Questions**

**Theme 1: Sociocultural best practices.** Seven of the eight practices outlined in this study as sociocultural best practices emerged as a theme among at least seven of the 10 participants. These consisted of scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, using formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students. The percentage of participants identifying the seven best practices is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Theme 1: Sociocultural Best Practices*

Best Practice	% of participants reporting this practice
Scaffolding	100
Collaboration and Cooperative Work Groups	80
Questioning	80
Establishing Background Knowledge	70
Building Vocabulary through Various Activities	90
Formative Assessment to Direct Instruction	100
Establishing Relationships of Trust with Students	80

***Scaffolding.*** The data analysis detailed that all the participants were familiar with scaffolding and it emerged as one of the sociocultural learning theories best practices currently used in the ESL classrooms. During the interviews, all participants shared scaffolding strategies they use to help ELL students to decode unfamiliar words. Participants 1, 4, 5, and 6 each stated that they use base words or root words and affixes as a decoding strategy. Similarly, eight out the 10 participants said that they have the students sound out words or use phonics and blending as a decoding strategy. Participants 1, 3, and 4 stated that they use specific programs that include various decoding strategies. These programs included the Scottish Rite Dyslexia Program, National Geographic Reach, and Open Court (a purchased reading program).

Unrelated to decoding there were other strategies observed and discussed by four of the 10 participants. During observation, Participant 1 introduced new vocabulary prior to a lesson. She used a music video that introduced the words with visual context for the students. Participant 1 played the music video three times allowing students to sing along the song that included the vocabulary words and meanings as they became comfortable. On the third time, the expectation was for all students to participate. During an independent practice, Participant 1 provided hand-over-hand assistance to some students, to others she provided step-by-step guidance, and to others no scaffolding was required.

Participant 4 provided another example of scaffolding as she was working with her class as they were writing biographies on historical figures. For some students she told specific pages to turn to in the reference book they were attaining their research. For other students she asked leading questions to direct them to discover what they needed on their own. She provided a few students sentence stems to assist them in their writing.

One exchange during the observation that demonstrated scaffolding was with a student who had asked Participant 4 about different jobs of the poor during the 1920s:

Student: "What was the different jobs of the poor people?"

Participant 4: "What jobs do you know from that period?"

Student: "I don't know the names."

Participant 4: "Can you describe what the individuals do for their employment?"

Student: "Employment?"

Participant 4: "Can you describe what they do for their employment; employment is another word for job."

Student: “They dig in the dirt to make flowers and cut grass at the houses.”

Participant 4: “That would be a gardener.”

Student: “What about the person who drives the rich guys around in the cars and makes their food and gives it to them?”

Participant 4: “A chauffeur drives them and a butler waits on them.”

The interaction between Participant 4 and her student showed how the teacher scaffolded the student’s needs by meeting him where his abilities lacked while still requiring him to complete the same task as the student’s peers without simply providing the student the answers.

***Collaboration and cooperative work groups.*** Collaboration and cooperative work groups were discussed and/or observed with eight out of the 10 participants. Participants 2, 5, and 6 included cooperative work groups that enabled students to work on tasks together and collaborate throughout the process. Participant 6 described one way she has students grouped so they feel comfortable and safe in order to express themselves in English:

I have a very difficult time with a couple of my kids who just will not express themselves whether it’s written or drawn...when I’m thinking about some of my peer student groupings I don’t group them with high, high students because it causes frustration on both ends. So I don’t really group them, they pair up. So they self-select their peers...They know who’s on my level so they’ll kind of move to those groups of kids.

Participant 6 further shared that another reason she likes the kids to group up on their own is that it helps them to take responsibility of their own learning. She demonstrated this during her observation when she set expectations for the groups prior to commencing their task that included establishing roles for each student and assigning a group leader to facilitate discussions.

Further, the data analysis showed that five of the participants created opportunities for their students to collaborate through talk and turn, group discussions, and sharing of work with peers regularly. Eight of the 10 participants incorporated collaboration and/or cooperative work groups as a practice in their ESL classrooms. These data supported this best practice in Theme 1.

***Questioning.*** Questioning was seen and/or discussed by eight of the 10 students primarily in the form of facilitating questions and collaborating questions. The facilitating questions focused on increasing language skills and text comprehension (Kim, 2010, p. 123). The collaborating questions were those used to establish dialogue with students to understand their learning and those that allowed them to express personal experiences when establishing background knowledge (Kim, 2010, p.123). The strategy of questioning was used by all eight participants as a tool for the development of vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Both forms of questioning, facilitating and collaborating, were observed during the classroom observation of Participant 2. The class had just completed the whole group choral reading. Upon completion of the activity Participant 2 asked, “What did the story tell you?” Participant 2 followed up the students’ responses with the question, “What

reading strategies did you use to know that and explain how you used it.” Similarly, Participant 4 had an anchor chart that addressed metacognition in the form of questions that the students should ask themselves to promote inner-speech related to their learning.

***Establishing background knowledge.*** Establishing background knowledge was a best practice used by seven of the 10 participants; all seven participants used questioning to carry out this strategy. However, Participants 1 and 4 stated that they include visuals presented on the Promethean Board to aid the activation of prior knowledge and background knowledge. Furthermore, Participant 2 stated that she establishes background knowledge by connecting current lessons with prior lessons. When Participant 7 was asked about direct instructional practices she replied with how she establishes background knowledge:

Definitely pre-teaching vocabulary...some of the kids in first grade haven't had experiences to begin with, much less there's a language in the middle...so kind of pre-teaching. Sometimes with a visual support or a book as a support so they can kind of get in that mind set and have that frame of mind of where we're going.

During the visit to her classroom the practice of establishing background knowledge was observed. Prior to reading aloud the book in which the setting of the story took place on a ranch, Participant 7 asked background questions about what a ranch-hand and livestock were. She furthered the pre-teaching of vocabulary that was in the story by having the students stand up to put on their imaginary cowboy gear as she pointed to each item from a picture in the book. The students put on their cowboy hats, bandanas, long pants, boots,



ropes, long sleeve shirts, and chaps. As the teacher demonstrated how to put on each item she asked them why each item would be an important tool for a cowboy on a ranch.

The data supports the use of establishing background knowledge as a best practice being used in the CSD ESL classrooms and supports Theme 1.

***Building vocabulary through various activities.*** The building of vocabulary through various activities was a practice seen and/or discussed by nine of the 10 teachers. There were many different methods for building vocabulary found in the data. The example shared above in establishing background knowledge from Participant 7 is one sample of a vocabulary building activity. Additionally, eight of the participants discussed the need for visual aids and anchors charts to promote the acquisition of vocabulary. Three of the participants discussed teaching vocabulary through reading and using context clues to find the meaning of unknown words. Likewise, three participants stated that they use root words and affixes to teach vocabulary. Participant 5 shared one of the vocabulary activities she uses with her ESL students:

They make their own dictionaries... [with] words that we come across that they're not familiar with. They put them in there and draw a little picture for each one of them and [a] definition so they've got those to refer back to strengthen their vocabulary.

This is another example of a vocabulary activity taking place in the CSD ESL classrooms. Other activities or strategies to build vocabulary that were observed or discussed were gestures, vocabulary card games, small group lessons, vocabulary

discussions, previewing vocabulary prior to reading, videos, and the students acting out the vocabulary terms.

*Using formative assessment to direct instruction.* The use of formative assessment to direct instruction was utilized by all ten of the participants. However, how teachers use the data to impact instruction varied by the teachers. Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 stated that they would review or reteach students either whole-group, small group, or one-on-one. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 stated they use formative assessments to make reading groups. Participant 7 stated that she uses it to determine students who need tutoring.

Two participants, 4 and 6, stated that they use the data from the formative assessments as a reflection on their teaching and what they need to change to help students learn. Participant 4 shared:

At the end of class I use it [formative assessment] for my reflection. I use it for my checking of understanding... If I find that it's the same lesson I've done twice and the kids still aren't getting it, I bring it to my colleagues and say "hey, they're not getting this. What are you doing? Can you help me come up with a different solution?" I kind of use it more for me. Did I do a good enough job today?

Likewise, Participant 6 stated:

I don't take a grade for it [formative assessment]. I just kind of see what I need to do. It's not that they didn't get it. It's what I did not do that they didn't get. So my formative assessments are 50-50. I see what they need and I see what I need to do. I use that as a tool to be better for them, not them better for me.

The different methods of formative assessment varied from the participants moving throughout the classroom checking students' work and collaboration, paper and pencils tasks, using technology, and questioning. All 10 participants shared multiple ways they formatively assess students. This showed that each participant used varying methods to assess students to attain their data.

*Establishing relationships of trust with the students.* The data showed that eight of the 10 participants established relationships of trust with their students. This was seen in a few different forms, the first being some of the participants greeting the students by name as they entered the classroom. Other participants shared personal stories about themselves with the students. Participant 2 shared a life lesson she learned related to her pet dog, Molly. Participant 6 reviewed some vocabulary terms and she used the example of her husband planning their vacation to Alaska. Two of the participants told their classes jokes that the students responded to with laughter. Participant 7 created questions and used examples in her teaching that included the students in her class and their personal interests.

**Theme 2: Sociocultural best practice deficiencies.** Metacognition, one of the eight practices outlined in this study as a sociocultural best practice, did not emerge as a theme among at least seven of the 10 participants. Additionally, although the best practice of scaffolding was identified as a sociocultural best practice used by all the participants there was discrepant data regarding decoding strategies used within the elementary ESL classrooms. Table 3 summarizes the percentage of participants that identified the Theme 2 findings of metacognition and scaffolding.

Table 3

*Theme 2: Sociocultural Best Practice Deficiencies*

Best Practice	Area within Practice	% of participants who used the practice
Metacognition	N/A	60
Scaffolding	Decoding	50

***Metacognition.*** The best practice of metacognition was seen or discussed by six out of 10 of the participants. Participants 3 and 7 previewed reading material with their students prior to reading tasks. Further, Participant 3 had students connect the text with their own lives.

The practice of supporting students' inner speech through teacher think-alouds and students questioning their own thinking and learning was practiced by Participants 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Participant 6 had the students come to the board one at a time and share the meaning of vocabulary words that were in sentences with the class. She had the students answer what the vocabulary words meant and then she stated to each student as they presented at the board, "What did you do? Talk it out." The students then provided what they were thinking as they went through the context clues out loud to the class. During her interview she stated, "I'll use the Promethean Board to show how the thinking process goes through, so we talk about our thinking."

