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## Best Practices for Differentiated Learning among Third through Fifth Grade ELL Students

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BEST PRACTICES FOR DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING AMONG  
THIRD THROUGH FIFTH GRADE ELL STUDENTS

by

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A project submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Specialist in Education  
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology  
Western Michigan University  
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## BEST PRACTICES FOR DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING AMONG THIRD THROUGH FIFTH GRADE ELL STUDENTS

Tara J. Macias, Ed.S.

Western Michigan University, 2017

With the increase of second language English learners in U.S. kindergarten through twelfth grade schools and the continued achievement gap between these students and English speaking students, educators and administrators need to develop, implement and support best practices for differentiation among English Language Learners. ELL students are often categorized as special education students while their only barrier to learning is language acquisition. On the other hand, ELL students may have additional learning difficulties that are not identified because there is an assumption that language acquisition is the single challenge to their learning. Educators often engage in whole group instruction with ELL students, however, differentiation in instruction and assessment is found to aide educators in meeting the individual and diverse needs of ELL students. The research found in this paper focuses on best practices for differentiation among third through fifth grade ELL students. This focus is vital because of important academic shifts, including learning to read to reading to learn during these years. A key finding is that the entire school environment, not only classroom instruction, affects success for ELL students. This research concludes with matrices that can aide instructors and administrators in evaluating their own school and classroom instruction in best practices for differentiation among third through fifth grade ELL students.

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Tara J. Macias

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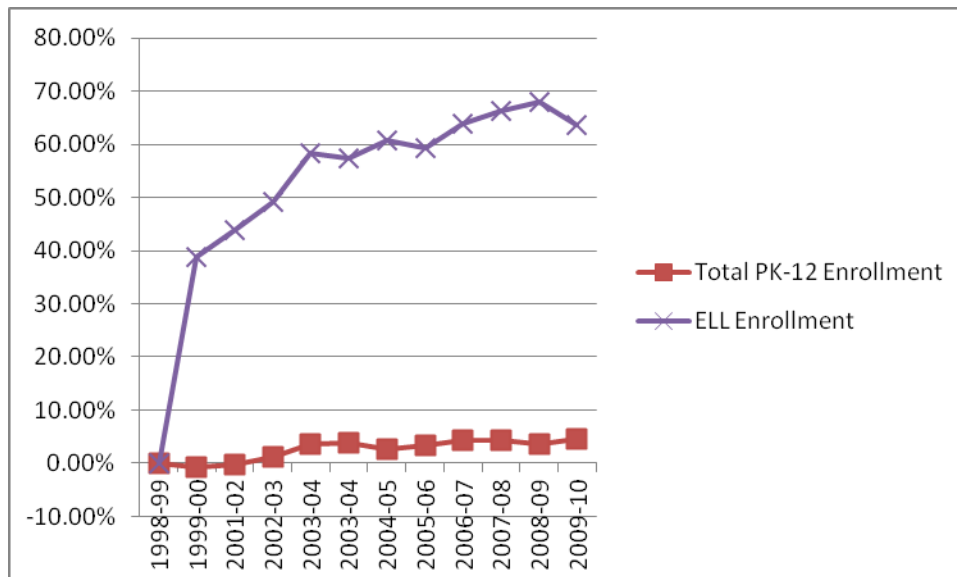
## **Introduction**

As English Language Learner (ELL) populations in schools increase with the expectations of both teachers and students, the importance of using best practices among ELL students must be addressed. Federal law mandates ELL students have access to high-quality education and are given the tools to reach their potential (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This commitment was reaffirmed in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics reports:

The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in school year 2013–14 (9.3 percent, or an estimated 4.5 million students) than in 2003–04 (8.8 percent, or an estimated 4.2 million students) and 2012–13 (9.2 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students). (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014).

In 2010, the National Center on Immigrant Integration within the Migration Policy Institute found that over 73% of ELL students' primary language (L1) was Spanish (McNamara, 2016). In Minnesota alone, the Department of Education recently reported that in K-12 education 5.4% of ELL students spoke Spanish as their L1 followed by 2.5% speaking Somali and 2.3% speaking Hmong (Raghavendran, 2016). It is estimated that 35-47% of Minneapolis area students do not speak English in their homes (Raghavendran, 2016). This growth in Pre-K through 12 grade enrollment of ELL learners in the past several years is reflected in Figure 1.

Change in U.S. Total and ELL PreK-12 Enrollment between  
School Year 1998-99 and 2009-10 (%)



*Figure 1: Data from National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language (NCELA). *The Growing Numbers of English Learner Students*, 2009/10 (Washington DC: NCELA, 2011), [available online](#).*

The Minnesota Department of Education noted in 2015 that in the last two decades, the number of English Language Learner students in the state has tripled (Raghavendran, 2016). Because of resource constraints and increasing percentages of ELL students with differing levels of proficiency in regular classrooms, general education teachers as well as English as a Second Language specialists must assess, plan, and implement best practices among this population. Federal and state education standards mandate that these students receive services, consisting of pull-out ESL courses, co-teaching environments or dual language programs (Ragvaendran, 2016). While the rate of second language acquisition is dependent on a number of factors, “in most cases it (second language acquisition) could take more than seven years” (Syrja, 2011). “[Federal law] requires that students who are acquiring English demonstrate progress in both content knowledge and English language proficiency, which means that all teachers need to understand students’ stages of second-language acquisition and support academic language development in addition to content knowledge” (Hill and Miller, 2013, p. 13). In addition to teachers, administrators must be willing and able to hold instructors accountable for best practices, not only by citing improved standardized test scores, but utilizing other proven methods of teacher and student assessment.

The good news is that best practices for ELL students are, many times, beneficial not only for ELL students but for all students (Ford, et. al, 2013). Creating low affective filters in the school environment; nurturing professional development and collaboration; integrating a variety of teaching, planning and evaluation methods; and creatively assessing student and instructor progress amplify the educational environment as a whole. Therefore, teachers and administrators can internalize standards of best practices for ELL students which enhance the

classroom and performance for all students. Further, the hope is that the findings in this study aid in the cultivation of a school culture that is productive for both teachers and students.

Many times ELL students are treated as a homogeneous group both inside the general education classroom and when “pulled out” for targeted instruction (Ford, Cabell, Konold, Invernizzi, and Gartland, 2013). Research confirms the need for greater differentiation among ELL students in order to reach their academic goals and that these goals should not differ from those of English proficient students (Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson and Spatzer, 2012). Differentiation or a “variety of means to make lessons understandable” (Diallo, 2014, p. 23-24), is frequently used among English proficient students, but is not as prevalent among ELL students (Parker, 2011). “As with native English speakers, best practice in early literacy instruction for ELL students requires differentiation to meet individual students’ specific needs” (Ford, et. al, 2013, p. 907).

### **Importance of English Proficiency among ELL Students in Upper Elementary Grades**

The researcher focused on best practices among third through fifth grade ELL students for two vital reasons. Standardized assessments of the Common Core usually begin in third grade, which allows the researcher to access data (in the form of test results). Standardized testing and Common Core are also useful as students must reach a certain level of proficiency in order to take them. In addition, there is a major shift in academic expectations between second and third grades, as well as between fifth and sixth grades. The shift in high expectations at these levels focuses on reading comprehension and academic reading, writing and speaking. Hill and Miller (2013) state, “Students must master academic English to understand textbooks, write papers and reports, solve mathematical word problems and take

tests. Without a mastery of academic English, students cannot develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to understand and express the new and abstract concepts taught in the classroom” (p. 20).

More importantly for this study, expectations of using problem-solving skills and comprehension (oral, written, reading, and listening) in English to understand academic textbooks and language also rise dramatically in sixth grade. Oral language proficiency in third and fourth grades is vital because of its direct relationship with reading comprehension: “Multiple language components: vocabulary skills, syntactical knowledge and listening comprehension are all associated with reading comprehension among elementary aged ELL students” (Ford, et al., 2013, p. 890). Supporting this claim, the principal at the school studied for this project stated that as the ELL population increased at the school, students struggled to convert from “learning to read to reading to learn,” which begins with intensity in third grade (Liz Ramsey, personal correspondence, March 29, 2017). By third grade, the lexicon used in English books for instruction has often grown beyond ELL students’ vocabulary base. Therefore, differing instruction must support this change to sophisticated reading comprehension (Ford, et al., 2013).

In upper elementary and middle school, students are required to read, speak, write, comprehend and problem solve in ways in which students with low English proficiency may struggle dramatically. Attaining proficiency in these areas prior to entering middle school can greatly reduce emotional stress, motivation levels, and drop-out rates in the coming years for ELL students (Baecher, et al., 2012). Therefore, the researcher investigated best practices of differentiation among ELL students, focusing on the upper elementary level.

## **Differentiation Among ELL Students**

As stated previously, ELL students are frequently grouped together for instruction both inside general education classrooms and when pulled out of the classroom for targeted instruction (Ford, et al., 2013). ELL students' abilities and experiences vary greatly (Ford et al., 2013).

English language learners vary in the home language they speak, the age at which they arrived in the United States, the age at which they were first exposed to English, their fluency rates in both their primary language and English, their years of schooling in their native country, and their family's socioeconomic status. What all of these variances point to is that there is no one-size fits-all response to addressing the many needs of this increasingly diverse population. (Syrja, 2011, p. 21).

These variances indicate that professional assessments may not reveal differences in needs among ELL students. For example, an ELL student is often labeled such because of their lack of English proficiency—without considering whether the student has additional learning disabilities or literacy skills beyond what the assessment measures. Research suggests that predictors of English literacy development such as phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and orthographic knowledge should be assessed in both the primary and the target (English) language in a way that assessments currently do not provide (Ford, et al., 2013). In contrast, an ELL student may be treated as if he or she has learning disabilities and is put into a special education classroom, when in fact, language proficiency is his or her central challenge. “Low levels of language acquisition are not equivalent to low levels of cognitive ability” (Hill

and Miller, 2013, p. 70). As educators and administrators, we must be careful to vary assessments, instruction, evaluation and accountability in ways that individualize learning for a range of ELL students.

Grouping all ELL students into one ESL program may be hindering Hispanic students more than other ELL students (Ford, et al., 2013; Chang, 2008). Hispanic ELL students, in general, benefit most from teacher-directed individual activities while demonstrating slower growth through teacher-directed whole class activities. Even small group instruction can leave some ELL and DLL students feeling lost and neglected while their fellow group members move at differing paces through academic material (Chang, 2008). Ford, et al. (2013), purports that person-centered approaches to analyzing test results can impact Hispanic as well as other ELL students and help identify variability within groups by indicating similar patterns of strengths and weaknesses for each learner (2013). The researcher recommends modifying lessons to individualize learning using this and other indicators.

Research of differentiated learning among ELL students is lacking (Chang, 2008; Parker, 2011). Chang's research focused on math performance and underlines that best practices in differentiated ESL education must translate to the breadth of subjects, not only reading, writing and conversation. In addition, comprehensive research among ELL students who are found to have learning disabilities is even more rare (Barrera, Liu, Thurlow and Chamberlain, 2006) and some see teachers' inability to differentiate among ELL students as a barrier to their success (Helfrich and Bosh, 2011). Hence, the researcher hopes that this project will add to the present literature available for educators to enhance teaching and learning strategies for ELL students across subjects, especially in upper elementary grades.

