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TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS  
IN THE K-5 CLASSROOM

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

ANITA WILLIAMS MCGRAW

August 2011

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers across the nation face challenges in today's diverse classrooms. To add to the pressure of meeting all of the students' needs and being successful on high-stakes tests, the growth in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the regular classroom has grown tremendously over the last several years. This study examined teachers' experiences in working with ELLs and their families in the K-5 classroom. Research on teachers' attitudes in working with this population was reviewed because teachers' attitudes have an effect on the quality of the education ELLs receive. Evidence based strategies to help teachers with ELL instruction were also reviewed. The qualitative research of this project was based on teachers' experiences in the K-5 language arts setting. Listening to the teachers' stories helped the researcher to identify their attitudes in working with this challenging population. Observations of these teachers in their natural setting and the teaching strategies they use with ELLs were also examined.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Brad McGraw, for his unending encouragement throughout this process. It is also dedicated to my parents, Dan and Shirley Williams, who have always believed that I could achieve anything through hard work and perseverance. I would also like to thank my friends, family, and colleagues who supported me during this endeavor.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) has grown. Between 1979 and 2008, the number of school age ELLs increased from 3.8 to 10.9 million. The percentage of students in 1979 was nine percent and had jumped to 21% by 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). The largest percentage of these students lived in California and Texas (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009). Although these states have had ELLs for years, many other areas in the country are beginning to see significant increases in their populations as well. Educators and educational leadership have had to respond to the growing need of educating students with different languages, cultures, and religions from their own. Unfortunately, this creates a problem since many teachers lack the training and knowledge base to effectively work with these students. In addition, because ELLs have the highest dropout rate in the nation (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio, 2005), it is vital for teachers to examine their attitudes, perceptions, and practices in relation to these students.

Attitudes are part of a person's disposition because they are based on beliefs and experiences. Bandura (1986) stated that individuals' beliefs and perspectives give insight into the kinds of decisions they make. This is no less true for educators. Shiveley and Misco (2010) suggested several attributes teachers should possess. These included

professionalism, a positive attitude, a caring attitude, a belief that all students can learn, and an appreciation for diversity. Many educators enter the profession with ideas about how certain groups act or learn and this can influence their practice (Karathanos, 2009).

In another study by Shaw, Stratil, and Reynolds (2001), they found that teacher attitudes were affected by their social support. If working with others who possess negative attitudes, it was more likely that the teachers had negative attitudes as well. The same held true for positive attitudes. Another interesting finding from this study was that teachers with more positive attitudes toward teaching were more likely to continue in their careers as teachers. As a result, attitudes not only affect students but can also have work and financial implications for teachers.

Research has shown that, overall, teachers report having positive attitudes toward teaching ELLs. However, when probed about specific aspects of teaching these students, they are less open about welcoming them into their classroom because they feel unprepared to educate them. One such quantitative study in a U.S. Midwestern school district revealed that teachers did not feel adequate to meet the academic needs of ELLs when compared to the general student population. Teachers also responded that students' first language interfered with their learning (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004).

Another study examined high school teachers' attitudes toward ELL inclusion (Reeves, 2006). The researcher conducted the quantitative study in a southeastern school district in the U.S. Again, with general questions, teachers revealed positive attitudes toward teaching ELLs in the regular classroom. On more specific questions, teachers said that they were reluctant to work with some ELLs and that they did not think that teaching them in the regular classroom was beneficial to all students. In addition, most

participants revealed that they felt unqualified to work with ELLs. However, they also answered the survey question negatively about receiving specialized training. Each study was based on quantitative data the researchers captured through one-time surveys and questionnaires. The participants were not given time to reflect on the reasons behind their answers or the implications for their teaching situations. Because most available research is quantitative in nature, this study's qualitative approach will allow a more in depth look at teachers' experiences in working with this population and how these experiences helped to shape teachers' attitudes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ELL student population has grown tremendously over the last few years (NCES, 2010). During this time, experts in the field of second language acquisition have given suggestions for working with ELLs. As teachers participate in professional development and learn more information to successfully reach this growing student population, their practices can improve. Researchers have given suggestions for school districts to help support their teachers and for principals on how to give effective building level leadership. In addition, teacher educators can focus on helping pre-service and practicing teachers learn the theory and practical implications of how to teach ELLs in the regular classroom (Karathanos, 2009).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore teachers' experiences with teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in the regular classroom. Kindergarten

through fifth grade teachers, who are all responsible for teaching language arts, will be utilized. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) will be used to determine participants. The researcher will seek to learn how these teachers work with ELLs, what experiences have shaped their attitudes toward ELLs, and to identify teaching accommodations they use with ELLs in their regular classrooms. Individual interviews and classroom observations will be used to gain insight into classroom teachers' experiences with teaching this population. By listening to their stories of working with ELLs, their attitudes will be revealed toward these students. Other documents such as teaching resources and lesson plans used with ELLs will also be examined.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study hopes to uncover some existing ideas teachers have when working with ELLs. It also hopes to enlighten educators about how their attitudes affect instruction. By listening to the participants' experiences, their attitudes will be revealed. The following questions will guide this study: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom?

### **Limitations**

1. The participants may not be completely honest with the researcher. They may give information they think the researcher wants to hear.
2. The participants may not be completely honest with the researcher because of a fear of being perceived in a negative manner.

## **Delimitations**

1. The participants will be teachers from a rural school district in the southeastern United States. Teachers of kindergarten through fifth grade, who are responsible for teaching language arts, will be included.
2. The school district is located in a small city of approximately 40,000 people. The district enjoys a good relationship with the city and has a lot of community support.
3. Of the 7421 students enrolled, 219 are classified as ELLs (2.9 %). The small percentage will not be an issue because only teachers of ELLs will be included in the study.

## **Significance of the Study**

Teachers have great influence over students in a classroom. Teachers set the tone each day in the manner in which they interact with their students. They also know when teachers have high or low expectations of them. (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Therefore, teachers' attitudes affect students and the kinds of instruction they receive in the classroom. Because of the impact on students, studying teachers' attitudes is important (Goldenberg, 1971; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). By listening to the teachers' experiences in working with ELLs for this study, their attitudes will be revealed.

This topic is also important because of the increase in the number of ELLs in the public schools who are expected to perform well on high stakes tests. Traditionally, urban school districts in large cities have more experience in working with ELLs. However immigrants have moved into more rural areas where there have been much smaller ELL

populations in the past. With this in mind, more and more teachers are expected to teach these students in the regular classroom. In some cases, these teachers have little or no training in working with these students. Discussing teachers' existing ideas can enlighten them as well as district leadership on how to best prepare for the task of educating ELLs (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004). In addition, identifying some evidence-based strategies to help guide teachers in their instruction will benefit teachers and students alike.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*BICS*: Basic interpersonal communication skills; Conversational interaction (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

*Bilingual instruction*: Using a student's native language along with English in classroom instruction (Echeverria, Voght, & Short, 2008).

*CALP*: The language ability used for academic purposes; academic language (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

*ELL*: English Language Learner. A student who is fluent in another language besides English and who is learning English. ELL is preferred over LEP because it emphasizes the positive aspects of language learning while LEP focuses on the deficits of language (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

*ESOL*: English speakers of other languages (Echeverria et al., 2008).

*LI*: Abbreviation for a student's native language (Echeverria et al., 2008).

*LEP*: Limited English Proficient. The federal government refers to English Language Learners using this term while schools more often use ELL (Echeverria et al., 2008).

*Realia*: Real objects used in teaching to help ELLs make connections to lessons (Echeverria et al., 2008).

*Regular Classroom*: A classroom led by a certified teacher who may or may not have any experience or training in working with ELLs.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

To understand each teacher's perspective, The Transformative Learning Theory is applied in this study. The theory began as Mezirow (2000) studied women who decided to further their college education later in life. In the thirty years since his study was published, the theory has become more diverse and has been used to explain many types of adult education. His theory states that it is not just about learning new information but a change in how the learner knows the information. Transformative Learning Theory is linked with Piaget's ideas on assimilating and accommodating. In assimilation, new information is shaped by existing knowledge. In accommodation, what is known and familiar actually change because of the new learning (Valsiner, (2005). Mezirow would say that this new path to learning is actually a transformation.

Transformative phases are explained to give more insight into what a change resembles. The steps through which learners progress are not linear steps but are more of a spiral with some phases repeated more than once. The first one is what Mezirow calls a "disorienting dilemma." The learner comes face to face with something that causes him to question what is familiar. It can be something that is stunning and happens all at once or something that progresses over time. The next phase is described as self-examination of emotions. Recognizing and confronting how a person feels about something is an



important part of this assessment. The third phase is a critical reflection of assumptions. Assessing the emotions and assumptions is vital in knowing what the learner believes and how he came upon those beliefs. Next, the learner may see that changes need to happen and he begins looking for new roles or actions. During this phase, several roles may be tried to find the right fit. Having a plan and gaining the skills or knowledge necessary to implement the plan are next. Afterwards, the learner practices the action or new roles until he feels more self-confident. Once these things are in place, he changes his life based on the new perspective gained from this process (Mezirow, 2000).

In Transformative Learning Theory, Mezirow (2000) stated “we are all active constructors of knowledge who can become responsible for the procedures and assumptions that shape the way we make meaning out of our experiences” (p. 72). Until mind-sets are challenged, transformation cannot take place. Mezirow believes that people become more open to change through constructive discourse. This involves an open dialogue to validate beliefs and to reflect on assumptions. The discourse should take place in a non-threatening environment with no power struggle between those involved. After taking time to hear and be heard, a person can decide what changes should be made (Mezirow, 2000).

As educators, the disorienting dilemma can be a first experience with an ELL student. As the teacher, it is vital to critically reflect on assumptions about these students. Staff development for ELL teachers should include a time for educators to recognize their bias toward certain populations and their feelings of having to accommodate these students (Miller & Pedro, 2006).

For teachers to take part in Transformative Learning, Mezirow (2000) mentioned four conditions. The first one involves exposure to someone or something different than oneself. For teachers of ELLs, most do not speak the same first language as the student. In addition to the language barrier, these students have very different experiences from American students, depending on their age when arriving in the United States. Building on ELLs' background knowledge takes expertise because of their differences. Also, depending on the family culture, the ELL students often have much different views of school and education than their American counterparts. Some cultures leave all educational decisions up to the school with little input. Other cultures revere the teacher and desire to work alongside the school for the benefit of the students. A teacher must seek to understand all of these differences in order to serve the students. The second condition is reflective discourse. This can be carried out with colleagues who share similar situations. In the discourse, everyone should be heard in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Each member should feel free to discuss his point of view and assumptions. The third condition is a mentoring community. It is important for teachers with ELL students to have good working relationships with supportive colleagues and to seek mentors for help. Once these circumstances are met, there is an opportunity for action, which is the fourth condition. With the right support and training, teachers can transform their teaching with the new strategies and information available.

Previous discussion about Transformative Learning Theory has focused on non-traditional college students. However, after studying the ideas, it is very appropriate to be applied for teachers who want to continue to learn and grow in their profession. Keeping informed of the latest research on teaching and learning is necessary for all

teachers, no matter their teaching context. Educators must evaluate their practices against new learning and make choices about how to best meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 will serve as an introduction. It will contain background information, the purpose statement, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study. In addition, a list of terms concerning ELL education will be defined. Next, chapter 2 will contain the review of literature, presenting previous studies on teaching ELL students. Chapter 3 will be the methodology chapter. In it, the procedures used in choosing participants and gathering data will be explained. A discussion on how the data will be analyzed will also be included. In Chapter 4, the researcher will interpret the data by developing themes from the interviews, observations, and documents. Lastly, chapter 5 will include the findings and the implications of the study for educators, administrators, and teacher educators.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In recent years, the number of ELLs has grown. Some of these families come to the United States to find better work, better healthcare, or for political asylum (O’Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008). In the 2003-2004 school year, 3.8 million students received ELL services. That was eleven percent of all students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009). The largest percentage of these students lives in California and Texas (NCES). Although these states have had ELLs for years, many other areas in the country are beginning to see significant increases in their population as well. Educators and educational leadership have had to respond to the growing need of educating students with different languages, cultures, and religions from their own. Because ELLs have the highest dropout rate in the nation (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D’Emilio, 2005), it is vital for teachers to examine their attitudes, perceptions, and practices in relation to these students so they can help these students be successful. In addition, examining teachers’ attitudes toward ELLs will help school districts in preparing teachers to work with a more diverse student population (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004).

The following questions guide this study: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom?

This review of related literature is divided into five sections, which support the overarching theoretical framework. First, a brief historical context is given to show the relationship between immigrants and public schools. Second, examples are given on how teachers' attitudes influence behavior. Third, previous research studies are reviewed that explore teachers' attitudes concerning ELLs. Once attitudes are revealed and teachers confront any misconceptions about ELLs, they are free to use the many instructional practices found to help these students. Therefore, the fourth section identifies some evidenced-based strategies to help teachers meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms. In the fifth section, unexplored issues are discussed, which form the basis of the study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Historical Context**

Unless one was born with a Native American heritage, every person in the United States can trace his or her history back to an immigrant. Since 1776, the U.S. has been an attractive place for immigrants from around the world. With many diverse nationalities represented in America, it has become a mosaic of cultures and people (library.thinkquest.org).

People came to the United States for different reasons throughout history. Corrupt governments forced many people to seek refuge in this country (Mead, 2009). Another major factor for coming to the U.S. was economics. Immigrants came seeking jobs and the promise of a life better than they were living elsewhere (Androff et al., 2011). Without a choice, their children came in order to keep the family together.

After several years of receiving immigrants with open arms, laws were passed restricting their arrival. The first law was in 1862. Congress decided that American ships could not bring any Chinese to the U.S. In 1882, another law restricted all Chinese entry. In the meantime, Congress also restricted people coming into the country that had certain diseases and people that were convicts in other countries. By 1917, the Immigration Act was passed that restricted certain areas of the world entry into the U.S. A quota system was established in 1921, revised in 1924, which set maximum numbers for immigrants from certain countries. Northern and Western Europe were given large quotas while almost all Asians were restricted. After World War II, the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed and many Europeans affected by the war were allowed to move to the U.S. From the 1950s through the 1970s, various laws were passed changing the number of immigrants allowed into the country and allowing those affected by wars and disasters to make their homes in America. The Immigration Act of 1990 set a maximum number of new immigrants to 700,000 for three years and then at 675,000 for the years after the initial three ([library.thinkquest.org](http://library.thinkquest.org)).

Since the 2001 terror attacks, U.S. citizens and immigrants have witnessed a change in policy and concerns over immigration. Lawmakers have tried to pass immigration reform because of the fear of future attacks on U.S. citizens (Brunner & Colarelli, 2010). Leaders debate whether it is better to further restrict the number of immigrants as well as what to do about the illegal immigrants already in the country. States, such as Arizona, have made headlines recently about their crackdown on suspected illegal immigrants (Thornburgh, 2010). As politicians debate these issues, those who work with the children of immigrants have their own responsibilities.

Throughout these different periods of history, schools were on the front lines in working with these young immigrants. Often, the children's first experience with Americans was through their public school teachers. The children had no choice in the matter as their parents made the decisions they thought best for their families. They had to attend school alongside others who spoke different languages and who possibly looked down on them for their plight. Educators were expected to help these students assimilate into the culture and to educate them to be productive members of society (Cho & Reich, 2008). Through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI provided for the education of all children, no matter their proficiency in English (U.S. Ed- OCR). In a 1974 court case, one set of parents did not believe their child's needs were being met. In *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), these parents, whose child spoke Chinese, filed a class action suit against the San Francisco Unified School District. The Supreme Court ruled on the case and said that identical education does not mean equal education under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because of the ruling, the school district had to provide appropriate educational opportunities to non-English speaking Chinese students there. In 1982, *Castaneda v. Pickard*, 648 F.2d, 989 (Fifth Cir, 1981) reached the Supreme Court as well. The court established a three-part evaluation of the adequacy of a school district's ELL program. It said that first, the program must be based on sound educational theory or on legitimate experimental strategy. Second, the program must include resources and personnel that can implement it. Third, the school district must evaluate and change procedures if needed to ensure students can overcome language barriers.

In 1982, another U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), provided the way for an education for undocumented children and young adults. The law

stated that they had the same rights as U.S. citizens and permanent residents to attend schools. The students, like others, are required to go until a legally mandated age. The law prohibits public schools from denying admission to a student on the basis of undocumented status. It also states that schools may not treat students differently to verify status. In addition, under the law schools may not require students or parents to disclose their immigration status or require social security numbers for admission to school (Morse & Ludovina, 1999).

With these laws firmly in place, teachers today know that they must work to ensure all ELLs' success. However, today's students face different challenges than the early ELLs. The U.S. today has a postindustrial economy. Factory and industrial jobs are not as readily available to immigrants as they were early in the nation's history. Students need as much success at school as possible in order to work in today's job market (Cho & Reich, 2008).

Another law, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) narrows the definition of students' success based on their standardized test scores. It states that all students, including ELLs, must become proficient in language arts and math by 2014. NCLB also wants the achievement gap among student sub-groups to be eliminated. However, educating students from diverse backgrounds is never simple. For ELLs, Abedi and Dietel (2004) asserted that this law poses major challenges. First, ELL performance has been historically low with very slow improvement. Next, the language of the test itself affects ELLs' performance because they are being evaluated on content and language ability. Third, the ELL student sub-group changes each year. When ELLs have high performances on these tests, they are removed from the sub-group because they



are no longer considered ELL. In turn, school districts receive new ELLs each year that struggle with their first experiences of standardized testing. The U.S. Department of Education did recognize this dilemma in 2004 and allowed higher performing ELLs to remain in the sub-group for up to two years. However, after the two years, the same problem will exist. Other reasons NCLB poses such a challenge is that ELLs, as well as all students, have influences outside the control of the school (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). In addition, even with the pressure of NCLB on local school districts, federal funding for K-12 language acquisition programs has been reduced by more than 50% since the law's implementation (Walker et al., 2004).