Likewise, Participant 8 stated that "we do a lot of think-alouds." She explained that she taught the students how to express their own thinking by modeling her thinking during various tasks, "I share what I'm thinking or how I view it and in time they share

how they view something or how they approach a challenge.” This practice of metacognition being used as a best practice was not seen in at least 70% of the participants and therefore fell into Theme 2.

*Scaffolding the activity of decoding.* Regarding the best practice of scaffolding, all 10 participants provide data related to practices implemented in the classroom to increase ESL students’ English proficiency. Furthermore, all 10 participants provided scaffolding strategies specific to assisting students in decoding unfamiliar words when reading. However, there is discrepant data that showed that five out of the 10 participants regularly did not implement one of the decoding strategies discussed to scaffold students in decoding unfamiliar words during reading. Participants 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 routinely told the students how to say unfamiliar words without using one of the strategies they discussed in the interview.

Participant 5 had two occasions during the observation in which students did not know how to read a word. The first time a student paused in his reading and another student shouted out the word. The student who initially did not know the word moved on in his reading. Participant 5 did not say anything regarding not shouting out or about the need to for students to use decoding strategies. Another student came to a word she did not know and asked Participant 5 what the word was and Participant 5 told her the word without requiring the student to use a decoding strategies.

Participant 6 had three opportunities to scaffold a student in decoding an unfamiliar word. On two of the occasions she told the student the word without implementing any scaffolding and once she had the student use the decoding strategy of

looking for root words. Participant 8 had 16 opportunities and Participant 10 had nine opportunities to scaffold students in decoding unfamiliar words and neither one ever used any strategies. Similarly, Participant 9 had 12 opportunities to use scaffolding to support students in decoding unknown words while reading; yet, she only required a decoding strategy one time.

**Theme 3: Other practices.** In addition to the sociocultural best practices outlined in the conceptual framework (Alvarez et al., 2014; Barr et al., 2012; Bruner, 1978; Cummins et al., 2012; Kim, 2010; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Walqui, & van Lier, 2010) the participants implemented three additional practices in their classrooms. These practices included the use of technology, anchor charts, and small group instruction. All of these practices were observed or discussed with at least seven out of the 10 participants (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Theme 3: Other Practice*

Practice	% of participants using the practice
Technology	80
Anchor Charts	80
Small Groups	70

**Technology.** The use of technology was observed or discussed in eight out of the 10 ESL classrooms although the ways it was utilized varied. The main technology tool used by the teachers was a Promethean Board provided by the school district. The use of

this tool varied from classroom to classroom. Participant 1 was observed using the Promethean Board to play a music video about the social studies vocabulary for the unit, *Being a Responsible Citizen*. The video provided visual representation and examples for the terms citizen, protest, and judgment. Participant 1 stated in her interview, “I like to implement media.” She also shared that her professional development is “a lot of technology.” Likewise, two other participants presented instructional videos to their classes through their Promethean Board.

Teachers used the Promethean Boards to provide interactive stations during student center rotations, to display assignments during independent work, to display vocabulary images, to present whole group review games, and to display flipcharts and other presentations. Participant 3 stated that she uses her Promethean Board to present flip charts, PowerPoints, and Prezi presentations during whole group instruction. She stated that she used presentations because her students find them “real interesting” and “pretty cool.”

***Anchor charts.*** The use of anchor charts during whole group instruction was seen and discussed in eight of the 10 classrooms. One type of chart used was graphic organizers that included *t* charts, Venn diagrams, and main idea charts. Another type of anchor chart used by the participants was written informational anchor charts that included comprehension strategies, vocabulary lists with images, and problem solving steps.

Participant 6 stated that they use anchor charts frequently during instruction and that she uses them to provide strategies for her students. She said that she tells the

students to “look up at your skills, what skills are you trying to learn?” referencing the anchor charts hanging in her classroom. Further she shared how she teaches the students to visualize the charts to help them when the charts are removed from the classroom for testing:

They start getting those pictures [in their minds], so when they walk out of my room and they have to do an assessment they don't have all of this up for them... You have to look at those [anchor charts] and put that picture in your head of what that poster looks like... so they can visualize it to help with some comprehension.

Participant 6 conveyed during her interview that the anchor charts in the classroom used as reference charts and guide resources for her students and remain available for weeks after the lesson has been taught. During instruction, Participants 1 and 6 both referenced anchor charts hanging within their classrooms from prior lessons.

**Small group.** Small group instruction was observed and/or discussed by seven of the 10 teachers. Participants 1, 2, 6, 7, and 10 utilized small group instruction time to provide guided reading lessons based on students ability levels and needs. Participant 1 stated that she has anywhere from three to four groups that consist of five to six students in which she provides daily reading lessons specific to the needs of the students in the groups. She further stated that she used the Reach Program from the district to teach her small groups. She explained how she used it for students new to the country with little to no English:



If they were in prekindergarten to first grade level they would basically do a sound a week. But it has to be really, really, really intense. And they don't know what I'm saying, so we try to do two sounds a week using the phonics and in addition to that rhyming. Rhyming is a big deal especially to learn the patterns, the spelling patterns.

Additionally, the participants who used small group instruction utilized it to reinforce vocabulary development, provide scaffolding for class assignments, and engage students in discussions related to whole group lessons. Further, Participant 2 shared that she has a reading specialist come and pullout small groups based on reading levels for 45 minutes each day.

**Theme 4: District ESL program.** During the data analysis the theme of participants not using the district adopted ESL program emerged. The CSD implemented the National Geographic Reach Program for its ELL students. The Reach Program was approved as the district ESL program in 2011 by the CSD. The data showed that three out of the 10 participants used the district's adopted ESL program. Table 5 presents the percentage of teachers who used and did not use the ESL program based on their knowledge of the program.

Table 5

*Theme 4: District ESL Program*

Knowledge of Program	% of participants responding to prompt
Use Program Regularly	30
Doesn't Use Program but Knows About It	20
Never Heard of Program	20
Lack Resources	40
Not Trained on Program	50

Of the seven participants that do not use the program, five of the participants stated that they did not receive training for the Reach Program. Participant 9 declared:

All that I really know is that I have a big stack of text books for National Geographic Reach in my cabinets and I've never heard anything about them in training or from my school or from anyone in my grade-level or content at this school. I don't really know what they're there for or how I'm supposed to use them.

Participant 5 and 9 expressed that they didn't know if they had ever heard of the program and Participant 9 stated she may have heard about the program but only in passing and that she didn't use it. Likewise, Participant 8 explained that she thought that Reach was an ESL program, but she didn't get trained on it.

In contrast, Participants 1, 2, and 7 shared that they use the Reach program. Participant 2 stated that she needs more copies of the books to use during whole group instruction. She added, "It [Reach] has such great information and practice and skills...

we use the Reach books for everybody. We'll copy them and use those stories for different selections because they are so positive and easy to read." Participant 7 stated that she used the Reach books for the visuals and vocabulary. However, she shared that she was unaware that it was a program she was to use and that she wished it was better incorporated with the district's language arts curriculum.

Four of the participants stated that they lacked the resources necessary to implement the program. Participant 3 stated that she didn't have any Reach materials. Participant 8 stated that she only had a single copy of the textbook for her entire class to share and that this was not sufficient. Participants 2 and 5 expressed the need for more textbooks in order to properly implement the program.

**Theme 5: ESL Teacher needs.** The theme of time emerged when looking at the data regarding what teachers felt their greatest need was to provide ESL students quality instruction. Out of the 10 participants five of them stated that they needed more time each day. All five of these participants stated that this time would be used for reading with the students in small groups. Participants 2 and 6 mentioned that they would use the Reach program during this extra time. Participant 2 currently uses the Reach program but added that she would like more time for the students to use it. She stated, "Sometimes you feel like you don't get to support them [ESL students] as much. You can see them making that progress and you're like, if I just had ten more minutes I think... [they would]... get it." When Participant 5 was asked what her greatest need was to provide her ESL students quality instruction she said, "I think it's just time to sit down with them [ESL students]... probably about 30 more minutes a day... to listen to them read more, talk

about what they're reading [and] their vocabulary.” Participant 6 stated that she knows about the district’s ESL program Reach but that she doesn’t have time in her day to use it and that an extra 20 minutes would allow her to use it with her lowest ESL students.

### **Findings by Research Question and Subquestions**

The study had one encompassing research question that was guided by the conceptual framework of ELL instructional practices as defined by practices within the sociocultural learning theory. The purpose of the research question was to examine the instructional practices being used by the elementary school ESL teachers in their classrooms to increase English proficiency for the ELL students. The four SQs were critical in attaining data related to the instructional practices because these SQs were used in the development of the interview questions. These SQs, and in turn the interview questions, provided different ways of asking the participants about the instructional practices taking place in their ESL classrooms. Additionally, the analysis of the data showed the omission of practices taking place in the ESL classroom and the district’s ESL program, Reach, not being used consistently in the ESL classrooms.

**SQ1: What direct instruction practices are used during ESL instruction in elementary schools in CSD?** Themes 1 and 3 emerged in the analysis in response to subquestion 1 regarding the direct instructional practices being used in the elementary ESL school classrooms. These themes are the sociocultural learning theory best practices that were outlined in the conceptual framework of this study and the other instructional practices not identified in the conceptual framework as a sociocultural learning theory best practice. These findings are relevant because each of these themes can be

categorized as instructional practices taking place in the ESL classrooms within the CSD that can increase the English proficiency for ELL students which addresses the research question for the study.

**SQ2: What formative assessment is taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms within CSD?** A component of Theme 1 addressed SQ 2. Theme 1 contained the instructional best practices that were identified from the data that were outlined by the sociocultural learning theory in the conceptual framework of this study. The use of formative assessment to direct the instruction within an ESL classroom was the component of Theme 1 that addressed SQ 2. These findings are important because the overall research question of this study focused on the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms and formative assessment was outlined for this study as one of the best practices based on the conceptual framework.