## **Goals of the Research Project**

The goals of this project are to explore best practices of differentiated learning among third through fifth grade ELL students and create matrices for assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation which reflect these best practices. These matrices can then be used by teachers and administrators as a rubric to ensure differentiated teaching and learning in general education and specialists' classrooms where a large percentage of ELL students are present.

Input for best practices was gathered from ESL teachers, specialists as well as from an extensive literature review. In addition, practices were aligned with changes in reading proficiency scores for third through fifth grade students over a seven year period in the school studied for this project.

## **Literature Review**

As the researcher discusses the present literature addressing differentiation among ELL learners in third through fifth grades, it is important to emphasize a few points. First, best practices in ELL instruction in general are widely published. Many of the practices described in this literature review may appear in these general discussions among ESL instructors and in the few ESL classes required by general classroom teachers in their professional certification process. However, the purpose of mentioning them here is to emphasize that these practices may be and can be modified to differentiate among ELL students, not simply implemented wholesale. What is important is not so much what each method teaches [instructors] but "...how teachers differentiate for students learning English to ensure a match between a task and a particular learning need" (Tomilson, 2008 as cited in Coleman Parker, 2011, p. 19). As the discussion progresses, examples of such modifications from the literature will be helpful to



give instructors suggestions in how to develop and utilize present practices for individualization among ELL students. Other practices mentioned may be unique for specifically individualizing ELL instruction for students.

In addition, the research found that categorizing best practices for differentiation was helpful for discussion, implementation, and accountability. The categories used here are not rigid and the researcher leaves it up to the school district, curriculum director, administrator and instructor to determine whether they are helpful for their unique context. The discussion will center on best practices for student enrollment, student assessment, classroom planning and instruction, and instructor assessment.

### **Student Enrollment**

It is important to look at student enrollment because the manner in which an ELL student enters the school district determines much about individualizing learning for that student (Syrja, 2011). This category also covers the status of the school itself at the point in time when any given ELL student enrolls. There are several determining factors that should be considered when beginning the process of enrolling an ELL student into a school. These factors are outlined in Appendix A.

From the present literature, the researcher found a number of important actions which the school can do to prepare itself during the process of enrolling ELL students such as creating environments for motivating students and developing teachers who possess cultural competencies. Creating a school and classroom environment that is rich and motivating for all learners allows administrators and instructors to create an environment with a low affective filter (Krashen, 1982 as noted in Diallo, 2014). An affective filter is “a screen of emotion that can block language acquisition or learning if it keeps the users from being too self-conscious or

too embarrassed to take risks when they speak” (Syrja, 2011, p. 73). Syrja (2011) points out that there are three types of affective variables related to second language acquisition: “self-confidence, motivation, and low anxiety” (p. 74). Suggestions to lower the affective filter are to learn about students’ countries of origin and cultural traditions; make students the “expert” at something in the class, allowing them to use L1 and L2 while explaining this part of their culture; pronounce students’ names correctly; use information about students’ countries of origin in class readings, examples, and scenarios in lessons; and use Total Physical Response (TPR) as much as possible. Total Physical Response (TPR) is used for beginning ELLs utilizing commands, physical responses, motions and gestures to learn English.

The school needs to create a professional environment for general classroom teachers and specialists where they can share their ideas, frustrations, and successes with each other. A school that incorporates shared planning time, recognition of staff, and time for staff to implement ideas that came from recent professional development opportunities will see greater success with their ELL students (Hirsh, 2016). When this positive and natural environment is cultivated, action research shifts the nature of teachers' questions from “focusing on what was taught to whether the students learned” (Syrja, 2011, p. 99). Instructors who are allowed to try something new in their classrooms and report to other professionals regarding its success or challenges helps both the students and other teachers. As Hirsh (2016) states, this can be done in a Professional Learning Community (PLC), contributing to the success of all students, including ELL students:

PLCs improve the teacher and learning of all students: EL students, students with disabilities, specialists on faculty for these students, and families and caregivers of these students. When schools and leaders focus on collective

responsibility for all students, PLCs allow staff to apply principles of social justice and equity as a way to transform discourse and address broader systemic inequities facing students and faculty who may be marginalized. Establishing shared goals for ELL outcomes will enable all PLCs to leverage their shared commitment, expertise, and learning. This shared focus should also result in net less work for all PLC members as new learning and solutions can be shared from team to team and school to school (p. 4).

Another tool that can be used to evaluate this professional school environment is the English Language Learner Program Survey for Principals (Grady & O'Dwyer, 2014). The self-reporting survey helps principals assess the level of success and challenges in a school to improve educating ELL students (Grady & O' Dwyer, 2014). Schools must create an environment of collaboration so a safe, affirming environment is present for both students and instructors.

Cultural competence of instructors and staff must be taken into consideration. This is discussed further under instructor assessments as the researcher feels that individual teachers may desire to self-evaluate their cultural competence and seek resources to enrich this area. Acute awareness of the cultures represented in one's school and classroom can be a key to avoiding apprehension and frustration (Grubbs, 2003). Grubbs (2003) states, "...optimally, the teacher could fold the new culture into the course content, providing a valuable learning experience for the other students in the class" (p.11). In addition, the school leadership should set an example of demonstrating and increasing cultural competence among its staff and students (Syrja, 2011). This increase will, in turn, lower the affective filter in the school and allow for ELL students to feel welcome and comfortable.

Schools may also examine a number of student factors when an ELL student enters the district. They should first evaluate the Home Language Survey carefully, but not consider it the only factor in determining eligibility for English Proficiency Testing. The Home Language Survey is the first step in determining whether a student will be considered an ELL student. The family of the student indicates on a survey given by the school whether a language other than English is spoken at home (Syrja, 2011). Instead of using this survey alone, the proficiency in both L1 and L2 must also be considered. Researchers find that fluency in L1 greatly increases the chances of success for proficiency in L2. Hence, testing for proficiency in both L1 and L2 will give much insight to instructors working with this student. Schools must consider the number of years that the student was schooled in their primary language. Many students have vast content knowledge because of their prior schooling that is never considered when entering U.S. schools as an ELL student. It may be helpful to test content areas in their primary language to get a feel for prior knowledge and what challenges in content lay ahead.

Educators and administrators must consider a students' prior exposure to English. This may include preschool or a level of conversational English already achieved. Baecher et al. (2011), suggests that testing for proficiency is simply not enough to determine the extent to which an ELL student needs services. In contrast, phonetics, alphabet skills and orthography skills must be assessed and taken into consideration. Preschool attendance is linked to early orthographic knowledge and skills (Ford, et al., 2013). Therefore, evaluating whether a student has attended preschool upon enrollment in a new school district can help determine the needs this student may have and the challenges and opportunities ahead in their ESL program. A student's prior exposure to English must be a consideration in differentiation for enrolling students.

Socioeconomic status of the family is also linked to academic success in English and non-English speaking households. Syrja (2011) suggests that schools provide supports for families in the areas of health and nutrition, preparing children for school, basic computer skills, intermediate computer skills, email and cell phone training, basic English and college preparation. In addition, Syrja (2011) realizes that connecting families with area resources and helping families navigate social services is important in student achievement. Syrja (2011) reports six practices that enhance these connections: Assisting families with parenting skills, improving communication with families, increasing opportunities for families to volunteer at school, helping increase family involvement in student learning at home, ensuring that families play a role in school decision making, and increasing collaboration with the community (Epstein as noted in Syrja, 2011, p. 82).

Syrja (2011) developed an ELL Profile Sheet, shown in Table 1, to gather much of the information mentioned in this section (p. 67). This resource can be used to create a profile for each ELL student to which all relevant teachers and specialists may have access. Creating a more robust profile on incoming ELL students was one of the needs identified by the teachers interviewed for this study (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 2, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). A full-bodied student profile gives instructors a springboard by which they can develop appropriate individualized academic plans. For lower elementary teachers, this profile may include results from Kindergarten screening such as the Kindergarten screening required by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minneapolis Public Schools, April 11, 2017). This encourages collaboration and also aids in creating differentiated learning for individuals and groups of students as instructors identify themes and connections to each other and the curriculum.

Table 1

*Form 2R.1 English Language Learner Profile Sheet*

Student Name	Years in U.S. Schools	Overall English Learner Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Language	Literacy	Years in School Prior to Arrival in U.S.	Other Pertinent Information

*Note:* Taken from *How to Reach and Teach English Language Learners* by Rachel Carrillo

Syrja, copyright 2011 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., p. 67. Used by permission, license number 4126830736426, June 12, 2017.

## **Student Assessments**

Added stakes for teachers and students in recent years emphasize summative assessments to determine success or failure for both teachers and students. While additional accountability in the education system is important, understanding what types of assessments are most helpful for success in a classroom where many students are ELL students is vital. Best practices in differentiating learning between ELL students cannot occur unless assessments are also differentiated. Baecher (2012), et al., purports that ELL students may demonstrate their comprehension and knowledge in different ways than other students and therefore traditional assessments may not fit ELLs. “The way in which ELLs demonstrate understanding and develop their own critical thinking skills may differ significantly from their non-ELL peers” (Helfrich and Bosh, 2011, p. 264). As Baecher et al. (2012) suggests this does not mean that content standards should differ for ELL students. The Student Assessment Matrix found in Appendix B may help administrators and teachers evaluate student assessments.

One of the most important summative tests taken by a potential ELL student is the initial test determining whether the student is considered an English Language Learner. The implementation of this test is determined by answers on the Home Language Survey, which, some argue is a faulty method of determination to initiate the test (Syrja, 2011). The tendency to homogenize instruction to ELL students may begin with this important test, which is mandated by federal and state law (Hill and Miller, 2013). This requirement is usually fulfilled through the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for

English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs English proficiency assessment) (Syrja, 2011). Testing “proficient” excludes the student from supportive ESL services; testing “non-proficient” mandates services (Syrja, 2011).

Because [ELL students] are tested in a language that is not their native language, using the assessment data to make (potentially unwarranted) high stakes decisions is suspect. Assessment data cannot accurately differentiate between language learning and learning difficulties. As such, there exists disproportionate amounts of ethnic and linguistic minorities in special education, with data misidentifying or failing to identify ELLs for special services (Guzman-Orth, 2014, p. 4).

At the school researched for this study, the test used to create a baseline for ELL students is World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Measure of Developing English Language (MODEL). This test developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), “...is a series of English language proficiency assessments for Kindergarten through Grade 12. MODEL can be used by educators as an identification/placement assessment for newly enrolled ELLs or as an interim progress monitoring assessment” (WIDA, 2014). In the WIDA MODEL test, students are tested on their proficiency in English language used in social sciences, math, language arts and science and is tied to the standards in the ACCESS for ELL Students assessment. The Children’s Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA) is also used in the school researched for this project. It is an adaptive test developed by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) used to track early literacy and math skills in prekindergarten through second (Spanish) or third (English) grades (NWEA, 2017). The NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Test is also implemented at the school researched in this study. The



MAP test is used to determine growth of students within the year and from year to year in reading and mathematics (NWEA, 2017). The data collected in this study is primarily data from the school's MAP testing in third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Researchers argue that multiple tests, both summative and formative, should be used to determine what, if any, ESL programming should be applied to a potential ELL student (Baecher et al., 2012). Therefore, tests, in addition to those that determine only proficiency or non-proficiency, should be used to determine services offered to ELL students and the types of services offered to these students. For example, evaluators should be looking for distinct patterns of literacy skills (Ford, et al., 2013). Ford et al. (2013), defines four distinct groups or literacy clusters into which ELL students may be classified, which can help determine individualized instruction: a) High Alphabet skills/High Phonographic skills; b) Average Phonographic/Strong Alphabet; c) Average Phonographic/Weak Alphabet; d) Low Phonographic/Low Alphabet (Ford, et al., 2013, p. 904). In addition, evaluators should be looking to determine the stage of language acquisition in which each ELL student is functioning. These categories are: a) Preproduction, b) Early Production, c) Speech Emergence, d) Intermediate Fluency, or e) Advanced Fluency (Hill and Miller, 2013, p. 16). Determining this stage through various evaluations will aid instructors in planning and implementation of lessons that are language rich and challenging for each student.

