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# Teaching English Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom: The Methods Teachers Use

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**Abstract:** *This research project was based on the growing need for research regarding English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms. It addresses the research-based methods for ELL instruction that teachers know of, use regularly, and what the methods look like in a regular classroom setting. A qualitative case study was conducted at one particular elementary school in the western United States. Data was collected using surveys, interviews, and observations. The data were coded and analyzed for themes, which corresponded with relevant literature on the topic. Results indicated that participants were familiar with some research-based methods for teaching ELLs, and used some of the methods regularly in their teaching. Observations of a mainstream classroom indicated that the participants implemented several research-based methods for ELL instruction into their teaching. The findings from this study may benefit other mainstream teachers with ELLs in their classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *Mainstream classroom, English language learners (ELL), teaching methods*

In many mainstream classrooms in the United States, English Language Learners (ELLs) are placed with native English speakers for at least part of the school day, and are expected to learn the same academic material as well as develop proficiency in English. Currently, there is a large achievement gap between native English speakers and English language learners in the United States (Goldenberg, 2008). Regular classroom teachers are given the responsibility to teach language and content to ELL students, with the goal of having all students pass end-of-year testing at a proficient level. Research has shown that these teachers typically lack training and face many challenges with the presence of ELL students in the mainstream classroom (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the methods and strategies mainstream elementary school teachers know and use regularly, and what these methods and strategies look like in a mainstream classroom. According to Martin-Beltran (2009) and Hayes (2005), the majority of existing research involving English language learners in the classroom focuses on program design and results. There is little research addressing the moment-to-moment language learning process. This study will add to the small body of knowledge available on the actual process of language learning that takes place in a mainstream classroom by focusing on best practices the teacher employs in order to facilitate language proficiency and academic achievement in all students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature offers many studies regarding ELLs. However, the majority of existing research focuses on immersion classrooms or test scores, and there is little research focused on mainstream classrooms with ELL students (Hite & Evans, 2006).

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Classroom teachers of ELLs often face challenges, such as lack of training (Curtin, 2005; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Hite & Evans, 2006), negative attitudes toward the ELL population (Walker et al., 2004), lack of resources and funding, and pressure from legislation and high-stakes testing (Thompson, 2004; Walker et al., 2004). In a study done in mainstream first grade classrooms, researchers Hite and Evans (2006) stated that, "Their [language minority students] academic success will depend largely on the abilities of the regular classroom teachers to address their academic and linguistic needs" (p. 106).

Despite the challenges, a few pertinent studies have identified mainstream classroom teachers who are effective in meeting the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs (see Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 1998; Penfield, 1987; Clair, 1993; Gersten, 1996; Gibbons, 2002). Through a study of related literature, themes for qualities and practices of successful classroom teachers of ELLs were identified. These include language acquisition awareness, facilitating student interaction, creating a positive classroom environment, teaching style, and curriculum choice and organization, and using research-based instructional methods (Curtin, 2005; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Hite & Evans, 2006; Lewis-Moreno, 2007; McElvain, 2010; Li & Zhang, 2004; Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000; Williams, 2001; Yoon, 2007).

#### LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AWARENESS

For ELL's, limited language production does not necessarily mean limited academic ability. De Jong and Harper (2005) indicate that teachers need to understand second language development and awareness. According to Watts-Taffe and Truscott (2000), it is also important for teachers to realize that academic language proficiency will take years to achieve, and that learning a new language is a life-long process. Wallace (2007) states that ELLs need explicit language scaffolding and vocabulary instruction, and teachers should be teaching academic vocabulary, not "watering down the content" for ELLs. Li and Zhang (2004) and McElvain (2010) concur, finding that teachers should build higher-level comprehension skills through reading selections that are authentic and meaningful. Several researchers (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Hite, 2006; Li & Zhang, 2004; Williams, 2001) agree that students' first language should be viewed and used as a resource, as well as supported. Even if the classroom teacher is not proficient in a students' first language, he or she should communicate multilingual values (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

#### FACILITATING STUDENT INTERACTION

Hite and Evans (2006) indicate that ELLs will benefit from verbal interaction with other students in the classroom, native English speakers and ELLs alike, and that teachers should facilitate such interaction (Hite & Evans, 2006). Curtin (2005) found that a classroom with ELLs should be more "vibrant" than silent (p. 40). Students should be given opportunities for academic conversation and discourse with peers (Curtin, 2005). Hite and Evans (2006) also found that having peers as "buddies" for the ELLs can facilitate interaction. Peer discussion and cooperative learning groups can provide a place for meaningful language to take place (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000).

#### CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The environment in the classroom, which Richard-Amato (2003) refers to as the affective domain, is comprised of factors having to do with attitudes, motivation, and levels of anxiety, which are influenced by acculturation and personality variables. Scarcella (1990) recommends things teachers can do to improve attitudes toward the classroom environment. These include encouraging friendships, emphasizing commonalities, creating a community where each

student is a contributor, and teaching students how their communication can be misinterpreted (Scarcella, 1990). In order to create a classroom environment with an atmosphere that encourages language acquisition, Richard-Amato (2003) suggests group activities and team-building lessons, which also allow time for authentic conversations. Williams (2001) outlines several things that teachers can do to build a classroom community based on respect and acceptance. These include: believing in every student's "genius," acknowledge when students are courteous to others, structure activities to allow choice and for students to practice appropriate interaction, point out when you learn something new from a student, and be reflective as a teacher. Yoon (2007) also suggests showing interest in the culture of each student, modeling embracing different cultures, and encouraging students to support ELL learning in the classroom.

### TEACHING STYLE

Many studies indicate that an interactive teaching style is most effective for a classroom with English language learners (Curtin, 2005; Li & Zhang, 2004; Williams, 2001; Thompson, 2004; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Hite & Evans, 2006). An interactive style consists of personalized, student-centered, and ever-improving teaching. Teachers are aware of student frustrations, conscious about how students are learning (Curtin, 2005), and use multiple pathways to determine what students know (Li & Zhang, 2004; Williams, 2001). Assessment results help determine lesson topics (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Li & Zhang, 2004), and classrooms are organized to be language-rich (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

Teachers have high expectations of all students (Thompson, 2004; Hite & Evans, 2006), and students are challenged, involved, given feedback, and respected (Hite & Evans, 2006). Students are able to extend their thoughts and construct meaning, and teachers are self-reflective and avoid assumptions (Williams, 2001). Classroom teachers make an effort to know all they can about their students, both academically and personally (Williams, 2001; Li & Zhang, 2004; de Jong & Harper, 2005), and they use the students' funds of knowledge to help the students learn (Hite & Evans, 2006). Interactive teachers also use research-based instructional methods and strategies to teach (Thompson, 2004).

### RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Research that identifies "best practices" for teaching English language learners and enhancing second language acquisition is readily available (Herrell & Jordan, 2008). The researcher selected the following instructional strategies because they are those taught to teachers in ESL endorsement courses at the universities in the state this study took place in. These include communicative practices such as partner work, cooperative learning groups, and verbal interaction between students (Richard-Amato, 2003; Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002), methods designed to foster literacy development (Richard-Amato, 2003; Dixon & Nessel, 1990; Richard-Amato, 1996), and the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Additional instructional methods include vocabulary instruction, comprehensible input, Total Physical Response (TPR), chants, music, poetry, storytelling, role-play, drama, and games (Richard-Amato, 2003).

### SUMMARY

Research has examined qualities of effective classroom teachers who help to meet the particular needs of the ELL population. These teachers are knowledgeable about second language acquisition, facilitate student interaction, create a positive classroom environment, and have an interactive teaching style. Also, these teachers use research-based instructional

methods and strategies in their teaching, such as the natural approach, providing opportunities for interaction and conversation, teaching literacy development skills, physical involvement in the language learning process, chants, music, poetry, storytelling, role-play, drama, and games. Research has identified these “best practices” for second language instruction. However, little research has been done regarding how these methods and strategies would be implemented in the mainstream classroom. The question remains as to what methods and strategies regular classroom teachers use in order to help meet the academic and linguistic needs of English language learners, while teaching content standards to all of their students.