**SQ3: What are elementary ESL teachers doing to help ELL students exit from the ESL program and become reclassified as regular program students?** SQ 3 was addressed as one of the interview questions and assisted in attaining further data regarding the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms. This SQ was important because it provided the participants another way of thinking about the instructional practices they implement in their classrooms. Furthermore, this SQ provided additional data to Themes 1 and 3. Themes 1 and 3 emerged in the analysis of the data in response to SQ 3 regarding what the elementary ESL teachers were doing to help the ELL students exit the ESL program and become reclassified as a regular program student. Theme 1 is the sociocultural learning theory best practices that were outlined in the

conceptual framework of this study. Theme 2 is the other instructional practices not identified in the conceptual framework as a sociocultural learning theory best practice. These findings are relevant because each of these themes can be categorized as instructional practices taking place in the ESL classrooms within the CSD that can increase the English proficiency for ELL students which addresses the research question for the study.

**SQ4: What do elementary school ESL teachers at CSD perceive to be their greatest needs in order to provide quality instruction to their ELL students?** Theme 5, ESL Teacher Needs, emerged from the analysis of the responses to SQ 4. The findings for this SQ are important because they showed that half of the participants find time as their greatest need in providing quality instruction to their ELL students. This connects with the overall research question because it provided data on instructional practices that the participants would implement if they had the time in their instructional day.

**RQ 5: What instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classrooms to increase English proficiency for the ELL students?** After analyzing the data it became apparent that when examining the research question regarding the instructional practices taking place in the ESL classrooms within the CSD it was important to not only include the themes related to the instructional practices taking place in the CSD elementary ESL classrooms, but to include the themes that emerged as practices that were not taking place in the ESL classrooms. The research question was developed from the overarching problem of the growing number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL students within the CSD. The study addressed looking at the

instructional practices taking place within the ESL classrooms but the analysis of the data showed that the absence of certain practices could be contributing to the problem and that these themes needed be included in the discussion of the research question itself.

Therefore, Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 all emerged in the analysis of the data in response to the Research Question of the instructional practices taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms to increase the ELL student's English proficiency.

The themes identified for addressing the RQ are the sociocultural learning theory best practices that were outlined in the conceptual framework of this study, sociocultural best practices deficiencies, the other instructional practices not identified in the conceptual framework as a sociocultural learning theory best practices, the district's ESL program, and ESL teacher needs. These findings are relevant because each of these themes can be categorized as instructional practices taking place that can increase the English proficiency for ELL students in elementary ESL classrooms or practices that are not taking place in the ESL classrooms that could contribute to the problem of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL students. Further, these findings are important because it confirms that most of the sociocultural learning theory best practices outlined in the conceptual framework of this study are taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms consistently with the exception of the practice of metacognition and decoding within the practice of scaffolding. Likewise, these findings are important because they directly address the research problem through the research question.

### **Evidence of Quality Data, Findings, and Discrepant Cases**

In order to ensure credibility and validity of the data and its interpretation I utilized triangulation and member checks. The triangulation consisted of analyzing and comparing all the interview data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, I used triangulation between the types of data, being interviews and classroom observations (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, upon the completion of the transcriptions of each interview, member checks were used by providing a copy of the transcripts to the respective participant to confirm accuracy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). These member checks were completed in order to ensure credibility (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

In dealing with discrepant cases, I considered each participant's data from the interviews and classroom observations. I triangulated each participant's data individually as well as collectively to identify inconsistencies. It was determined that discrepant data existed in the best practice of scaffolding in the area of decoding. During the interview process all ten participants identified decoding practices they incorporated in the classroom to scaffold ESL students when they come across unfamiliar words they needed to decode. However, the triangulation of the observational data with the interview data showed that five of the participants regularly did not implement these decoding practices. This discrepant data were identified and addressed in the theme of sociocultural learning theory best practice deficiencies in order for it to be accounted for in the study.



## **Summary of Findings**

The research question guiding this case study was: What instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classrooms to increase English proficiency for the ELL students? The findings showed that seven of the sociocultural learning theory best practices— scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, utilizing formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students—were being used by at least 70% of the elementary ESL teachers in their classrooms. Additionally, the findings showed that the practices of implementing technology into the classroom, using anchor charts, and having small group instruction were taking place in the ESL classrooms by at least 70% of the elementary ESL teachers.

Further, the findings indicated the deficiency by less than 70% of the participants implementing the sociocultural best practice of metacognition and the discrepant data regarding decoding within the best practice of scaffolding within the elementary ESL classrooms. Likewise, the findings showed that only 30% of the participants were using the district's ESL adopted program Reach. As well, the findings revealed that 50% of the participants indicated the need of additional time in order to provide their ELL students quality instruction.

The problem within the CSD is the number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL students. The purpose of this study was to identify the instructional practices taking place in the CSD elementary classrooms. The findings indicated that there are

many best practices taking place in the ESL classrooms; however, the findings also revealed that there is a deficiency in some practices, resources and time, training, and the implementation of the district's ESL adopted program. The analysis of the data showed the need to address these areas. Therefore a white paper report was the project completed for this study to cover all these areas identified in answering the research question.

### **Conclusion**

The research design used for this study was a qualitative case study that investigated the ELL instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms within CSD. The sample was a purposeful homogenous sampling. The participants were two certified ESL teachers for each grade level from first grade through fifth grades for a total of 10 participants. The participants came from one of three elementary schools within the CSD.

The data collection consisted of interviews and classroom observations (Creswell, 2012). The interviews were semistructured and consisted of open-ended questions (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The observations were recorded using observational field notes that document both the events observed and my thoughts regarding the observations (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The data analysis used the processes of organizing the data, data exploration, the coding of the data, building themes, and interpreting the data (Lodico et al., 2010). In order to ensure credibility and validity of the data triangulation and member checks were used (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Discrepant data were included in the report findings and included in Theme 2.

In Section 3, I will explain the project, which is a white paper report. This project includes recommendations for professional development for the district's adopted ESL program, Reach, to help ensure time for teachers to work with students in small groups on reading. Likewise, equipping teachers with the proper resources for the Reach program is a related recommendation. Further recommendations include professional development in the practice of metacognition more specifically teacher think-alouds and administrator walkthroughs to reinforce the use of teachers using decoding strategies with students. In Section 3, I will also provide the in-depth details for the project.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The project I selected for this study was a white paper report (see Appendix A) that details the recommendation for the CSD based on the research study and the review of literature. This section includes the rationale for the project genre and the review of literature based on the project. Further, I will also provide a description of the white paper report along with the project evaluation plan and the project implications. The goal of the white paper report was to share with the CSD the background of the doctoral study, provide the study's data and data analysis, and offer recommendations based on the study and its data analysis.

#### **Rationale**

A white paper report is a document that identifies a specific problem for an organization, such as a school district, and offers recommendations to remedy the identified concerns (Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), 2016). A white paper report has a specific purpose, audience, and organization base (Purdue OWL, 2016). Governments, corporations, and other organizations have used white paper reports to provide authoritative documents that are informative in nature that maintain a position or provide a solution to a certain problem (Purdue OWL, 2016). For this purpose, I selected a white paper report to address the problem of the high number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL within the CSD. In this study, I examined the instructional practices taking place within the elementary ESL classrooms. The data gathered provided

information that supported the practices occurring and those practices lacking within the elementary ESL classrooms.

My analysis of the findings from the study revealed that the current ESL program, Reach, is not widely used throughout the district with fidelity. In addition to the Reach program not being implemented throughout the ESL classrooms, 50% of the ESL teachers stated that they needed more time to work on reading with the ESL students in small groups. Small group guided reading is one of the components of the Reach program. Therefore, providing professional development to ESL teachers on the Reach program will accommodate for this need. Additionally, the data showed that there is a need for professional development in the practice of metacognition. The data provided that only 60% of the participants used some form of metacognitive practice within the ESL classroom. Therefore, the metacognitive practice of teacher think-alouds will be discussed and recommended in the white paper report to address this deficiency. Likewise, there were discrepant data that showed a need for providing teachers support and follow-up in implementing decoding strategies. During the interviews, all participants shared various decoding strategies to assist students in decoding unfamiliar words; however, many of the teachers did not carry out these practices in the classroom. To address this discrepancy, administrator walkthroughs were researched and will be recommended to the CSD in the white paper.

I chose a white paper report as the project because it can specifically address the local problem within the CSD while providing the district with the research data and the data analysis. Further, a white paper report provides for research-based recommendations

to be delivered to the district. These recommendations could lead to effective ways in decreasing the number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL by improving the ESL classroom instruction based on the data and researched literature.

### **Review of the Literature**

I conducted this review of literature based on the genre of writing a white paper report to the CSD and supplying the district with proposed recommendations. The data from the study showed the need for professional development training in two areas. The first was with the district's adopted ESL program, Reach, and the second was in the sociocultural learning theory's best practice of metacognition. In regards to metacognition, in this literature review, I will focus specifically on the strategy of think-alouds, one practice of metacognition. Therefore, one section of the review of literature will be centered on professional development that covers training for teachers in the areas of the district's ESL program and think-alouds. Additionally, in the review of literature, I will address the need for reinforcing the strategy of decoding in the classrooms through the practice of administrator walkthroughs. This was seen as a need based on the data I gathered for the study.

The white paper report addresses these specific areas of concern based on the study's results. A white paper report provides specific recommendations for identified concerns (Purdue OWL, 2016), and therefore, my focus in this review of literature was appropriate because it directly addressed the needs based on the research data and the format it will be presented in to the district. Therefore, the white paper report will address professional development and administrator classroom walkthroughs.

I conducted the research for this review of literature using EBSCO Host by gathering articles from ERIC, Sage Journals, and Thoreau through the Walden University Library. The key words I used in the search were: *program fidelity, professional development, public school professional development, professional development fidelity, professional development school programs, think-alouds elementary schools, think-alouds, metacognitive think-alouds, metacognitive think-alouds teachers, walkthroughs, principal walkthroughs, walkthrough feedback, and principal teacher feedback*. The searches I conducted using these terms provided the studies referenced for this review of literature and my project study.

### **Program Fidelity**

The effectiveness of an educational program is contingent on the fidelity carried out in both the implementation and maintenance of the program (Bradley, Crawford, Dahill-Brown, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2015; Maynard, Peters, Vaughn, Sarteschi, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2013; Nelson, Oliver, Hebert, & Bohaty, 2015). When fidelity to a program is high, then the effects obtained from the program are effective (Nelson et al., 2015). In contrast, when a program is implemented only partially, inconsistent, incorrectly, or abandoned completely, the fidelity and effects of the program are jeopardized (Nelson et al., 2015). Fidelity to a program is critical in being able to determine the program's effectiveness (Maynard et al., 2013). If a program is not carried out with fidelity, then the interpretation of outcomes is inconclusive (Maynard et al., 2013).

Effective programs require fidelity in order for a program to be effective over time (Nelson et al., 2015). In order to achieve the lasting effects of a program, attention should be given to program fidelity in the areas of program training, monitoring of the practices, and elements of the program (Bradley, Crawford, & Dahill-Brown, 2015). Further, it is essential that teachers have the necessary instructional supports and resources in order for a program to be implemented and sustained with fidelity (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015).

It is important for an organization to develop protocols and strategies to ensure the fidelity of a program through all its stages (Bradley et al., 2015). A program requires all levels of personnel, district, school, and teachers to individually maintain the fidelity of the program in order to attain the intended results (Bradley et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2015). It is of the utmost importance that all individuals involved in an academic program understand their role and how to carry out the program correctly in order to obtain the desired student outcomes (Maynard et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2015). The success of a program is based on the ability of all individuals, trainers, classroom teachers, resource departments, and so forth, to fulfill his or her role in the program (Nelson et al., 2015). A program is only as effective as the fidelity and quality in which it is implemented and carried out (Nelson et al., 2015).

### **Professional Development**

Research shows that productive professional development is critical for teacher growth and school success (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015). Further, research supports that professional development for teachers improves their classroom instruction



through increased knowledge, pedagogy practices, and self-confidence (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014; Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015; Lin, Cheng, & Wu, 2015). It is necessary that teachers receive professional development that provides the opportunity to learn the skills, instructional approaches, and knowledge required to positively impact student learning (Murray, 2013).

Professional development must be meaningful, and therefore, relevant to teachers in order for it to be effective (Dever & Lash, 2013). The purpose of professional development is to enhance individual teacher performance and enable change by correcting unsuccessful practices (Blandford, 2012). In order for professional development to bolster teacher practices and be effective it must be continual and ongoing instead of being fragmented 1 to 2-day activities (Murray, 2013). Professional development should be routine within a school and district in order to support teachers' learning (Krasnoff & Education Northwest; 2015). In regards to how much time should be spent on a subject matter for professional development, Ho and Arthur-Kelly (2013) shared that there should be at least 30 hours per topic. Furthermore, professional development should be relevant to teachers by being embedded with real context that is specific to what they teach or skills they need (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015; Murray, 2013; Parise, Finkelstein, & Alterman, 2015). As well, teachers must perceive the professional development as a need for them in order for it to be effective (Sanders, Parsons, Mwarumba & Thomas, 2015). Likewise, teachers want professional development that they can immediately implement in their classrooms (Parise et al., 2015).

Teachers have suggested that when professional development has clear goals and they have an understanding of “the district’s professional development plan,” their learning improves and becomes connected to their classrooms and instruction (Parise et al., 2015, p.4). This in turn helps teachers to internalize the information being presented during professional development in order to improve their abilities as a teacher (Krasnoff & Education Northwest; 2015). Following effective professional development, classroom teachers’ performance improves contributing to teacher growth and lasting change (Lin, Cheng, & Wu, 2015; Murray, 2013).

### **Think-Alouds**

Metacognition allows ELL students to understand and evaluate their own learning and cognitive processes (Tzohar-Rozen & Kramarski, 2014; Yanguas & Lado, 2012). A think-aloud is one metacognitive strategy used to understand the cognitive processes used by its participant when completing complex tasks and problem solving (Scott & Dreher, 2015). Think-alouds share the working memory of the individual going through the process and engages it related to the task at hand (Scott & Dreher, 2016). Think-alouds should be modeled for students by teachers stressing its value and importance so students can benefit from the explicit modeling (Carey, Howard, & Leftwich, 2013; Ortlieb & Norris, 2012; Tzohar-Rozen & Kramarski, 2014). Structured think-alouds modeled by teachers may offer students an example and a concrete way to stay engaged in the cognitive processes taking place during learning, critical thinking, and problem solving (Carey et al., 2013; Ebner & Elri, 2013). When teachers model think-alouds, they provide

examples of their own thinking processes and the actual thoughts taking place during specific tasks for their students (Ortieb & Norris, 2012).

When students engage in think-alouds, their opportunities to increase their learning are enhanced (Lee, Irving, & Owens; 2015). Learning increases as students acquire the abilities to self-regulate their learning and become active learners through think-alouds (Ebner & Ehri, 2013). Evidence shows that think-alouds have a positive impact on student thinking and learning (Ortlieb & Norris, 2012; Yanguas & Lado, 2012).

### **Classroom Walkthroughs**

School administrators have been shown to have the second greatest impact on student achievement outside of a student's classroom teacher (Lochmiller, 2016). One way in which this influence is achieved is when school administrators take on the role of instructional leaders by conducting frequent classroom walkthroughs that include feedback directly linked to the instructional practices taking place in individual teachers' classrooms (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016). The use of classroom walkthroughs has shown to be vehicles for positively impacting classroom instruction and student achievement (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016). When school administrators consistently spend time in classrooms providing teachers with feedback that changes instructional practices, then student and school achievement increases (Lochmiller, 2016). Moreover, when teachers receive regular feedback their instruction improves (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

Classroom walkthroughs provide teachers opportunities for professional growth when the walkthroughs include feedback (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016). However, in order to attain this professional growth the feedback must be frequent, individualized, specific, and based on concrete observable data (Khachatryan, 2015; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Also, in order for classroom walkthrough feedback to positively affect teacher growth, it is important that the feedback is descriptive and contain a focal point that details practices that are or are not being accomplished in the classroom while ensuring that the teacher's self-esteem is not endangered (Khachatryan, 2015).

Walkthroughs allow school administrators to influence and maintain the practices taking place in the classroom (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014). Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) stated that classroom walkthroughs help create a culture of positive instruction when they are frequent and focus of instructional practices. Furthermore, teachers see walkthroughs as coaching and professional development opportunities when they are able to communicate with the administrators about specific teaching practices (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Teachers further feel that specific feedback allows them to be reflective about their actual instructional practices and think more deeply about how to best improve their pedagogy practices (Khachatryan, 2015). Likewise, principals feel that conversations regarding walkthroughs provide them with the ability to redirect less effective instructional practices based directly on individualized observable data (Grissom et al., 2013).

Classroom walkthroughs are the primary source for teachers' feedback regarding their instructional practices (Grissom et al., 2013). Classroom walkthroughs and the collaboration derived from the walkthroughs between administrator and teacher create professional learning opportunities at the same time as accountability for teachers (Taylor & Gordon II, 2014). Additionally, walkthroughs are a means of administrators being an instructional support for their teachers who may be struggling and in need of developing pedagogical practices and/or habits (Grissom et al., 2013; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Page, 2016) Feedback from walkthroughs should lead to individualized professional development for teachers (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014).

### **Project Description**

The project consists of writing and presenting a white paper report to the CSD. The report will be presented to the ESL director following the final approval of this study from Walden University. The white paper will consist of an introduction, a description of the local problem, a summary of the doctoral study including the data analysis, recommendations based on research-based literature, and a conclusion.

### **Resources, Supports, Potential Barriers, and Barrier Solutions**

Resources to complete the white paper report consisted of the resources used to complete the doctoral study. This included the research from both literature reviews by supplying background information regarding the local problem, the research for the best practices, program fidelity, teacher professional development, and administrator walkthroughs. Likewise, the data collection and analysis from the doctoral study all contributed to the creation of the white paper report. All of these components supplied

the information for the reports leading up to and including the recommendations to CSD. An additional resource was the Walden University Library. I used the Walden Library to conduct my research for the literature reviews. Furthermore, the CSD ESL elementary school participants and their classrooms that were used for observations were resources that led to the collection of data that contributed to the white paper report.

Supports for the report were found in many individuals that made this report possible. The first being my committee chair from Walden University who provided feedback and guidance throughout the entire process of my study. Additionally, the support of the assistant superintendent of CSD made the white paper report possible. This individual's support helped me attain approval for my study outside of the district's scheduled proposal review dates; a facilitation that without which would have delayed my study by 8 months. Further, the support of the school principals in working within their schools and with their staff helped in the development of the report. Finally, the participants of the study themselves were a support for the white paper report. If it were not for their participation in the interviews and classroom observations there would have been no data or study to report. Furthermore, there are potential supports if the recommendations of the white paper report are implemented.

Potential supports include professional development training for the ESL teachers in the implementation and maintenance of the district program Reach from the district's ESL department. The district already requires ESL teachers to receive at least 6 hours of training each year in addition to attending district waiver-day trainings that could be used to include the professional development recommendations from the project study.

Likewise, another potential support includes the necessary resources provided to teachers and students from the district in order to implement the district's ESL program with fidelity. Additionally, if all the primary recommendations are accomplished the secondary recommendations could provide the potential supports. These potential supports would be from the ESL department in the form of additional professional development for teacher in the teaching strategy of think-alouds, which also can be included as part of the district's already established ESL 6-hour trainings. Likewise, there is the potential support from the district leadership department in providing professional development to the principals in the practice of classroom walkthroughs. The district currently encourages school administrators to visit classrooms at least 10 hours a week. Therefore, classroom walkthroughs would already have the support of the school district and the administrators would only need professional development in providing the recommended instructional supports.

Another potential support for the recommendations and the instructional supports for the administrator walkthroughs are the current district personnel who provide monthly administrator trainings. These trainers could include the supports needed for the administrators to carry out the recommendations. All of these potential supports indirectly provide a potential support from the individuals receiving the support back to the ESL students. Therefore the individuals receiving these supports thus become a potential support for the ESL students.

A potential barrier for the white paper report would be if the CSD, more specifically the ESL director, does not accept the report or chooses to disregard it or its

recommendations. A possible solution for this barrier is to set an appointment with the ESL director and present the white paper report. This action would ensure that the report is reviewed and the recommendations are at the least shared with the director.

In relation to the white paper report recommendations themselves, there are two potential barriers. The first barrier is the potential budget restrictions that could hamper the purchasing of the necessary resources for both the teachers and students. The ESL department potentially may have its funding allocated to other areas and be unable to make any immediate purchases or adjustments. A possible solution for this could be utilizing the literacy departments funding or campus funding because the ELL students literacy success is directly related to both. The second potential barrier is that of providing the professional development to the ESL teachers in the implementation and maintenance of the Reach program. The ESL department current has its professional development and training classes already established for the current school year. Therefore, a potential solution is beginning the implementation of the white paper report's recommendations for the following school year and beginning the development and planning for it at this time.

### **Proposal for Implementation Including Timetable**

Upon approval and acceptance of my doctoral study by Walden University, I will schedule an appointment with the director of the ESL department, present my white paper report, and provide her a copy of the report. Based on the potential barriers a timetable for the implementation of the recommendations to begin is the summer prior to the 2017–18 school year. This timetable is based on the district's ESL summer training



opportunities for ESL teachers. Furthermore, this start date would permit the district the time to determine the monetary sources for the purchasing of the needed resources and materials. Likewise, this timetable would permit the professional development organizers and trainers the necessary time to prepare to instruct ESL teachers and school administrators.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others Involved**

My role was to create the white paper report based on the doctoral study's data and data analysis. Additionally, my role was to present and provide the report with the recommendations to the ESL director. There were no others involved that have any roles or responsibilities in the project development or its distribution.

In carrying out the primary recommendations of the white paper report any others involved will come from the ESL department. The ESL director will first have the responsibility of listening to and reviewing the white paper report. Further, in order for the recommendations to be implemented the ESL director will need to develop or assign another individual or committee to create the professional development for the Reach program. Additionally, the ESL director will be responsible in allocating funds to acquire the needed classroom resources for teachers and students as well as resources for the professional development. In addition to the ESL director, others involved will be the ESL department trainers who will carry out the professional development to the ESL teachers. Likewise, the secondary recommendations will also involve others in providing further professional development to the ESL teachers and school administrators. Again, the ESL director or an individual or committee delegated by the director will need to

create professional development for the ESL teachers in the strategy of read-alouds and for administrators in the area of reinforcing decoding strategies through administrative walkthroughs. Once this professional development is created the ESL trainers would then have the responsibility of providing the professional development to the ESL teachers and school administrators.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation plan to determine whether or not the white paper report had the desired impact on the district will be to verify when the primary and secondary recommendations were fulfilled. Following this step, I will work with the ESL director and review the ongoing ELL data for the percent of students being reclassified as LTELL for the next three years. I will look to determine if there is a decrease in the number of ELL students being reclassified from year to year compared to the baseline school year of 2014–2015.

### **Project Implications**

There is a lack of English proficiency among many ELL students nationally and many of these students are being reclassified as LTELL (Calderon et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga et al., 2010). As well as being a national concern, the increasing number of LTELL students is a local concern for the CSD. According to internal district documents, there was a 43% increase in the LTELL population between the 2013–2014 school year and the 2014–2015 school year. The white paper report has possible implications both on a local level for mitigating the

increase of LTELL classifications and far reaching in a larger context by highlighting and affirming ESL teacher best practices.

### **Local Stakeholders**

The local concern of the increase of LTELL students is one that must be addressed by the CSD. The white paper report offers recommendations to assist in providing a solution for this problem. The report recommends training on the implementation of the district's adopted ESL program. This program is not being implemented with fidelity if it is being used at all. The training of ESL teachers in the use of this program would provide them with the time that many of the participants in the study stated they would like for providing small group guided reading. Additionally, it is recommended that the necessary resources for the district's Reach program be supplied to the teachers during the training. The training and the implementation of the district's adopted program could directly impact the English language acquisition of many of the ELL students thus directly reflecting on the number of students being reclassified as LTELL.

Additionally, the report provides secondary next step recommendations once the ESL program Reach is implemented and maintained with fidelity. There are two secondary recommendations. The first is for ESL teachers to receive professional development in the metacognitive practice of think-alouds modeled to students by ESL teachers. This will offer ESL students with strategies and skills that could assist them in problem solving and reasoning as well as enhancing the development of English. The finally secondary recommendation is that school administrators use classroom

walkthroughs with feedback to ensure that ESL teachers are implementing the decoding strategies they possess with students when they are reading. This directly impacts the ESL students by aiding them with their English development and abilities to decode unknown words when they are reading.

All of these recommendations, the primary and secondary, assist ESL students in their English language development, which in turn assists them in being prepared to test out of the ESL program instead of being reclassified as LTELL. By providing them with the white paper report, the CSD will be able to implement the district adopted ESL program with fidelity by creating professional development for the ESL teachers in the implementation, carrying out and maintenance of the Reach program. Likewise, the white paper report informs the district of the needs the ESL teachers have in order to provide quality instruction, which are the resources for the Reach program and time to provide the small group guided reading through the Reach program. Once this has been achieved the secondary recommendations can be addressed. These consist of professional development for think-alouds and administrative classroom walkthroughs with specific focuses for ESL classrooms.

### **Larger Context**

Likewise, ELL students being reclassified as LTELL students is a national concern. The white paper report has far reaching implications for social change beyond the local community. This report provides other districts, similar to CSD and those with the same problem, research and data of the instructional practices taking place within the elementary ESL classrooms of CSD. This report will allow those schools or districts to

consider the practices detailed in the report and the recommendations while exploring their own local problem. The report will provide them with a body of research and literature needed because of the lack of current literature in the area of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL and the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The project for this doctoral study is a white paper report that identified the specific local problem of the increase of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL. With the report, I addressed this doctoral study's research, data collection, and data analysis. In the report, I also provided the CSD two primary recommendations and two secondary recommendations that address the findings from the study's data analysis. In Section 3, I reviewed the literature that supported the white paper report's research-based recommendations. In the literature reviewed, I explored the use of professional development in teacher training, ensuring program fidelity, and providing educators with needed supplies and resources. The literature review also included a discussion of think-alouds and the implementation of them as a metacognitive tool to assist students in their learning. Finally, in the literature review, I explored the practice of administrator classroom walkthroughs that included feedback.

Further, in Section 3, I detailed the doctoral studies project by providing a description of the white paper report, the resources, supports, potential barriers, and solutions for the barriers. The main resource for the report was the doctoral study itself. This includes all of the research of the study, the data collection, and the data analysis.

The support for the report came from the individuals that aided in attaining approval for completing the study within the district and who provided feedback for the research study, the principals of the research site locations, and the 10 participants of the study. The potential barrier for the white paper report is the report not being accepted or reviewed by the CSD ESL director. The solution to ensure the report is delivered and reviewed is to schedule an appointment with the district ESL director to present the report to her once the report and doctoral study have been approved and accepted by Walden University.

The project implications for this study and project provide the CSD with recommendations that can directly impact the instruction taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms. These recommendations directly assist ELL students in their English language acquisition and in turn assist in remedying the number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL. The report and study could have far reaching implications by providing additional research and literature to a topic and issue that currently lacks in both areas. In Section 4 of this study, I will provide my reflections and conclusions for this study.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

The problem I analyzed in this case study was the increasing number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL students within the CSD. This problem was explored through the lens of the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms. This section contains my reflections and conclusions of the project study including the project strengths and limitations; recommendations for alternative approaches; scholarship; project development; leadership and change; reflection on the importance of the work; and the implications, applications, and direction for future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

#### **Strengths**

This project holds several strengths. First, the use of a white paper allowed me to directly address the current situation in the district regarding the increase of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL through the lens of the instructional practices taking place within the elementary ESL classrooms. Through this project, I offer recommendations that are timely and relevant to the district and ESL teachers and are supported by current literature and research. Further, my recommendations in the project may directly influence the instructional practices within the elementary ESL classrooms.

Additionally, one of the strengths of this project is the white paper report itself. The use of a white paper report provides a concise and detailed overview of the case study allowing the recipients to gain an understanding of the study with its findings and

proposed recommendations in a shorter, more reader friendly format. Furthermore, in the white paper report, I addressed all the themes identified in the case study and provided recommendations that address each theme. The recommendations themselves are strengths for the project study.

In the white paper report, I offered both primary and secondary recommendations. This is also strength of the study in that the primary recommendations provide research-based actions that could provide the greatest impact to treat the problem of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL. Furthermore, the secondary recommendations, also research-based, strengthen the study by offering next steps for the district once the primary recommendations are completed and ensuring all themes from the study are addressed.

My recommendations suggest providing ongoing professional development and administrator walkthroughs that directly impact the instruction ESL students receive in their classrooms. The primary recommendations for the professional development take into account training in the district's ESL program to ensure program fidelity in the ESL classrooms. This professional development would instruct the ESL teachers on the use of small group guided reading that addresses one of the themes. Additionally, the recommendations call for needed resources for teachers and students in order to implement and carryout the district's ESL program. The secondary recommendations include training on the use of think-alouds in ESL classrooms to directly impact the ESL students' learning and language acquisition. The secondary recommendations also call for administrator walkthroughs that can positively impact the instructional practices of



the ESL teachers as administrators reinforce the use of the decoding strategies the ESL teachers already possess and need to implement. Although the project study has these many strengths, it also contains limitations.

### **Limitations**

Despite the many strengths of this project study, I have also identified a few limitations as well. The first was that the research study for this project was based solely on elementary school ESL teachers, and therefore, can only address this level of schooling. Likewise, the research study was limited to only three schools and 10 participants. Further, the white paper report will initially only be available to CSD and those who read doctoral project studies. Additionally, the project study is specific to the CSD. Finally, a possible limitation is the acceptance of the white paper report's recommendations by the school district. The district's personnel may not agree with the recommendations or may have another course for the elementary ESL teachers' professional development at this time and may choose to not implement the recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

I have identified five limitations for this project study. Each of these limitations has alternative solutions. I will first address the limitation of the research study being based solely on elementary school ESL teachers. This can be remedied by extending a similar study within the secondary ESL classrooms. Similarly, the limitation of the research study focusing on only three elementary schools and 10 ESL elementary

teachers can also be resolved by expanding the study to more ESL classrooms and teachers.

The project study is also limited in that the white paper report will only be delivered to the CSD and viewed by those who research doctoral project studies. This limitation can be resolved by having the white paper report published outside of this doctoral project study. An additional limitation of this project study was that the white paper report is specific to the CSD. Although this is a limitation, the white paper report can still be used by other districts. Other districts' personnel can use the white paper report as a source and model for their district; however, in order for it to be specific for their needs a research study must be completed in their district.

The final alternative solution addresses the limitation for this project study that the CSD leadership may potentially not accept the white paper recommendations. This could be due to CSD leadership not agreeing with the recommendations or having a different direction for the elementary ESL teachers' professional development. One approach would be to present the white paper report in person through a presentation in order to explain the report and answer any questions. Further, ensuring that flexibility is possible for the recommended trainings and professional development could allow for the incorporation of the professional development recommendations along with any current or future professional development plans. This tactic would allow for the inclusion of the recommendations without impeding current plans by the district.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

I selected the white paper report as the project for this study to address the problem of the increased number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL. However, there are alternative approaches that could have been used to address this problem. A curriculum plan could have been developed for the ESL department that included the use of the Reach program and provided teacher with notes that included the use of the strategy of think-alouds. However, this was not used because it would not have addressed the reinforcing of the decoding skills or the need for the necessary resources to carry out the curriculum plan. Likewise, professional development on its own could have been an alternative approach to a white paper report for this project. Professional development, which is part of my white paper report, would have provided the teachers and school administrators with a purpose, goals, and outcomes that are connected to the data. Yet, without the necessary resources, the professional development would be pointless because it would not be able to properly be implemented and carried out.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Description of Processes Learned in Researching**

In regards to the research process, I attained the knowledge that I patterned my actions after throughout my study. The entire study was impacted by the skills I attained to complete credible literature reviews. I attained the knowledge to locate current, peer-reviewed, primary, reliable, and relevant sources that strengthened my study and provided direction for my conceptual framework, the broader problem of my study, and

my project study. I also learned how one strong source could lead me to another quality source with pertinent information and data.

Furthermore, I gained the ability to define a specific local problem and use an appropriate research methodology that addresses the local concern. I acquired the knowledge and practice in achieving access to participants for a study and protecting their rights through the IRB approval process and the participants' informed consent. Additionally, I learned to collect qualitative data, organize it, and analyze it in order to discover themes that address the research question and subquestions.

I also became skillful in gathering data and using it to directly address the local problem by contributing to resolving the local concerns and potentially on a larger scale through a scholarly document. I learned to present my recommendations that directly relate to the research data through the process of writing a white paper report. The knowledge and skills attained through this process were critical in the completion of this project study and in my growth as a researcher.

### **Description of Processes Learned in Project Development**

I grew to understand that project development is a process based on the data provided from the study. Prior to my study, I believed that my project study would be professional development. The reasoning for this presumption was that I had experience in creating professional development and I felt proficient in doing so. Further, I felt that I could take whatever the data provided and create professional development to address the results. However, I realized that project development is a process. This process required me to use the findings from the study and to consider how these findings related to the

research problem and question. I found that in qualitative project studies one must allow the emerging themes to direct the project study. I realized that professional development alone would not be able to address all of the themes that evolved in my study. I discovered that I needed to develop a project that would address all of my themes.

As I read various educational journals, government articles on education, and dissertations, I considered the format in which many of the authors presented solutions to their research problems. Furthermore, I began to reflect on conversations with peers in my doctoral classes and I recalled one individual sharing with me information regarding white paper reports. I realized that a white paper report would allow me to present my study, findings, and make recommendations that would address each theme from my data analysis. Furthermore, a white paper report is a means of sharing my study with anyone, district leaders included, in a concise and purposeful manner that would allow the opportunity to initiate positive change, including appropriate research-derived professional development initiatives based on emerging interest and needs.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

When I began the doctoral program, I felt I was proficient in action research. I implemented this practice frequently as a teacher and school administrator. My actions were always based on a problem, a collaborative or noncollaborative potential solution, the implementation of the action, and finally, the evaluation of the action. This method served me well at the time as an educator. However, as I began my path through the doctoral program and as I have completed my research and project development, I discovered the value and importance of being a researcher. I have learned to ask the

important questions that identify local problems at hand and I now know where to go with these questions. I gained the knowledge of reviewing quality literature and how it can drive the direction one goes when addressing local problems. I acquired the ability to search out studies similar to a local concern, attain the data and its analysis from those studies, and take into consideration the implications of those studies in order to promote social change locally and possibly beyond. I am now able to identify primary and secondary sources, use credible and recent sources, and locate peer-reviewed studies.

I am equipped with the skills to collect data and analyze it as a scholar because of my research and project development. Additionally, I have learned to be a scholarly writer. The skill of a scholarly writer and those of a researcher and project developer have helped me progress as a scholar and a lifelong learner to be an agent for positive change.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner in education, I have taken the knowledge I have gained throughout my career from schooling, professional development, and collaboration and applied it to the role or position I held at the time I acquired my knowledge in order to positively benefit students. My personal growth as a practitioner was enhanced as I developed as a researcher and throughout the development of my project. My current role in education is that of an elementary school administrator who oversees a campus-based ESL program. Throughout my research and project development I have incorporated practices I have attained into my faculty and Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Furthermore, I have been able to reflect on the themes I discovered from my study to provide me look-fors on my own campus as I work with my ESL teachers to

more adequately teach our ESL students and assist them in their English language acquisition. Furthermore, I will request from the district to incorporate the recommendations from my project and whether it is accepted or not, I will implement the recommendations on my campus.

Further, my research and project development has helped me to continue my education and desire to conduct research and apply the concepts I learn to impact my practices as an educator to best benefit student learning. Likewise, my research and project development has helped me understand the need for me to continue to learn and develop as a professional educator and to apply my knowledge to benefit educators, parents, community members, and most importantly students. My research and project development have allowed me to acquire the skillsets of a researcher to better serve the educational community. I am still developing as a researcher; yet, my experience with my research project has ignited a desire in me to continue my personal development as a researcher and educational practitioner to promote transformative change that will positively affect the field of education.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

When I began my doctoral program I did not have a strong understanding of the research project and all it entailed. I began reading the information that Walden University provided regarding the EdD Project Studies and I asked questions when I was in attendance at my residency. All of this aided me as I prepared for this project. However, the process itself expedited my learning and understanding, and provided the most growth as a project developer. Initially, I thought that I was going to complete

professional development as my project. The conceptual framework for my study outlined eight ESL best practices and I had the preconceived idea that I would base my project around some of these practices in the form of teacher professional development. However, as I analyzed my data and the themes from the study emerged I realized that professional development would not address all needs highlighted by the themes my study presented. Additionally, I knew that if I completed professional development as my project it would not be as precise and inclusive as it needed to be in addressing needs identified by the themes. My understanding as a project developer grew in the need for the data to dictate the project through my research and the completion of my project.

### **Leadership and Change**

Throughout my doctoral program and my leadership experiences within my occupation and without, I have learned that effective leaders are agents of change. Within the field of education the landscape is ever evolving as a result of changing demographics, sociopolitical pressures, technological advances, and socioeconomic diversity. These factors require educational leadership that initiates positive change.

My leadership skills and knowledge have expanded since beginning the doctoral program and as I have completed my doctoral project study. The main philosophy I have developed during my doctoral experience is the need of being a life-long learner in education and to use my learning to stimulate positive change. I have begun my journey as a researcher, a path that will provide me a more credible voice in promoting change. As a researcher I have learned how to examine a problem, conduct quality research directly related to the problem, collect data, evaluate data, and to allow the data to dictate



the direction for change. These skills have strengthened me as a leader and agent of change and will continue to do so as I strive to bring stakeholders together to develop common goals and initiatives to promote student learning and success.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

The growing number of LTELL students is a major concern across America. The work of this study has identified this concern on the local level through district data that confirms the national alarm. The work of this study provides literature that documents the growing concern. Furthermore, this study provided a conceptual framework based on best practices utilized within the sociocultural learning theory that is documented in the literature review. However, the greatest importance of this work is the implications it has on positively impacting the learning and language acquisition of the ESL students within the district. It was through the data collection and data analysis that the themes of this study emerged and revealed what instructional practices were taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms. The work on the project, the white paper report, provided the recommendations to the district based on the needs identified from the themes that could impact the instruction within the elementary ESL classrooms to better instruct the ELL students. I learned that the importance of this study is in the positive change it may provide the district, its ESL schools, its ESL teachers, and the ELL students themselves.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Potential Impact for Positive Change**

One of the missions of Walden University is to provide its students the education they need to impact positive social change (Walden University, 2013, p. 5). This project

has the potential to do so on the organizational, school, and classroom level for the ESL program within the school district. This project's primary recommendations could influence the district's ESL department by directly addressing the need for fidelity in the implementation and maintenance of the districts ESL program Reach with its ESL teachers. The fulfillment of these recommendations could impact the needs of the elementary ESL teachers in training and resources for the program Reach. As well, the incorporation of the secondary recommendations of professional development for think-alouds and weekly walkthroughs by school administrators to reinforce best practices by elementary ESL teachers. These recommendations could directly influence the instruction that the ELL students receive, potentially increase the learning and language acquisition of the ELL students, and prevent them from being reclassified as LTELL.

### **Implications and Applications**

The purpose of this research study was to address the research question: What instructional practices are elementary school ESL teachers using in the ESL classroom to increase English proficiency for the ELL students? The data analysis provided five themes that addressed the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms. These themes consist of (a) seven of the eight sociocultural best practices outlined by the study's conceptual framework were taking place regularly or discussed by the participants; (b) metacognition, one of the eight sociocultural best practices outlined by the conceptual framework was not being practiced regularly; (c) other practices that were identified in the study; (d) the districts ESL program not being used with fidelity,

teachers not trained on how to use it, and insufficient resources; and (e) the elementary ESL teachers' perceived need for time to work on reading with students in small groups.

The implication for this project study is the white paper report and the recommendations it provides to the district. These recommendations do not exceed the boundaries of the study and apply specifically to the school district in which the study took place. There are primary and secondary recommendations. My first primary recommendation was ongoing professional development be used in training all ESL teachers on National Geographic Reach Program. The implementation and continued use of Reach would allow the teachers to incorporate into their plans the time they feel they need to work with students in small groups on their reading skills. My second primary recommendation was that all ESL classrooms must be supplied with all the required resources for the implementation and carrying out of the Reach program.

Once the primary recommendations are implemented and being followed next step secondary recommendations were provided the district. The secondary recommendations were: (a) professional development be provided for ESL teachers on incorporating think-alouds into the classroom to assist in the ESL teachers incorporating metacognitive practices for their ELL students, and (b) the final recommendation is that school administrators conduct weekly classroom walkthroughs in all elementary ESL classrooms to reinforce the practice of using decoding strategies with their students.

### **Direction for Future Research**

Future research on ELL students being reclassified as LTELL within the CSD is to duplicate this study on the secondary level. This study was limited to the elementary

ESL classrooms. A second recommendation for future research is to expand this study to include more elementary ESL schools and elementary ESL classrooms. My final recommendation for future research would be to complete a longitudinal study on the districts' reclassification of ELL students to LTELL and where those two groups of students are years after their graduation or drop-out dates.

### **Conclusion**

The growing number of ESL students being reclassified as LTELL is a national concern. It is the LTELL student population that is one of the lowest academic achieving groups in public schools and they are among the largest student population for dropping out of school (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012; Menken et al., 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). Underachieving in school or dropping out of school altogether directly impacts the economic progression and global effectiveness of the United States in ensuring its population is educated and prepared for the workforce (Faltis, 2011). Thus, when ELL students do not attain English proficiency the problem contributes to their inability to succeed in school and be prepared to contribute to the workforce (Calderon et al., 2011; Faltis, 2011). Therefore, quality instruction is critical for ELL students. This study shed light on some of the practices taking place within the elementary ESL classrooms and provided recommendations that can positively impact change within the school district to improve the instruction for the ELL students. In this study, I provided recommendations through a white paper report that indirectly benefits ESL students by directly addressing the instructional practices taking place in the elementary ESL classrooms.

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Appendix A: The Project: White Paper Report

Elementary Instructional Best Practices for English as Secondary Language Teachers

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Walden University

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## Elementary Instructional Best Practices for English as Secondary Language Teachers

### **Introduction**

In the United States over the past decade, there has been an increase of immigrants, including refugees, transforming the makeup of the United States and its public schools (Baker & Rytina, 2013; Shi & Steen, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). The fastest growing population in the public schools are immigrant children in which half of the immigrant children do not proficiently speak English (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011; Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012; Shi & Steen, 2012). According to the Center for Immigration Studies, 51.6% of immigrants age 5 and older do not proficiently speak English, with many of them expressing that they do not speak English at all (Camarota, 2012). Likewise, The Public Policy Institute of California reported that 53% of immigrants reported not speaking English well with 20% of those individuals reporting that they did not speak English at all (Hill, 2011, para. 1). To add to this growing concern the Center for Immigration Studies reported that 86.7% of immigrants speak a language other than English at home thus not supporting the English language skills taught in school (Camarota, 2012). This means is an increase of English language learners (ELL) in public schools. The United States Department of Education, (USDOE; 2015) reported that the ELL student population grew from 4.1 million to 4.4 million between 2002 and 2012 (para. 1).

The concern with this increase of ELL students is that these students struggle in American schools because of their lack of English proficiency thus impacting the academic success for many of them (Calderon et al., 2011; Menken et al., 2012; Suarez-

Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010). Under ideal conditions, it takes an ELL student between four and seven years to attain English proficiency (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Nevertheless, many ELL students do not experience model conditions that would permit English proficiency in that expected period (Gahungu, Gahungu, & Luseno, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Therefore, many ELL students struggle in their schooling creating an achievement gap between ELL students and their non-ELL peers (Shi & Steen, 2012; Solari et al., 2014; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Likewise, the longer ELL students are classified as ELL, the greater their prospect is of struggling in school and the likelihood of their dropping out of school (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012).

To compound the concern, greater numbers of ELL students have been in United States schools for more than six years and still have not gained English proficiency thus being reclassified as long-term English language learners (LTELL; Maxwell, 2012). These LTELL students are among the lowest academic achieving students and are among the greatest student population for dropping out of school (Harris, 2012; Maxwell, 2012; Menken et al., 2012; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). The increasing and persistent disparities in the academic success and acquisition of English proficiency for ELL students is a national concern but it also is a local concern for the Constitution School District (CSD), a pseudonym (Calderon et al., 2011; Shi & Steen, 2012).

### **Local Problem**

The LTELL student population increased 43% between the 2013–2014 school year and the 2014–2015 school year. According to internal confidential district reports, in the 2013–2014 school year the LTELL population was 2,564 and increased to 4,472 during the 2014–2015 school year. Data retrieved from internal, confidential district documents provided evidence that the LTELL population in CSD is following the national trend as the fastest growing population in the district.

According to internal confidential district reports for 2013–2014 and 2014–2015, in the CSD there has been a significant increase of LTELL students between the 2013–2014 and the 2014–2015 school years. These internal reports show that there was a 2% increase of ESL students from the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 school years; however, there was a 43% increase of LTELL students. The problem in CSD is that ELL students are not attaining English proficiency within the 4 to 6-year expected window. Therefore, an increasing number of ELL students are being reclassified as LTELL.

### **Summary of Doctoral Study**

#### **Methodology**

Based on the increasing number of LTELL students within the school district, I examined the instructional practices taking place in the elementary English as a second language (ESL) classrooms. My study identified instructional practices taking place in the elementary school ESL classrooms and analyzed them in relation to a conceptual framework of best practices. I used the research question (RQ): What instructional

practices are elementary school ESL teachers utilizing in the ESL classroom to increase English proficiency for the ELL students?

The conceptual framework for my study was based on the sociocultural learning theory. Included in the sociocultural learning theory were eight best practices. These practices were scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, metacognition, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, utilizing formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students.

The research design selected for this study was a qualitative case study. In order to explore the instructional practices of elementary school ESL teachers within the district, a purposeful, homogenous sampling was used. The participants for this doctoral study consisted of two teachers from each grade level from first grade through fifth grade ( $N = 10$ ). The participants were all certified ESL teachers at one of three elementary schools within the district. The justification for using two from each grade level was to ensure that there was data to analyze both vertically among grades and within each grade level. I worked with ESL teachers within three elementary schools with the district that were within 15 miles of my campus. I did not select any teachers from the school in which I am the principal due to the requirements for conducting ethical research (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

During this case study, data were collected via interviews and classroom observations, from the certified ESL teachers, regarding the instructional practices taking place in their ESL classrooms. The interviews consisted of one face-to-face interview per

participant that lasted approximately 1 hour. Likewise, the observations consisted of only one observation per participant that were approximately 1 hour each.

### **Data Analysis/Results**

Following the data collection an analysis took place that showed the emergence of five themes. The findings were compared with the eight best practices outlined in the review of literature based on the conceptual framework outlined by sociocultural learning theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

Additionally, the findings were directly connected to the RQ.

**Theme 1: Sociocultural best practices.** Seven of the eight practices outlined in this study as sociocultural best practices emerged as a theme. These practices emerged among at least seven of the 10 participants. These consisted of scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, used formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students.

**Theme 2: Sociocultural best practices deficiencies.** Metacognition, one of the eight practices outlined in this study as sociocultural best practices, did not emerge as a theme. It was not among at least seven of the 10 participants. Additionally, although the best practice of scaffolding was identified as a sociocultural best practice used by all the participants there was discrepant data regarding decoding strategies used within the elementary ESL classrooms.

During the interviews, all 10 participants provided scaffolding strategies specific to assisting students in decoding unfamiliar words when reading. However, there was

discrepant data from the observations that showed that five out of the 10 participants regularly did not implement one of the decoding strategies discussed to scaffold students in decoding unfamiliar words during reading. Five of the participants routinely told the students how to say unfamiliar words without using one of the strategies they discussed in the interview.

**Theme 3: Other Practices.** In addition to the sociocultural best practices outlined in the conceptual framework of this study, there were three additional practices that the participants implement in their classrooms. These practices include the use of technology, anchor charts, and small group instruction. All of these practices were observed or discussed with at least seven out of the 10 participants.

**Theme 4: District ESL Program.** During the data analysis the theme of participants not using the district adopted ESL program, National Geographic Reach, emerged. The data showed that three out of the 10 participants used the district's adopted ESL program. Of the seven participants that do not use the program, five of the participants stated that they did not receive training for the Reach Program. Two of the participants expressed that they didn't even know if they had ever heard of the program.

Four of the participants stated that they lacked the resources to implement the program. One participant stated that she didn't have any resources for the program. Another participant stated that she only had a single copy of the textbook for her students and that this was not sufficient. Likewise two other participants stated that they need more textbooks in order to properly implement the program.



**Theme 5: ESL Teacher Needs.** The final theme of ESL teacher needs emerged as time when looking at the data regarding what teachers felt their greatest need was to provide ESL students quality instruction. Out of the 10 participants five of them stated that they needed more time each day. All five of these participants stated that this time would be used for reading with the students in small groups. Two of the participants stated that they would use the Reach program during this extra time if they had it.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Greatest Impact**

**Program Fidelity.** The analysis of the data showed that there is a lack of program fidelity for district, schools, and individual ESL teachers. This is shown in the case of many ESL teachers lacking the necessary professional development on the district's ESL program Reach. Likewise, the data analysis identified the insufficient number of student textbooks and teacher manuals in many of the ESL classrooms preventing ESL teachers the ability to carry out the program correctly. Finally, the analysis of the data showed that the implementation of Reach into the instructional day by the ESL teachers is inconsistent, partial, and in some cases nonexistent.

When fidelity to a program is high then the effects obtained from the program is effective (Nelson, Oliver, Hebert, & Bohaty, 2015). In contrast, when a program is implemented only partially, inconsistent, incorrectly, or abandoned completely the fidelity and effects of the program are jeopardized (Nelson et al., 2015). Fidelity to a program is critical in being able to determine the program's effectiveness (Maynard, Peters, Vaughn, Sarteschi, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2013).

If the fidelity of a program is not carried out then the interpretation of outcomes is inconclusive (Maynard et al., 2013).

Effective programs require fidelity at the implementation of the program and maintaining the fidelity of the program over time (Nelson et al., 2015). In order to achieve the lasting effects of a program attention must be made to program fidelity in the areas of program training, monitoring of the practices and elements of the program (Bradley, Crawford, Dahill-Brown, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2015). A program requires all levels of personnel, district, school, and teacher, to individually maintain the fidelity of the program in order to attain the intended results (Bradley et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2015). This high level of fidelity to the districts adopted ESL program Reach is not being accomplished in the CSD and needs to be corrected in order to prevent the ESL students from being reclassified as LTELL. Increasing the fidelity of the ESL program Reach within the CSD will have the greatest impact in increasing the ELL students' English language acquisition and rectifying the problem of the increased number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL.