Finally, understanding the level for each domain (listening, speaking, reading and writing) must be shared with the entire instructional team working with each individual ELL student, not only the ESL specialist. When looking at a specific student's scores on a sample language proficiency assessment, a student may earn an overall score of level 4 because the student possesses high listening and speaking skills, but a more careful look at each domain

score is important. In the above example, the student scored in level 2 for both reading and writing. “Being uninformed about these levels may [lead] to several inaccurate assumptions..., including that the student is not engaged or that she has a learning disability since she is a level 4 but is unable to read and comprehend the textbook” (Hill and Miller, 2014, p. 43).

To avoid lumping ELL students into homogeneous groups, school leaders must be careful to develop and implement varied, minimally biased summative and formative assessments as “an emerging English user’s limited verbal output does not mean the student has limited cognition” (Hill and Miller, 2014, p. 17). Frequent formative assessments are useful for differentiating among ELL students as well as general education students. “Checking in” with students as they move through material that is especially language rich can increase the knowledge of the instructor, enabling them to adjust individualized learning opportunities for their students. Formative assessments and growth measures are an area where opportunities for using oral language, both conversational and academic, abound. As we will see later in this discussion, the emphasis on oral language is vital for differentiation among ELL students and for their success as they grow in proficiency. Therefore, assessments should include oral components. Using oral language with ELL students not only improves their reading and writing but gives instructors another method to gain insight into how to individualize learning.

School districts should consult with specialists and instructors to discover the best assessment tools giving a balance of summative and formative evaluations in L1 and L2. Syrja (2011) suggests that teachers divide up various assessments among fellow teachers and ESL specialists to begin creating a file of differentiated assessments used at each grade level and in each subject. Developing two or three vital, differentiated assessments each year helps

instructors implement them thoughtfully (Syrja, 2011). The assessment tools chosen by schools should vary in emphases so literacy clusters, stages of language acquisition, cognition and content is evaluated with the purpose of creating individualized learning opportunities.

### **Classroom Planning and Instruction**

It is important to note that the researcher acknowledges that not every lesson, every unit and every classroom interaction will demonstrate each of the best practices in classroom planning and implementation. However, it is important that general education teachers and specialists frequently and regularly demonstrate a variety of these practices across subjects, not only in language arts. It is the hope of the researcher that the creation of the Planning and Instruction Matrix (Appendix C) will aid instructors in reviewing their plans and reflecting on lessons taught to enhance individualization. Below is a discussion of the most prevalent practices affecting success in differentiation for ELL students.

**Literacy clusters for early learners.** When planning and implementing lessons, instructors need to take into consideration the literacy clusters discussed in the student assessment section of this paper. These include a) High Alphabet skills/High Phonographic skills; b) Average Phonographic/Strong Alphabet; c) Average Phonographic/Weak Alphabet; d) Low Phonographic/Low Alphabet (Ford, et. al., 2013, p. 904). Ford et al. (2013) purports that grouping students into the four literacy clusters can aid in differentiation from early stages of language acquisition and can help ELL students develop the phonetic, orthographic and alphabetic skills needed to be successful in early elementary school and beyond. In fact, Ford et al. (2013) comments that “Oral language development has a strong relationship to emergent literacy skills in Preschool...and becomes important again in third grade when reading comprehension becomes the focus of instruction” (p. 908). This connects to the discussion on

assessing students in a variety of ways and in both L1 and L2 to determine literacy strengths and challenges in contrast to only proficiency measures (Ford et al., 2013). Hence, teachers developing and implementing individualized lessons should aid students in strengthening phonetic, alphabetic and orthographic language.

**The stages of second language acquisition and the Thinking Language Matrix.**

One of the most practical tools in differentiated learning among ELL students is the Thinking Language Matrix developed by Hill and Bjork (2008) and noted in Hill and Miller (2013), which combines the Stages of Language Acquisition with Bloom’s Taxonomy. Bloom’s Taxonomy is “a classification system used to define and distinguish different levels of human cognition—i.e., thinking, learning, and understanding. Educators have typically used Bloom’s Taxonomy to inform or guide the development of assessments, curriculum, and instructional methods such as questioning strategies” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). The Thinking Language Matrix can be used at any grade level and with any level of English proficient student in any subject area to scaffold learning across both the Stages of Language Acquisition and Bloom’s Taxonomy so that instructors engage higher cognitive skills while challenging language acquisition. “One way to support a child’s emergent language is to choose a strategy that is developmentally appropriate for the child’s language acquisition stage” (Facella, Rampino, and Shea, 2005, p. 210). Hill and Miller (2013) propose using tiered questioning along Bloom’s Taxonomy which “helps teachers engage all of their students” when their classrooms may consist of students along a wide range of second language acquisition (p. 16). They suggest all students are given the same content objective in any given lesson, but the level of questioning and the stage of language acquisition required for activity and assessment

differ among students (Hill and Miller, 2013). Instructors and specialists should be regularly using this practical tool for lesson planning and implementation of individualized learning among their ELL students.

The practice of utilizing the Thinking Language Matrix is strongly linked to chunking and questioning, which has been found to be an effective practice among ELL students with learning disabilities (Barrera et al., 2006). Training, planning and implementing Chunking Questioning Activities (CQA) with small groups of ELL students who have disabilities “show promising results for ELLs with disabilities based on improved comprehension and reading accuracy results” (Barrera, et al., 2006, p. 19). This method is used by teachers in small groups: the teacher or student reads a small section of text; teacher or peers ask questions about that section and make predictions; more text is read to draw conclusions about previous predictions; predictions can be changed or discussed and students move through the text (Barrera, et. al., 2006). Instructors in this study noted that CQA, small group guided discussion, and pictorial representations of a story all contributed to greater comprehension. Again, using these strategies among ELL students to individualize learning will improve proficiency and comprehension.

Implementing the Thinking Language Matrix is easily linked to incorporating language objectives into content objections across subjects. As discussed, ELL instruction is not solely the responsibility of the ESL specialist or language arts instructor. In fact, when language objectives are integrated into the entirety of the curriculum, ELL students gain critical skills needed to speak, read, write and problem solve at the advanced, academic levels needed to be successful in middle and high school (Barrera, 2006). Hill and Miller (2013) suggest there are multiple strategies for implementing such integration and using cues, questions and advance

organizers are a few of these. In a classroom setting, whether science, math, social studies or language arts, these methods can be used to differentiate learning among ELL and English proficient students, nudging them past conversational language into academic language. Therefore, teachers from all subject areas should be trained in how to differentiate learning combining multiple language objectives using various instructional strategies while maintaining a single content objective for the entire class.

For classroom teachers assessing students, Baecher et al. (2012) comments that combining multiple language objectives with one common content objective for all students is a great way to practically acknowledge individual needs in the classroom without lowering content standards or demeaning ELL students who can cognitively handle the material. The following example in Figure 2 shows the content objective as Matching Animals to Their Environment, while the levels of Thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy) and Stages of Second-Language Acquisition vary, creating multiple language objectives with a common content objective (Hill and Miller, 2013, p. 73-74).

	<b>Language Use Across Stages of Second-Language Acquisition</b> Moves from simple to complex in grammatical tenses, forms, vocabulary, etc.				
<b>Levels of Thinking and Language Functions</b> Level of thinking and academic language move from concrete recall to more complex, abstract levels	<b>Preproduction:</b> nonverbal response	<b>Early Production:</b> one-word response	<b>Speech Emergence:</b> phrases or short sentences	<b>Intermediate Fluency:</b> longer and more complex sentences	<b>Advanced Fluency:</b> near native
<b>Evaluation</b> appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, defend, estimate, evaluate, judge, predict, rate, select, support, value	Teacher mismatches animal with its environment and asks, "Is this the right environment? Find the right environment."	What are the best materials for the duck to build a nest?	What makes a good home for a bear? (Examine settings and evaluate, such as why a cave makes a good home.)	What would happen if you put a worm in desert?	Recommend a different environment for a mother duck to raise her ducklings. Defend your choice.
<b>Synthesis</b> arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up	Point to the animals that live in the soil.	Say the names of the animals that live in the soil.	How would changing the abdomen of a scorpion affect its habitat?	What would a clam need to survive in desert?	How would you protect the wildlife in a forest where hiking was very popular?
<b>Analysis</b> Analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test	Show me an animal that cannot live in the forest.	Name the parts of a fish that help it live in the water.	How are raccoons and squirrels similar? How are they different?	How does a bear use its claws to catch fish? To gather berries?	Why do you think a bear hibernates in winter?
<b>Application</b> Apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use	Show me what would happen if we put a fish in the desert.	Tell me what would happen if we put a fish in the desert.	How could you change the body of a fish to make it fly?	How would you capture and transport scorpions to a zoo?	How would a deer camouflage itself in the forest in winter? In the desert?
<b>Comprehension</b> Classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate	Show me where a deer lives.	Tell me which animals eat meat.	Why is a toad the color it is?	Explain how a snake catches its prey.	Why do fish need gills to live in the water? How do gills work?

*Modified Thinking Language Matrix for Matching Animals to Their Environments (continued)*

<b>Knowledge</b>  Arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, name, order, recall, recognize, relate, repeat, reproduce, state	Where is the raccoon?	What is the name of this animal?	What are the body parts of a turtle?	Give the definition of mammal.	Tell me everything you know about a clam.
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*Figure 2.* Modified Thinking Language Matrix for Matching Animals to Their Environments.

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Edition, by Jane D. Hill and Kirsten B. Miller, 2013, Figure 6.2, page 73 and 74. Copyright

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**The four domains of language.** Teachers and specialists need to plan for and implement opportunities for ELL students to work within all four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening (Syrja, 2011). Ford et al.'s (2013) discussion of the importance of oral language introduces the vital significance of planning for and implementing many opportunities for oral language, both conversational and academic, throughout all subjects. While all four domains are equally important, many ESL programs and standardized assessments focus on reading and writing. Hill and Miller (2013) state, "Students will learn more English when engaged in the action of talking with other students than through typical teacher-directed activities designed solely to deliver content" (p.2). Because speaking comes later in the stages of language acquisition, instructors often de-emphasize its importance compared to the development of the other three domains. "Encouraging them (ELL students) to speak and interact during academic content instruction in order to build their academic vocabulary ensures that we build both strong academic oral language as well as social language" (Syrja, 2011, p. 103).