Although much research has been done surrounding English language learners, most of the current research focuses on program design and results, not on the moment-to-moment process of language learning (Hayes, 2005; Martin-Beltran, 2009; Fortune et al., 2008). There has been some research observing the students in the language learning process (Martin-Beltran, 2009; Potowski, 2008), but little research focuses on what instructional strategies the teachers use to encourage language development while meeting academic curriculum requirements. More research needs to be done in this area to identify strategies for use in teaching English language learners in the mainstream classroom.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were twenty elementary school teachers at one particular school in a western state. These teachers were selected for this study because there is no support at this school beyond the mainstream classroom for ELL students, yet as a whole the students have consistently met the state test score requirements in all subject areas. All of the participants completed the Teaching Strategies and Methods Survey (see Appendix A). Four of the teachers - Judy, Julie, Marie, and Linda (participants were given pseudonyms) - were interviewed, and one teacher, Julie, was selected for observations. Table 1 displays demographic information for the participants.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics*

Participant (pseudonyms)	Grade taught	Number of ELLs in classroom	ESL endorsed?
Marie	1	2	No
Judy	3	2	Yes
Jane	2	4	No
Stacy	4	4	No
Michael	4	4	No
Debbie	K	4	No
Pam	1	2	Yes
Angela	5	0	No
Kim	6	4	Working on it
Kelly	4	2	No
Carolyn	3	7+	No
Joan	K	0	No
Charlotte	K	6	No
Martha	1	2	No

Sophie	1	2	No
Karen	2	2	No
Harriet	2	4	Working on it
Sharon	2	6	No
Jared	5	2	No
Louisa	1	7+	Working on it

### DATA COLLECTION

A qualitative case study facilitated exploration of the research questions within the context of regular classroom setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study used surveys, interviews, and observations to collect data about the teaching methods and strategies mainstream teachers use to help English language learners. The researcher administered the Teaching Strategies and Methods Survey (see Appendix A) in person at the selected site. The survey included multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended response questions. This survey was designed to elicit information about the methods they were familiar with for teaching ELLs, and methods they used regularly in the classroom. The main purpose of the survey was to allow the researcher to identify participants who use research-based strategies and methods in their classrooms regularly.

Following the administration of the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four purposefully selected participants to gain further insight into the methods and strategies these teachers use in their classrooms in order to meet the needs of ELL students. These four participants were selected based on their responses to the survey. The researcher selected three participants who indicated that they regularly used research-based methods and strategies in their classrooms - Judy, Julie, and Marie (pseudonyms). The researcher also selected one participant who indicated that she did not regularly use research-based methods and strategies in her classroom - Linda. The follow-up interviews allowed the researcher to gain more detailed responses and ask clarifying questions. The researcher used Creswell's (2008) interview protocol (see Appendix B) to conduct the interviews and take notes. All interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

From the participants who were interviewed, the researcher selected to observe in Julie's classroom. This participant was purposefully selected. Both her survey and interview responses indicated that she regularly used research-based teaching methods and strategies in her classroom. The researcher conducted thirty hours of observations of the teacher and her methods over a three-month period of time, in order to obtain the best understanding of what the methods and strategies looked like in the classroom. These observations were scheduled with the teacher to avoid any scheduling conflicts such as assemblies and field trips. Using observations to collect data allowed the researcher to record information as it appears in a setting and study actual behavior (Creswell, 2008). During the observations, the researcher took notes, using an observation guide (see Appendix C). The observation guide allowed the researcher to have an organized means for recording and keeping field notes (Creswell, 2008). After each observation, the researcher had a short debriefing session with the teacher.

### DATA ANALYSIS

All of the data from the surveys, interviews, and observations was analyzed to identify emerging themes to determine what research-based methods and strategies mainstream elementary school teachers know and use, and what they look like in a mainstream classroom. The researcher used color-coding and hand analysis to get a hands-on feel for the data (Creswell, 2008). The coding corresponded with the themes that had been developed in the

literature review for research-based best practices for language learner instruction. Information from the surveys was recorded and summarized on a spreadsheet.

Data from the surveys, interviews, and observations was read multiple times by the researcher to get a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2008). After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions to identify themes from the participants' responses. Preliminary themes were developed using an inductive approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Data from the interviews was coded by placing those that fit into the preliminary categories. As new themes emerged that did not fit into a previously identified category, a new category was added.

The researcher used the observation notes to identify themes regarding the research-based methods and strategies used. The data was coded into the categories previously developed through the interviews. As new themes emerged, new categories were added. The researcher looked at the categories that had been created from analyzing both interviews and observations, and combined the information into the final themes. The data collected from this study can identify what research-based methods and strategies mainstream teachers at this particular school know of and are regularly using in their classroom to benefit English language learners. The data will also provide a glimpse into the moment-to-moment process of language learning in a mainstream elementary classroom.