It is apparent that there are a number of laws and policies that must be followed in the education of ELLs. With the accountability and pressure teachers experience in educating all students, it is vital for educators to stay abreast of how these regulations will affect their specific teaching context. Teachers may not feel adequately prepared to meet these demands or they may not be willing to seek resources to help. Some teachers may perceive working with ELLs as overwhelming while other teachers may see it as a welcome challenge. Educators in regular classrooms feel differently when asked about working with this population. In the next section, research is given that shows teachers' attitudes have a great influence over student achievement.

### **Teacher Attitudes Influence Behavior**

Attitudes are part of a person's disposition and can influence the way an individual acts in certain circumstances based on his or her beliefs (Villegas, 2007). A person's attitude can be positive or negative and can influence the outlook on life and on

specific situations. Teachers must be very careful because their attitudes affect classroom climate, relationships, and students' behavior and performance (Goldenberg, 1971).

Because of this, schools of education throughout the country are responsible for assessing their teacher education students' attitudes before they graduate. In 2002, The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) required universities to provide evidence that their students have the proper disposition needed for successful teaching (Shiveley & Misco, 2010). Ediger (2002) goes on to say that prospective teachers must have positive attitudes before they can even be considered for a job.

Attitudes are part of a person's disposition because they are based on beliefs. Bandura (1986) stated that individuals' beliefs and perspectives give insight into the kinds of decisions they make. This is no less true for educators. Shiveley and Misco (2010) suggested teachers should possess professionalism, a positive attitude, a caring attitude, a belief that all students can learn, and an appreciation for diversity. However, many teachers come to schools with preconceived ideas about how certain groups act or learn and this can influence their practice (Karathanos, 2009).

Villegas and Lucas (2007) wrote that teachers must have sociocultural consciousness. When they possess this trait, they realize that race, ethnicity, social class, and gender have shaped their students' worldview. Teachers look beyond their own personal experiences and seek to understand those of their students. Research has shown that students coming into the schools with little English ability often feel unsafe, alienated, and depressed. They feel that they are between two worlds and have difficulty adjusting to the tradition, expectations, and attitudes in the school environment (Lee, Butler, & Tippins, 2007).

These same ideas are part of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Howard (2003) asserts that teachers will encounter increasingly diverse classrooms. Teachers must know how students' backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicity affect their learning in order to be successful with these students. In addition, teachers need to use this knowledge to help students make connections with the school environment. Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to meet the social and cultural needs of students as well as to make learning relevant for them. ELLs bring cultural capital to the classroom that must be recognized and used to help them achieve academic success. Teachers should treat these students with respect and with the belief that they are capable of learning in the educational environment. Howard (2003) goes on to say that teachers must be careful to avoid stereotypes in their teaching and class discussions, which do more harm than good. Culturally relevant teachers examine themselves for preconceived ideas and present lessons in ways that are effective and relevant for today's classrooms (Howard, 2003).

Successful teachers do not see these students who are different than them from a deficit view (Nieto, 1996). Having negative perceptions of certain students can affect teachers' motivation to meet the students' individual needs. Also, it can affect the students because the teachers have such low expectations of them. Teachers who have low expectations of students are less likely to call on these students or to give them enough wait time in response to class discussions or questions (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In addition, teachers will be less likely to put new ideas into practice if they have negative attitudes (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004).

According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), when teachers have positive attitudes, students are the beneficiaries. Teachers provide students with more rigorous activities

and teach students to monitor their own learning. They have high standards for all students and hold students accountable. Teachers with positive attitudes and the belief that all students can learn do less skill and drill practice and provide more work for students to use higher order thinking skills. When teachers project these attitudes, students are affected (Shaw, Stratil, & Reynolds, 2001). Teachers can either influence their students to want to come to school or influence them to give up “and just roam the streets” (Jobe, 2005). In a research study by Wilson (2006), it was concluded that instructors’ attitudes have far-reaching effects on students. She found that one of the best predictors of student success was knowing that their teachers had genuine concern for them. Teachers show this concern through many different behaviors that are results of their attitudes and beliefs.

In another study by Shaw et al. (2001), teacher attitudes were affected by their social support. If working with others with negatives attitudes, it was more likely that the teachers had negative attitudes as well. The same held true for positive attitudes. Another interesting finding from this study was that teachers with more positive attitudes toward teaching were more likely to continue in their careers as teachers. As a result, attitudes not only affect students but can also have professional implications for teachers.

Evidence indicates that attitudes in general are very powerful. When teachers are working with ELLs, this is no less true. Preconceived ideas and assumptions held by teachers about ELLs form the opportunities designed for them (English, 2009). Teachers must reflect on their prejudices and try to better understand each ELL student as an individual. Learning about their families and situations will help teachers make more sense of their cultural differences. In addition, understanding the historical context of

these families and the immigrants that came before them can lead to a change in teachers' thinking concerning ELLs. According to Miller and Pedro (2006), this information can help teachers recognize and change their previous assumptions and prepare them to meet the needs of all of their students.

Walker et al. (2004) stated that there are several reasons that teachers' attitudes toward ELLs could become more negative in the next few years. First, the number of language-minority speakers will increase. Second, teachers need much more training on how to teach ELLs in the regular classroom. Third, refugees and immigrants are coming into areas where there has been little cultural diversity in the past. Fourth, laws that make teachers stringently accountable for ELLs' academics may create a backlash against these students in the classroom (Walker et al., 2004). The next section reveals research about teachers' attitudes toward ELLs.

### **Research on Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes About ELLs**

By first knowing the extent of beliefs and attitudes in a given place, negative ones can be confronted and then transformed (Walker et al., 2004). Several different research studies reveal the importance of teacher attitudes in ELL instruction. The first is from a Midwestern suburban school district with a sudden increase in the ELL population because of recent immigrants and refugees (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004). The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of teachers and the needs of ELLs. Languages spoken by the students included Arabic and Chaldean. Students also came from Albania, Eastern Europe, China, and India. In this study, the researchers surveyed 729 teachers in this district of 15,000 students. ELLs comprised

one third of those students. The researchers worked with the district leadership to cover fourteen areas in the survey including teacher efficacy, approaches to teaching, second language learning theories, ELL assessment, relationship between language and academics, school climate, and teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the parents of ELLs. In all, seventy-eight items were included for teachers to rate their responses using a 5-point Likert scale. An open-ended portion for teachers to prioritize their needs was also included. In addition, some questions included alternative wording to allow teachers with no ELL experience to project what they would do if they taught these students. Opportunities were given for teachers to indicate the type of assistance they needed to improve their teaching of ELLs, how much experience they had teaching ELLs, and if they had any formal credentials related to teaching these students.

Overall, general attitudes were favorable in this district toward ELLs. Seventy percent said that they would welcome ELLs in their classes. However, only 43% said that they would like to teach these students. Also, teachers with more ELL contact had better attitudes than those with little contact. The study revealed that teachers in lower grades and teachers with less experience were more favorable toward ELLs than those in high school and those with more experience. After analyzing the results, researchers did find some inconsistencies and areas where more teacher training was needed. One such area was using the students' first language (L1) in teaching them. A little over half of the respondents, 52%, said that L1 interferes with learning. The researchers pointed out that this shows teachers' lack of knowledge in second language acquisition. Another area where more training was needed involved assessment procedures and services available for ELLs. Responses also showed that teachers believed that diversity can enrich the

community but admitted they do not know how this looks in the classroom. The participants revealed that they were ambivalent about their school being a welcoming environment for ELLs and their families. One other area showed that teachers in this district did not believe they could teach ELLs as well as students in general. As a result of this study, the district leadership reshaped its professional development and refined policies dealing with ELLs and their families (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004).

Another quantitative study looked at high school teachers' attitudes toward ELL inclusion (Reeves, 2006). This study had fewer participants than the first one but the purpose was much the same: to examine teacher attitudes in four categories related to ELLs. The researcher surveyed teachers in four high schools in the southeastern United States with the largest population of ELLs in the district to gain insight into these four categories: attitudes toward inclusion, modification of coursework, professional development, and attitudes toward language and learning. Demographic information was gathered on the teachers including their teaching experiences with ELLs. Fifteen percent had no experience while 77.8% had some experience teaching ELLs in the regular classroom. Participants also gave information about their years of teaching experience, native language, subject areas taught, gender, and language minority training.

The researcher examined the questions for the four categories. For the first area, teachers had welcoming attitudes toward having ELLs in their classrooms. However, 40% indicated that ELL inclusion did not benefit all students. On more specific items, some teachers reported that they were reluctant to work with certain ELLs. Seventy-five percent agreed that ELLs should not be included in the regular classroom until they reached a minimal level of English language proficiency. The researcher concluded that

the discrepancy might be due to the participants wanting to give socially acceptable answers. On modification of coursework, the second area, teachers had a tolerance for it but were more willing to give extra time for completion of assignments instead of simplifying coursework or reducing the amount of coursework for ELLs. The researcher asserted that this was because the teachers were concerned about equity for all of their students in class. As for the third area, professional development, most respondents felt unqualified to work with ELLs. However, when probed about specific professional development, almost half were uninterested in receiving training to help with ELL instruction. Reeves said that this might be due to the disappointing record of one-shot professional development. In the attitudes toward the fourth area, language and learning, two misconceptions were apparent. The first one was that ELLs should be fluent English users within two years. In reality, it could be more than seven years for students to reach proficiency (Cummins, 1979). The second misconception was that their native language interferes with learning English. Research has shown that a student's first language can help them acquire a second language (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). The researcher concluded that teachers in general want to welcome ELLs into their classes but that they are unsure of how to do it successfully (Reeves, 2006). Like the Karabenick and Clemens-Noda (2004) study, this one revealed positive general attitudes but many misconceptions when probed about specific aspects of teaching ELLs.

Another study was conducted that used both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain insight into teacher attitudes. The researchers wanted to integrate information on teachers' attitudes in a Great Plains state with data on the social aspects of the community in which the teachers taught (Walker et al., 2004). Teacher demographics, including years



of experience and training in working with ELLs, and differences in teachers' attitudes in three different types of communities were central to this study. The first community had a low-incidence of ELLs. Here, the schools had less than a 10% enrollment of ELLs. The second type of community experienced a rapid-influx of ELLs due to refugees in the early 1990's when citizens from Bosnia, Somalia, and the Sudan were relocated in this area. The third community had a segregated minority of ELLs consisting mostly of migrant workers.

Data were collected in two ways. The researchers used a 14-question survey to determine the degree and extent of teachers' attitudes toward ELLs. A 5-point Likert scale provided information on teacher attitudes, teachers' self-efficacy in working with this population, impact of teaching ELLs on teachers' work load, knowledge of best practices in teaching ELLs, and school receptivity toward ELLs. Teachers from 28 schools across the state were included in the survey. Interviews were also used and provided data by giving the researchers a deeper understanding of the factors that affect teacher attitudes, school services for ELLs, obstacles in teaching ELLs and ways negative teacher attitudes were shown in the school settings. Six teachers were included in the interviews (Walker et al., 2004).

Overall, the researchers found that teachers were neutral to negative in their attitudes toward ELLs. Of those surveyed, 70% were not interested in having ELLs in their classrooms while 14% of teachers did not want ELLs at all. Twenty-five percent of the teachers said that it was the students' responsibility to adapt to the American way of life and 20% said they did not think they should adapt their classroom instruction for ELLs. As for professional development, 87% of teachers said they had never attended

any ELL training and 51% said they were not interested in specialized ELL training. However, 62% of teachers said their school welcomed ELLs and 78% said that these students brought needed diversity to the school setting. The researchers explained that political correctness influenced this paradox in the answers (Walker et al., 2004).

Unlike the first two studies, the researchers uncovered several reasons for negative teachers' attitudes in the interviews. Lack of time and lack of training were cited as two of the biggest reasons teachers do not want to teach ELLs. Negative administrator attitudes and lack of support were mentioned as well. In addition, misconceptions existed among teachers about ELL education. Most teachers indicated that a student's native language interfered with learning English and that ELLs should be fluent in English after one year (Walker et al., 2004).

In this study, the researchers also wanted to compare teachers' attitudes in the three different types of communities. They found that teachers in low-incidence schools had optimistic perceptions of ELLs. However, their experiences were mostly based on high achieving foreign exchange students. Rapid-influx schools were more neutral to positive in their perceptions of ELLs. Those teachers were the most realistic and realized that there were many factors influencing ELLs' achievement. The teachers in the migrant-serving schools held the most negative attitudes toward ELLs. These attitudes were direct results of working with low socio-economic migrant workers for a few months during the school year (Walker et al., 2004).

Based on this study, the researchers offered several suggestions. First, they stated that administrators needed professional development. As school leaders, they set the tone for the entire school and they should be seen as leaders in this area. Second, teachers

should be trained to work effectively with specialized ELL teachers and administrators. Third, professional development should be based on the specific needs of teachers. Cultural and religious information should fit the types of students in the district. Fourth, pre-service teachers need more training in working with a diverse student population. College courses that emphasize how they will be responsible for all of the students in their classrooms should help them be more willing to meet each child's individual needs. Last, schools should help educate the community about ELLs to create a more open community (Walker et al., 2004).

During the fall of 2008, McKinney conducted his dissertation study at the University of Tennessee. The purpose of his study was to examine regular education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of ELLs in the regular classroom. The study also looked at the influence of support, personal expertise, and time on teachers' attitudes. A web-based survey was administered during the fall of 2008 to 388 teachers in a large school district in Tennessee. High school, middle school, and elementary school teachers were all included. The survey included questions about benefits of inclusion, teachers' preparation to work with ELLs, management issues with ELLs, as well as general attitudes about teaching ELLs in the regular classroom. In addition, teachers completed items asking about their professional experience and other key demographic information. Questions about expertise, time, and support were also included.

The researcher analyzed the data through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In his analysis, he repeated each research question and gave the responses for the questions one at a time. For the first question, dealing with teachers attitudes and the support they receive, 233 of the 388 said they received adequate support.

The researcher said that there was no significant difference in those who reported adequate support and those who did not. Of those citing adequate support, most identified the expert ELL teacher in their building as being the reason they felt supported. For question two, McKinney wanted to know if teachers felt they had adequate expertise in teaching ELLs and the factors that influenced their perceptions. He did find a significant difference in teachers who felt they had adequate expertise and those who did not. Only 165 of the 388 revealed that they had the adequate expertise to meet the needs of ELLs in the regular classroom. Of those 165, most said that in-service training was the reason for their knowledge. Although in smaller numbers, others cited pre-service training and classroom experience helping as well. The researcher wanted to know if teachers felt that they had enough time to work with ELLs and the factors affecting time for the third research question. Again, he found a significant difference in teachers who felt like they had enough time and those who did not. Of the 388 participants, 58 stated that they had enough time to work effectively with ELLs. A reduced class size was the most mentioned reason for feeling that they had enough time. Having a teaching assistant and an additional planning time was also mentioned (McKinney, 2008). The low number of teachers reporting that they had adequate time mirrored the study by Walker et al. (2004) where a lack of time was a major issue in teaching ELLs effectively.

McKinney came to several conclusions from his study. Teachers with feelings of expertise have significantly more positive attitudes toward ELLs. Because of this, it is vital for teachers to continue to learn and improve their practice. Only 21% of teachers said their pre-service training prepared them for the diverse classroom. As in other studies, this researcher concluded that teacher education programs must change their

programs to reflect today's classrooms (O'Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008; Walker et al., 2004). Professional development also needs to be long-term and supportive for teachers already in the classroom to help them perfect their skills and therefore increase their positive attitudes toward ELLs. Another conclusion from the researcher was that teachers who feel they have enough time to work with ELLs have more positive attitudes toward these students. The positive teachers cited a reduced class size as one reason for having time. However, in this era of school budget cuts, smaller classes cannot be guaranteed. He suggested that teachers be taught how to manage their classroom time better through quality professional development (McKinney, 2008).

O'Neal et al. (2008) agreed with McKinney (2008) about teacher education needing a change. The purpose of their qualitative study was to examine teachers' past university preparation at an elementary school and the effect their training had on the school environment. A rural North Carolina school district of 9,000 students was used in this study that has grown from 1,134 ELLs in 2002 to 1,630 ELLs in 2006. The school selected in this district was a K-5 school with 24 regular classroom teachers participating. Focus groups were used to gain insight into the kind of training these teachers experienced in working with ELLs. Fourteen percent of those interviewed said that they received no college training in working with ELLs. However, 46% of them had received their degrees within the past ten years. The authors contended that having ELLs in schools was not a recent trend and that universities even ten years ago should have addressed the needs of these students. Fifty percent of the teachers said that they would have enrolled in a course if one had been available. In addition, 100% wanted to participate in staff development focused on ELLs. On another positive note, 100% of the

teachers said that they felt responsible of the ELLs in their classroom and did not expect any other ESL teachers to take charge. The authors noted the demeanor of the respondents was one of shock that they would even ask such a question. From this, the authors concluded that the school recognized their roles in teaching all children, no matter their backgrounds. Even though the teachers felt responsible, only 25% felt adequately prepared to teach ELLs in their classrooms.

Because of the lack of ability on the teachers' part, the authors made several recommendations for this district that can be used in other districts as well. They recommended that teachers have a college course on language acquisition theory to help clear any misconceptions held by the teachers. Ongoing professional development was also recommended that supported teachers long term through collaboration and was not a one-time session. These authors highly recommended the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). In this model, student achievement improved in language acquisition as well as in content areas (Echevarria et al., 2008). In addition, the authors stated that universities should change their teacher education programs to include more issues related to language and cultural diversity. In their view, school districts in this study were trying to fix a problem through staff development created by lack of preparation by schools of education (O'Neal et al., 2008).

One school of education in the Midwest did try to help prepare their students for the increasingly diverse classroom (Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, & Dalhouse, 2009). They conducted research to gain information about the knowledge and attitudes of preservice teachers toward refugee ELLs. They said that attitudes toward this population can be affected by their university preparation and wanted to help educate these future

teachers, who were mostly white, female, and middle class, about the reality of today's classroom. In this action research project, the researchers posed two questions: (1) Does the perceived ability of preservice teachers to teach ELLs improve? (2) Do the attitudes of preservice teachers toward ELLs improve? The participants included 53 preservice teachers who would serve as pen pals to 53 ELLs in sixth-eighth grade. Another group of 40 preservice teachers served as the comparison group.