Intentionally planning for opportunities to use oral language as well as the other domains throughout subject areas is an occasion to individualize instruction. Based on the Thinking Language Matrix, instructors are able to work in a student's Zone of Proximal Development while nudging them toward more challenging language use and acquisition in various settings (Hill and Miller, 2013). The Zone of Proximal Development is the area between what the student is currently capable of and the achievement point desired next for the student (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Hill and Miller, 2013). Creating and monitoring these opportunities for oral language in elementary school raises emerging language to conversational language and conversational language to academic language, which is necessary

to navigate middle and high school texts, evaluations and lectures. Each of the domains gives instructors ample opportunity to differentiate instruction for ELL students and therefore, teachers should intentionally plan for and implement activities in each domain throughout the curriculum and across subject areas.

**Varying instructional methods and utilizing teacher-directed individual activities.**

Teacher-directed individual activities is shown to highly impact Hispanic students whose primary language is not English (Chang, 2008). While instructors should vary instructional methods, it is important to understand that with Hispanic students in particular, some strategies may hinder rather than help them. Whole class instruction is necessary, but “teacher-directed whole class activity poses problems for the instruction of language minority students or underachieving students. When teachers depend mainly on teacher-directed whole class instruction, students who require special attention fall behind...” (Chang, 2008, p. 84). In addition, teacher-directed small group instruction may be harmful to some ELL students, “particularly if their readiness level has not reached that of the rest of the class. ELL students may feel ‘incompetent and neglected’” (Chang, 2008, p. 85). Teacher-directed individual activity is the method that most highly impacts Hispanic ELLs, according to Chang’s (2008) study. However, it requires small class sizes and deep knowledge of students’ individual needs and backgrounds. Creating small groups (3-6 students) that are divided by second-language acquisition stages will enhance this method as individuals are directed in specific activities by the teacher (Baecher et al., 2012). Student-selected activities demand much more from the students and are usually implemented at the higher levels/stages of Second-Language Acquisition (Chang, 2008).

An opportunity presents itself to communicate and collaborate with instructors from multiple subject areas to ensure instruction is varied. If every teacher in each subject is primarily using teacher-directed whole class activity as their primary method to transfer knowledge, then more varied methods must be planned for and implemented to enhance instruction for ELL and English proficient students. Instructors can use these insights to vary instruction according to the needs of their ELL students, striving to minimize the negative effects of using primarily one method of instruction through the day (Chang 2008).

**Creatively using primary language in the classroom.** In studies conducted by Jim Cummins in 1981 and 1991, it was shown that cognitive or academic skills and literacy skills in one's primary language transfer to gaining those skills in the target (L2) language (Karathanos, 2010). A follow up study by Thomas and Collier (1997) demonstrated that, in addition, content learned in L1 also transfers to learning in L2 (Karathanos, 2010). In fact, this transfer "explains the most variance in student achievement and is the most powerful influence on [ELL] students' long-term academic success" (Karathanos, 2010, p. 4). The argument for allowing ELL students to use their primary language in the classroom has been debated and currently the tendency is on English immersion as opposed to strategies to include native languages (Karathanos, 2010). Allowing L1 in classrooms with a high percentage of ELL students give access to content that would previously have been inaccessible, allows the ability to draw on previous knowledge and experiences more readily, and lower the affective filter, giving positive psychosocial benefits such as affirming "value, status and identity" (Karathanos, 2010, p. 5). These benefits translate into higher motivation and self-esteem, factors deemed vital to learning a second language (Syrja 2011).

Instructors can integrate primary language into productive growth for the target language (English) by employing a number of strategies such as grouping into the same L1 or differing L2 proficiency levels; recognizing and discussing cognates; translating important material such as assignments, calendars, newsletters, key words on worksheets; implementing visuals, word walls, posters, flashcards, primary language picture books and manipulative objects; teaching other students important words in L1 and allowing the students to share information about their culture and traditions in native languages; removing penalties for using L1; singing songs, reading word problems and vocabulary activities in the primary language.

Karathanos (2010) states:

How an educator transacts language policy within his or her classroom can either reinforce or challenge larger societal relations of power. Educators who encourage use of the L1 in classroom practices are not only promoting literacy development and academic achievement in both languages, but they are also directly challenging coercive relations of power that have traditionally oppressed minority and underrepresented groups [i.e. English-only movements that subordinate the native languages and cultures of ELLs] (Karathanos, 2010, p. 24).

The lesson for instructors of ELL students attempting to individualize learning is clear: creatively integrate primary language into instruction to lower the affective filter in the classroom and among their peers. This creativity will pay off in the transfer of skills and content to the target language.

**Total physical response for pre- and early production ELLs.** Especially for ELL students in the preproduction and early production stages of second-language acquisition, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a useful tool to differentiate learning. This strategy was developed by James Asher in the late 1960s and requires students to respond to commands by physical movements. Grubb (2003) states,

...the essential aspect of TPR has been the association of movement and language, often through an imperative delivery-active response format. Initially, the teacher models the command through several repetitions, consistently using the target language to identify the desired behavior. Once students respond to the command, the teacher then ceases to perform the target action, relying instead on the verbal expression of the imperative (Grubb, 2003, p. 13).

Using TPR in instruction is not as easy as simply implementing motions to accompany lessons. Therefore, the methods must be implemented after thorough training and with fidelity (Syrja, 2011). Implementing TPR with specific students at the lower levels of language acquisition in small groups and/or individual sessions may give these ELL students access to content that they otherwise would miss. It may be a method most effective in lower elementary grades (kindergarten through second grade) and used only as needed in upper elementary classrooms. It is conceivable to imagine teacher-directed individual or small group activity employing TPR for advance organizers or to learn specific vocabulary needed to comprehend a lesson, while ELL students at the more advanced stages, who already understand these terms, move forward on the unit in another manner that fits their needs.

**SIOP for intermediate fluency ELLs.** Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) specifically scaffolds learning for ELL students at the intermediate fluency stage of second-language acquisition to help them access content despite their limited proficiency in English (Syrja, 2011). This strategy is specifically geared toward differentiation as it layers learning for ELL students, depending on their accessibility to subject content. The strategy organizes 30 methods for teachers under eight corresponding headings: Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice and Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review and Assessment (Jones, Sloss & Wallance, 2014). Examples in approaching challenging content can be using graphic organizers, visuals, word studies and concept maps to build on prior knowledge. This methodology can be implemented in any subject area and therefore, instructors across subjects should be thoroughly trained in its benefits and challenges to engage their ELL students appropriately and aid them in accessing content.

**The role of technology in differentiated learning for ELL students.** The researcher would be remiss not to mention the role technology plays in differentiating learning for every student, but especially for ELL students. Employing technology to aid general education teachers, subject area instructors and ESL specialists in individualizing learning for students is a vital key to success. Developing multiple ways in which ELL students can interact with both primary and target language in the classroom can be a focus area of technology use. Diallo (2014) states that technology can be used to both scaffold and differentiate learning, lower the affective filter, and increase comprehension for ELL students. In addition, skills needed to interact with technology are gained in tandem with unit objectives (2014). Diallo (2014) reports a Michigan State University study conducted in 2008 suggested that integrating

technology into the classroom without teacher training regarding the creation of meaningful tasks that are tied to learning, will not help language learners. However, utilizing focused programs such as Personalized Intelligent Mobile Learning System (PIMS) which matches current event news articles with language learners' reading abilities, was shown to increase the English vocabulary of third graders (Diallo, 2014, p. 25). An instructor who is comfortable with using technology creatively and meaningfully can greatly enhance individualized learning among ELL students.

### **Instructor Assessments**

Instruction cannot be separated from teacher evaluations. If students are not achieving their goals, then instruction must be altered. This is true for those teaching ELL students as well. We cannot discuss best practices for assessment and instruction of ELL students without discussing how these teachers will be and should be evaluated. Appendix D outlines important elements of instructor assessment.

Not all instructor assessment needs to be punitive. In fact, self assessment, peer assessment, and professional assessment are most productive and incite the most change when they emphasize recognition and motivation. A key factor in this type of assessment is the environment set by the school and led by the administrators. This was discussed in more detail previously, but it should be mentioned again here because as we create standards for ELL students to succeed, we must be willing to engender environments where instructors can also succeed.

## Self Assessments

Two areas in which instructors should self-evaluate regarding differentiation of ELL students are cultural competence and the integration of best practices into lesson planning and implementation.

**Cultural competence.** Cultural competence in teaching is defined by the National Education Association (NEA) as “the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own” (National Education Association, 2015). Many districts encourage diversity training and cultural competence training wholesale to their students, staff and faculty, at one or two high-impact seminars. Yet, it is individual instructors who must evaluate where he or she stands in this area on a regular and on-going basis. Each year, students with varied backgrounds, cultures and traditions enter the classroom and, therefore, teachers and staff need to evaluate where they are along a continuum of competence. While no one ever fully “arrives,” instructors and administrators should begin to feel more confident in this area as time moves forward. The NEA notes several considerations when developing cultural competence: valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, the dynamics of difference (identifying and resolving conflicts that may arise between represented cultures), knowledge of student culture, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity (National Education Association, 2015). Once a school demonstrates leadership and professional development in this area, instructors can then look for particular resources reaching specific groups of students. Suggestions are to find poets, authors, musicians, storytellers, folk songs and stories, heroes and villains, politicians and athletes in the students’ countries, regions and



languages of origin. Spending time with these materials, integrating them into lessons, and allowing students to be experts in these areas will increase teachers' competency and lower the affective filter in the classroom.

**Integration of best practices into lesson planning and implementation.** Instructors should also assess the depth and breadth in which they integrate best practices, such as those affirmed in this study. Teachers and specialists should recognize that “most success is seen when varying strategies” (Facella et al., 2005, p. 211). These authors purport that when teachers are evaluating integration, these strategies should be categorized into those that engage learners emotionally, teach language specifically and are best for teaching in general (Facella et al., 2005). Again, creating an atmosphere where reflection on teaching and learning is encouraged and permitted within the constraints of the school day benefits ESL specialists, general classroom teachers and subject area instructors as they meet individual needs of ELL students.

### **Peer Assessments**

Fellow instructors can give important insight and ideas for individualized learning. Peer observations and training by peers can help teachers lower affective filters for ELL students in their classrooms, learn new skills and give room for creativity in specific lessons or units. In addition, peer collaboration and sharing of information and ideas can increase productivity and has been linked to increased student achievement (Windeman, 2011). Therefore, by lowering the barriers to sharing and observing each other, teachers can aid both ELL and English proficient students to succeed.

## **Professional Assessments**

Schools employ professional evaluations to determine the effectiveness of their teachers and instruction. Areas of success and challenges should be discussed regularly for teachers and specialists working with ELL students as well. However, the signs of progress and success may be more difficult to determine with ESL specialists and general education teachers with high percentages of ELL students. Therefore, it is important that evaluations are tied to implementing best practices in the classroom and formative evaluations such as archival evidence of student progress, in addition to summative student tests. “Well-designed evaluations systems that take into account many significant variables offer tools for growth and effective teaching” (Warring, 2015, p. 703). Administrators must be careful to assess teachers based on a variety of factors and standards, not only high stakes testing required by State and Federal authorities, recognizing that traditional methods of assessing students and teachers may not tell the whole story of success in the context of increasing ELL student populations. Doing away with punitive evaluation systems and engaging in professional recognition among peers encourages all teachers, including those teaching ELL students, toward achievement.