## FINDINGS

Through the survey responses, the participants reported knowing of several research-based methods and strategies for teaching second language learners. The chart below shows data collected from the surveys regarding the methods participants were familiar with. The data from the surveys indicated that a large percentage of the participants were familiar with partner work, music, poetry, and games. Only a small percentage of the participants indicated they were familiar with Sheltered Instruction and TPR. A few participants indicated additional research-based methods and strategies for teaching ELLs that they were familiar with. The responses included pre-teaching vocabulary, peer review, using the students' primary language, and total immersion. Data collected from the surveys regarding the regular use of each method and strategy indicated that the most often used are partner work and games, with Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol and TPR being the least often used.

From the interviews and observations, four main themes emerged from the data. These themes are in relation to what methods and strategies for teaching English language learners the participants use regularly in their respective classrooms. The methods are: teaching style, language acquisition awareness and development, SIOP, and various other methods.

### TEACHING STYLE

Each of the participants interviewed had a different perception of the challenges English language learners brought to their classrooms, and how these challenges influenced the participant's individual teaching style. Marie (all names are pseudonyms) said one of the challenges she faced with ELLs is that "they're nowhere near where they should be language-wise." The way she meets this challenge is to work with them individually, model language use, and "point out when they are saying or writing things wrong, so they can be aware of it." Judy felt that if the ELLs were merely given confidence and liked school, they would do well academically. She explained that she tries to help her students enjoy school, and she does fun projects and hands-on activities that will help them be engaged in learning. Also mentioned was the need to help the ELLs not "feel inferior" to the other students.

Linda described that she felt ELLs were “usually quiet, and easy to overlook.” Her strategy to help with those challenges is to be caring, patient, and willing to help the students who struggle understanding what to do. She also mentioned that communicating with the parents was a challenge, and she felt that the students continuing to speak their primary language at home was a setback to their progress in English.

Julie said she views her ELL students “as a help,” because it makes her explain everything better, which benefits everyone in the classroom. Speaking of the ELLs, she said, “They’re not dumb. They’re just as smart as everyone else, they just have a different barrier.” This participant said she meets these challenges through checking on her ELLs periodically, making sure they understand the tasks. She also tries to connect her instruction with what they already know, so that it is easier for the students to comprehend.

Throughout the observations, Julie’s teaching style reflected her perceptions of ELL students in her classroom. She would frequently walk around the classroom while students were working, and quietly ask them if they understood or if it made sense. Julie’s comments to the students were usually of a positive nature, such as “we have some good artists here,” and “that’s a great way of thinking about it.” She used positive reinforcement to manage her classroom, and the students were very responsive.

While teaching, Julie used multiple methods to get a concept across. During a math lesson on skip-counting by 3’s, students were instructed three different ways during one lesson: making an array with manipulatives, using the calculator, and singing a song. Julie’s teaching style was very organized, differentiated for the student’s particular needs, and connected to student’s background knowledge and current life.

#### LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Through the interviews and observations, all participants provided examples of ways they were aware of the process of language acquisition and encouraged language development in their classrooms. During the interviews, all of the teachers mentioned allowing extra time for the English language learners, and that they understood that learning English “wouldn’t all happen this year.” When asked, “What makes an effective teacher for ELLs?” one participant responded with, “having patience.”

Along with extra time, participants also stressed the importance of giving additional examples and practice for language skills. Teachers allowed this through modeling, slowing down their speech, and repeating instruction. One participant gave an example of a student who had incorrect sentence structure when he wrote in English. The teacher explained that she was aware that he was using the sentence structure from his primary language. She said, “It is my part to make sure he sees it, hears it, and is aware of it. Then he just needs more time until he can see it himself.” During my observations, I noted several instances when the teacher would give ELLs additional time to work on an assignment.

Each of the participants described a heavy emphasis on literacy instruction and development for their entire class. A large majority of the daily schedule in each classroom was dedicated to literacy skills such as phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary, guided reading, reading fluency, literature circles, read-aloud, shared reading, writing, and spelling. All of the participants also discussed spending time doing “small group time” for reading instruction. Judy gave an example of a math lesson she taught based on a picture book she had read to the class. Marie discussed spending extra time working on reading comprehension with English language learners to make sure they “understand what they are reading.” She also said that she gives her ELLs “lots of opportunities to write,” because she feels that will help them learn English better.