The researchers used a quasi-experimental design. All of the preservice teachers completed a questionnaire during their university course. The experimental group of 53 spent the next ten weeks writing letters to their middle school ELL partners. Afterwards, the college students completed the questionnaire again. In addition, the 53 who served as pen pals were given additional open-ended questions about the project. When comparing each preservice teacher group, the researchers found that the pen pal group said that the project better helped prepare them to work with ELLs and that their attitudes improved toward ELLs. Participants noted that interacting with the ELLs gave them insight and a greater respect for diversity than they had before the project. After examining the results, the authors agreed with the previous study. Professors at the university level need to do more to prepare future teachers to work with the ELL population (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009).

In each study, general attitudes seem to be favorable toward ELL students. However, when probed, it becomes more apparent that many teachers feel unsure of how to help ELLs. This leads to the teachers being reluctant to teach them in the regular classroom. Whether through college preparation or quality, ongoing staff development, teachers can learn effective strategies to help in their lesson preparation for these

students. The next section highlights some evidence-based teaching practices to help teachers in their quest to meet the needs of these diverse learners.

### **Evidence Based Strategies**

In the last section, many studies revealed teachers' overall attitudes are positive toward ELLs. When asked specific questions about how these students acquire knowledge, teachers were unsure of how to respond. Their lack of experiences and interactions with ELLs can often be roadblocks to their teaching. Teachers' misconceptions can lead to low expectations and even hostility toward these students. Many teachers possess distinct beliefs about diversity and these beliefs affect their teaching practices (Karathanos, 2009). Once teachers confront their personal ideas and misconceptions, they are free to engage these students as a vital part of the classroom community. Many researchers have studied the best methods to use with these students. The following section discusses how teacher educators, school districts, principals, and teachers can effectively work with ELLs in the regular classroom.

To help teachers understand how lost and alone some ELLs feel, one teacher educator decided to show her students preparing to become teachers first-hand what it is like to sit in a classroom where the lesson is taught in an unknown language. In a meeting with these perspective teachers, she conducted a lesson in which she only spoke Chinese. She explained that the lesson was very basic and short but that it shocked the class and provided a springboard for discussion. After the lesson, she broke the class into groups and had them discuss what they understood, how they felt, and to brainstorm ideas that would have made it easier for them to understand (Washburn, 2008).



The findings of her experiment had important teaching implications. She stated that the most surprising finding was that the students felt alone and out of place. Even though they knew that no one else spoke Chinese, they still felt confused and frustrated. To know what to do, they either had to watch others, use previous experience, or guess. This is much like the ELLs in classrooms today. Teachers must be willing to try a variety of teaching techniques to help them. Having more empathy for them can mean being more patient, looking for extra materials for them, and extending wait time to assist them in learning (Washburn, 2008).

When teachers begin working with ELLs for the first time, a disorienting dilemma may occur (Mezirow, 2000). This dilemma can be something that makes teachers question what they know about teaching and learning. If working with students from different cultures or religions, it may also make teachers question their preconceived ideas about certain groups of people. In this journey, teachers have the opportunity to go through what Mezirow calls a transformation. In his Transformative Learning Theory, he says preconceived ideas must be confronted. By examining previous ideas about how these students learn and the cultures from which they come, having an opportunity to discuss ideas openly with colleagues, and changing actions to reflect new learning and insights are goals of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000).

Getting to know ELLs and their families is a great first step in this transformation. To help with this, schools should perform a detailed interview with the parents upon enrollment. Academic histories of the students are common but more details are needed. With the help of a translator, parents could give language background, how much support they expect to provide, and discuss their feelings and goals about the school year (Rance-

Roney, 2009). Giving parents time to voice their opinions, needs, concerns, and goals is important in building a link from school to home.

Over the last several years, experts in the field of second language acquisition have given many suggestions for working with ELLs. As teachers participate in professional development and learn more information to successfully reach these students, their attitudes can improve. Feeling inadequate, scared, or unprepared can give way to confidence and expertise with the right support. As their practice improves, they see increased learning among ELLs.

School district leadership can have a major influence over how teachers perceive ELLs. With the right support, Karabenick and Clemens-Noda (2004) asserted that teachers can implement strategies and ideas that will help ELLs excel. One effective strategy is to find ways to reach out to the ELL parents and community-based organizations. Working with agencies already involved with this population and offering help in meeting their needs can show these parents that they matter to the schools. Teaching them how to help their children and the kinds of involvement that the schools desire can help build strong partnerships between schools and home.

Another way for districts to support teachers is by providing quality staff development on working with ELLs. Such training could include important cultural awareness and information on second language theories as well as teaching strategies. O'Neal et al. (2008) recommended using the SIOP model by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2008) as quality, ongoing staff development. In this model, the authors contend that using a sheltered instruction approach is beneficial to the students. This model seeks to make content and concepts more comprehensible while at the same time, supporting the

students' language development. There are eight areas for teachers to use as guides when planning lessons for their students through the SIOP model. They are lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice application, lesson delivery, and assessment. Each area contains recommendations for teachers to use as they plan their lessons. Checklists and lesson plan templates are included in the book for teachers to use as well (Echevarria et al., 2008).

Finally, school districts must provide leadership about ELL students' assessments. With NCLB's accountability component, districts can help by focusing on reading. Better readers perform better on tests. Also, they should closely track ELL achievement and performance. Modifying the language on the tests could also be helpful as well as providing accommodations that are valid (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). In addition, district policies should be clear about the procedures to use to help identify ELLs who may be eligible for specific services (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004).

Teachers can benefit not only from district level support, but school level support as well. Principals who provide leadership in this area can free teachers to do their best in meeting ELLs' needs. Dahlman and Hoffman (2009) agree that a school review team approach is an effective way to show support to faculty and students. The atmosphere of the team must be comfortable and relaxed and all members must feel free to voice opinions and concerns. No one person should dominate the team and each individual should work and contribute on the tasks. Members of an effective team include the principal, an experienced ESL teacher, a general education teacher, and someone with expertise in this area, such as a higher education teacher, if available (Dahlman & Hoffman, 2009).

With proper district and school support, teachers can implement various strategies in their classrooms to help ELLs. Research shows that the more teachers know about effective practices, the better their attitudes toward these students (Karathanos, 2009). Once teachers understand these practices, they can implement them at the classroom level with their students.

To help students connect what they know from one language to another, teachers can support first language (L1) development while they work to acquire English. Although this issue can be political, using L1 makes it easier for the students to connect new concepts and makes it easier to learn English (Bauer, 2009). Most teachers are not going to be fluent in their ELL students' first languages. However, they can still provide an environment that supports additive literacy for their students. First, teachers can encourage students to speak their first languages as much as possible. Encouraging parents to maintain the L1 at home is good and helps the student continue to learn and make connections. Second, teachers can allow students to use their L1 on some academic tasks such as note taking and research. The L1 especially helps students in content-area knowledge (Karathanos, 2009). Third, teachers can promote L1 by treating the ELLs with respect. Helping the students understand that knowing two different languages is an asset to them can help them to appreciate the hard work they are doing now and help them to feel valued as contributing members of the class (Bauer, 2009). After two to three years of using L1, the average student can score twelve to fifteen points higher on standardized tests than the student not receiving L1 support (Nordby & Loertscher, 2009).

As for literacy instruction, Teale (2009) asserted that good instruction for non-ELLs in the early grades is very much the same for ELLs. Comprehension, phonological awareness, fluency, word recognition, vocabulary, and writing are important for all young students acquiring literacy skills. For ELLs, there was an added benefit if assessment informed classroom instruction. He also said that objectives must be clear and that instructional routines should be consistent. Active student involvement and many opportunities for authentic practice were also important (Teale, 2009).

Another effective strategy is using multi-media instruction to teach new concepts. Silverman and Hines (2009) conducted a research study in which teachers supplemented their science vocabulary lessons with video clips. They used pre-kindergarten through second grade classrooms with 85 students involved. Each grade had a non-multimedia group and a multimedia one. A pretest and a posttest were conducted on each child. After analysis, the researchers found that the ELLs in the multimedia group scores increased twenty-three points while the ELLs in the non-multimedia group scores increased eleven points. The researchers went on to say that the dual presentation of the lessons supported ELLs because they have more difficulty understanding only verbal explanations of words. In addition, the ELLs were able to learn many more words using the multimedia approach than just those taught in the lesson. While the multimedia instruction did not negatively affect the non-ELLs, the ELLs were able to increase their vocabulary knowledge so that they can have more of a chance to catch up with their peers (Silverman & Hines, 2009).

Washburn (2008), an ESL teacher educator, gave several teaching tips to aid students in comprehension. First, she affirmed that using multiple representations of key

items is necessary. An illustration, photo, and realia can all be used to help with descriptions. Using manipulatives and giving students hands-on experience can be effective as well. When teaching, she recommended pausing between phrases instead of speaking slowly. Giving the students enough wait time is also important. In addition, body language can be used to communicate with ELLs. When possible, it is helpful to give the students an advanced copy or outline of what will be covered in class. Overall, the researcher recommended showing the students great respect and making them feel an integral part of the classroom community (Washburn, 2008).

Peterson and Salas (2004) also gave advice on presenting new information to ELLs. They suggested lecturing as little as possible. Games, skits, songs, and partner conversations are more effective in their opinions. Using whole class instruction was also discouraged. They wrote that ELLs get lost in this type of instruction and teachers should use small groups as much as possible. Another suggestion was to use literature that featured the ELLs' cultural groups. This can show appreciation for the students' backgrounds and help them feel connected to classroom activities (Peterson & Salas, 2004; Lee et al., 2007). Another important part of lesson preparation is including language objectives in all content areas. ELLs need exposure to engaging content that is rich with vocabulary. Teachers can include objectives about vocabulary as well as about content in their presentations (Bauer, Manyak, & Cook, 2010).

Supporting teachers in L1 usage, literacy instruction, and lesson presentation can help them to teach ELLs more effectively. In addition, teachers must be equipped with information about testing accommodations for this special population. Often, ELLs receive no accommodations or do not have proper ones addressing their linguistic needs

(Willner, Rivera, & Acosta, 2009). Proper accommodations include changing the testing procedures, materials, or testing situations for these students. To guide schools in ensuring appropriate accommodations, five recommendations were given. First, students must be taught the content. Second, accommodations should support linguistic needs. ELLs need help with the language of the test to be more successful. A team approach should be used when making decisions about accommodations. General education teachers, ESL teachers, or others with knowledge about the students should be included. Also, the accommodations should meet the individual student's needs. All ELLs do not need the exact same ones. Last, students should have some practice with the accommodations before the test. For instance, a student's first use of a dictionary should not be on test day (Willner et al., 2009).

Considering these evidence-based strategies, teachers have many approaches available to help with educating this unique population. However, if teachers do not seek to understand the specific needs of ELLs, or if they believe that they should not have to accommodate their learning, these resources will not help. Teachers must examine their beliefs about these students. Once educators find that their preconceived ideas are incorrect, they are more likely to change their negative perceptions of these students. Furthermore, Olson and Jimenez-Silva (2008) contend that changing teachers' beliefs is a vital first step in improving instruction for ELLs. Because attitudes influence teachers' behavior and decision-making, it is important to study teacher attitudes.

## **Unexplored Issues**

In this review of literature, six studies are mentioned specifically. Participants from these studies include teachers from all grade levels in three of them, one that only included high school teachers, one that focused on elementary teachers, and one that involved preservice teachers. The research influenced professional development and sought information on different aspects of teaching ELLs. In addition, the elementary teachers gave information about their undergraduate college preparation or lack thereof, to teach ELLs. However, there are unexplored issues in the research concerning elementary teachers in their teaching of language specific subjects. One researcher focused on the ESOL faculty in one school district who teach reading to ELLs only. However, regular elementary teachers were not included in her study (Janzen, 2007). Since ELL study is inherently language-based inquiry, a logical course of action is to study the attitudes of elementary teachers who spend a large part of their day teaching language specific subjects. Confronting misconceptions in these K-5 teachers will benefit students and help to put younger ELLs on a firmer educational foundation. In addition, high-stakes testing makes school districts concentrate more on reading skills than ever before. Unfortunately, many ELLs are put into remedial reading classes that focus largely on decoding and less on the vocabulary development and comprehension that they need (Harper & de Jong, 2009). In light of this inadequate response by school leadership, elementary teachers must examine practices toward ELLs in their teaching of language specific subjects.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of elementary teachers, in their teaching of language specific subjects, toward English Language Learners in the K-



5 elementary classroom. In addition, the study also explores the approaches elementary teachers use to teach ELLs.

### **Summary**

This review of related literature began with information about the growth of ELLs in public schools. Because of the increase in the student population of ELLs in U.S. schools, teachers will encounter students with diverse language backgrounds in their careers. Next, a brief historical context was presented with an overview of laws concerning immigration and ELL education. After the historical context, research was reviewed on how teachers' attitudes affect the classroom environment and how they can affect individual student achievement. Next, several research studies were discussed from different areas of the country concerning teachers' attitudes toward ELLs. Afterwards, evidence-based strategies were considered at the district, school, and classroom levels. Last, the rationale and purpose for studying attitudes of elementary teachers in their teaching of language specific subjects was stated.

The research in this review of literature revealed that teachers had neutral to positive feelings toward ELLs in general. They stated that they believed the diversity that ELLs brought to their schools was positive and that they would welcome them into the school community. However, the studies revealed many misconceptions about teaching this population as well as reluctance to personally work with ELLs in their classrooms. Some reasons revealed for this were lack of preparation or training, lack of administrator support, and lack of time to meet their individual needs.

Several implications for teachers and administrators were revealed in this review of the literature. One was that teachers must realize the power their attitudes have in the classroom. They affect classroom climate as well as student behavior and performance (Goldenberg, 1971). Researchers also concluded that the number of ELLs would increase in the coming year, especially in areas not used to diversity (Walker et al., 2004). In each study, the authors recommended more staff development and training for teachers, particularly in the area of first language acquisition (Karabenick & Clemens-Noda, 2004; O'Neal et al., 2008). Teachers need information in learning how to use the students' first language in instruction and realize that the students are not expected to be fluent English speakers within two years (Reeves, 2006).

Another important implication involved institutes of higher learning. Schools of education nationwide are not producing graduates ready to teach in diverse classrooms (Walker et al., 2004; O'Neal et al., 2008). Even graduates in the last ten years report little coursework specifically designed for teaching ELLs. Universities have the opportunity to lead the way in how teachers respond to teaching students from diverse languages, cultures, and religions. The more teachers know, the better their attitudes toward these students (Karathanos, 2009). The next chapter will include information on the participants and the methodology for this study, addressing elementary teachers' attitudes in their teaching of language specific subjects.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

This research study will examine teacher experiences with teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in the regular classroom. More and more teachers are expected to teach ELLs because of the increase in ELL enrollment in U.S. schools over the last several years. Some teachers have very positive interactions with this population while others have more negative experiences. All of these experiences and perspectives help to form teachers' attitudes toward teaching these diverse learners. Furthermore, attitudes affect how teachers interact with students and what kinds of instruction they use. Therefore, it is important to hear their experiences and how they have contributed in forming teacher attitudes toward this population (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

This study seeks to answer the following questions: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom?

The researcher will seek to determine themes that may occur when asking teachers about their experiences. Examples of recurring themes may include: feelings of inadequacy to meet ELLs' needs, lack of teaching experience, belief that the students should be fluent in English before joining a regular classroom.

This chapter is divided into several sections. A rationale is given for using qualitative research with this particular study. Next, I discuss using a phenomenological approach to guide this qualitative study. As a qualitative researcher, I am an instrument

for gathering data and I discuss my role and background as a part of the study. Next, I discuss the research plan, including information about the participants and how data will be collected, recorded, and analyzed. The chapter ends with a summary and a look ahead to the next chapter of this research study.

### **Rationale for Using Qualitative Research**

In educational research, there are three approaches that researchers use to execute a study. They are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. Creswell (2009) stated that the differences in the three are based on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and the procedures used during the study.

Quantitative research is used to test already established theories. Relationships among variables are measured and reported using statistics in an objective report (Creswell, 2009). Researchers come to the study with preconceived ideas about what data should be collected and use numbers to generalize the results of a study to a certain population. Furthermore, the researcher is detached from the participants and the settings and is concerned only with observable behavior (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Mixed methods research involves some of these same concepts. However, it also incorporates qualitative characteristics. A mixed methods design may be used to broaden the scope of a research study. By using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, a researcher may build on the results from another study where just one method was used. In addition, a researcher must be familiar with both kinds of research and take time for broad data analysis including verbal as well as numeric data (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative research methods seek to understand social phenomena from the point of view of the people involved. The participants' perspectives are key in this type of design. Data is gathered in natural settings and the researcher is often personally involved with the participants. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are central to this research design. In addition, researchers usually use original instruments without relying on those developed by others (Creswell, 2009). Research findings may be generalized by looking for similar cases or experiences among participants. Researchers report information as their analysis of what they heard or observed in the field. Of course, once data is reported, qualitative researchers understand that their audience members may form their own opinions about the findings (Gal et al., 2007). Unlike quantitative research, where a theory is tested using variables, qualitative research may generate theories based on what was gathered in the field.

With my study, it is apparent that the qualitative research design is best suited for learning about teachers' experiences with ELLs in the classroom. As a qualitative researcher, I will seek to understand and interpret teachers' attitudes toward ELLs by listening to the experiences they have had in teaching them. I will gain access to these teachers and their perspectives by being the main research instrument (Glesne, 2006). The study will seek thick description regarding the teachers' experiences rather than trying to prove or test a theory (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Patton (2002) wrote that qualitative data should be descriptive by transporting the reader to the time and place the information was gathered. By allowing teachers of ELLs to tell their stories of working with this population and their families, I can provide the reader with a clear picture of the participants' experiences.