## **Method**

For this study, three schools in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area were invited to participate. Two of the schools are dual immersion school serving a high percentage of ELL students. One of the dual immersion schools is private. Two schools are public, state-funded schools. The non-dual immersion public school approached is a regular kindergarten through fifth grade neighborhood public elementary school with no immersion programs. However, it also serves a large number of ELL students. The public dual immersion school gave consent, but the teachers and principal were unresponsive to multiple attempts for interviews and access

to test scores. The public non-immersion school did not give their consent for the study. The final school, a private dual immersion K through eighth grade school (School A), gave consent and access to test scores. In this case, three third through fifth grade teachers gave face to face interviews, while two teachers gave email response to the distributed question bank. In addition, the principal gave consent to be interviewed and assisted in compiling test data. All six of these staff members gave written consent for the information given in the study.

School A is a private, dual immersion school, the enrollment of which has steadily increased in non-English speaking households over the last seven years (L. Ramsey, personal communication, January 30 and March 23, 2017). It provides private education for kindergarten through eighth grade students. Each class has two sections. Dual immersion (Spanish/English) is taught in kindergarten through second grade to be expanded to each grade in each following year. Each quarter, the two grade level teachers team teach, dividing up subjects to be taught in English and Spanish while language arts is taught in both languages. For example, math and science are taught first and third quarters in Spanish and second and fourth quarters in English. Social studies and religion are taught first and third quarters in English and second and fourth quarters in Spanish. Students receive instruction in one language in the morning and the other language in the afternoon. Music, Physical Education and Art are taught in English. The library holds both English and Spanish books for students to check out for additional reading support and enjoyment.

In addition to teacher interviews, reading scores for third through fifth grade students at school A were analyzed from 2009-2016. Because professional development sessions for Sheltered Instruction began in 2008-2009 and expectations of implementation began in 2010, a rise in test scores among these students should be evident from testing data. NWEA MAP tests

were the primary test used in the recorded years. However, the Minnesota State Standardized Test (MCA) was used in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. The reason for the change was that it was mandated by the Archdiocese (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, March 29, 2017).

Instructors felt that the MCA did not give the information they needed to adjust teaching and learning during the year and consequently, the Archdiocese reversed the mandate for this school year and in the future (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, March 29, 2017). Prior to analysis, testing data was stripped of identifiers except grade level and if the student was identified as an ELL student. Data was analyzed using two factors: first, if the student met yearly growth goals (individualized for each student) and second, if the student met or exceeded grade level proficiency. These goals are given in percentages of total ELL students in third, fourth and fifth grades (Figures 4, 5 and 6). The time frame is characterized by a number of professional development foci, but Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was the main focus of instructional growth geared toward ELL students in this time period. In addition, instructors were held accountable by administration and outside trainers through observation and coaching.

### **Interviews**

From a total of 8 instructors at the third through fifth grade level at School A, three consented to be interviewed in person and two answered interview questions via electronic mail. In this study, these five teachers are identified by an abbreviation (TA, TB, TC, TD, and TE) to preserve the teachers' confidentiality. Those instructors with high levels of teaching experience (over 20 years), do not hold ESL endorsements but have been given multiple professional development opportunities to build their strategies and tools to address the increase of ELL students in their classrooms. One teacher with five years teaching experience

does hold an ESL Endorsement with her teaching certificate (TD, February 23, 2017).

Informal trainings and formal professional development at the school have focused on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol model of instruction (L. Ramsey, personal communication, January 30, 2017). Since 2009, repeated professional development has occurred for existing and incoming staff (L. Ramsey, personal communication, January 30, 2017). When questioned about methodology in the classroom, SIOP was used by all 5 of the instructors interviewed (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, personal communication, January 2, 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). In most cases, this method is used in whole group instruction and not necessarily to differentiate between students. The reason for this approach was that most of the vocabulary or skills were needed by most or all of the students, regardless of their language acquisition level or literacy cluster and therefore it is perceived as most efficient to use SIOP in a whole group setting (TA, TB, personal communication, January 19, 26, 2017).

Technology is used to differentiate learning among four of the five of the teachers interviewed. Only the physical education teacher does not use this method in her classroom for differentiation (TC, personal communication, January 2, 2017). The primary programs used are IXL for English math and language arts and Raz-Kids for audio books and reading comprehension in both languages (TA, TB, TD, personal communication, January 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). One instructor noted that she uses an application that can level any book with an ISBN number so she can appropriately assign leveled readers to her fifth graders (TB, personal communication, January 26, 2017).

Using primary language (L1) to teach the target language (L2), Total Physical Response (TPR), teaching every language domain (writing, reading, speaking, and listening), teaching various language objectives across subjects, and Chunking and Questioning Activities

(CQA) are each used regularly by 3 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed to individualize learning (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, personal communication, January 2 - February 23, 2017). Expanding students' vocabulary is one area in which integration of L1 works well. One teacher explained that she often points out cognates, word origins and common base words when teaching new English vocabulary (TA, personal communication, January 19, 2017). Another teacher teaches common English expressions while using comparative expressions or words in L1 (TB, personal communications, January 26, 2017). Finally, a teacher reported that students may use L1 to peer teach a concept to a student with lower L2 abilities (TC, personal communications, January 10, 2017). Examples given during interviews were a mix of planned and unplanned use of L1 in the classroom. None of the teachers used L1 formally to differentiate students, but informally as needed for individualization (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, personal communication, January 2 – February 23, 2017). Using primary language to enhance secondary language teaching and learning is a valuable tool and may benefit ELL students who are most in need of individualized instruction.

Total Physical Response (TPR) is also being used by 3 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. However, most did not use it to differentiate between students but instead as whole group instruction (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, personal communication, January 2 – February 23, 2017). Understandably, the instructor using this method most readily was the physical education teacher as the environment and subject matter lead to more natural connections from movement to English acquisition. None of the teachers received specific training in TPR and this area would need more investigation to determine whether the instructors are using it faithfully. As Syrja (2011) points out the [TPR] methods must be implemented after thorough training and with fidelity in order for success for second language learners. In addition,

because this method is most effective for ELL students in the lower acquisition stages, the strategies may not be as readily needed as grade levels rise (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Therefore, it is being applied to differentiated groups that are naturally in the lower acquisition stages because they are in the lower elementary grade levels. This may explain the percentage of teachers not implementing this strategy in the third, fourth and fifth grades.

Ensuring that every language domain (speaking, writing, reading and listening) are addressed in second language acquisition is occurring with 3 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. Because physical education does not lend itself to all of the domains, the emphasis on listening skills is noted in this subject area (TC, personal communication, January 2, 2017). However, one teacher emphatically stated that oral language is a focus of her language arts. She recommended a curriculum change (that was implemented mid-year) for upper elementary to combat the lack of oral language instruction in lower grades (kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade). She felt that ELL students were not being asked to “turn and talk”, share informally nor formally (presentations) using academic oral language sufficiently so that they had to learn this when they entered her grade level (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). A curriculum change or enhancements made in lower grades as well could target the oral language domain earlier in the curriculum (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Another teacher expressed the hope that those students who lacked proficiency in any particular domain would be identified earlier so early intervention could occur more intentionally prior to the upper elementary grade levels (TA, personal communication, January 19, 2017). Finally, a teacher expressed that students coming into her classroom range in English reading proficiency from 1.8 to 8.6 (reading grade level first grade, eight months to

eighth grade, six months) (TB, personal communication, January 26, 2017). With this wide range of levels, she expressed the challenge in adjusting teaching appropriately. It is obvious that the teachers value the four domains, but more professional development, curriculum adjustments and accountability in this area are needed.

Implementing multiple language objectives with consistent content objectives across subject areas is used by 3 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. Teachers not using this method felt that language objectives needed to be taught in whole group settings because most students needed this type of instruction, not only a small group of students who may have lower English proficiency (TA, TB and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19 and 26, 2017). The teachers using this strategy felt their students had a greater range of language needs and therefore benefited from various language objectives when teaching content in subjects other than language arts. It is notable that 3 of the 5 teachers interviewed reported they used this strategy while 2 of teachers interviewed reported using the Teaching Learning Matrix which aides in this strategy while integrating Bloom's Taxonomy. In explanation, instructors may be doing this organically so it is difficult to report, this strategy needs more intentionality on the part of the teacher in the planning process so it is time consuming to implement, or more training is needed to help teachers implement this strategy more naturally into lesson planning and implementation. As stated previously, this training should be implemented for teachers of all subject areas so summative evaluations of students can be individualized without lowering the standard of content acquisition (Baecher et al., 2012).

Chunking and Questioning Activities (CQA) are also used by 3 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. This type of instruction is not usually appropriate in a physical education setting because there is very little reading or reading comprehension occurring during class. One other



teacher reported using this method “not much” in her classroom. However, the teachers using this strategy reported that it is very effective in helping students comprehend text of various subjects, including science, social studies, different genres in reading groups, and religion (TA, TB, personal communication, January 19 and 26, 2017). The instructors using this method reported that it best functions when the teachers model it. They are finding appropriate ways to assist peer groups to implement this method (TA, TB, and TD, personal communication, January 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). One teacher reported that she hoped to introduce literacy groups that would integrate these strategies after being trained appropriately to integrate this strategy more effectively in the classroom. However, because of the importance and intensity of training the groups, she felt she needed a qualified volunteer or educational specialist to help launch the groups appropriately. Because of lack of school resources, this was a barrier for implementation in her classroom (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Both Teacher-Directed Individual Activity, using Literacy Clusters (differentiated groups based on phonetic skills, alphabet skills and orthographic skills), and using the Teaching Learning Matrix in planning and implementation of lessons were reported to be used by 2 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. Above we discussed the possible barriers for implementing the Teaching Learning Matrix to aid teachers in giving multiple language objectives across content and subjects. While the teachers who reported using this method spoke mostly about using Bloom’s Taxonomy, they reported that they use the language acquisition stages across Bloom’s Taxonomy in a more informal way (TA, TB and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, and 26, 2017). In addition, both cited the time that it

takes to implement the Matrix challenges them in their planning. Again, while use of this method is reported, it is difficult for teachers to implement it to effectively differentiate between students in an efficient manner (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017).

Grouping students into literacy clusters (phonographic, alphabetic, and orthographic) is used by 2 of the 5 of the teachers interviewed. For one teacher, this is the greatest benefit of changing her upper elementary language arts curriculum to *Words Their Way* (Helman, Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 2012) mid-year (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). She cites the benefit of the change as being natural groups of students emerging who need to work on various areas of vocabulary and language development (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Therefore, her students are now grouped into four literacy clusters around their individual needs for language acquisition (TD, personal communication, February 23, 2017). The *Words Their Way* (Helman, et al., 2012) curriculum begins with assessment tools to group students into literacy clusters and gives customized vocabulary building techniques tailored to the needs of the literacy cluster. Subsequent assessments give teachers freedom to rearrange groups as students' needs change. The curriculum offers specific tools geared toward native Spanish speakers as well (Helman, et al., 2012).

Using a variety of teaching methods while increasing Teacher Directed Individual Activities is a challenge for each of the teachers interviewed. Two of the 5 teachers reported using it in mostly informal ways (TB and TD, personal communication, January 26 and February 23, 2017). Examples are bringing students up to their desk for individual writing conferences to discuss areas of improvement in their writing or presentations and informally

individualizing instruction for one or two students who need extra help while facilitating math or reading small groups (TB and TD, personal communication, January 26 and February 23, 2017). In this way, students are receiving Teacher Directed Individual Activities while the teacher is working in small groups with other students. Another method used is having qualified volunteers or education specialists work with students individually on specific language skills (sounding out words, breaking words into syllables, spelling skills, etc.) (TB and TD, personal communication, January 26 and February 23, 2017). These teachers' efforts demonstrate the practice of teacher-directed individual activities in mostly informal strategies.

Dividing students into stages of language acquisition (pre-production, production, speech emergent, intermediate fluency and advanced fluency) is used by 1 teacher interviewed. Teachers interviewed seemed unclear as to the stages and what significance they have to how they teach in the classroom (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, personal communication, January 2, 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). Those who do not use this strategy reported they are not familiar with how to assess this area and/or reported their students seemed to fall into basically the same stage (TA, TB and TE, personal communication, January 2, 19 and 26, 2017). However, from the report of one teacher regarding the range of reading grade levels in her classroom (first grade, eight months through eighth grade, six months) it is evident that a variety of acquisition stages do exist in the upper elementary classrooms (TB, personal communication, January 26, 2017). As this strategy was used least among those interviewed, further investigation is needed to assess whether professional development is needed in this area or if this strategy is not applicable here.

Several important themes arose from teacher interviews. First, all grade level classroom teachers reported that the education specialists hired by School A could use their time more effectively to aid teachers with the specific strategies mentioned in this study (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). The instructors requested that the one outcome from this study is that the specialists continue their valuable work in assessing tests and curriculum, but set aside their non-academic work to be more available to teachers (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). Teachers covet this additional time to utilize education specialists and qualified volunteers for launching new literacy groups, facilitating small group and teacher-directed individual activities, implementing special projects (oral presentations, art projects that link to curriculum, language rich science and social studies projects, etc.), giving insight into implementing multiple language objectives across content, advanced questioning (Teaching and Learning Matrix), and teaching “mini courses” to students regarding use of technology (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017).

The instructors interviewed feel that more professional development is needed in SIOP and other areas of differentiation for ELL students (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). Building a toolbox of strategies and matrices such as the ones in this study is a high priority for all the teachers interviewed in this study. Each teacher genuinely desires success for their students and hopes to deepen and broaden their own knowledge to help their students reach this success (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). To achieve this broadening and deepening, teachers mentioned needing peer observations (within and outside of the school), more practical professional development (more workshop style than seminar

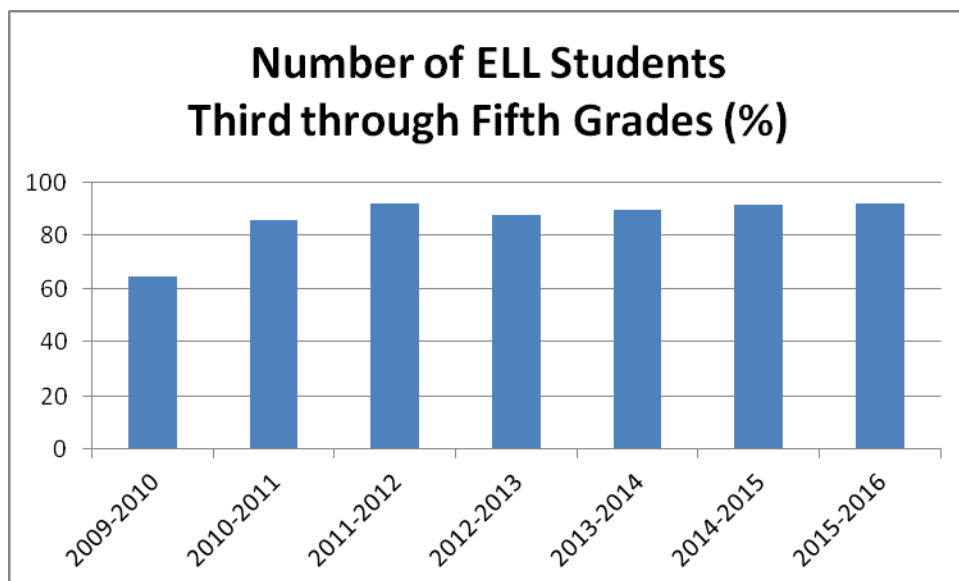
style) and increased utilization of the dual immersion coach or similar faculty to make high quality suggestions about enhancing lesson plans, implementation and assessment strategies (TA, TB, TC, TD and TE, personal communication, January 2, 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017).

Teachers interviewed cited the need for increased flexibility to plan for, set up, implement, and assess creative lessons that target the strategies in this study (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). They name both time and resources as a barrier for utilizing best practices more intentionally and consistently (TA, TB, TD and TE, personal communication, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017). In addition to utilizing education specialists more effectively, suggestions from the teachers in this sphere were to increase the number of volunteers on the playground and lunch room to relieve teachers and education specialists, increase quality and quantity of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and offer before and after school “open hours” for students needing extra academic help and parents needing an informal conference.

### **Review of Test Scores**

This research focused on North West Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading test data of third through fifth grade students from 2009-2014 (five academic years) and the MCA reading test data from 2014-2016 (two academic years). The goal was to observe whether an increase in SIOP training corresponded to a rise in reading scores among third through fifth grade students. The researcher paid most attention to the percentage of students meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals and meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency on the NWEA MAP reading assessment. Data was provided by the Principal, Mrs. Liz Ramsey who is in charge of academic progress and instruction at School A

(L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 23 and 24, and February 20, 2017). Figures 4, 5 and 6 reflect the test results, showing the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding yearly goals in blue and students meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency in red. The difference in tests is demonstrated in years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 showing only a red bar, indicating the MCA measures only grade level reading proficiency. Figure 3 shows the increase of ELL students from 64.46% to 91.9% in grades three through five during the testing period of seven academic years.



*Figure 3.* Percentage of ELL Students at School A: Third through Fifth Grade (%)

As stated in the introduction, School A has experienced similar growth of ELL students as the rest of the State of Minnesota, seeing enrolled students from non-English speaking homes become a growing percentage of each classroom (Figure 3). Over the seven year period studied, there was a 28.04% growth in ELL students at School A in third through fifth grade. The research in this study found that with this increase in ELL students come increased challenges for the school environment, differentiated lesson planning and implementation, and student and teacher assessment. School A recognized these challenges some years ago and began hiring bilingual and ESL endorsed staff, translating documents and newsletters, investigating academic programs and interventions, and providing professional development focused on meeting these challenges in the classroom (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30 and March 29, 2017).

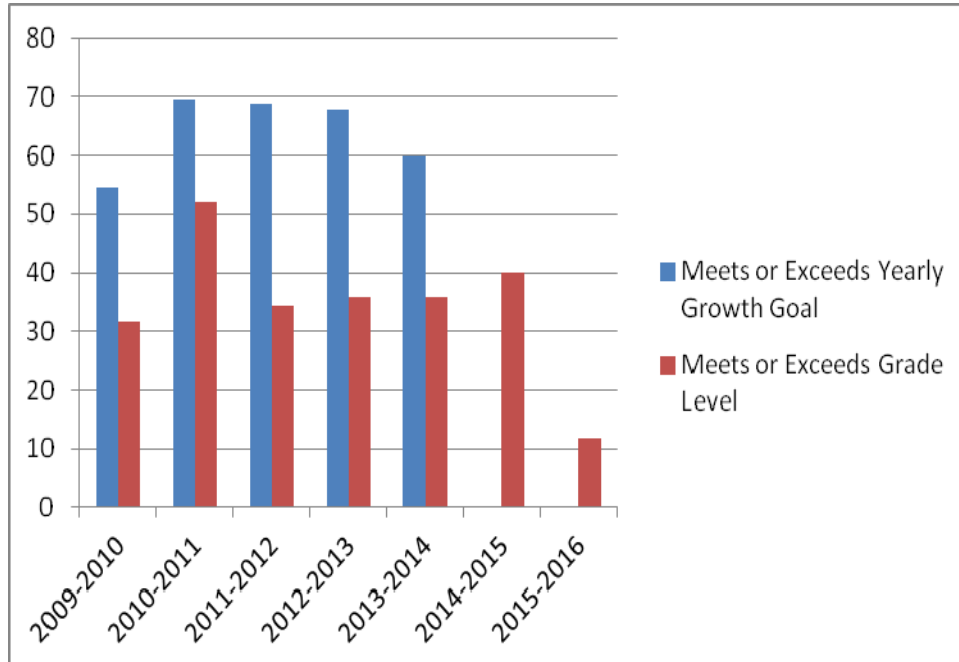
Interventions for ELL students was the primary goal of professional development provided to the instructional staff at School A in the last seven years. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol was a vital part of this professional development in the area of instruction, but sessions also included interpreting NWEA MAP tests to implement appropriate interventions for ELL students from the testing data (L. Ramsey, professional correspondence, January 30, 2017). Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training incorporated coaching and observations from Hamline University instructors, refresher workshops for teachers who began using the strategies in class during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, and training and coaching for new staff (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017). In addition, Hamline University SIOP instructors helped teachers analyze students' writing to indicate skills students need to succeed in the writing domain (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017). Staff also received training in how to create language



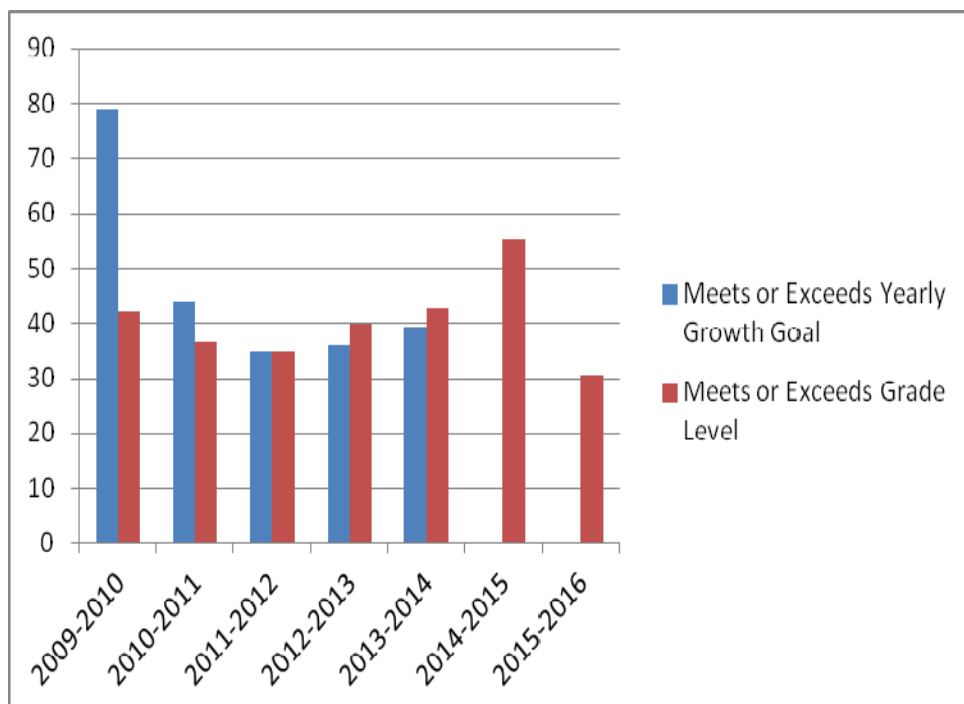
development objectives in various content areas in 2012 – 2013 (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30). In addition, School A began to investigate dual immersion as a possible way to advance students' academic vocabulary in both English and Spanish, hoping this would help them achieve greater overall success in the classroom (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30 and March 29, 2017). Once School A was accepted into the Two-Way Immersion Network for Catholic Schools (TWIN-CS) in 2012, five staff members attended a week-long intensive training on dual immersion and staff began specified training from the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017). Since 2014, much professional development has focused on administrating various assessments and implementing corresponding changes to instruction in addition to continuing CARLA, TWIN-CS and SIOP training appropriate for ELL and dual immersion students (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017).

Testing data was analyzed from 2009-2016, which were the same years during which School A focused much attention on SIOP as an effective strategy for ELL students. The data collected was analyzed to observe whether reading scores improved as SIOP was implemented by third through fifth grade instructors. Figures 4 through 6 show the percentage of third through fifth grade students meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals and students meeting or exceeding grade level reading proficiency over the last seven academic years. In third grade, the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals rose from 54% initially to 69% and stayed relatively steady for three years (Figure 4). In 2013, yearly growth goals began to fall slightly (Figure 4). In fourth grade, the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals plummeted from 79% to 43% as the percentage of ELL

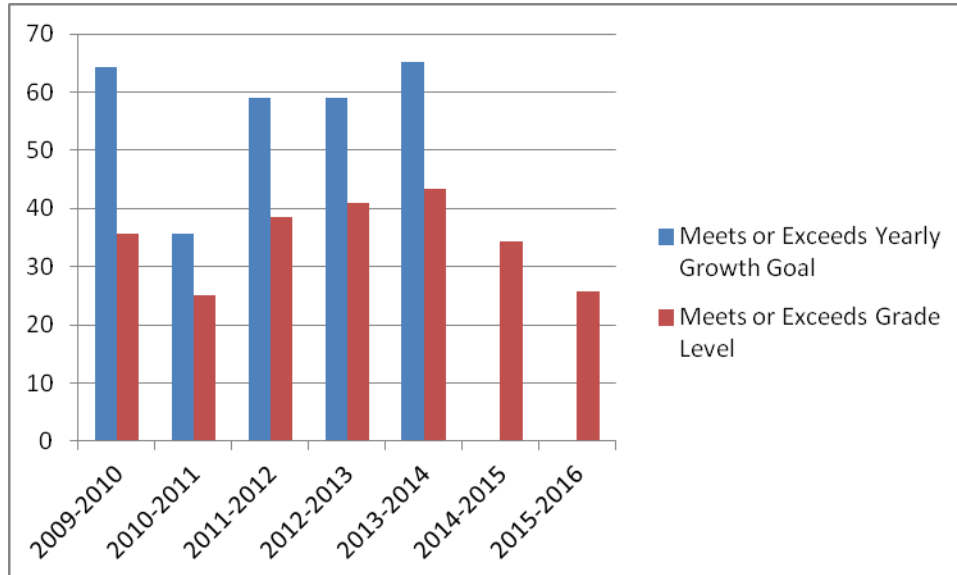
students rose dramatically (Figure 5). While the percentage of ELL students in fourth grade meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals has climbed slowly since 2010, it has not come close to the previous percentage when 46% of the students were English only students (Figure 5). In fifth grade, the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals plummeted as well from 63% to 35%, but quickly rebounded to 59%, eventually surpassing the percentage of fifth grade ELL students previously meeting or exceeding yearly growth goals at 65% (Figure 6).



*Figure 4.* Third Grade ELL Students at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading (2009-2016).



*Figure 5.* Fourth Grade ELL Students at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading (2009-2016).

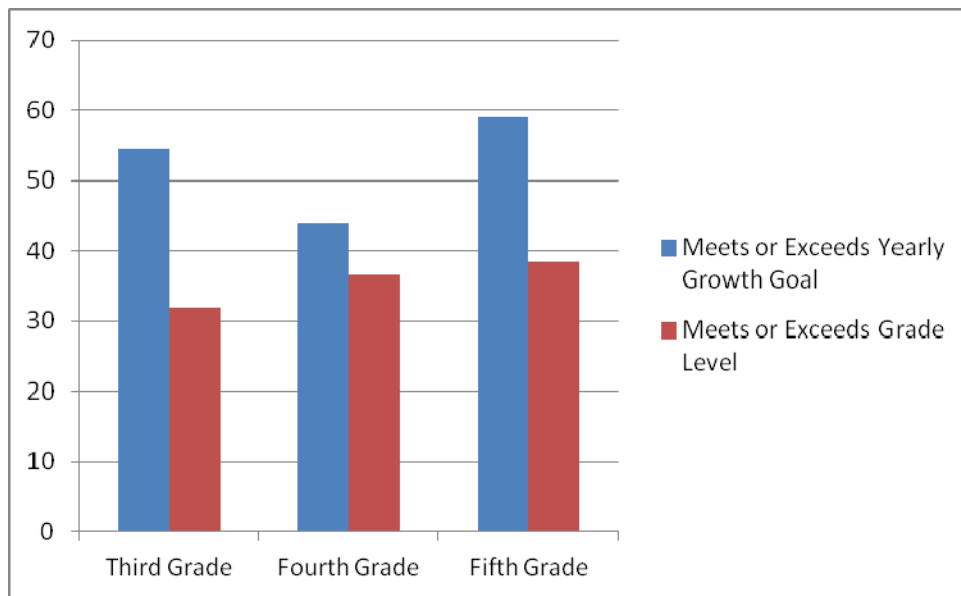


*Figure 6.* Fifth Grade ELL Students at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading (2009-2016).

Grade level reading proficiency was also analyzed and demonstrated in Figures 4 through 6. In third grade, the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level reading proficiency initially rises to 52% and then sees a dramatic drop to 35% in 2011-2012 (Figure 4). After 2012, third grade has seen a slow but steady increase in percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level reading proficiency standards (Figure 4). In fourth grade, the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level reading proficiency standards gradually decrease from 41% to 35%, seem to bottom out and then slowly rise again to 42% (Figure 5). A similar phenomenon occurred in fifth grade with a slow, steady rise from 25% to 42% in the last few years of recorded data (Figure 6). If the academic year 2015-2016 of the MCA test is removed from the data set, the percentage of fourth and fifth grade ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level reading proficiency standards is at or above the initial year of the study (Figures 5 and 6). When the academic year 2015-2016 of the MCA test is removed from the data set in third grade, ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level is also rising steadily, but has yet to reach the levels of the initial year of the data set (Figure 4). This demonstrates that ELL students have recovered from the initial drop in scores and, given continued skills as outlined in this study, are capable of achieving grade level reading proficiency even beyond what previous students had achieved (Figures 4, 5 and 6). It may also indicate that the implementation of intensive professional development in SIOP methodology has paid off in increasing the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency in reading, albeit a slow and steady increase over time (Figures 4, 5, and 6).

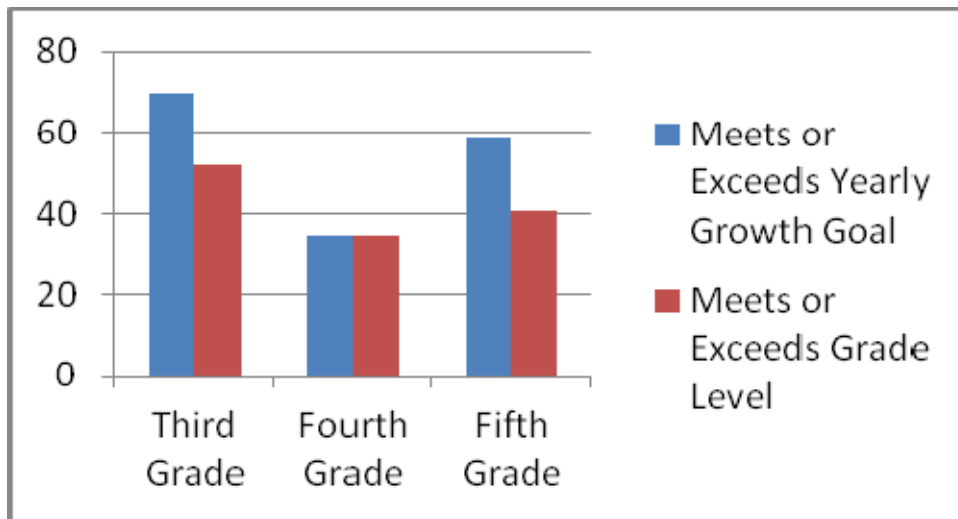
Figures 7 through 9 demonstrate growth in reading for groups of ELL students as they proceed through third, fourth and fifth grades. This was done for three groups of students for which the NWEA MAP data set was complete during the time period studied to observe if

there was an increase or decrease in growth or proficiency at a specific grade level. As the figures show, fourth grade students consistently lost momentum in reaching their yearly growth goals in fourth grade (Figures 7, 8 and 9). This may indicate a greater academic challenge for students at this grade level, a need for a staffing change, a need for more professional development and staff support or a need for more individual student support at this grade level. Student Groups Two and Three also experience a decrease in grade level reading proficiency in fourth grade (Figure 8). Grade level reading proficiency was also analyzed for Groups One, Two and Three. Groups One and Three see slight increases as the group progresses from third to fifth grade (Figures 7 and 9). Group Two, however, experiences a drop from 50% to 30% and a rise back up to 39% over the same time period (Figure 8).

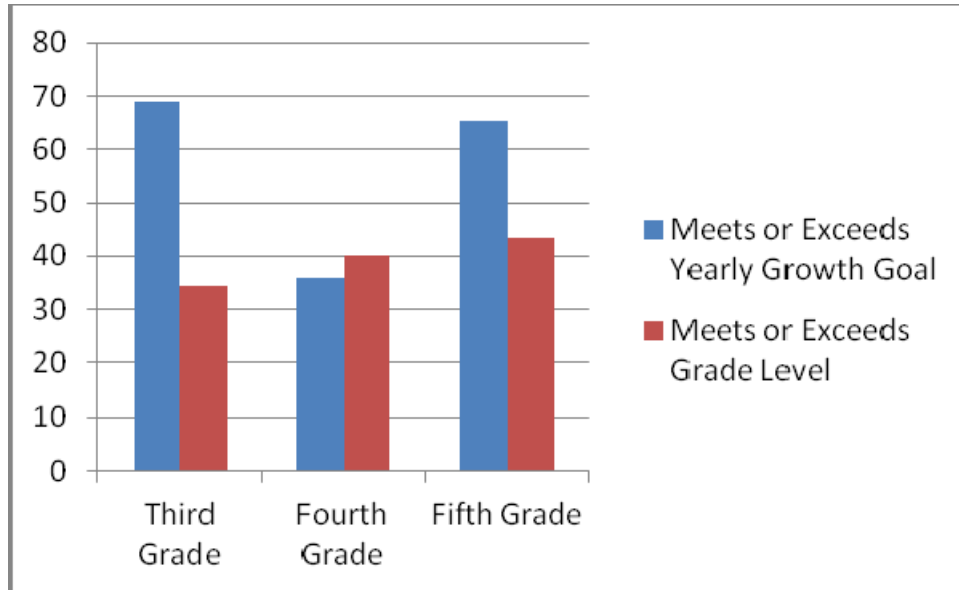


*Figure 7.* ELL Student Group 1 at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading through Third, Fourth and Fifth grades.





*Figure 8.* ELL Student Group 2 at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading through Third, Fourth and Fifth grades.



*Figure 9.* ELL Student Group 3 at School A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Yearly Growth Goals and Meeting or Exceeding Grade Level Proficiency in Reading through Third, Fourth and Fifth grades.

## **Results and Recommendations**

The researcher cannot attribute all of the increases in the percentage of ELL students meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency in reading to a sole intervention (namely SIOP). However, the fact that School A concentrated heavily on SIOP over the past seven years in their professional development does give insight as to why these scores have rebounded since the initial dramatic rise in ELL students at the school (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017). Other interventions such as testing analysis to adjust teaching and CARLA training may also be contributing factors in this progress.

After analyzing the interviews and the testing data, themes arise that indicate some specific recommendations for School A as they proceed. One of the most heartening observations through the interview process was the wholehearted desire by the teachers and staff for the ELL students at School A to succeed academically and in life (TA, TB, TC, TD and TE, personal correspondence, January 10, 19, 26 and February 23, 2017 and L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, March 29, 2017). In addition, the school is working hard to lower the affect filter for in-coming families (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, March 29, 2017). Therefore, there is an openness demonstrated by the teachers interviewed, the principal, and the administration to suggestions and input on how to build on the momentum the school has as they move forward with a very different student body than in the past (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30 and March 29, 2017). The summary and recommendations here are ones that School A can implement as they construct a broad foundation for dual immersion learning with over 90% ELL students.

Both the interviews and the testing data reflect a need to refresh and support SIOP. It may be helpful to continue with workshop style professional development in this area so that teachers can begin to hold a treasury of lesson plans differentiated especially using the SIOP method. In addition, the strategies mentioned in this study may become a vital part of the toolbox that instructors at School A hold, working together to broaden and deepen their strategies for helping ELL students succeed. Because these methods of differentiation can be used for both ELL students and English only students, teachers can feel the strategies will work in various settings. It may be helpful to concentrate on one or two strategies mentioned in this study over the course of one to three years in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and in general professional development sessions, keeping teachers accountable for implementation through peer learning, observations and professional assessments. Some areas of specific concentration could be the Thinking and Learning Matrix, increasing emphasis on oral language, Total Physical Response for lower elementary instructors, and developing an enhanced student profile so teachers can anticipate needs most appropriately. Using the matrices provided in the Appendices in this study may help School A implement, resource and assess these strategies.

In addition, it is suggested that School A further analyze the needs and challenges in the fourth grade classroom. This seems to be a place where more research is warranted to determine what type of student support or staff adjustment is needed to prevent the low performance witnessed at this grade level. As indicated above, this may be due to the difficulty in academic content, the teaching strategies engaged, a need for a staffing change or more

support for the staff, or a need for more individual student support. The data indicates that it is difficult to bring these students back up to grade level performance in fifth grade, so discovering and resourcing the challenges in fourth grade may positively affect proficiency in grade five and beyond.

School A uses a variety of high quality assessments in their classrooms (L. Ramsey, personal correspondence, January 30, 2017). It is recommended that the most effective student assessments be identified and that teachers be trained well to use, implement, score and adjust teaching according to the results of these tests. The NWEA MAP test, the WIDA MODEL test and the NWEA CPAA tests are all high quality assessments for indicating proficiency, growth and grade level assessments in both English and Spanish. However, informal, day to day summative assessments can be used by the teachers to adjust teaching and learning on a more immediate and less intensive timetable. Teachers should not be overburdened by assessing students, but should be using a few of the most effective tests to glean the information they need to affect their teaching strategies (Syrja, 2011).

Finally, there is ample opportunity among the strategies and methods in this study to utilize educational specialists and well-qualified volunteers for individualized instruction and to support teachers to differentiate learning among third through fifth grade ELL students. This study gives a good indication of the needs of the third through fifth grade teachers and the ELL students they serve which may guide the administration to creatively think about how educational specialists and qualified volunteers might best aid both students and staff. Examples may be giving most reliable volunteers or non-teaching staff members increased lunch room and recess duty. This would free up more preparation time for teachers and give educational specialists and other qualified volunteers more time to work with small groups or

individuals. In addition, using educational specialists, staff, or qualified volunteers to help teachers set up a classroom for large hands-on projects, supervise groups of students while the teacher is doing individual testing or teacher – directed individual activities, or help teachers launch a pilot program such as literacy groups over the course of several weeks may be a more effective use of their time and enhance differentiated instruction for ELL students. These types of activities would enhance the strategies for differentiation as well as support both teachers and students.

### **Conclusion**

Schools using a variety of strategies both inside and outside the classroom help ELL students succeed. Differentiation among third through fifth grade ELL students begins with a mix of factors affecting their academic success. Schools cannot rely solely on the classroom teacher to implement methodology for differentiated learning. In contrast, the school environment, lesson planning and implementation, and student and teacher assessments are all aspects of success for the higher elementary ELL student. As VonGlaserfled (2002) stated, “To get into another language requires going beyond a different grammar or vocabulary. It has to do with the structure of one’s world and negotiating another way of seeing, feeling, and reconceptualizing new experiences” (VonGlaserfled, 2002, as quoted in Parker, 2011). The matrices located in the appendices of this study may help administrators and teachers evaluate the main areas of consideration when differentiating learning for ELL students: to help students “reconceptualiz[e] new experiences” (Von Glaserfled, 2002, as quoted in Parker, 2011). Administration must support professional development to deepen and broaden the strategies used by teachers with a high percentage of ELL students. This includes cultural competency training; effective professional evaluation processes; and workshops so that teachers can

convert lesson planning theory into effective lesson implementation. In addition, a variety of summative and formative student assessments may be used to adjust teaching and learning. Finally, the school environment should lower affect filters so teachers, families, and students readily use their skills. Considering these factors, schools can develop a plan to differentiate learning for ELL students so these students can reach further success in the classroom and in society.

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## Appendix A

### Considerations for Students Entering ELL Programs

#### School and Classroom Environments

<b>Student Enrollment Considerations</b>	<b>Considerations to lower affect filters in classroom and school</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
	Professional development re: Instructional and Assessment methods for ELL students	
	Cultural Competence Training for Faculty and Staff	
	Engage in Professional Peer Learning Groups (Professional Learning Communities, Peer Observations, etc.)	
	Welcoming to cultural groups served by school (Languages used, texts, hiring practices, leadership, etc.)	
	Enhanced student profiles (Level of English prior to enrollment, socio-economic status, level of content knowledge, preschool experience, country of origin, gifts and talents, expertise, etc).	
	Use of the English Language Learner Survey for Principals	

## Appendix B

## Best Practices Matrix for Teachers and Administrators

## Student Assessments

<b>Student Assessment Considerations</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
	Use of Home Language Survey	
	Use of appropriate English language proficiency baseline testing (ACCESS/WIDA MODEL, etc)	
	Use of other summative and formative testing to evaluate individual needs and accomplishments in English acquisition (WIDA MODEL, NWEA CPAA and NWEA MAP testing, etc.)	

## Appendix C

## Best Practices Matrix for Teachers and Administrators

## Classroom Planning and Implementation

<b>Best Practices Used in Classroom Planning and Implementation</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Whole Group</b>	<b>For Differentiation/ Individualization</b>
	Literacy Clusters (Phonographic skills, Alphabet skills, Orthographic skills)		
	Language Acquisition Stages (Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency, Advanced Fluency)		
	Teaching Learning Matrix (Language Acquisition Stages combined with Bloom's Taxonomy)		
	Chunking and Questioning Activities		
	Language Objectives across Subjects/Content		
	Language Domains (Speaking, writing, listening, reading)		
	Teacher Directed Individual Activities		
	Creative use of L1 to teach L2		
	Total Physical Response		
	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol		
	Integration of Technology		

## Appendix D

## Best Practices Matrix for Teachers and Administrators

## Instructor Assessments

<b>Instructor Assessment</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
	Self Assessments		
		Cultural competency	
		Integration of best practices	
	Peer Assessments		
		Internal observations	
		External Observations	
		Peer collaboration/sharing of action research	
		Peer training/PLCs	
	Professional Assessments		
		Special considerations for ELL population	
		Professional goals set, evaluated and realized	
		Evidence of integration of best practices in lesson planning and implementation	



## Appendix E

### List of Terms

CQA – Chunking and Questioning Activities is an instructional method to increase reading comprehension.

DLL – Dual Language Learner – A person who is learning a target language, such as English, alongside their primary language for the purpose of achieving proficiency in both languages. The terms DLL and ELL are often used interchangeably, despite the fact that not all DLL learners are ELL learners.

ELL – English Language Learner – A person who is learning English and is not yet considered proficient according to accepted assessments.

ESL – English as a Second Language - A program in which the goal is to enable ELL students to reach proficiency in the English language.

Home Language Survey – The first step in determining whether a student will be considered an ELL student. The family of the student indicates whether a language other than English is spoken at home. As discussed, the results of this survey can be misleading as initial proficiency assessments often do not consider other literacy skills or challenges the student may encounter.

English Language Proficiency Assessment – This is normally the second step in determining whether a student will qualify for English learner status. Should a student be deemed proficient on this assessment, the likelihood of ELL status is very low. If not proficient, the student qualifies for ESL services and, according to Federal and most State laws, must be serviced appropriately (Hill and Miller, 2013).

L1 – Native/Primary language

L2 – Target language

Push In Program – The ESL teacher comes into the general classroom to aide ELL students alongside general education students and teachers.

Pull Out Program – ELL students are taken out of the general education program for part or all of the day to receive ESL instruction.

RTI – Response to Instruction is a multi-tiered classroom strategy used for English proficient and ELL students to determine whether they need additional support for learning.

SIOP – Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is a set of strategies used to instruct core content, thereby helping ELL students access content standards despite growing English proficiency.

TPR – Total Physical Response is a strategy used by instructors for beginning ELLs utilizing commands, physical responses, motions and gestures to learn English.

Zone of Proximal Development – The area between what the student is currently capable of and the achievement point desired next for the student (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Hill and Miller, 2013).

## Appendix F

### Permission Letters to Reprint Material

June 15, 2017

Tara Macias  
7235 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue S  
Richfield, MN 55423

#### **Permission to Use McREL Material**

Permission is hereby granted to Tara Macias to reprint the following material which was created by McREL in the dissertation she is writing:

Figure 6.1 Modified Thinking Language Matrix for Matching Animals to Their Environments, pp. 73–74 from *Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

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## Appendix G

## HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: November 15, 2016

To: Brett Geier, Principal Investigator  
Tara Macias, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 16-10-63

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Best Practices for Differentiated Learning among 3rd-5th ELL Students” has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

**Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.**

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

**Approval Termination: November 14, 2017**

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