During the observations, Julie taught several language lessons to the whole class, such as homonyms, synonyms and antonyms, prefixes, suffixes, and long vowel patterns. Other lesson topics included reading for meaning and reading strategies for decoding and comprehending. She used writing during math lessons, and used shared reading to teach social studies.

#### **SHELTERED INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

Although none of the participants mentioned sheltered instruction by name in the interviews, several of them described methods that fall under the SIOP umbrella. This is a method for teaching second language learners that is widely accepted (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). The SIOP model is based on the theories that language processes (listening, reading, speaking, writing) develop interdependently (Echevarria et al., 2008). In SIOP lessons, language and content objectives are woven together and teachers make the content comprehensible through visual aids, modeling, demonstrations, graphic organizers, vocabulary previews, adapted text, cooperative learning, peer tutoring and native language support (Echevarria et al., 2008). The teachers build upon students' experiences and prior knowledge, taking into consideration students' affective needs, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles (Echevarria et al., 2008). With the SIOP model, there is a high level of student engagement and interaction with the teachers, other students, and the text in order to teach students declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, study skills, and learning strategies (Echevarria et al., 2008). The SIOP model is specifically designed for flexibility in differing classroom situations, including those with all ELL students and also those with a mix of native and nonnative English speakers (Echevarria et al., 2008).

In the interviews, all of the teachers discussed going over vocabulary words, as well as making the content understandable through modeling and examples. Judy, Julie, and Marie all discussed using companion reading in their classrooms, which is a SIOP strategy. During the observations, Julie demonstrated a high level of understanding of the importance of making her teaching comprehensible to all students, and of ways to do just that. The classroom walls were covered with posters, which displayed vocabulary words, checklists, and charts. During lessons, Julie used pictures, modeled tasks, photographs, manipulatives, and many examples to make the content comprehensible. When giving instructions, she typically broke them down into step-by-step items. She used both explicit and spontaneous vocabulary instruction. Pre-, during, and post-reading activities were implemented nearly every time the students read any material, including graphic organizers, questions, and reading guides.

It appeared that Julie had a grasp on what the students experiences and prior knowledge consisted of, and built her teaching around that. Before reading a selection about different foods around the world, she asked the students if they had ever seen TV shows such as "Survivor" or "Fear Factor." This launched a discussion of the "weird foods" contestants on the show had to eat, which then led into the reading of the article. During reading, Julie explained any terms the students were unfamiliar with. After reading the article, students answered questions about what they had just read, and Julie guided them in making inferences about "why people eat weird foods."

#### **OTHER METHODS**

Some of the other methods the participants mentioned using to help their English language learners include: music, art, poetry, storytelling, games, drama, and rhymes. In Julie's classroom, the researcher observed her using similar methods to those just listed. She had a poem the students recited each day posted on the bulletin board. The students learned songs to help them with their math facts, as well as games to practice math skills. Julie utilized

technology by taking her students to the computer lab frequently to practice test strategies, since their state tests will be on the computers. Her students practiced reading fluency by doing partner plays and choral readings.

#### WHAT DO THESE METHODS AND STRATEGIES LOOK LIKE IN A MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM?

The bell rings and students in Julie's third grade classroom file in the door, chatting happily with each other. Julie greets the students as they walk in. There is a math problem on the screen, and students pick up individual whiteboards, and begin working to solve the problem. After a few minutes, student volunteers share their thought process with the class in answer to the math problem. Students complete a timed math facts test, which is differentiated for their level depending on what facts they have previously "passed off."

The school day proceeds with students participating in an "opening" routine, saying the Pledge of Allegiance, completing math skills related to the calendar, and discussing the schedule for the day. Julie shows a baby picture of one of the students, reading clues about that student while the rest of the class guesses who it is. Next, Julie goes over the previous day's homework, answering questions students had, modeling and working through problems on the whiteboard. This evolves into a math lesson on multiplication. Students use manipulatives to create arrays on their desks, learn a procedure for multiplication on their calculators, and sing a song to help them remember their "times 3" facts. Math time ends with students playing multiplication games with a partner, such as "multiplication war," "multiplication tic-tac-toe," and "multiplication dominoes." All of the students are highly engaged in their games.