## **Phenomenological Approach**

A phenomenological approach will be used in this study. A participant's point of view is central to this approach (Flick, 2009). Experiences will be described and what these experiences mean to the participants will be examined. Often, these meanings are not in the consciousness of the person. Therefore, researchers must get to the ideas and beliefs that underlie the surface experiences (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Phenomenology is characterized by having a single focus of study. However, the researcher should be open to more factors surfacing as the study progresses. In addition, a small number of participants are usually involved in an in-depth and lengthy study. Using a phenomenological approach will also shape how questions are asked during interviews, what data are collected, and how patterns and themes from participants are analyzed and reported (Creswell, 2009).

There are several advantages to conducting a phenomenological study. First, the procedures for conducting a qualitative study as phenomenology are very clear. Researchers require less training than in other areas such as ethnography. Second, using interviews has far reaching benefits in that they can provide many different views of participants' experiences. Third, phenomenology can be used to study a variety of educational phenomena from students and teachers' experiences (Gall, et al., 2007).

Patton (2002) stated that phenomenology is used to study how people perceive, describe, judge, remember, and discuss with others a certain phenomenon. Therefore, I will seek to understand how teachers perceive, describe, judge, remember, and discuss teaching ELLs by listening to their experiences. Each teacher will have a personal story that is unique to him or her. However, I will seek the essence of teaching ELLs by

looking for common meanings from each participant. I will also look for reasons in what is stated, as well as implied, as to how these experiences have shaped their perspectives. I will listen closely to the teachers' stories and how they describe their work in the individual interviews. In addition, I will analyze body language and other expressions. I will seek all available information about their experiences and about how these experiences are expressed into their teaching practices (Patton, 2002).

## **Role of Researcher**

### **Background of Researcher**

I have been a professional educator for many years. In 1997, I earned my master's degree, with an emphasis in language arts, while teaching full time. In 2001, I also achieved National Board Certification and successfully renewed the certificate in 2010. My selection of this topic comes from both personal and professional experiences. First, I had the opportunity to spend an entire summer in a country working with college students who were learning to speak English. As a young, single teacher, I would seek opportunities like this to stretch me personally and to refresh me for the next school year. Even though I was their teacher, I learned a lot from those college students. Russian and Azeri were the languages spoken in the city and community where I lived and I was fluent in neither. Since English was not common in this remote part of the world, I got a taste of what it was like to be in the language minority that summer. Growing up as a Caucasian in the southern United States, I had never experienced being a part of the minority. Because of that very personal experience, I developed compassion for ELLs in my own school.

Several years ago, the school district in which I work began using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model to meet the needs of ELLs (Echevarria et al., 2008). With this approach, ELLs from each grade were placed together in one classroom. Soon after, my classroom became the ELL room for first grade. Though challenging, I have enjoyed working with these students and their families. I became known as the teacher who wanted all of the ELLs in her room! Over the last several years I have taught students from Egypt, India, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, and the Philippines. In addition, I am a district trainer for the SIOP model to help other teachers in their work with ELLs.

Even with this background in working with ELLs, it was not until a graduate class two years ago that it became apparent to me that a topic related to ELLs should be the focus of my dissertation study. I had known for a while that the subject of teaching ELLs was very close to my heart and through this class, I had several opportunities to present information related to ELL literacy. By the end of the semester, I realized how much I enjoyed discussing the needs of ELLs and that I wanted to learn all that I could in order to help make their academic journeys as rewarding as possible. The others in this class began calling me the “ELL expert!” Through this study, I seek to understand other teachers’ experiences in educating these students and in working with their families. I also want to know how their perceptions of these students affect the kinds of instruction they use with their ELLs.



## **Researcher Bias and Assumptions**

As the researcher in a qualitative study, my role is very different than in a quantitative study. First, I must be aware of my verbal and nonverbal behavior as I interact with the participants. Second, I must realize that I am a learner who will reflect on my entire data set. If I act as an expert, it may affect how my participants respond. Therefore, I must listen more than I speak during the interviews (Glesne, 2006).

As a teacher who enjoys working with ELLs, I must be careful not to reveal too much of my enthusiasm about having them as a part of my classroom community. My personal bias is that any teacher who does not want an ELL student does not want to take the time to learn how to add to her instruction to benefit these students. In fact, a defining moment for me took place a few years ago when a colleague looked at me and said, “If they don’t know how to speak English, they should go back where they came from. Why should I change my teaching?” I was appalled at her remark. Unfortunately, I have encountered other teachers who feel similarly. I have several assumptions about these educators that I will have to keep in check during my interviews with them. First, some teachers may feel that they do not have enough time to meet the needs of ELLs. The documentation that goes along with teaching these students can be overwhelming to many. Another reason teachers may not want to teach ELLs is that they feel they do not have the expertise to work with them effectively. Many teachers never had college courses that addressed diverse populations and they do not know how to work with them or their families. Another assumption I have is that some teachers simply believe that they should not have to alter their instruction. They think that they teach the material and that it is the student’s job to learn it. In addition, many teachers know little about second

language acquisition and believe that the student must be fluent in English before they ever enter a regular classroom. Even though I could argue with teachers who possess any of these points of view, I do not want my participants to neglect telling me their true feelings or to feel that I have negative views of them if they do not enjoy teaching ELLs. They only need to know that I have had ELL students in the past and that I want to hear their experiences, both positive and negative. I will explain later how I plan to keep these assumptions in check.

### **Research Plan**

Before beginning my study, I will seek approval from my dissertation committee on my proposal. Once approved, I will complete necessary paperwork for the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) so that I can work with human subjects. Federal regulations give the IRB power to oversee university research to ensure that human rights are not violated (Creswell, 2009). When I have IRB approval, I must give an overview of the study to the school board and superintendent of the schools where the study will take place.

The research will be conducted in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The school district serves students from 17 different language backgrounds besides English. Of the 7421 students, 219 are classified as ELL. Conducive to qualitative research, and phenomenology in particular, only teachers who have taught ELLs will be included. Participants will receive an information letter from me about the study. It will contain my contact information as well as an explanation of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions. The form will also

assure them that their information will remain confidential and that I will use pseudonyms in my writing (Creswell, 2009). Individual interviews will be conducted with those who agree to participate. I will also gather documents such as photocopies of lesson plans, documentation of student accommodations, and teaching resources. Photographs may also be used of teaching resources that are too large to photocopy. It will also be necessary to observe participants in their natural, classroom settings (Gall, et al., 2007). Once the information is collected, I will organize and analyze the data by looking for emerging themes among the data from participants.

### **Participants**

Creswell (2009) mentioned four areas to consider when discussing participants: the actors, setting, events, and the process. The actors will be language arts teachers from grades kindergarten through fifth in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The educators will range in experience from veteran teachers to those with little time in the classroom. The degrees earned will also vary among teachers as well as the amount of training they have had in teaching ELLs. All participants will be responsible for teaching language arts to ELLs in regular classrooms. The setting will be elementary language arts classrooms for observations. The interviews will also take place in the classrooms, or wherever the participants deem is most convenient for them. The events will be interviews and classroom observations. Creswell's (2009) last area, the process, will be the teachers involved in teaching their ELLs and their words and actions during the individual interviews.

I will take several steps to gain entry in working with these participants. As already mentioned, I will get approval from my dissertation committee, the IRB, and the superintendent of the school system to conduct the research. Once all of that is in place, I will choose participants through snowball sampling. This approach will allow me to ask professionals if they know anyone who teaches ELLs in the elementary language arts classroom. By asking many people, the “snowball” will get bigger as more and more names are mentioned. Additionally, teachers that are mentioned repeatedly may provide rich information for my topic (Patton, 2002). This type of purposefully selecting participants is used to help me best understand and focus on teachers with ELL teaching experience and differs from random sampling in quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). Participants will receive an introduction letter from my school email address about the study. By communicating the request in this way, participants will know that I am a classroom teacher as well and that their help will contribute to my research (Gall, et al., 2007). I will give the participants a letter of introduction about the research as well as a copy of the information form already mentioned.

### **Data Collection**

In qualitative research, several typical forms of data are used. They are observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). In this research project, I will use all four of these for data collection.

**Observations.** The first one, observations, will be carried out in participants’ classrooms. I will be a researcher-observer in these settings without participating. To record my observations, I will use a two-column observation protocol. One side will

contain direct observations while the other side will contain my own thoughts about what I observe. I will also note the time, date, and setting of the observations (Creswell, 2009).

As the research instrument, I will be looking for several things as I observe in these classrooms. At first glance, I can see if the teacher has lesson and language objectives posted for the class to see. I will also look for a variety of visuals posted around the room with print as well as pictures. I can observe if the teacher uses manipulatives and realia in her lessons and for the students to use while they are working. I will note how the teacher makes connections with students' backgrounds as she introduces new topics. As the teacher leads the class, I can watch to see if she uses clear speech and makes eye contact with the ELL students to make sure they understand. She may also speak in a slow manner while she models what she expects from her students. In addition, I can examine how she groups students for working with each other. She may pair a native speaker with an ELL for certain types of activities. She may also allow ELLs to work together, one who is fluent in English with another ELL who is not as fluent (Echevarria et al., 2008). Through all of these, I can get a sense of how supportive the teacher and students are of the ELLs in the class.

There are multiple advantages with this type of data collection. I will be able to see first-hand how the teachers interact with students in their classrooms. I will also be able to take note of information while it is occurring. Additionally, I may see unexpected things and observe details that are too uncomfortable for the teachers to discuss in interviews. Of course, there are limitations as well. The teachers and students may see

me as an intruder (Creswell, 2009). As a veteran teacher, I know that any other person in a classroom can alter the way students interact with each other and with the teacher.

**Interviews.** I will also conduct individual interviews during this research project. These interviews will take place face-to-face in teachers' classrooms or other sites that are convenient for the participants. Creswell (2009) stated that two advantages of interviewing are giving the researcher control over the line of questioning as well as giving the participants the opportunity to provide additional details and information after the observations. Interviews also allow the researcher to know participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Disadvantages of using interviews include participants not revealing true feelings because of trying to please the researcher and participants not being able to fully articulate their perspectives (Creswell, 2009).

Patton (2002) discussed three basic types of open-ended, qualitative interviews. The first one is the informal conversational interview. This one allows for researcher flexibility and may need many conversations before the researcher gets needed information. The second one is the general interview guide approach. This one allows the researcher to prepare a list of questions to discuss during the interview. However, the interviewer is free to ask probing questions to clarify the discussion. Using a guide can also help the interviewer stay on the topic and cover the same questions with each participant. Lastly, standardized open-ended interviews may be conducted. With this approach, the exact interview protocol is written in advance of the interviews. Each participant gets the same questions in the same order. In this way, dissertation

committees, the IRB, and gatekeepers can be assured of what will and will not be discussed during the interviews.

In my research, I will use the interview guide approach. By using this approach, I will have a guide of four or five questions to ask but will also be allowed to explore different aspects of teaching ELLs as participants tell their stories. I will use an interview protocol that includes information on the date, setting, and participant. I will allow space between questions to write participant's answers as well as my observations during the interviews (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I will audiotape each interview and prepare transcripts of each one. Participants will be assured that no one else will have access to the recordings. I will keep them locked in a filing cabinet during the research and afterwards, the tapes will be erased.

**Documents.** Along with observations and interviews, I will collect documents from each participant. Advantages of document collection include having written records in participants' own words and having access at any time to analyze them (Creswell, 2009). As the researcher, I will collect participants' lesson plans for their ELL students. I will also gather documentation on teaching accommodations used with ELLs. As a qualitative researcher, I will also be aware that some other documents may be useful and available to me once I am in the field.

**Audio-visual materials.** I will also use any supportive audio-visual materials from participants' classrooms. Large visuals and teaching resources will be photographed to provide more information of each participant's teaching context. Advantages of using audio-visual materials include providing a creative outlet to show teachers' resources and can be an unobtrusive way to get information (Creswell, 2009).

## **Ethical Considerations**

Issues of ethics will be considered throughout the entire research study.

Beginning with the research questions, I will constantly evaluate myself to make sure that no harm comes to any individuals or groups. Creswell (2009) wrote that the researcher should be aware of ethics in data collection, in data analysis, and in writing about the research. In each area, steps will be taken to ensure there are no ethics violations.

Many of these safeguards are cited in the research plan. As mentioned, the IRB will review the study to ensure that there are no ethics violations in the research proposal. The school district in which the study will take place will also review the plan and give permission for its implementation.

I will also follow several steps to make sure that accurate data is collected and that no participants experience adverse effects from the study. First, potential participants will receive a letter explaining the purpose of the study. If they desire to be interviewed, they will receive an information form about the research before beginning. Second, I will explain to the teacher participants that their honest answers are crucial and that no harm will come to them, personally or professionally, for their responses. They will also understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, they will have a chance to read the analysis to check for accuracy. Third, data will be stored in a locked cabinet and only accessed by me (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

After all of these safeguards in are place, I will also be aware of ethical reporting of the study. I will not use words that are biased against any racial or ethnic group. In fact, the term “English Language Learner” is preferred over Limited English Proficient (LEP) because it emphasizes the positive aspects of language learning while LEP focuses



on the deficits of language (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). I will also accurately report the findings. There will be no suppressing information or fabricating findings to meet my needs. In addition, I will include the entire research plan when presenting the findings so that readers can judge the trustworthiness for themselves (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the entire process, I will consult my dissertation committee if any unexpected ethical issues arise (Patton, 2002).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity have different meanings in qualitative research than in quantitative research. In quantitative studies, the two deal with instruments used in the research. Reliability concerns an instrument's ability to produce stable information when used more than once. Validity concerns an instrument's usefulness in drawing meaningful conclusions during a study. In qualitative studies, reliability specifies that the researcher is consistent in all aspects of the study. Validity is important in qualitative research because it is based on accurate findings from the points of view of the researcher, participants, and readers of the research accounts (Creswell, 2009).

**Reliability.** Qualitative researchers need to use caution in their work to ensure reliability. One way to accomplish this is to make sure that the transcripts of interviews have no mistakes. The researcher should read over them carefully to compare them with the audiotapes. Another way to make certain of reliability is to carefully watch how the information is coded during analysis. As the researcher works with these codes and their meanings repeatedly, it is vital to make sure that code meanings do not change. I will use

a colleague to check my code definitions to guarantee intercoder agreement. In this way, I will have another person look at my analysis to see if she agrees with the codes that I used (Creswell, 2009).

**Validity.** In qualitative research, a study has validity when the findings are accurate to the participants, the researcher, and to the intended audience. The literature on validity suggests several approaches that can strengthen validity in a research project. These strategies include triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, thinking through researcher bias, and presenting discrepant information (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al. 2007; Patton, 2002).

*Triangulation.* Triangulation adds credibility to a study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, in this study, a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis will be used. I will listen attentively and observe the participants' body language during the interviews. In addition, I will examine the kinds of teaching resources they use in the classroom and take photos of these visuals if needed. I will also use documents such as lesson plans and documentation of student accommodations in the classroom to help paint the complete picture. By using all of these, I will be able to look for consistencies and discrepancies in the data (Patton, 2002). Also, using different sources to build themes will cause the study to have greater validity (Creswell, 2009).

*Member checking.* This will be used to allow participants to read the final report based on their interviews. Teachers will be asked to comment on the accuracy of the descriptions and themes and have a chance to add any other insights or comments about

the report. Follow-up interviews or email correspondence will be necessary to allow participants the opportunity for member checking (Creswell, 2002; Gall et al., 2007).

*Peer debriefing.* Having a colleague read and discuss the analysis will help to point out any researcher bias that exists and add validity to study (Creswell, 2009). I will use a colleague with no stake in the research project in this role. She is familiar with my passion for ELL research and I trust her to keep me in check as I record my work with participants. She is qualified to fill this role because she is a veteran educator who has worked with ELLs, special education, and regular education students. She also holds a doctorate in education and is familiar with the dissertation research process. In addition, she has read several important reports for me in the past and I know that she will ask tough questions to keep me focused on accurate analysis.

*Researcher bias and audit trail.* To minimize researcher bias in the report, an audit trail can be used in my fieldwork to examine my own thinking and analysis. Several different pieces can fit into this chain of evidence such as reflective notes, data, and code definitions. All of these parts should be kept for many years so that others can inspect them if needed (Gall et al., 2007). Patton (2002) also stated that an audit trail could help verify fieldwork rigor and minimize researcher bias. In her book, Glesne (2006) included four questions to guide a qualitative researcher in reflective analysis. The first two ask what the researcher notices and why. The third question asked how to interpret what is noticed. Finally, the fourth one asked the researcher to explain how that interpretation is the right one. These questions will guide me as I take notes during fieldwork about my own thinking and as I bracket my assumptions as they relate to these teachers. I must take what I know about teaching ELLs out of the picture to really hear

and understand others' experiences. By listening to them and by looking for commonalities among them about the essence of teaching ELLs, I can reduce my own bias (Patton, 2002).

*Discrepant information.* As I examine the data, I expect to encounter some information that is contrary to the established themes. I will not hide this information but will discuss how it contradicts other findings. With multiple participants and different perspectives, the report will be more realistic and valid with opposing views (Creswell, 2009). In addition, detailing situations that affect data collection, such as people who were unavailable to me or site abnormalities, will lend a sense of credibility to my study as well (Glesne, 2006).

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the means for converting the data into research findings. Qualitative differs from quantitative research in that often, qualitative data analysis is occurring alongside data collection (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). One text says that outlining the intellectual steps in qualitative analysis, and phenomenology in particular, is very difficult (Patton, 2002). Although different qualitative studies vary in how analysis is accomplished, I will follow several general guidelines in my study.

The first one is to gather and organize the data (Creswell, 2009). I will have the interviews transcribed by a professional and I will also arrange the other data into groups. Each group will be labeled as lesson plans, accommodations, photos, or field notes. I will also include other information that becomes available during the research process.

Another guideline includes reading the data several times (Creswell, 2009). The first time I read all of the documents, the purpose will be for my general information and to refresh my memory on the information. I will also make margin notes as thoughts occur to me during this initial reading. Coding will take place with subsequent readings. Creswell (2009) recommended picking the most interesting document or the shortest to begin. As I read, I will list and color-code the topics from the data on separate notes. Once I study all of the documents, I will label the texts with the topics and find descriptive words to use for themes (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006). I will not only look for themes from each participant but I will also synthesize findings across participants (Gall, et al., 2007). After this is accomplished, I will place materials from each theme together and reread. I will further evaluate the information by looking for things that I expected, those that were surprising or unusual, and data that addressed the larger perspective of teaching ELLs (Creswell, 2009).

After I read and code the data, the next step is to write about my findings. I will describe the themes in a written narrative using thick, rich description. In this way, readers should see the setting and information as if they were there (Gall, et al., 2007). Using quotations from participants and discussing their experiences from their points of view will help to accomplish this (Creswell, 2009). In addition, a new view of teaching ELLs can emerge from the study by reporting data in a personal and creative way (Patton, 2002).

As I write and interpret the findings, I will look at the data in three ways. First, I will write about any lessons gleaned from the study (Creswell, 2009). If I approach data collection with what Patton (2002) calls *epoche*, I will not let my preconceived ideas or

judgment stand in the way of hearing the participants' views. Therefore, even though I have my own experiences with teaching ELLs, I will still search for lessons from other teachers. Another way I will look at the data is to compare my findings with the literature on teachers' perspectives in working with ELLs. Although most of the literature contains surveys of teachers reported quantitatively, I can still compare the findings with my participants' views. In addition, I will examine the data for new questions that emerge concerning teaching ELLs (Creswell, 2002).

### **Summary**

This section explained the design of this qualitative research study. A review of the research questions that will guide this study were given as well as a rationale for using qualitative research. Phenomenology, a particular kind of qualitative research, was also discussed and why it is the proper approach with this topic. Afterwards, the background and role of the researcher was given. Next, the research plan for this study was specified. Under the research plan, the participants' information was written along with how data will be collected in multiple ways. Continuing the discussion on the research plan, ethical considerations and reliability and validity issues were discussed as well. The last part of the chapter contained the data analysis plan for this study. The next section will include information from the elementary teachers' interviews about their experiences in teaching reading and other language specific subjects to ELLs. Observations made about teaching resources and information from other documents will be included as well.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Chapter four will include several vital aspects of this research project. First, I will review the research questions for the study. Next, I will present information on each participant involved, including the number of ELLs they currently teach. Afterwards, I will present several themes that emerged during the data collection and analysis.

With the number of ELLs steadily increasing, teachers are given the opportunity to learn and grow in their profession as they encounter more and more diverse classrooms (NCES, 2010). The questions guiding the research are: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom? Classroom observations and teacher interviews were used to help answer these questions. Other data such as lesson plans, ELL evaluations, teacher resources, and photos were also included.

#### **Participants**

The participants were all language arts teachers in Kindergarten through fifth grades. The kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers all taught in schools housing only kindergarten through second grade. The third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers taught in schools housing third-fifth grades. The teachers' ages ranged from the early twenties to almost 70, with an average age of 45 years. Their teaching experience varied as well. One teacher had taught less than one year while another one had taught almost 40 years. The average years of teaching experience was 19 years. Three of the participants earned

Master of Education degrees while five had earned Bachelor degrees. As for the number of ELLs, the numbers ranged from two in a couple of the classes to eight in one classroom. All had some form of the school district’s ELL training except for one teacher. Three had no foreign travel experience while five had some kind of travel experience that influenced their teaching situations. One teacher spoke and read Spanish fluently. Another participant told of her ability to read Latin. Two other participants also said that they could somewhat read Spanish, but not fluently. The other four participants were monolingual English speakers. The demographic information is summarized in the table below.

Participants

Participants	Years of Experience	Grade Level	Speaks Second Language	Number of ELLs
Ms. Deliberate	40	Kindergarten	No	4
Ms. Easygoing	17	Fourth	No	4
Mr. Enthusiastic	2	Third	No	3
Ms. Languages	13	Third	Yes	3
Ms. Novice	Less than 1	Second	No	3
Ms. Nurturer	32	Kindergarten	No	2
Ms. Tender	23	First	No	2
Ms. Veteran	27	Fifth	No	8

The next section will provide narratives about each participant included in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant according to some overarching trait I noticed while gathering data.

**Ms. Deliberate**

Ms. Deliberate had the most teaching experience of any of the participants. Although she would not reveal her exact age, she is between 65-70 years old. She has



been teaching for about 40 years with experience in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. She earned a Master of Education degree as well as a recent Bachelor of Art degree in art. This year, she taught kindergarten with four ELLs. Her only formal training to work with these students was provided by the school district and based on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarria et al., 2008).

Ms. Deliberate has traveled extensively outside the United States. When asked if she had ever had a problem communicating with someone, she said:

... I have been to Japan around four times and there is definitely a problem. I just use a lot of sign language. That seems to help me when I'm trying to communicate with the Asian people. I've also done the same thing with the Hispanic or Arabic or whatever...hand motions, draw pictures, that kind of thing.

As we talked further about her travel experiences, I asked her how her time in different cultures had influenced her teaching of ELLs. She responded that it had affected her greatly. She understood what it was like to be surrounded by others who did not speak her language. She went on to say that it also made her aware that she has to find other means in helping them to communicate with her.

Ms. Deliberate got her name because of her manner of working with children on concepts that are around them. She uses every opportunity to teach them vocabulary and language patterns. She indicated this idea in her interview.

I just think you need to go beyond because they are not even aware of the meaning of words. You've got to show them, find things...I use a lot of magazines. I show them things...their surroundings. We talk about the latch or

the air conditioner vent or whatever, the windowpanes. There are squares in the windows. There is a circle on the door. Just be familiar with their surroundings.

Ms. Deliberate appreciated and accepted the differences that ELLs bring to her classroom. As a fluent reader of Latin, she understood the differences in languages her students bring to her classroom. She said, “I love working with them! They are such a pleasure. They give me great pleasure! That's how much I love them.”

### **Ms. Easygoing**

Ms. Easygoing completed her seventeenth year in the classroom this past spring. She is around 39 years old and holds a Bachelor's degree in education. She taught fourth grade this past year and has experience in third grade as well. She had four ELLs with various language abilities. Like Ms. Deliberate, she attended the school district's training for SIOP (Echevarria et al., 2008) in the past. This was her only formal training to work with this population.

During the interview, I asked her to tell me about any travel experiences that affected her teaching of ELLs. She said that several years ago, she experienced being in the language minority when she chaperoned a group of high school seniors on a Mexican cruise for their senior trip. They went to Cozumel and Grand Cayman during their time and only had one instance of miscommunication. After an excursion from the ship, they wanted to take a taxi back to the dock but the taxi driver only spoke Spanish. She said, “We tried to talk really loud and use hand motions...we had lots of trouble.” Eventually, someone off the street had to come and translate for them so that they could get back to the ship on time. Upon further reflection, she stated that it was very frustrating not being

able to communicate with him. When probed about any influences that situation had on her teaching, she said that she tries to put herself in her students' positions and to see from their perspectives. She said that she would get frustrated too if she went to Tijuana, one of her student's former home, and had to take a standardized test. She reminds herself a lot of how she would feel and that helps her relate to her students.

Ms. Easygoing conducted her class with a calm and easy manner. Her friendly interactions and laughter with her students as they came in from recess showed that she enjoyed her job. She truly did not care that I was there observing her class and her students seemed to ignore me too. She allowed her students to work in cooperative groups on a reading activity. It did not matter to Ms. Easygoing if a group was working on the floor, at desks, or on the floor in the hallway. She did not mind the buzz of conversation happening around the room as she moved among the students checking their progress. When it was time to end the reading work and move to the next activity, she calmly told the students what to bring with them and left the room without an explanation for me. Of course, I followed the class as they moved with the other fourth graders to their game show type review for the statewide assessment. While other participants wanted to make sure I understood what happened in their classes, Ms. Easygoing just let me observe and draw my own conclusions.

### **Mr. Enthusiastic**

Mr. Enthusiastic had the distinction of being the only male participant in this study. Since the study focused on teachers in the K-5 setting, male teachers are rare in the lower grades in this school district. He also had an all male, third grade class.

Among those students, three were ELLs with varied English fluency. Mr. Enthusiastic completed his second year and holds a Bachelor's degree in education. He is also a talented visual artist, which was apparent in his classroom. He created a football field on one side of his classroom with each student's name on a football. This acted as his behavior board for the class. Mr. Enthusiastic had also painted a picture of one of Michelangelo's works on the ceiling of his classroom. In addition, he had created an awning for a literacy café display on another wall. As for ELL training, he had less than the first two participants because he only attended half of the SIOP (Echevarria et al., 2008) training provided by the school district.

Mr. Enthusiastic, who is in his late twenties, said he had no travel experience that influenced his teaching. However, he did tell about another experience that affected him.

...the only time I've ever really been around people that did not speak English besides this was once in my ninth grade year. I was paired with a boy from Mexico named Juan. The teacher paired me with him...she said because of our personalities, she thought we would get along. I was able to speak with him even though we couldn't talk we would just point things out and show and we became good friends.

I asked him if this experience had affected him and his work with the ELLs in his classroom. He responded that because of that experience, he understood a little better about how his students come to him from such different places. He went on to say that as a student, his friend Juan would not do anything without him. Juan was really dependent on him in school. Because of that, he tried to make sure that all of students were friends

with each other and that no one was dependent on another. He did not want his less fluent ELL to feel lost when another native Spanish speaker was absent.

Mr. Enthusiastic was everything his name indicated each time I saw him. His students were also affected by his enthusiasm. Upon arrival in his classroom, I noted that when I knocked on the door of this classroom, it was opened wide by a couple of third graders who greeted me warmly. Their teacher was right behind them to shake my hand and welcome me into his third grade class. The students, all boys, were getting ready to play a game to review some literacy concepts. I waded through the boys and took my seat by the windows.

A deep sense of community and respect, for all learners, was very apparent in my observation. Mr. Enthusiastic also told me a story during the interview that reiterated this. He began by telling me how the entire class supported one of his ELLs, Adam, who spoke no English at all at the beginning of the year.

He spelled the word 'August' right. He was really slow. When he got to the 'g' he did his hands and was like, "G.G.G." He was doing it with his hands. He did u...s...t. When he said 't' the whole class erupted. It was like he had won the Superbowl!

As he relayed this story, I told him that I had observed the students encouraging this same student and how it seemed that they cheered a little more loudly for him when he answered a question correctly. He agreed that his class really wanted to see Adam succeed and they all helped him whenever possible.

Another example of his enthusiasm occurred the first time he heard Adam say something in English. He said, "...he stopped and said, 'See you later Mr. Enthusiastic!'

I started clapping and running and hugging him and said, ‘There we go! Now we are getting somewhere!’ He was actually talking to me!”

### **Ms. Languages**

Like Mr. Enthusiastic, Ms. Languages also taught third grade. She had thirteen years of teaching experience, mostly in the third and fifth grades. Ms. Languages also taught for a few years in a private school and is in her mid-thirties. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in education and had also attended the district’s SIOP training (Echevarria et al., 2008). Unlike most of the other participants, she also completed a workshop to be a school district trainer, helping other teachers implement the SIOP model in their classrooms. Of course, she got her name because she is the only participant that speaks a language besides English.

Of all of the participants, Ms. Language had the most extensive travel experiences. Because of time spent in other cultures, she appeared to be the most adaptable and flexible in working with ELLs. During the interview, she told me about some of those experiences.

I have a lot of personal, life experience that some people do not have. I am married to a Mexican and I do speak some Spanish. My personal life and traveling to Mexico and Argentina and Brazil...places I've been contribute to the things I do in my classroom. I can bring things and show things and cook things for my classroom. Stories-it allows things to become a little more rich. That probably has really been my biggest asset.

Even though she speaks Spanish, she has struggled with communication during her travels. While in Brazil, she had trouble because she did not speak Portuguese. In addition, she traveled to Argentina before she could speak Spanish very well. Her two weeks there allowed her to see how difficult it can be for her ELLs.

Ms. Languages was very passionate about teaching her ELLs. She believed in adding activities to her classroom to make the lessons come alive for her students. She shared activities that included movement and art to really motivate and engage her ELLs. However, she was the first to admit that she was not always perfect in her efforts.

I've had some success. I've had some failures. My heart has always been in the right place. I think I try harder. I think it makes it easier for me to adapt than for somebody else. I have that background. The resources are a little bit more available to me.

### **Ms. Novice**

Ms. Novice graduated from a nearby university one year ago. She is in her early twenties and earned a Bachelor's degree in education. Ms. Novice was substituting for a second grade teacher on maternity leave this past spring. She had three ELLs in her class of 18. Of the three, one boy struggled a great deal with the English language. Unlike every other participant, Ms. Novice had no formal training to work with ELLs. Even in her college training, which was a short time ago, she indicated that ELLs were only mentioned a little in one class. In her interview, she stated, "In the SPED class that we have to take there, we kind of went over accommodations for special education students... ELLs were mentioned in maybe one or two chapters of the book and

sheltered instruction was gone over briefly.” Her first encounter with an ELL student was in her student teaching. She said had it not been for that time, she would not have known anything about helping her current students.

Ms. Novice has also traveled to Mexico in the past. When asked about experiences where she had trouble communicating, she said, “I did travel to Mexico about five years ago. As far as communicating directions or locations, buying things, as far as that goes, the only place I've ever been is to Mexico.” She also used this experience to help her understand her ELLs. Ms. Novice said that she felt singled out because she did not understand the way others around her understood. She remembered feeling very different and tried to make sure her ELLs did not experience that same feeling. She said, “That's why I try to think about something that I would understand or how I would perceive things if I were them in order to make them...either relate to something prior or just to get inside their heads to help them understand better.”

### **Ms. Nurturer**

Ms. Nurturer was the only teacher I never got to observe in her classroom. We tried several times to schedule a visit but something always came up that prevented it. I did get to interview her about her experiences though and I found out that she taught for 32 years. She is in her mid-fifties and has public and private school experience. When teaching in the private sector, she was also her church's preschool director. She holds a Bachelor's degree and indicated that all of her teaching years have been in kindergarten except for one year when she taught fifth grade math. This past year, she taught two ELLs in a class of 13. One had been adopted from China and had English-speaking



parents. The other child had an Arabic background and spoke no English when he walked through the door of her classroom at the beginning of the school year. As a teacher in the same school district, she had also attended the SIOP training (Echevarria et al., 2008). Like Ms. Languages, Ms. Nurturer attended the workshop to be a district trainer for ELL teachers as well.

Ms. Nurturer said that she had no travel experience where she had trouble communicating with people. She did relate that some of her family members had traveled. "My family has all been on trips, mission trips to Ecuador and Panama and Romania and they've just...done that. I've heard from them. Personally, this is probably been the biggest eye-opener for me..." I went on to ask her about any other experiences that affected her teaching. She said, "Our church has a Spanish service, they use our church. We have Spanish-speaking people in our church. Probably just in school would be my main experience with that."

Ms. Nurturer earned her name because of the way she talked about her students. Her face was a constant smile while she relayed stories about this past year during our interview. Being one of the older participants, she seemed like she was used to taking care of the academic, as well as the emotional and social needs of small children.

I can just tell you that with both the children, the first thing that Shay learned to say was "I love you." I think that before anything else, that if you can win them over and get their trust and meet their needs that way, the rest will come. They need to trust you and they need to know that you are there for them and with Shay, on the first day, he had never been away from his mom or his dad. His little mom was crying and his dad was crying and we were all crying! She did not

... speak English and there she was ... I told the daddy to make sure to tell her that I would take good care of her baby. So he did and I won her over that way and she knew that I would take care of her baby.

In addition, she could not wait to show me her students' progress on their assessments throughout the year. She gave me copies of several of these because of her pride in their achievement. I did not get to see her interacting with her children because the classroom observation had to be canceled several times. However, her use of the term 'little mom' in the previous section seems to be negative and that she may have a patronizing view of this mother. I found no sense of condescension as she relayed her experiences about her students or their families. Ms. Nurturer's age and experience could make her view this young mother as needing as much care as the students in her classroom.

### **Ms. Tender**

Ms. Tender taught first grade this past year and has experience in kindergarten and second grade. She was also her school's early literacy teacher for 16 years. In this role, she worked with individuals and small groups of children on their reading and language skills. This past year was her first year back in a regular classroom since before her early literacy years. Ms. Tender, who is in her forties, just completed her twenty-third year as a teacher. She earned a Master of Education degree with a reading endorsement. Ms. Tender taught two ELL children this past year. She indicated that both were high functioning first graders, with one testing into the gifted program for next school year.

Ms. Tender said that she had no travel experiences that influenced her teaching. However, she did tell me about a program from her early teaching years. During this time, the high school Spanish teacher worked with lower elementary teachers and utilized high school students in the classrooms as well.

...when I taught in the classroom before, I was one of the teachers who took part in the Spanish training. We did those little fun tapes and had training with a Spanish teacher every week. She came to my classroom and her students did a lot of activities with my kindergarten students. I think hearing her experiences as someone who was an English Language Learner and working with her for several years probably did help me as far as teaching in that kindergarten year and first grade years and even in early literacy. That background was good.

Ms. Tender enjoyed that program and also developed empathy for her own students with language difficulties. Her care and concern were very apparent when I visited her classroom. I noted in my observation narrative that the atmosphere in the room was supportive. The children knew what was expected of them during the whole group lesson as well as the small group work center time. Because the teacher talked in a low voice, the children did the same in their interactions with each other. As she monitored the class, she was affirming the children in their work and giving the children pats on the back when needed.

Also during my observation, I sat close to the ELLs who were working on individual reading activities. Ms. Tender was monitoring the entire class as she walked around the room. Her interactions with individual students also conveyed her love and care. Once, when Aaron, an ELL student got off task, she approached him. Ms. Tender

walked over and said, “Sweetie, remember to read quietly into your reading phone!” Ms. Tender walked around and monitored each group as they worked and helped with a computer crisis in one corner of the room. After several minutes, Aaron rolled over onto his back and decided that he was finished. As Ms. Tender passed by him again, she knelt beside him and reminded him of other books that he could spend his time reading. She did not tower over him to assert her authority and her tone conveyed concern that he used his time wisely.

### **Ms. Veteran**

Ms. Veteran taught fifth grade with 27 years of teaching experience. She holds a Master of Education degree and has taught all grade levels in the elementary schools from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. She indicated that her favorite grades were fifth and sixth. Among all of the participants, she taught the highest number of ELLs last year with eight in her classroom of 23. Like the other participants, she attended the SIOP (Echevarria et al., 2008) training to help her with teaching strategies for ELLs.

Ms. Veteran also had many travel experiences that influenced her teaching over the years. During the interview, she described trips to Europe and the French speaking parts of Canada.

I've really been blessed to travel some in Europe and some in Canada and I was totally lost with the French language. I found that Italian was a little easier because I had had Spanish in high school. Yeah. In San Francisco too. It is such a cosmopolitan city and I had experiences there where I didn't know what they were saying.

She went on to say that those times made her more sensitive to ELLs' needs. She said, "It makes you more aware of how difficult it is to have that language barrier."

Ms. Veteran also conducted her class in a manner that showed a respect for all learners and with a routine so that the students knew what to expect. She had taught routines and procedures to her students and her lesson plans indicated activities that visual, auditory, and tactile learners could enjoy. In addition, she had established a community where her students felt safe to take risks. At first, she recognized the ELLs reluctance to engage in class. Before long, there was a definite change. In the interview she told the following:

They were a little reticent at the beginning to express themselves in a group or with other kids. Actually before Christmas, they had gotten very comfortable as a learning community and were very polite and well behaved and well mannered as they went through that process. They became prone to question anything they didn't understand and very prone to dig for answers to things they didn't know. They were just more verbal and more open with that as time went on and I felt like that was a real accomplishment.

On the day I observed her class, Ms. Veteran was working with a small group of students at her table. The others were working in small groups around the room. I paid special attention to the groups with the ELLs and sat close by to record some of their interactions. I enjoyed how a group of three boys, two who were ELLs, conveyed their mutual respect for one another. As I approached the group, I overheard, "Do you understand why you missed it?" This group was intently looking at their answers and comparing them with each other as well as the correct choices. One student, Joe, was

very encouraging. He looked at another student, Tom, and said, “No offense but you have missed a lot of fact/opinion questions.” I was impressed with his analysis of his friend’s mistakes! As they continued to work, they came across a question about paraphrasing. Jo said, “I missed that one because I did not know what the word ‘paraphrase’ meant. Then, Ms. Veteran taught us and I understand better now.” Both boys agreed with him. Tom missed quite a few questions and was getting overwhelmed. The other two boys immediately came to his rescue with support. Jo said, “He has been improving in his work.” I loved their interaction! Furthermore, my presence did not affect them at all. They did exactly what they were supposed to do by thinking through why they missed questions and discussing their work as a group. In addition, they were also taking care of each other’s feelings while working. It was obvious that the boys had mutual respect for each other.

Ms. Veteran did have the most ELLs in her class of all the other participants. With eight most of the year, I wondered if she felt overwhelmed or if she would be happy to tackle the challenge once again. Without a doubt, she responded that she would do it all again.

Oh yes, I would love it! I love working with them! They were the bright spot in my day. Just very sweet. I forgot...on my birthday, three of the Hispanic children came in the next morning with little presents. They had taken things from home and wrapped them up. They wrote me notes, super sweet, very sensitive.

## **Summary**

I was surprised that overall, each of my participants seemed to enjoy working with ELLs. I will speculate why I believe that happened in Chapter 5. They each had unique stories to share and seemed especially proud to talk about the personal interactions they shared with their diverse students. Each one had a sense of pride as they discussed how much their ELLs learned and had grown throughout the year. Of course, they also had challenges along with those accomplishments. In the next section, several themes that emerged throughout the data collection process will be discussed. In addition, how these themes applied to each participant as well as across all of the participants will be examined.

## **Themes**

In qualitative research, classifying and organizing the data that has been collected during fieldwork provides a structure for reporting the findings. Once this descriptive part of analysis has taken place, interpretation can begin. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not use statistical tests to determine significance of the findings. Qualitative research relies on the skill of the researcher. During this work, the researcher must consider the responses of the participants and how the intended audience will react as well (Patton, 2002). As the data is sorted and defined, the researcher puts similar pieces of information together. Working with the data again and again leads to the merging of codes into themes and subthemes (Glesne, 2006). This part of the chapter focuses on describing those patterns and themes that emerged during data collection. It

also sets the stage for interpretations and conclusions in the next chapter of this research report.

To begin the coding process, I read the data numerous times. The data consisted of observation narratives, field notes, interview transcripts, lesson plans, teaching resources, and photographs. Before assigning codes, I grouped like pieces of data together. First, I read over all of the observation narratives and looked for common themes. Next, I put all of the participant interviews together and read them, also looking for patterns. After this was complete, I went through the same process with the photos, teaching resources, and lesson plans. Upon completion, several themes emerged that addressed the research questions.

Overall, five themes surfaced after analyzing the data. The first four answered the first research question: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? These were Parent Involvement and Communication, Support for Teachers, ELL Students' Characteristics, and Teaching Challenges. One theme, Instructional Strategies, addressed the second research question: What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom? Instructional Strategies was also divided into two subthemes: Classroom Management and Lessons and Activities.

### **Parent Involvement and Communication**

“You have got to communicate with those parents,” indicated Ms. Deliberate in her interview. She was a firm believer in helping the parents learn how to help their



children. Ms. Deliberate even made a home visit to help with one of her student's basic needs.

Well, I went to one of their homes. I rode the bus to talk with the mother about getting the child in bed so I went over and did the sign language and tried to make him understand that he needed to be in bed by 7:00 at night. I would do my hands and try to communicate with her and that's been much better. He was trying to sleep in class, dark circle under his eyes, he wasn't learning like I felt like he could.

From basic needs to academic needs, Ms. Deliberate indicated the key to her students' success was in training the parents and other adult caregivers in how to help the ELLs with tasks at home.

Just to let them know the things that their children need. I need someone to translate their newsletters; I need someone to help them with their homework, to go over their sight words, spelling words. I help as much as I can at school but they still need that extra help at home. If their mother does not speak English how are they going to help them with spelling words?

Ms. Deliberate had overcome this problem with many of her children. After observing one high achieving ELL in her reading groups, she stated that he was successful because his mom worked with him a lot and expected him to do well. With this particular child, Ms. Deliberate was able to somewhat communicate with his mother. She understood English but had more trouble when speaking. With Ms. Deliberate's guidance, the mother was able to really help the child to excel at school by reinforcing his learning at home. Ms. Deliberate spoke with pride about her relationship with this

mother. She said, “I have communicated with her frequently this year. I feel that I have her support.”

Ms. Deliberate also spoke of another success story with one of her female ELL students. She was able to work with the student’s grandmother. Because of the additional resources, the student’s classroom achievement increased.

I have another little girl whose grandmother came up. She speaks English. I gave her workbooks and supplies and she works with her. I send her notes and she has come a million miles. It's all in communication with the parents. Let them know you care, that 's my opinion. Let them know you care. If you don't care, you don't need to be working with them.

Of course, Ms. Deliberate recognized that it is not always easy to get the parents involved and that some parents are more reluctant to have a close relationship with the teacher. She relayed some information about a grant that the counselor at her school received a couple of years ago and how effective she believed it was for the parents who attended. Unfortunately, it only lasted one year.

I thought it was such a good thing when our counselor got that grant. She would bring those ELL parents up here and talk to them and have different people come and show them how to teach reading. We babysat the kids and we fed all of them and she would have a speaker to give them training. I think that is where we are falling short. You have got to communicate with those parents. If you don't, I feel that the kids are going to fall.

Ms. Novice noticed some of the same difficulties in teaching her ELLs reading because some of her students’ parents do not speak English well enough to help their

children at home. In the interview, she said, “ A lot of their parents don’t speak English in the homes so it is hard to give them a reading assignment when their parents can’t correct them.” She gave the students extra help at school or gave them more time to complete tasks if they needed it.

When asked about communication between her and some of her students’ parents, she said that it was difficult as well. As a result, parent involvement was low.

One of mine will translate to his parents. He has a better understanding of English and can translate. The other has very limited understanding so it is very hard to communicate newsletters or special events or things going on during the week, it is difficult.

Ms. Tender agreed that getting parents involved was difficult with a language barrier. In her interview, she discussed how some parents had translators and how she had used school provided translators as well. Even with help, talking with parents can prove very difficult. Ms. Tender relayed her frustration over the issue during her interview.

The phone is the hardest time to communicate with parents. One of my students this year had a very...well her mom's English was excellent. The other parent has a family friend that interprets. She'll call and that usually is okay. I have had one parent in the past that I had trouble communicating with just because of language. Mr. Spanish was here and he would translate some for us but it was still...it's not personal is what I am trying to say. You can't really feel like you are having your own conversation with a parent when you are having to go through another person.

Ms. Easy-going found that some of her parents liked to communicate over email much better than over the phone, or even in person. As more and more people use email as a main source of staying in touch, her students' parents found this method to be the best at staying informed of their child's school activities.

They asked me at the beginning of year, "Can we only correspond through email?" They liked email better than talking. It gave them a minute to translate. It was fine. I sent Kim's newsletters home on the email. They liked email. I guess they think we talk fast and it gives them a minute to figure it out. They would email me a lot. I hardly ever got phone calls.

Another aspect of parent involvement that was mentioned had to do with parental trust of the teacher. The more the parents trusted the teacher, the less they seemed to question her or him about school tasks. The participants said that if the parents knew they cared about their children, they expected the teacher to always act in the best interest of the students. Ms. Nurturer said, "...I won her over that way and she knew that I would take care of her baby. I guess just win their trust."

Ms. Veteran agreed. In her interview, she indicated that even though some of her parents were reluctant to be involved, she knew they cared about their children and that they had faith in her to do the right things to help their children.

The Hispanics were very supportive and very interested but they were very reluctant to be participants. I only had one Hispanic child whose parents were very much involved. The child whose mother is Japanese, both parents work. Her father worked in the furniture business at the executive level and the mother

is with Toyota and works twelve-hour days. They were very supportive and involved on the phone and email but they were not a presence as such.

Ms. Veteran also discussed another student and the trust that child's parent showed her throughout the year. She said that the parents, who spoke Arabic, would ask about educational things so that they could help their child. However, the parents also told her that they trusted her completely with the education of the child. Ms. Veteran said, "I thought that was interesting because that is not necessarily the thought of a lot of people today. But I think there is a lot of that just trust of authority."

Ms. Easy-going agreed with the idea of trust of authority. During her interview, she said that she had never had any of her ELL parents question her about things that took place in the classroom.

They never had any demands or wanting me to do certain things. They...whatever you say...every one of them from the Japanese parents...every one of them. They never asked when are we going to do this? Or why are you doing it like this? You said it, that 's what we are going to do. Every one of them.

Mr. Enthusiastic experienced the kind of communication that made him feel very satisfied with his work with one of his ELLs. Even though he could not communicate with this mother directly, she would use a translator to let him know how much her son was flourishing under his guidance. Like with all parents, hearing appreciation from this ELL parent was very rewarding for Mr. Enthusiastic. During his interview, he said, "Mom couldn't be happier. She said that he was coming home telling her things he was learning in English... She was very happy just with his socialness and how much he loved his classroom."

In any classroom, working with parents is an important part of helping children to be successful. Even though communicating with ELLs' parents can present a greater challenge, these participants recognized that having a good relationship with them was important. Another important part of helping ELL students achieve in school deals with the kinds of support the classroom teachers receive. Each participant had something to say about the support available to them, some positive and some negative.

### **Support for Teachers**

“I think that anything we ask for that would benefit them we've been given.” Ms. Tender said this in her interview and knew that in this particular school district, there were supports in place to help teachers know the abilities of their ELLs. Another participant, Ms. Nurturer showed me several documents that helped her meet the individual needs of her ELLs. Soon after enrolling in school, her students were given a language test to determine their English proficiency and if they qualified for ELL services. The school counselor administered this test to both of Ms. Nurturer's students and determined that they both qualified. Once they entered the ELL services, they were given several assessments throughout the year to monitor their progress. They were also given a service plan with listed accommodations for the classroom. Because Ms. Nurturer taught kindergarten, the accommodations were grade appropriate for classroom instruction. For older children who take the state tests, their accommodations were for instruction as well as testing situations. As the language service plan was followed, Ms. Nurturer was extremely pleased that her Arabic speaking child improved from a 31% language score at the beginning of the year to an 81% language score by the end of the

year. Furthermore, her native Chinese speaker scored high enough to be dismissed from all ELL services. With these supports in place, it gave the teacher the needed information and help to spur these children on to their highest potential. Besides the assessments, other district and building support was mentioned as well.

Several participants mentioned how supportive the entire school staff was in helping the ELL students in their classrooms. Ms. Nurturer said, “Everybody in the school just took them under their wings... anybody that sees them, specials teachers, they just take ownership of them.” Mr. Enthusiastic even stated that not only would other teachers help his student, the principal would step in at times as well.

An assistant would get Adam once a day for an hour and a half and do Rosetta Stone. After he got finished with that, she would play different vocabulary games and work with him. In the building, we would get help. Dr. Principal was very big on making sure that he was comfortable and happy. Anytime they had anything in the grade, he had already made friends with Adam; he would take him to the little parties or whatever and just expose him to things. He was always up for that!

Besides assessments, school counselors, and school personnel helping with ELLs, the participants told of others in the district they could count on for help. Ms. Deliberate mentioned people who have been trained to work with ELLs who have been in her classroom.

We have a lot of support. We have people that have been trained to come and help us if we have any kind of problem. I know they would be here, they came

last year and this year to observe in my class and give me feedback that I thought was wonderful. Yes, we have a lot of support.

Ms. Easy-going agreed that she had building level support from her principal as well as district level support when she needed it. She could not think of a time when district leadership had not provided her with help.

Here, anything I've needed, basically, they give me really good support. When I needed to call in the high school lady to translate, Mrs. Principal and Mrs. Assistant Principal were both here. They want to stay in close contact... Mrs. Helper at central office is a lot of help too. She has found us translators a lot that we didn't even know about.

Another participant expressed the same ideas during her interview as well. Ms. Tender said that she had received a lot of training and resources to use with her students. She also knew whom to contact for help in communicating with parents and for getting newsletters printed in other languages for her students. In addition, she mentioned computer resources and other language supports that were available to her. She said, "We have a lot that would support language. I think a lot of that is just because we are a lower elementary school. Language development is a big thing for kindergarten/first grade anyway."

With all of these positive comments, it seemed apparent that most teachers felt that they had what they needed to teach their ELL students. However, Ms. Languages gave a discrepant view of the support at her building and at the district level as well.

I'm not really sure that there are many people that can provide me the support I need here. That is just an honest response. I feel that if I went to someone with a



question that they would try to answer it. I feel that the other trainer, there are two here in the building, I think that they rely a lot on websites... and their personal experience too.

Ms. Languages came back to the idea of district support later in the interview after discussing the training that she led at her school. She was disappointed that her principal had put off the training until the end of the school year. I sensed her frustration when she told of having to lead her colleagues through the information on a day after they had administered a statewide assessment in their classrooms. She stated that the district needed to work on a plan that was consistent across all schools so that teachers knew what was expected of them as well as what was available to them. She blamed the district for not setting more rigorous guidelines for building principals as well.

I think that, as a teacher, what resources are available to me? I wouldn't be able to tell you, short of knowing that there is a person in the district office that I could contact. I know that. But you said what resources are available to me? I have no idea. I know what is available to me from what I have done for myself.

Mr. Enthusiastic also expressed some frustration with district personnel. Even though he felt supported by his principal, he had a bad experience with a leader from central office. On a day when he was out of his classroom, Ms. Leader came by to observe. The substitute teacher was not following his plan for Adam, a new ELL student he had just received. Ms. Leader was appalled that Adam was browsing through a dictionary by himself in one corner of the room. According to Mr. Enthusiastic, "She went to the principal's office and threw a fit!" Even though Dr. Principal assured her that Mr. Enthusiastic was working well with Adam, she insisted on setting up a meeting for

the following day. During the meeting, Ms. Leader expressed concern about what Adam was doing when she arrived. Mr. Enthusiastic told her he was not accountable for that because he had no control over the substitute while he was away. He said, “She kind of got the hint and Dr. Principal was in there with me really helping me out with that. After it was over...that was the only meeting I ever had.” Mr. Enthusiastic stated that he thought it was unprofessional that she never came back to offer any kind of support for him or for Adam. Because of this instance, he lost a lot of respect for the district leadership concerning ELL education. Like Ms. Languages, he thought that the district should be more unified in its approach and support for teachers all over the school system.

Teaching ELLs can be both rewarding and challenging for educators. The participants’ stories illustrated both of these with parents and with teacher support. Besides parental involvement and communication and support for teachers, another theme that emerged during data analysis was ELL students’ characteristics.

### **ELL Students’ Characteristics**

“They were the bright spot in my day!” said Ms. Veteran. As the participants described their experiences of teaching ELLs in their language arts classrooms, several similar traits were mentioned. The teachers held these students in high regard because of their respect and work ethic in the classroom. The students’ native cultures did not matter. Students from Japan, Mexico, Sudan, and Palestine, to name a few, were all described in parallel ways.

Several participants mentioned how their non English-speaking students reacted upon arrival in their classrooms. When a student first experienced a U.S. school, often he or she would not attempt to speak for weeks. The students would watch and listen intently to what was happening around them. Mr. Enthusiastic said that Adam would not speak for the first month or so. He went on to say, “He wouldn’t ask questions, he was just very lost. He was in a different world. I would try to talk back and forth.” Because of his silence, Mr. Enthusiastic was ecstatic when Adam left one day and said, “See you later, Mr. Enthusiastic!” With that interaction, he knew that Adam was absorbing more than it seemed to those around him.

Ms. Easygoing also told of a time when one of her students surprised her. Kim was a student from Tijuana and spoke no English. She too was very quiet and watched everything that happened in the classroom. One day, Ms. Easygoing made a plea for some needed classroom supplies. She asked students to ask their parents to put the items on their shopping lists that week, hoping that maybe a few would remember. To Ms. Easygoing’s great surprise, Kim came in the next day with the supplies. Ms. Easygoing said, “I just thought that was a big breakthrough. I didn’t think she understood a word I said. I didn’t think she understood anything!” The teacher was very pleased that Kim understood and told her parents. She had even convinced her parents to go to the store that evening to purchase the items. Ms. Easygoing said that experience may seem trivial to some, but she finally saw that Kim was learning some English and was beginning to communicate.

Ms. Nurturer agreed that her students have surprised her in the past as well. She relayed one story of working with a literacy group several years ago. Even though this

particular student could speak a little English, he never used typical American expressions. One day, while she was working with other children across the room, he yelled out a very common English phrase. During the interview, Ms. Tender could not remember the exact words the student used. However, that incident made an impression on her. She said, “I remember thinking that he has it now. Even he was using phrases...it indicated that he really got it.”

Ms. Veteran talked about two other traits of her ELLs. Describing their vulnerability, she said, “I just saw so much more innocence in them than in the other children.” She commented on several of her students’ strong faith as well. At the beginning of the school year, she allowed the students to bring personal items from home in order for the class to get to know one another. Ms. Veteran gave them time each day to share their things and to discuss why they chose those items. Many of her ELLs came with belongings related to their church activities. She said that they shared with pride about their special items from their first communion or other similar things. As for behavior, she said, “They are very respectful. I haven’t had any of my ELL children give me a minute’s trouble all year.” Other participants agreed with her assessment of their behavior as well. In fact, Ms. Veteran told a story about pairing one of her ELLs with a low-achieving native English speaker. She said that her ELL spurred the other student on to do his best and that the boys ended up having a really good relationship. She credited the ELL with helping the other student stay on task and out of trouble.

Ms. Deliberate agreed. She said, “They are the hardest working children.” She enjoyed every minute of teaching them because they were proud of their things and took care of their things. Ms. Deliberate also stated, “They are proud to get an education.”

Ms. Languages agreed with that statement when she told about an additional activity she was doing with her ELLs first thing each morning. Even though it was extra work, she said, “They would bounce into the room, get their book, and walk right up to the desk just to read with me. They would be so excited!” Ms. Easy-going also said that her female ELLs were very hard working. However, she had one experience with a male ELL student and did not find him as motivated as the girls. She was the only participant that mentioned having an under-achieving ELL student.

Two other teachers discussed another issue with ELLs and their interaction in the classroom. Ms. Tender noted a difference in these students when they were sick or upset. She even mentioned that trying to help them through these times was her greatest challenge in working with ELLs.

Sometimes these children speak pretty fluent English but when they get upset or emotionally stressed, they forget how to say it in English. So, for language arts or any subject, that is a problem. They will be really, really upset but they can't tell you why. I think that makes them mad that they can't tell you why. That's probably been the biggest challenge, I've had two boys, one a previous year and one this year, that was a very big thing that came back over and over and it would just be a difficulty for them and made them shut down on their learning because they were frustrated and could not tell me what to do to help.

Mr. Enthusiastic experienced the same thing with one of his ELL students. This one in particular could communicate fluently in English but there were still times when he would shut down and not respond. The student told Mr. Enthusiastic that he understood what another child, who just arrived in the country, was going through

because he was in the same position when he came to school in kindergarten. Mr. Enthusiastic described these experiences as the child's "inner demons" he is fighting. He believed that his emotional problems stem from the differences in his school and home environments. Mr. Enthusiastic said, "He had his mind on a lot of things...I had to really get close to him so that he could open up and tell me when he was having a bad day." The goal of both of these teachers was to gain the trust of their students so that they could help them with emotional and social issues and not just academics.

Of course, dealing with the whole child, emotions and all, has always been a challenging part of teaching. This is no less true for ELL students. The next theme that emerged during data analysis was the instructional challenges teachers face in the classroom with their ELLs.

### **Teaching Challenges**

"We have a lot of work to do," according to Ms. Languages. The participants mentioned several challenges they have faced when working with ELLs in the regular classroom. A discussion of the teachers' experiences would not be complete without including their perceptions of the biggest instructional challenges when working with this diverse group of learners.

Six of the participants mentioned very specific concepts that they found to be difficult for their students. They were figurative language and phonemic awareness. Ms. Veteran emphasized the first one in her fifth grade classroom. She said, "...they were totally unaware of the idioms and expressions of the language." Ms. Easy-going agreed with Ms. Veteran during her interview.

My other ELLs were fine in every subject except, vocabulary and had a lot of trouble with figurative language. They are so literal, figurative language would throw them for a loop and I would pull them in groups and we would really work on figurative language the most. Math was easy to them because it is so concrete. That figurative language...yeah. If I would do a play on words, it would...they would look at me!

To combat this difficult material, Ms. Veteran told about a book that she illustrated for her students. She used a resource that had idioms children should know from kindergarten through fifth grade. Using those idioms, she researched illustrations to match the phrases and put them together in book form. Ms Veteran said that her students loved the book and were often found pouring over it trying to understand these expressions.

Along those same lines, Ms. Nurturer said that one of her ELLs would have trouble with words with double meanings. She often found Shay with a puzzled look on his face like he was trying to imagine what she meant. She said, "...that would be hard for him. So we would stop, a lot of times, we would stop in the middle of a book and we would just talk about things like that." Even though her kindergartners loved the crazy words and rhymes in nursery rhymes, Ms. Tender's first graders wanted her to explain the nursery rhymes to them.

Nursery rhymes and things like...Knick Knack patty whack... they wanted to know 'What is that?' Or I know one little boy when we were reading the *Three Little Pigs*...he just totally did not get the huff and puff or chinney chin chin and

things that are in books like that. That is difficult for them...that's not part of what they are used to hearing.

Besides figurative language and nursery rhymes, several participants mentioned phonemic awareness and spelling issues with their students. Ms. Novice stated that spelling was particularly hard because of the English spelling patterns. She emphasized that her students had difficulty reading and writing some words because English was very different from what they heard in their native languages. Mr. Enthusiastic found that his ELLs did not have a solid grasp of letter sounds either because many sounds in English are not represented in other languages. In addition, Ms. Easy-going said that her students had trouble picking the same vowel sounds in words as well. As far as visually memorizing the words, she said they did okay. However, when asked to tell the difference in consonants and vowels or the differences in vowel sounds, they were often confused. Ms. Tender agreed with the others and stated that she spent a lot of time on phonemic awareness. However, it was a great challenge to her ELLs because the English sounds and phrasing were just very different than what many of them were used to hearing.

Ms. Tender also told a story about a student she had a few years ago who had a lot of trouble with phonemic awareness. He was an American living with his family in Mexico. He spoke English fluently but had attended a Spanish speaking kindergarten and had learned to read and write some in Spanish.

When he came here to first grade, all of his instruction had been in Spanish. But he was very fluent in English-speaking it-but anything written he had done in Spanish. It was amazing to me when he tried to write. He would get so



frustrated. He could communicate since he was fluent in English. He would say, "Ms. Tender, I do not understand because in Spanish you say the sound and you write the letter down and that is it! Why do you have to put 'ph' and 'th'?" It would drive him crazy.

Ms. Tender went on to say that she enjoyed watching his kind of “backwards language learning” because he was able to verbalize what her other students could not. It helped her teaching to hear him articulate the differences in English and Spanish and how confusing it was for him. She used those memories this past year as she worked with her ELLs on words with unusual spellings. Anticipating their questions, she stated, was one way of helping them with the confusing aspects of the English language. She said she tried to emphasize to them that she knew certain spelling patterns did not make sense but they had to learn them anyway. Ms. Tender said she knew that they were still thinking, “Well, why do I have to put that?”

Although many challenges were mentioned dealing with classroom instruction, only one teacher mentioned a challenge that she saw as a district-wide problem to overcome. Ms. Languages stated that she thinks the school district needs to do more to communicate with the teachers about ELL instruction. There was a group of teachers, at least one from each school, trained to be leaders in the district concerning ELLs. Since the weeklong workshop, she felt that there had not been enough follow up with those teachers or time given for those educators to meet together for support. She would like to see clear expectations for those trainers.

We are told that our kids aren't going to be successful if we don't have clear expectations. Well the teachers aren't going to be successful if you don't have

clear expectations. Until the district has clear expectations for their teachers, and for their trainers, and for their buildings...you really won't be at the best point.

In addition to this, Ms. Languages would also like to see the district website set up in a way to better serve ELL parents. Right now, only English is represented on the website. She has explored other districts' sites and found they are much more parent-friendly. The others often have documents available in languages besides English and offer more resources to help parents and students acclimate to the school environment. Even though there are classroom challenges, she also saw ways in which her school district could be stronger to serve the ELL student population and their families.

The next theme from the study was directly tied to the second research question: What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom? The Instructional Strategies discussion will include various strategies the teachers mentioned or that I observed during fieldwork.

### **Instructional Strategies**

Because all but one of the participants had been to the district level ELL training, many of the same strategies were noted with each participant. First, strategies implemented directly by the teacher dealing with classroom management will be discussed. Afterwards, strategies used in lessons and activities will be cited.

**Classroom Management.** In every classroom observation, I noted a very active classroom environment. Ms. Deliberate and Ms. Veteran were the only ones with their desks lined up in rows. However, in both classes, most students were grouped in other

areas working with partners or small groups. In fact, Ms. Veteran had many of her fifth graders spread on the floor and even in the hall huddled together to work. In both classes, the teachers worked with small groups at a table while the others worked around the room. The rest of the classrooms had desks arranged in small groups. Ms. Tender had a short group lesson with children sitting on a large carpet before they were dismissed to their literacy centers. Ms. Easy-going and Ms. Novice had everyone working in small groups all over the room while the teachers monitored, popping in and out of groups to check on progress.

Ms. Languages and Mr. Enthusiastic were the only ones who spent most of the time leading a whole group activity. However, Mr. Enthusiastic's vocabulary game was very active! The boys were standing and facing Mr. Enthusiastic as he sat at a student's desk. The teacher was asking them to give the answer to vocabulary associated with literacy concepts such as parts of speech and kinds of nouns. Each student had a turn to answer a question. If a student was correct, he got two basketball shots into a hoop attached to the back of the classroom door. If the student could also spell the answer, he got three shots. This created a fun atmosphere where the students were cheering and clapping for one another.

Ms. Languages was also leading a whole group activity. She called for the students to gather on the floor in front of her while she passed out small white boards and markers. She began reading a book to the class and had them respond in different ways on their white boards. As she called on students, she asked them to justify their answers. In this way, she got them to think about their reasoning for each question. The ELLs were listening and writing their answers just as the rest of the class. By giving the

students time to write their answers, she gave all of them the time needed to participate. ELLs used this time in order to think in their native language before responding in English. They were engaged and enjoyed the book and activity to review story elements and other literacy concepts. The students responded with laughter at the funny parts of the book and listened to each other's reasoning as they answered the questions.

In every class, the students were actively engaged in the activities. It did not matter if they were working with the teacher or with a group of their peers. Each classroom had a buzz of activity that was conducive to learning. Besides leading active classrooms, each teacher posted the learner objectives for the day.

Posting learning and language objectives for the students was another instructional strategy that I observed in every class except for one. In that one in particular, the walls and white boards were clear the day I observed because the fifth graders had just taken a state science test. The teacher was required to remove everything from the walls and white boards. She would have had them posted any other day. One reason that I found objectives posted was because of the district's ELL training. It was emphasized during the training to let the students know ahead of time what will be expected of them for that day. The expert who led the training said that it was important for ELLs to know because it helped get them ready for the lesson. In addition, an outside consulting firm had observed teachers in this district during the school year. The so-called experts insisted that objectives and sample test items be written for the students to see each day. Of course, teachers used the objectives in their lesson plans but also took the extra step to post for their students each day.

The last instructional strategy dealing with classroom management that I noticed was the grouping of the children. Each teacher discussed how he or she formed groups for their active classrooms. The participants discussed how they thoughtfully put students together with their ELLs in order to meet the needs of all the children in the group. Mr. Enthusiastic and Ms. Veteran even documented how the groups were formed in their written lesson plans. Ms. Easygoing said, "I purposely try not to put all of my ELLs together. I don't want them to feel singled out." When asked about instructional strategies, she said that she would consider not just the lesson content, but also the group dynamic of who should be together for certain activities. Ms. Veteran agreed. She stated that she was as concerned with the students' comfort level and their willingness to answer questions as she was with academic tasks. She emphasized this during her interview.

I was especially conscious of the grouping of having them with someone that they were comfortable with, first of all, and then also to make sure to group them with someone who was very fluent and very verbal and very willing to share and help. I had enough kids that that was possible for kids to be scattered across the room. I have five or six that I can count on to do that. I always had them paired with somebody.

Ms. Nurturer also told a story about how powerful working with peers could be for her ELLs. She allowed her non-English speaking student to work with two little girls at the beginning of their kindergarten year. All three students benefited from their interaction.

I had two little girls in my room who were very mature and were very precious. They told me that they could help me with Shay. They moved his chair between

theirs and moved his little name and put it right there. They were his little teachers. That was great! He loved it!...If we were doing...Let's just say that when we were learning color words, they would have the words lined up and they were teaching him the colors, that kind of thing.

**Lessons and Activities.** Besides having classroom management plans in place, I also noticed several common instructional strategies that each teacher used or documented in lesson plans. The most common one in each class was the use of visuals for the students. Each teacher had charts and teaching resources on display for the students to use whenever they needed. I took several photos of illustrated word walls, thinking maps, and phonemic awareness displays such as beginning letter sounds, initial blends/digraphs, and onsets/rimes. Mr. Enthusiastic and Ms. Veteran documented their use of visuals, such as thinking maps, in their lessons plans as well. Ms. Deliberate mentioned drawing for her students during her interview.

When I read, I draw a lot for my kids. If they don't know...for instance...Cinderella...I drew a fireplace and then I put the hearth and told them this was the hearth and put the wood and the cinder that comes out...that's how she got her name. But I draw a lot on my big white board. That visual for them...

Mr. Enthusiastic, a talented artist himself, also draws a lot for his students to help them understand concepts. He also mentioned using technology to help illustrate ideas for his ELLs.

I use the large butcher paper and large sticky pads with our vocabulary words. I would put it, especially for Adam's purpose, in Spanish and in English. Then I

would try to have a picture by it. With the Promethean Board in there, I was able to quickly go online and pull one up if he didn't understand what I was talking about.

Ms. Languages also stated that she incorporates technology to help her ELLs understand their vocabulary words and other ideas. She said, "...every week we have a vocabulary PowerPoint with pictures." She also stated that her ELLs rely more heavily on pictures in books and that they need those pictures to help make inferences. Other participants talked about drawing pictures and being able to use the Internet to help their ELLs as well. Ms. Veteran said that she uses the Internet a lot to help with concepts because it is quick and easy to find pictures related to their school tasks.

The second most common instructional strategy after using visuals was using the students' native language to help them make connections. Ms. Nurturer quickly labeled classroom objects in Arabic for her non-English speaking student at the beginning of the year. Mr. Enthusiastic also had objects labeled in Spanish around his classroom. Whenever possible, the teachers would send notes or newsletters home in the child's native language as well. Ms. Easy-going used a series of Spanish language books for one of her students to read and enjoy. The student devoured each one and Ms. Easy-going said that she planned on finding more books in other languages to help keep the children reading fluently in their first language. In addition, Ms. Languages had a teaching resource that had math concepts written in different languages for her students.

Besides emphasizing the students' native languages, each teacher was willing to use a native peer to help when appropriate. This was especially appropriate with the Spanish-speaking children because there were at least two in each class. The teachers

allowed them to use their native languages to help each other understand concepts or to clarify instructions. In some instances, the students were more reluctant to translate for their peers. In those cases, the teachers did not force them. Mr. Enthusiastic emphasized that he did not want his more fluent English speaker to ever feel like he was just there to translate for the other child. He made sure that both boys knew they were important and that their own learning was a priority. By allowing the use of the students' native languages, the participants showed respect for the students' cultures and made connections with them as much as possible.

The last instructional strategy commonly found among the participants was the use of real objects and manipulatives. These hands-on activities were good for their entire class but were vital to help their ELLs understand lesson content. Ms. Tender said, "I do try to bring in real objects a lot to show them." Ms. Languages mentioned using cooking activities and other objects as well. She also documented through photos some hands-on activities where the students made models of the earth and other science concepts. Ms. Nurturer and Ms. Deliberate, both kindergarten teachers, told about how they use play-dough in their lessons. Their young children needed the tactile stimulation to learn letters and other literacy principles. Of course, using those type things were also highly appropriate to help ELLs understand as well. Ms. Novice had her students investigating real capacity containers and listing common classroom and home objects of the same size. The use of manipulatives was also well documented in Mr. Enthusiastic's lesson plans. From constructing objects to using common items in a classroom store activity center, he provided his students with hands-on activities to increase their learning.



## **Summary**

Chapter four began with a review of the research questions that guided this study. A discussion of each participant followed with an emphasis on demographic information as well as descriptive information about their classrooms and experiences with ELLs. Afterwards, the data was explained by being divided into five themes that emerged through analysis. The five themes were Parent Involvement and Communication, Support for Teachers, ELL Students' Characteristics, Teaching Challenges, and Instructional Strategies. The last was broken into two subthemes: Classroom Management and Lessons and Activities. The next chapter will contain the interpretation of the data and implications for further study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The experience of teaching English Language Learners among K-5 teachers is much different than working with native English speakers. This research provided an outlet for elementary teachers to tell their stories about the rewards and difficulties of working with this population. The two research questions guiding this study were: How do language arts teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs in the K-5 setting? What approaches do elementary teachers use with ELLs in the regular classroom? In chapter four, I discussed each participant, the five themes that emerged during data analysis, and how the themes related to each research question. In this chapter, I will include a discussion of the findings, a discussion of some factors that may have affected the study, implications from the findings, and areas for future research concerning teaching English Language Learners in the regular classroom.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

When writing about the findings of research after data analysis, Creswell (2009) recommended framing the information into three areas. The first one was to report about things that were expected during the research. The second was to tell about things that were surprising or unexpected during data collection and analysis. The third one was to give an account of information that addressed the larger perspective of the research,

including new questions that emerged. Therefore, I will use these three areas to report my findings.

### **Expected Information**

As the researcher with a passion for the subject of teaching ELLs in the regular classroom, there were several aspects of working with these learners that I expected to see during fieldwork. The first one was that the participants lacked the home-school connection that they desired. Because of many of the students' parents' poor English skills, the teachers felt like communication was a barrier and that the lack of help at home for students was also a barrier. Although translators were available as well as various software programs to help translate newsletters, the participants still felt that there was a deficit in information and help that could be provided to families of ELL students.

Besides communication, I also expected to find common visuals posted throughout every classroom. A few years ago, the school district decided to provide posters with key pictures for initial consonants, blends, and digraphs, as well as key pictures for short and long vowel sounds. In addition, posters were given that included common onsets/rimes for the students to use when constructing other words. Each teacher used these posters as resources for their students. Furthermore, each participant went through training to use thinking maps, which are visual, in their classrooms as well. I saw evidence of several different kinds of thinking maps used during lessons throughout each classroom.

The last area that I expected to find involved activities that seemed to be the hardest for ELLs. Spelling and phonemic awareness deficits were mentioned over and

over by participants as being hard for their ELLs. This was expected because of the differences in sounds and patterns in English from many of the students' native languages. In some cases, there are no matching letters or sounds in other languages and this often confuses young ELLs learning to read and write in English. Another hard concept mentioned for ELLs involved idioms and figurative language. Because these phrases cannot be translated literally, they often confuse these students. Participants mentioned having to work on those very often to help their students understand that part of the English language.

### **Surprising Information**

Even though I have taught ELLs for many years and have read a lot of information on the subject, the participants presented me with some surprising information. The first involved these participants' attitudes toward their students. In this particular school district, each grade has one or two designated teachers who teach all of the ELLs for that grade. They were chosen by their principals to fulfill this role and many have taught this group of students for several years. The leaders of the schools chose teachers that they believed would work with this group to best meet their needs. Each participant shared stories of successes and challenges. Through them both, it was very apparent that these teachers truly loved these students and wanted the very best for them. Each talked about the students' contributions to the class and how much they enjoyed seeing them learn and grow throughout the year. I am not sure that this would be the same case if the school district's policy was different and required all teachers to work with ELLs.

Another surprising aspect was one of the participant's hard work in overcoming the language barrier with her ELL parents. After observing her counselor conduct a parent workshop over several months with many ELL parents, she decided that there were ways to teach them how to work with their children. She made home visits and invited parents to come to her classroom so that she could share materials and strategies with them to use at home. Even with the communication barrier, she was able to demonstrate different approaches for her parents to use and she saw the effects in student achievement in her classroom. She went above and beyond her work as a teacher to really help her parents understand that they were an important part of their child's education. She was an exemplary example of how to effectively involve parents, despite their language ability. Along these same lines, two other participants mentioned using email as the preferred means of communication between them and the parents. With the availability of free email accounts to anyone, this was a good way to keep in touch with parents. The teachers said that the parents requested email because they had time to contemplate the messages and get help translating if necessary. The parents could also take their time writing back so that their message was clear, unlike quick phone conversations.

Another surprising bit of information dealt with teacher support. I was surprised that all of the participants but one felt that they had the support they needed to help with their ELLs. Teachers in kindergarten through second mentioned people and resources available to them. One teacher commented that the nature of language arts in K-2 lends itself more easily to ELL instruction than language arts in the higher grades. The one participant that felt she did not have enough support was more concerned with district

policies than with having more help in her classroom. Ms. Languages had the most personal experience with people from other cultures and that led her to see beyond her classroom to the big picture of the district as a whole. She was very capable in working with her students but still wanted more guidance for every teacher and more help for ELL parents. I was surprised when she mentioned the lack of expectations for ELL trainers in the district. Each building leader had different views and she believed that no one was taking full responsibility for maintaining a successful ELL program at the district level. She discussed having a full time person in charge and accountable for the success of the district's ELLs and for working with their parents. At the time, a part time worker was responsible for the ELL program. Ms. Languages was very strong in her opinion about this being changed. I was grateful for her honest assessment of the subject.

Besides the positive attitudes, parental training and teacher support, I was surprised at the uniformity I found in the classrooms. I knew that the school district had hired a consulting firm to observe in the district's classrooms and to make recommendations for improving student achievement. I had no idea that this would have such a strong effect in the classrooms that I observed. Because I had not taken all of the recommendations as absolute truth or the only way to conduct my classroom, I did not expect to see many of my participants reacting as if they believed these suggestions were the best way to teach. For instance, the consultant recommended one way of calling on students during class discussions. He wanted every teacher to write their students' names on sticks and put them in a container of some kind. During class discussions, he expected teachers to randomly pull students' names from the container to answer. He did not want to see any student raising a hand or calling out an answer. He only wanted to see

teachers using sticks because he thought this was the best way to conduct a class. As a result, I saw this practice over and over during my observations. I never would have believed that many, many teachers were using this method alone in their classes just because the consultant said it was best.

Another surprising aspect was that many teachers mentioned student grouping as an instructional strategy. I expected to hear about different activities and materials they used in their classes when asked about teaching strategies. Especially true of the teachers in third, fourth, and fifth grades, they often used cooperative groups in their classrooms as an instructional strategy. To them, which students worked with their ELLs was just as important as the activities involved. Depending on the goal of the lesson, some participants would make sure that an ELL was paired with another ELL who was stronger in English. At other times, none of the ELLs would be allowed to work together. Each participant talked about the ability and comfort level of their ELLs when working in groups. Each was also aware of the purpose of the activities and how the ELLs could be most successful. In this way, the teachers were not only concerned with the academics but also with how the groups interacted socially.

The last area that I found surprising was how the participants described their ELLs. Other than one teacher seeing a difference in the motivation of the one male ELL she taught, all of the participants said that their ELLs were hard workers and very motivated to succeed. The surprising part was the teachers saw no differences in the students from different parts of the world. I expected the teachers to somewhat distinguish students from certain areas by their motivation and achievement. This did not happen. The students' work ethics were all described as strong, no matter if they were

from Japan, Mexico, or Morocco. I was very pleased with this information because it showed that the teachers appeared to have no preconceived ideas about different groups of people. If they did, they did not discuss their perceptions with me. The next section will discuss information gathered that addressed the larger perspective of teaching ELLs in the regular classroom.

### **Larger Perspective**

In much of the literature on teaching ELLs, teacher preparation is mentioned quite often. One area that many researchers discuss deals with the lack of college preparation for aspiring teachers (O'Neal et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2004; Walker-Dalhouse, et al., 2009). In my study, Ms. Novice was the youngest teacher and the most recent college graduate. In her teacher education program, she stated that ELLs were only mentioned briefly in one of her classes. She went on to say that she had never encountered an ELL until the very end of her program during her student teaching. I expected the other participants to say that their colleges did not cover the subject of ELLs but I was surprised to hear that from someone who graduated a year ago. It is very apparent that universities need to seek information on the subject of teaching ELLs to better prepare their pre-service teachers.

Another issue addressing the larger perspective from this study was the use of many evidence-based strategies recommended in the literature for ELL instruction. One strategy was the use of technology to enhance instruction (Silverman & Hines, 2009). Not only was the technology motivating, it allowed the teachers quick access to information to help their ELLs understand concepts. Each participant had at least one



computer with Internet access and most had several computers. Many classrooms also had Promethean Boards to help with large group instruction. Software programs were used as well as iPod applications to aid language development.

The use of various kinds of visuals was also apparent in each classroom. Using visuals, realia, and manipulatives is vital in helping ELLs understand lesson contents (Echevarria et al., 2008; Washburn, 2008). Participants used the district provided resource posters but also supplemented them with drawings, pieces of art, and hands-on objects to help their ELLs. Using these visual and hands-on resources was good for all of the students but ELLs especially needed them to make connections with what they already knew.

The last idea that addressed the larger perspective of teaching ELLs had to do with using the students' first language (L1) to help them in English. Proponents of using L1 said that it is important in second language acquisition and should be used whenever possible (Bauer, 2009; Echevarria et al., 2008; Karathanos, 2009). Increasing knowledge in L1 actually increases the capacity for English (Echevarria et al., 2008). For the students brand new to English, the participants labeled common classroom objects with their native language and English to help them learn environmental words. For another, literature in the student's native language was used to help her continue to increase her knowledge in it while she developed fluency in English. Other participants used dictionaries with different languages and English to aid instruction. In addition, the students were encouraged to use their native language to discuss questions and concepts with others during class. More fluent English speakers were often found helping others who were less fluent during my observations. The participants seemed to understand the

importance of native language use and were not threatened by it in any way. By allowing it, the teachers also showed respect for each student's native culture and welcomed it as part of the classroom. The next section will concentrate on possible factors that affected the outcomes of this study.

### **Discussion of Possible Factors Affecting Study**

Over the course of data collection and analysis, there were a few factors that could have affected the outcomes of this dissertation study. As already mentioned, the policy in this district was to group ELLs in each grade with one or two teachers each year. Each participant was chosen for this study because they teach ELLs. Each one was chosen to teach ELLs at some point in the past by their building level principals. Because they were chosen by their principals, it could be assumed that they were considered very capable, open, and nurturing to handle the demanding situation of working with ELLs and their families. All of the teachers had very positive attitudes toward this population and desired to keep working with them. If the policy were different, and ELLs were spread among everyone in each grade, I would expect to find some dissenting attitudes and views from the teachers.

Another factor that could have affected this study was the use of a consultation firm by the school district. I found many of the same practices in each room as a direct result of the firm's recommendations. One advisor in particular spent time in every classroom that I visited, plus other classrooms all over the district. I did not expect his work to affect my study because I did not adhere to all of his expert suggestions in my own classroom. However, as I observed my participants, I found that many of them did

listen to his suggestions and incorporate them into their teaching. As a result, I saw similar practices and procedures in each setting.

The last factor that could have affected my study was the time of year that the research took place. All of the observations, interviews, and data gathering took place the last six-seven weeks of school. In this school district, the students were involved in several high-stakes test during this time. The concentration of work was on preparing for those tests. In addition, the students knew the year was almost over and they were ready for summer. That may be why I saw a lot of group work and not a lot of lecturing and individual work. The participants recognized that working with peers could be more motivating than working alone. I would be interested to see if I observed the same things during another time of the year.

### **Implications and Future Research**

Upon completing the study in this school district in the southeast United States, several implications for district leadership came to mind. First, they should build on the excellent training they have provided their teachers. Providing refresher courses and time for discussing ELL needs will keep this subject in the forefront of the minds of educators in this district. The district should also provide ongoing support for those chosen to teach ELLs. The teachers should feel less evaluated and more supported by those who come to observe their teaching. Time should also be provided for teachers to gather in learning communities to discuss experiences, successes, and strategies for ELLs. Unfortunately, focus is divided among too many educational topics to make a real impact on the ELLs and their teachers at this point. This should change. A full time ELL coordinator could

help this school district achieve much more concerning their diverse students and families.

Another implication from this research deals with teacher preparation at the university level. It is time for teacher education programs to embrace the subject of teaching all ELLs. Courses should be devoted to helping future teachers understand the history of immigration, the political implications and arguments dealing with immigration, and their responsibility to educate all students that enter their classrooms. Understanding different cultures and how they are assimilating into life in this country can also be vital in helping future teachers work with ELL families. Of course, pre-service teachers should also be taught the many evidence-based strategies that are helpful in educating ELLs. In addition, future teachers should have experience teaching and working with ELL students in the schools under the supervision of the classroom teacher or university supervisor. The more experience they have, the better prepared they will be in their own classrooms.

As for future research, several ideas come to mind. I would like to know how other districts' teachers describe their experiences of teaching ELLs. In schools with less district-wide training, I would expect to see more diversity in teaching practices. I would also like to research the differences in teachers at different grade levels. A study describing the differences in elementary teachers' experiences to middle school or high school teachers' experiences would be interesting. In addition, I would like to see how different school districts organize their ELL departments and the successes and barriers that they experience. Comparing and contrasting the programs with the overall achievement of their ELLs would also be worthwhile.

## Summary

This qualitative research study discussed the experiences of teachers who taught ELLs in the regular classroom. The teachers taught the lower elementary grades, between Kindergarten and Fifth grade, which easily provided a context of teaching language arts to these students. The study also sought information on the kinds of practices these teachers used with their ELLs. With all of the participants, they described positive experiences in working with this population. The educators were open to changing their teaching to meet the needs of the students and had high expectations for each one. They were willing to find resources and help them in any way. Their positive attitudes were apparent as they told stories of their teaching experiences and interactions with their students and families. Although each faced challenges, they overcame and learned from them. Unlike most quantitative studies available in the literature, this study provided an outlet for the teachers to truly convey their experiences in working with ELLs. This study also provided enlightenment for teacher educators and district leadership on the realities of working with ELLs. As a result, these experiences can help prepare others for working effectively with English Language Learners in the regular classroom.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

## Introduction Letter for Participants

My name is Anita Williams McGraw and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Mississippi. I am doing a qualitative research study on teachers' experiences with teaching English Language Learners (ELL) in the regular classroom. I am asking you to participate in this study to help me better understand teachers' feelings, ideas, and experiences in teaching this population.

I am asking you to participate for several reasons. The first one is that I need teachers from the elementary grade levels. There is not much research on how elementary teachers teach language specific subjects to ELLs. Another reason is that it can help you. The benefits to you of being involved in this study include additional learning on your part of how to serve these students, being able to share successes and frustrations in your work, and being able to form a bond with other educators over the challenges that are faced when working with these students and their families.

Because this is a research project, many steps must be followed. First, I will provide you with an information letter to read before we begin. As part of the project, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. I will gather my information through individual interviews and observations. If you are part of an individual interview, rest assured that anything you say will be confidential. In my writing, your real name will not be used. I will audio record our session and I will be the only one with access to the recordings. The recordings will be destroyed after my use.

Please note that I am not looking for right or wrong answers through our conversations. I am seeking your honest opinions, ideas, and perspectives on working

with ELL children. As educators, your experiences, good and bad, are the heart of this project. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Williams McGraw



APPENDIX B  
INFORMATION FORM

## **Information about a Research Study**

**Title:** Teaching English Language Learners in the K-5 Classroom

### **Investigator**

Anita Williams McGraw, M.Ed.  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Guyton Hall  
The University of Mississippi  
(662) 915-7350

### **Advisor**

Lane Gauthier, Ph. D.  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Guyton Hall  
The University of Mississippi  
(662) 915-2005

### **Description**

We are seeking teachers' perspectives on teaching English Language Learners in the regular classroom setting. In order to gain insight, we are conducting interviews and observations to ask teachers about their work with this population and their families. The interviews should take less than an hour, and I would like to observe your classroom for 30-40 minutes over a period of 3 days or less.

### **Risks and Benefits**

There is minimal risk involved with this study. There are no right or wrong answers. Each person is assured confidentiality. Benefits include sharing ideas and perspectives with colleagues.

### **Cost and Payments**

The only cost involved is your time. There are no other costs in helping with this study.

### **Confidentiality**

Your name will not be used in any way. In the writing, you will only be identified with a pseudonym.

### **Right to Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this project. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, contact Mrs. McGraw or Dr. Gauthier in person, by letter, or by telephone. Whether or not you choose to participate or to withdraw will not affect your standing with The University of Mississippi or with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

### **IRB Approval**

The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed this study. The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

APPENDIX C  
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

# Observation Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Observations:

Reflections:

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

# Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Setting \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Tell me about your years of teaching experience, your level of education, and what training you have received in working with ELLs.
2. How many ELLs do you currently teach or have taught in the past?
3. Could you describe some challenges you have faced in teaching the language arts to these students?
4. Have you ever had difficulty in communicating with someone? What about students' parents?
5. Do you read in a language other than English?
6. Describe a time when you felt a sense of accomplishment with your ELLs.
7. How do you approach a language arts lesson plan for your ELLs? What things do you consider?
8. Does your school require certain things?
9. What specific activities and materials do you use in teaching reading to your ELLs?
10. How is teaching reading to ELLs different from teaching native English speakers?
11. How prepared are the ELLs from your school when they leave to go to the next grade level?
12. What kinds of administrative support do you receive?
13. Have you ever experienced being in the minority, such as travel experiences?

14. Do you have any experiences outside the classroom that have helped shape your teaching of ELLs?

15. Is there anything else you want to add? Is there something that I should have asked you and didn't?

## VITA

Anita Ruth Williams McGraw graduated from public school in Tupelo, Mississippi. After high school, she attended Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. She graduated Summa Cum Laude in 1995 with a Bachelor of Science in liberal studies and began her teaching career at Shannon Elementary School in Shannon, Mississippi.

In 1997, Mrs. McGraw completed her Master of Education degree at the University of Mississippi with an emphasis in reading. In the fall of 1998, she began teaching at Church Street Elementary School in Tupelo, Mississippi. During her time there, she traveled, experiencing many different cultures. One defining experience occurred when she traveled to Baku, Azerbaijan during the summer of 2000 to teach English to college students. She returned to her classroom with a new appreciation of English Language Learners and their contributions to her classroom.

During the 2000-2001 school year, she completed the requirements to become a National Board Certified Teacher. In 2010, she successfully renewed this certification. While teaching at Church Street Elementary, she was accepted into the Doctor of Education program at the University of Mississippi in October 1996. Mrs. McGraw will begin teaching at Carver Elementary School in Tupelo, Mississippi in the fall of 2011.