### **Primary Recommendations**

- 1) It is recommended that ongoing professional development be utilized in training all ESL teachers on National Geographic Reach Program. This professional development should be a part of the annual 6-hours of training required for ESL teachers. Further, all ESL teachers new to the district or teaching ESL in the district who have yet to be trained on the program should receive an initial training that provides an overview of the program and how to implement it into

their classrooms. Many teachers are not using the program and/or have never been trained on how to implement it into their classrooms. Likewise, for many of the teachers it has been over five years since they received training. In addition, the training the teachers received was only one half-day training. Professional development can bolster a teacher's practices and be effective if it is continual and ongoing instead of being fragmented or 1 to 2 day trainings (Murray, 2013). Furthermore, professional development should be routine within a school and district in order to support teachers' learning (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015). Additionally, some teachers are only using part of the program and have not implemented it with fidelity. The implementation of programs requires high fidelity to the program in order for a program to obtain a high effectiveness (Nelson et al., 2015). A program is only as effective as the fidelity and quality in which it is implemented and continued to be carried out (Nelson et al., 2015). The training of the ESL teachers on the Reach program will allow them to see that this program is comprehensive and contains research-based instructional strategies that provide students with whole group and small group instruction. The implementation and continued use of Reach would allow the teachers to incorporate into their plans the time they feel they need to work with students in small groups on their reading skills.

- 2) A second recommendation is that all ESL classrooms be supplied with all the required resources for the implementation and carrying out of the Reach program. It is critical that teachers have the necessary instructional supports and resources

in order to positively impact student learning (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015).

### **Next Steps**

The increasing and maintaining of fidelity of the Reach program within the CSD is the first step in resolving the problem of the increased numbers of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL within the CSD. Furthermore, this is the most important action that should take place within the CSD to remedy the problem. However, once this is repaired there are further areas that should be addressed that will further support the ELL students in their English language acquisition and in being exited from the ESL program instead of being reclassified as LTELL.

### **Secondary Recommendations**

- 1) The third recommendation is that professional development be provided for ESL teachers on incorporating think-alouds into the classroom. This too can be part of the 6-hours of annual ESL training the ESL teachers are required to attend. The purpose for this professional development is that learning increases as students acquire the abilities to self-regulate their learning and become active learners through think-alouds (Ebner & Ehri, 2013). The think-alouds should be modeled for students by teachers stressing its value and importance so students can benefit from the explicit modeling (Carey, Howard & Leftwich, 2013; Ortlieb, & Norris, 2012; Tzohar-Rozen & Kramarski, 2014). When students engage in think-alouds, their opportunities to increase their learning are enhanced (Lee, Irving & Owens,

2015). Evidence shows that think-alouds have a positive impact on student thinking and learning (Ortlieb & Norris, 2012; Yanguas & Lado, 2012). Training teachers to be proficient at modeling think-alouds could positively impact student learning while providing the ESL teachers this valuable teaching strategy.

Research supports that professional development for teachers improves their classroom instruction through increased knowledge, pedagogy practices, and self-confidence (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014; Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015; Lin, Cheng, & Wu, 2015). It is necessary that teachers receive professional development that provides them the opportunity to learn the skills, instructional approaches, and knowledge required to positively impact student learning (Murray, 2013).

- 2) The final recommendation is that school administrators conduct weekly classroom walkthroughs in all elementary ESL classrooms to reinforce the practice of using decoding strategies with their students. It is recommended that the school administrators provided feedback with each visit. It has been shown that school administrators have the second greatest impact on student achievement outside of a student's classroom teacher (Lochmiller, 2016). One way in which this influence is achieved is when school administrators take on the role of instructional leaders by conducting frequent classroom walkthroughs that include feedback directly linked to the instructional practices taking place in individual teachers' classrooms (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016). Classroom walkthroughs provide teachers opportunities for

professional growth when the walkthroughs include feedback (Gorsuch & Obermeyer, 2014; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016). However, in order to attain this professional growth the feedback must be frequent, individualized, specific, and based on concrete observable data (Khachatryan, 2015; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Furthermore, for it to positively affect teacher growth it is important that the feedback is descriptive and contains a focal point that details practices that are or are not being accomplished in the classroom while ensuring that the teacher's self-esteem is not endangered (Khachatryan, 2015). The practice being recommended at this time is the use of decoding strategies. The walkthroughs can include multiple focuses based on individual teacher needs.

### **Conclusion**

This white paper report outlines the national concern with the increase number of ELL students within the United States. Further it explains the growing number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL nationwide. This countrywide problem is a local concern for our school district. According to district internal confidential reports, there was a 43% increase in LTELL students between the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 school years when there was only a 2% increase in the ELL population.

This report summarizes the doctoral study that was a qualitative case study that explored the instructional practices taking place within the ESL classroom of CSD. The study consisted of interviewing and classroom observations of 10 ESL teachers within the district. The study identified instructional practices taking place in the elementary school

ESL classrooms and analyzed them in relation to a conceptual framework of best practices. These practices include scaffolding, collaboration and cooperative work groups, metacognition, questioning, establishing background knowledge, building vocabulary through various activities, used formative assessment to direct instruction, and establishing relationships of trust with the students. The analysis of the data from the study led to five themes that were the catalyst for the four recommendations to rectify the problem of the increase of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL within the district. The recommendations are categorized as primary or secondary. The primary recommendations are for increasing and maintaining the fidelity of the district's ESL program Reach. Following these two recommendations should provide the greatest results in decreasing the number of ELL students being reclassified as LTELL. The two secondary recommendations are areas to be addressed to further improve the exiting of the ELL students from the ESL program once the first two recommendations have been completed. These consist in providing ESL teachers with professional development in the form of think-alouds and administrator classroom walkthroughs to hold teachers accountable for ensuring students are using decoding strategies as they are reading.

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## Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Terrance Bigley  
Interview Protocols for Project Study

### Interview Checklist

- \_\_\_ Did I gain permission to study this site from district?
- \_\_\_ Did I gain permission to study this site from principal?
- \_\_\_ Did I attain informed consent from the participant and provide a copy to the participant?
- \_\_\_ Ensure that the interview location is comfortable to interviewee prior to interview
- \_\_\_ Ensure that audio equipment is working
- \_\_\_ Secure permission to record the interview
- \_\_\_ Listen more and talk less from the beginning of the interview
- \_\_\_ Ask probing questions for clarification and elaboration
- \_\_\_ Withhold all judgments and only document participants data
- \_\_\_ Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form prior to interview
- \_\_\_ Read Project Description prior to interview (below)

### Interview Protocol-

*Understanding Elementary LTELL Through the Instructional Practices of ESL Teachers*

**Date & Time:**

**Setting (pseudonym):**

**Interviewer:** Terrance Bigley Jr.

**Interviewee (pseudonym):**

**Grade Level:**

**Project Description to Share with Interviewee**

This study is part of the researcher's doctoral program. The purpose of this study is to identify ESL instructional practices taking place in the elementary school classrooms of ELL students in the CSD ISD.

The participants for this study will be selected based on a purposeful, homogenous sample. The participants for the study will consist of two teachers from each grade level from first grade through fifth grade. The sources of data being collected are interviews and classroom observations each lasting approximately 1 hour.

The data from this study will be tracked through a research log that will be completed and kept on my laptop. All data will be secured to ensure participant confidentiality and will be password protected. The laptop will be kept locked in a file cabinet in my home. As well, the audio recordings of the interviews will be locked in a file cabinet in my home along with the field notes and the research log. The audio device is also password protected. Additionally, all data will be transcribed by me onto my computer that is password protected. All reported data will be done using pseudonyms for privacy purposes.

This study is voluntary and nobody from the district will treat you differently if you chose not to be a part of the study. The risks for being part of the study are minor discomforts, such as stress or anxiousness of a 1-hour interview and observation. This study poses no safety risk. Furthermore, the study provides no monetary payment, gifts or reimbursements for participation.

**Interview Questions (semistructured, open-ended) \*TURN ON RECORDER**

- 1) What is your highest level of education?
- 2) What certifications and trainings have you attained?
- 3) How many years of experience do you have in education?
- 4) What have been your different roles in education?
- 5) How long have you been an ESL teacher?
- 6) What training have you had for instructing ESL students?
- 7) What instructional practices do you implement into the classroom?
- 8) What direct instructional practices do you use when teaching?
- 9) What practices do you utilize to help students decode words?
- 10) What comprehension strategies do you incorporate into your classroom and how do you implement them?
- 11) How is formative assessment used in your classroom?
- 12) What are the exiting criteria for ESL students to be reclassified as non-LEP?
- 13) How do you help your students achieve this goal?
- 14) What is your greatest need in order to provide your ESL students quality instruction?

**\*STOP RECORDING and THANK PARTICIPANT**

## Appendix C: Observational Protocols

Terrance Bigley  
Observational Protocols for Dissertation Study

**Observational Checklist**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Did I gain permission to study this site from district?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Did I gain permission to study this site from principal?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Did I attain informed consent from the participant and provide a copy to the participant?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Remember that my observational role is as a nonparticipant
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do I have the means to record the fieldnotes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ensure that I enter site slowly so as to not disturb the setting?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ensure that I take descriptive and reflective notes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write in complete sentences to capture detailed fieldnotes and complete notes immediately after observation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thank participants and principal for access to the site.

**Observational Fieldnotes-**

*Understanding Elementary LTELL Through the Instructional Practices of ESL Teachers*

**Participant (pseudonym):**

**Setting (pseudonym):**

**Observer:** Terrance Bigley Jr.

**Role of Observer:** Nonparticipant, Observer of the ESL teacher and practices implemented by the ESL teacher

**Date & Time:**

**Length of Observation:** Approximately 1 hour

**ESL Best Practices from Contextual Framework**

- 1) Scaffolding
- 2) Collaboration and cooperative work groups
- 3) Metacognition 4)
- 4) Questioning
- 5) Establishing background knowledge
- 6) Building vocabulary through various activities
- 7) Utilizing formative assessment to direct instruction
- 8) Establishing relationships of trust with the students.

<b>Description of Teacher and Practices</b>	<b>Reflective Notes</b>



## Appendix D: Participant 4 Anchor Chart

- 1) Can I describe what I am learning?
- 2) Why am I learning this?
- 3) Where will I apply this in life?
- 4) How do I know that I am learning it well?
- 5) Do I know what I need to do to become better?