Students finish their games and get settled back in their seats. A photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr. is projected onto the screen. The students have been learning about the civil rights movement. Julie begins the lesson with a connection to the students' lives by asking, "If somebody was mistreating you, how would you solve that problem?" The students give various answers, and then Julie leads the discussion into the peaceful ways Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to solve problems. The students then do a shared reading of an article about the marches and speeches Martin Luther King, Jr. implemented. Each student has a copy of the article and they all read together.

After the reading, the PowerPoint presentation continues with many photographs from the 1960's. Julie facilitates a discussion among the students about mistreatment and "separate but equal." This discussion is full of higher-level thinking questions, inferences, and connections to the students' background knowledge and current lives. "These are actual photos. Other people in the country saw things like this going on, and they wanted to help the blacks out. They didn't like what they saw; they didn't think it was fair... In your own life, think about it. If you're out on the playground and you see someone getting bullied, would you help him or her? Could you do it in a peaceful way?" The emotion in the room is high - students are standing up, many hands are raised, and some students are shouting out.

A writing assignment is the last part of the lesson, with Julie asking the students to come up with their own opinions and think for themselves about how to make the world a peaceful place. It appears that all of the students have ideas, as they begin writing furiously. Julie asks if anyone wants to share their idea, and several students volunteer to read their assignment to the class. After the lesson, I talked with Julie about this assignment. She said, "I am trying to help them be reflective and explain what they think and why they gave that response. They need to be able to do that for their reading assessment, and it is an important skill to have."

This snapshot of a morning in Julie's classroom is a small example of how she teaches every day. She utilizes many research-based methods and strategies for teaching English language learners, and incorporates them into her lessons. She feels that this benefits all of her students.

In the lessons just described, Julie used the following research-based methods: partner work, literacy-based curriculum, games, music, and many components of SIOP. She makes her content comprehensible to the students various ways, and integrates content objectives such as social studies and math along with language objectives. Her teaching style is highly engaging, connected to the students' background knowledge, and conducive to a classroom environment where students feel safe to take risks.

## DISCUSSION

A few limitations are recognized in this study. The results of this study cannot be generalized to other teachers in other mainstream classrooms. This was a qualitative case study of one school and one particular teacher. The sampling was purposeful. The findings also cannot be generalized to higher-grade levels, as they may not have the large focus on literacy, as do the younger elementary school grades.

This study led the researcher to several conclusions. First, there is a lack of ESL training among the mainstream classroom teachers included in this study. The findings regarding the number of participants who had their ESL endorsement compared to the number of participants with ELLs in their classroom is consistent with what was found in previous research (Curtin, 2005). However, each participant in this study was familiar with at least one of the research-based teaching methods listed on the survey and used at least one of the methods regularly in their classrooms.

Second, the participants were more familiar with the teaching methods that are generally thought of as "just good teaching." The strategies such as partner work, games, music, and poetry are widely considered effective teaching practices for all students (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Richard-Amato, 2010). Fewer participants were familiar with the teaching methods that have been researched more specifically for language acquisition, such as TPR and SIOP. A few participants listed "vocabulary instruction" and "vocabulary building activities" as other teaching strategies they were familiar with. These seem to fall under the SIOP umbrella. However, they did not indicate they were familiar with or used SIOP regularly in their classrooms.

Third, it was apparent that some of the teachers held or developed ideas about English language learners that contradict the research. One of the participants felt that the students continuing to speak their primary language at home was impeding their ability to learn English. This contradicts Cummin's (1981) findings that the more proficient a student is in their primary language, the more proficient they are likely to be in a second language. Another misconception a participant had was feeling the need to point out every linguistic error an ELL makes. This focus on grammar and syntax can heighten the affective filter and make language learners feel afraid to take risks (Richard-Amato, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to research the use and implementation of research-based methods and strategies used by mainstream teachers to help meet the needs of English language learners in their classrooms. We are in an era of changing demographics and many teachers whose attitude and teaching practices are not helpful to the growing ELL population in mainstream classrooms (Walker et al., 2004). However, the researcher was able to observe a teacher who successfully utilized many research-based methods and strategies in her classroom. Those few ELLs in her classroom are receiving an education that is meeting their needs and allowing them to learn language skills along with academic content.

Further research needs to be done in this area to examine more mainstream teachers with ELLs in their classrooms. Another area of research that needs to be addressed is that of effectiveness. This study did not examine whether or not the methods and strategies Julie used in her classroom were effective with her English language learners. More research needs to be done in this area. Research is also needed to determine if more ESL training would translate into effective teaching practices for English language learners in the mainstream classroom.

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## Appendix A

### Teaching Methods and Strategies Survey

Please answer every question honestly. Your answers are confidential. Please list your name if you are willing to answer follow-up questions about your responses.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

1. What grade do you teach?
  - a. Kindergarten

- b. 1<sup>st</sup>
  - c. 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - d. 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - e. 4<sup>th</sup>
  - f. 5<sup>th</sup>
  - g. 6<sup>th</sup>
2. How many ELLs (English Language Learners) do you have in your classroom this year?
- a. 0
  - b. 1-2
  - c. 3-4
  - d. 5-6
  - e. 7+
3. Do you have an ESL endorsement? Circle one.
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Currently working on it
4. Which of the following research-based teaching strategies and methods are you familiar with?
- a. The natural approach
  - b. Partner work
  - c. The affective filter or affective domain
  - d. Language experience approach
  - e. Literacy-based curriculum
  - f. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
  - g. Total Physical Response (TPR)
  - h. Chants
  - i. Music
  - j. Poetry
  - k. Storytelling
  - l. Role-play and drama
  - m. Games
5. Which of these teaching strategies and methods do you use regularly in your classroom? Please indicate how often you use each strategy using the following scale:
- |            |                        |                         |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 0 - Never  | 1 - Monthly            | 2 - A few times a month |
| 3 - Weekly | 4 - A few times a week | 5 - Daily               |
- a. \_\_\_\_\_ The natural approach
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Partner work
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ The affective filter or affective domain
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ Language experience approach
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ Literacy-based curriculum
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_ Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_ Total Physical Response (TPR)
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_ Chants
  - i. \_\_\_\_\_ Music
  - j. \_\_\_\_\_ Poetry
  - k. \_\_\_\_\_ Storytelling
  - l. \_\_\_\_\_ Role-play and drama
  - m. \_\_\_\_\_ Games

6. Which of these teaching strategies and methods have you found to be effective for teaching second language learners? Please indicate the effectiveness of each strategy using the following scale:
- 1 - Not effective                      2 - Occasionally effective                      3 - Sometimes effective  
 4 - Frequently effective                      5 - Always effective
- a. \_\_\_\_\_ The natural approach
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Partner work
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ The affective filter or affective domain
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ Language experience approach
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ Literacy-based curriculum
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_ Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_ Total Physical Response (TPR)
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_ Chants
  - i. \_\_\_\_\_ Music
  - j. \_\_\_\_\_ Poetry
  - k. \_\_\_\_\_ Storytelling
  - l. \_\_\_\_\_ Role-play and drama
  - m. \_\_\_\_\_ Games
7. What other teaching strategies and methods do you use regularly in your classroom?

### Appendix B

#### Interview Protocol

Project: Mainstream Teachers and the Methods They Use

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Grade taught:

Describe the project

1. Purpose - Examine the moment-to-moment process of language learning in mainstream classrooms with ELL students
2. Data - Interviewing teachers to ask more about their surveys and potentially select a teacher for observations
3. Confidentiality - I will record and take notes, but I will be the only one to see them and they will be destroyed when I have the information I need from them
4. Time - It will take approximately 15 minutes

\*Get consent then start recording.

Interview Questions

1. What is the typical daily schedule in your classroom?
2. What research-based instructional methods and strategies for teaching second language learners do you use regularly in your classroom?
3. How do you incorporate these methods and strategies into your teaching?
4. Which methods and strategies have you found to be effective?
5. What other methods and strategies for teaching second language learners do you use in your teaching that you have found to effective?

- 6. What are some of the challenges you face as a teacher of English language learners and how do you meet those challenges?
- 7. In your opinion, what makes an effective teacher for ELL students?
- 8. Would you be willing to have me come observe your classroom for 30 hours over the next three months?

**Appendix C**

Observation Guide

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson topic:

Lesson objective(s):

Strategy/method used:

- |                  |              |                  |                           |
|------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Natural approach | Partner work | Affective filter | Language experience       |
| SIOP             | TPR          | Chants           | Literacy-based curriculum |
| Music            | Poetry       | Storytelling     | Role-play/drama           |
| Games            | Other _____  |                  |                           |

How the teacher implements strategy/method:

De-briefing questions: