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AN INVESTIGATION OF *ON OUR WAY TO ENGLISH*®, A READING PROGRAM  
FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN A RURAL WESTERN REGION NORTH CAROLINA  
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

By  
Regina King

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2019

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Regina King under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daddy who died on March 4, 2019, after an almost 5-year battle with throat and lung cancer. He was the bravest and strongest man I have ever known or ever will know. Although he went through surgery after surgery and lost his ability to talk for good and then went through many radiation treatments time and time again, he never complained. I wish he could have seen me graduate with my doctorate, but I know he is watching from above. I want him to know that I am now finishing this degree in his honor rather than just for myself.

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made it through this process without his guidance and leadership. He always knew the right words to say to keep me moving forward. His words of wisdom will stay with me always.

## Abstract

AN INVESTIGATION OF *ON OUR WAY TO ENGLISH*®, A READING PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN A RURAL WESTERN REGION NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT. King, Regina, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study examined how a literacy program, *On Our Way to English*® (OWE), for English Learners (ELs) was implemented in one North Carolina public school district. The program contained the elements of phonics, vocabulary, reading, and writing instruction. The researcher collected documents from participants as well as conducted observations of teachers implementing the program with ELs while taking field notes. The data collected were analyzed to determine how competent the participants felt in implementing the program with EL students and how it impacted their academic success. The participants' strengths were with using the vocabulary and writing instruction provided by the program, yet they expressed concerns with the reading comprehension and phonics portions of the program. The findings proved that English as a Second Language teachers in this study spent quality time on teaching students vocabulary and were comfortable doing so just as the program prompted them to do. Furthermore, the participants also appeared comfortable with using the writing strategies the OWE program offered for EL students as well. The data revealed their frustrations about having a lack of time to work on the phonics instruction offered by the program, so they tend to pick and choose what they feel is most important for their students' success.

*Keywords:* English Learners (ELs), vocabulary, writing, reading comprehension, literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill for adults and children of all ages for them to function in society today (Davis, 2016). “Social growth and economic advances depend on an educated society” (Gueth, 2012, p. 12). Approximately 130 million people (43%) in the United States are unable to complete basic reading tasks (Binder, Snyder, Ardoin, & Morris, 2011). According to Davis (2016), tasks such as filling out job applications or reading the instructions on a medicine bottle become virtually impossible for adults who struggle to read. Even daily activities as mundane as reading road or warning signs become frustrating for people who are unable to read. Many jobs require reading to complete the job, and the employee’s job performance may be based on his/her ability to read in some cases. Poor reading skills increase reaction time and the time it takes to comprehend text in the workplace, which in turn decreases what the employee can accomplish in a given amount of time.

The problem of poor reading skills, however, is not equally distributed among demographic subgroups. Specifically, children whose first language is not English struggle with reading at far greater rates than their native peers (Overstreet, 2014). With federal funding for schools depending on proficiency of subgroups such as English Learners (ELs), it is imperative to understand that ELs are one of the biggest groups who have problems with reading in United States schools, due to their lack of English language proficiency (Morisoli, 2010). EL students may communicate well socially in groups of friends, but academic English is challenging for them (Morisoli, 2010). These students are part of language assistance programs that help them acquire proficiency in the English language and meet the academic and achievement standards of their non-EL

peers (Morisoli, 2010). Their participation in these programs can lead to improved English language proficiency as well as improved academic outcomes (Morisoli, 2010).

In 2014-2015, the number of ELs in schools was estimated to be 4.6 million, which was more than the estimated 4.3 million in 2004-2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The percentage of ELs in public schools increased between 2004-2005 and 2014-2015 in all but 15 states, with Maryland having the largest influx of EL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). California had the highest number of ELs in its public schools at 22.4% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The District of Columbia and seven states had 10% or more of their students in public schools who were ELs in 2014-2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Eighteen states had more than 6% but less than 10% of ELs in their public schools during this same school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Twelve states had between 3% and 6% of ELs in their public schools, and 13 states had less than 3% of these students in their schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

A greater percentage of EL students were present in lower grades during the 2014-2015 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In kindergarten, 16.7% were EL students as compared to the 7.8% of sixth grade EL students. This pattern occurs because of ELs who reach English language proficiency, determined by ACCESS testing in most states, by the time they reach the upper grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Table 1

*Number of Students Enrolled in the Nation's Public Schools by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Students Enrolled
Hispanic	3,700,000
Asian	517,000
White	283,000
African-American	172,000

As shown in Table 1, Spanish is the first language of 3.7 million or 77.1% of EL students, making it the most common language of these students. Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese were the second most common home languages of ELs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In 2014-2015, Hispanic EL students made up over 75% of the EL enrollment in public schools. Asian students were the next largest group with 517,000 students. Finally, there were 283,000 White EL and 172,000 Black EL students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Approximately 665,000 students were identified as EL with disabilities. In North Carolina alone, the EL student population increased from 68,063 in 2004 to 93,726 in 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

This large population of ELs in public schools lags behind their peers in reading more than any other subject area (Morisoli, 2010). They have not yet mastered the English language, so they face many struggles as they work to acquire English reading skills (Morisoli, 2010). A group known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) looks at reading achievement in Grades 4, 8, and 12 in schools across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). They used a reading scale that ranged from 0-500. They looked at fourth, eighth, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading scale scores for 2013 and 2015 to determine if students were meeting the proficiency goals

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Table 2

*2013 and 2015 National Average Reading Scale Scores*

	2013	2015
Fourth Grade	222	223
Eighth Grade	268	265
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	292	292

As shown in Table 2, fourth graders scored an average scale score of 222 in 2013, which did not differ much from the 223 score in 2015. For eighth graders, the score of 268 in 2013 actually dropped to 265 in 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). For 12<sup>th</sup> graders, their scores stayed the same in 2013 and 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

With ELs coming from culturally diverse backgrounds and experiences, some may have attended school in their first language and been taught reading skills (Morisoli, 2010). Some of these students may not have attended school consistently and might not be able to read well in any language (Morisoli, 2010). In order to become better readers, they must learn about multiple-meaning words and various sounds a single letter can make in the English language. They must also learn sounds, rhythms, and patterns of the second language they are learning (Morisoli, 2010). To better educate these learners, ELs need to be assessed on an individual basis to determine their backgrounds, schooling experiences, reading abilities, and needs (Morisoli, 2010). One of their most common problems is reading dis-fluently, reading slowly, labored, or unexpressively, thus retarding comprehension (Morisoli, 2010). In some cases, it can be common for an EL to read a passage with ease but not be able to correctly answer questions about it (Morisoli,

2010). As a result, these students tend to have comprehension problems due to a limited vocabulary and little background knowledge; thus, even reading texts aloud to these students is not helpful for enhancing their comprehension (Robertson, 2009).

### **Significance of the Problem**

The United States is known for being an immigrant nation, and ELs have always been present in our country (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for example, there was a large influx of non-English speaking immigrants who entered the country (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Recent immigration trends suggest that the schools in the United States are filled with ethnically and linguistically diverse students, and many of them are learning English as a new language (Short, 2011). During the 2005-2006 school year, more than 5 million ELs were enrolled in Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Most of these students were in the elementary grades (Short, 2011); however, ELs are not achieving as well on national and state assessments as native English speakers. In 2007, the NAEP reported that the average reading score for fourth grade ELs was 36 points less than that for English speakers. In fact, 70% of these ELs scored at the lowest level. As a result, it is clear that ELs need support with acquiring academic English in order to be successful in all content area classes (Short, 2011).

Research shows that Latinos have particularly low graduation rates for high school and college as well as low achievement and reading scores (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Passing tests and exams is especially difficult for ELs who have entered our schools due to their limited English proficiency. Many of these students cannot pass the exit exams required to graduate high school because they are only given in English

(Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). Subject area exams are even more difficult for these students since they spend most of their time in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes learning English rather than subject area material; therefore, these circumstances cause EL students to struggle greatly in school (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010).

For the most part, ELs are able to communicate their basic needs and some basic information in English, but this does not prepare them for the school setting (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). Schools are now requiring these students achieve a certain level of proficiency in the English language that goes far beyond basic communication (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). Significant intervention is needed to assist these students with gaining proficiency, or they will fall farther and farther behind in their academics (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). In order to become fluent in the English language, ELs must go through a process over time that requires different types and levels of support throughout the process (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Toppelberg & Collins, 2010).

Due to their limited English proficiency, EL students struggle with learning to read (Rubin, 2016). Learning to read for these children is even more difficult depending on their family's socioeconomic status, native language fluency, and their parents' levels of education (Rubin, 2016). They also have the highest retention and dropout rates of any other groups of students in the United States (Rubin, 2016). In order for EL students to develop literacy skills equal to those of their English-speaking peers, they must increase their English language proficiency skills (Rubin, 2016).

Fluency is considered to be one of the most important traits of a skilled reader and leads to the reader spending less time and effort decoding text and more time gathering meaning from the selection (Rubin, 2016), which is a skill EL students struggle with

since they read at slower rates than their peers (Morisoli, 2010). These lower fluency rates cause EL students to struggle academically, be less motivated, and be less successful in school overall (Morisoli, 2010). Furthermore, problems with fluency lead to difficulty in other subject areas as students do not have the reading skills to gather information in other curriculum areas such as science and social studies (Morisoli, 2010). Instruction to increase fluency rates for second language learners must focus on increasing their reading rates by using strategies such as repeated reading as well as teaching vocabulary and comprehension skills (Morisoli, 2010; Robertson, 2012).

ELs also struggle with comprehension because of limited vocabulary knowledge and prior knowledge (Robertson, 2012). Teaching vocabulary before reading a text assists students with understanding words, which is a key to comprehension (Robertson, 2012). Also, ELs who have difficulty with comprehension tend to read more slowly, struggle with following along with stories, and have trouble picking out important details, which leads to frustration (Robertson, 2012); therefore, comprehension is a hard skill for ELs to master, so they need direct instruction to encourage their English proficiency literacy development and fluency (Robertson, 2012).

Many ELs want to succeed in school, but they do not have the academic language skills or background knowledge to complete tasks such as comparing historical events, solving word problems in math, or writing a summary. After 1 year in school, ELs are tested on grade-level material in English, although they are not proficient in the language. This creates a difficult situation for these students. Without being orally proficient in English and without being able to write the language, ELs have difficulty learning and demonstrating their knowledge (Short, 2011).

Developing academic language is of particular importance for ELs. Most ELs develop the “everyday” or social language quickly such as language used between students on the playground; however, social language is very different from academic language, which is needed to learn the content across curriculums. The lack of specific language goals causes ELs to be missing the necessary tools to be actively engaged in their classes. All content learning should be combined with teaching academic language so ELs have an equitable opportunity to succeed in school (Gibbons, 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate program implementation and teacher perception of competency and impact of *On Our Way to English*® (OWE) in a rural western region public school district. Through this study, the researcher determined if the program was being implemented as designed for use by ESL teachers. The researcher also gathered information about the ESL teachers’ perceptions of their competence in delivering the content in the program as well as their perceptions on how the program impacts the learning of ELs. Research showed that many schools offered instruction in ESL to ELs, but the instruction mainly focused on survival language, proper grammar, and basic vocabulary (Short, 2011). The instruction had not been connected to what was being taught in other classes so it had not been successful in helping students succeed in school. Instead, ESL instruction should develop language skills as they are related to content-based topics. ESL teachers develop English language proficiency in students by correlating topics from various curriculums in their grade levels (Short, 2011).

ELs need to interact and talk about the content within their grade level in order to expand their language. OWE provides many opportunities for ELs to interact and

collaborate with their peers using a variety of content area related texts with audio support. The program was designed to align with the English language development standards created by WIDA (once stood for World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, but now just stands for WIDA, an organization that develops and supports English language development standards for ELs) as well as supports the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). It scaffolds instruction for differing levels of proficiency in the English language, allowing for differentiation. The curriculum of this reading program is organized around science and social studies themes that are aligned with each grade level's CCSS. These themes engage students in many opportunities for practice with the academic language related to the content. The reading selections include both narratives and informational texts such as familiar stories, traditional stories from different cultures, poems, and plays. These resources are available online for the students to use also where they can hear the text read aloud as each word is highlighted as it is read (Freeman et al., 2014).

OWE begins each lesson with a Language Workout that includes three oral language activities that are intended to build collaboration and vocabulary; increase student confidence; and assist students with using grammar, phonics, and vocabulary. Within each unit, students are encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations about the content they are learning while using the academic language associated with the theme of the unit. This allows students to develop oral proficiency as they are learning science and social studies content. "Learn the Words" can also be found in each unit that introduces the students to academic vocabulary needed in order to understand the text that will be read. The students engage in reading a text multiple times and cite evidence

from the text in order to answer questions related to the reading. The program also includes a writing component that begins with modeling writing for students; then completing shared writing where the class collaborates to create a writing sample; and finally, the students complete independent writing (Freeman et al., 2014).

Using a qualitative research design, the researcher studied the program OWE to determine if the program was being implemented as its developers planned for it to be. The case study methodology was incorporated to analyze how the ESL teachers perceived their own delivery of the program and their perceptions of how the program impacted student learning. Documents were collected related to the program, which assisted to inform the study. The researcher conducted interviews with the ESL teachers and conducted observations in their classrooms as OWE was being implemented. Field notes were collected during the observations that were analyzed to help inform the study as well.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Hall and Hord's (2015) Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was used as a theoretical framework through which to interpret teacher perceptions and observations of the OWE program. The model was used to represent the motivations, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings a person experiences during a change process or innovation. Hall (1979) viewed change, brought on by the implementation of a new program, as a process, not an event. According to its developers, change cannot be accomplished right away, rather it takes time and is developmental according to how those implementing the change feel about it (Hall, 1979).

CBAM employs the Stages of Concern (SoC) to consider individuals' feelings,

attitudes, and perspectives as they become part of a change effort. The SoC move from self-centered concerns to more task-oriented concerns and then to concerns about how the innovation is impacting students. The stages range from 0 to 6 with 0 being the lowest level of concern and 6 being the highest level of concern. Stage 0 focuses on Awareness Concerns, which is when the individual feels the change is of no concern to him or her. At this stage, the person does not seem to care about the change and/or knows nothing about it. Stage 1 refers to Information Concerns where a person is concerned about learning more about the program that is being implemented. Stage 2 is centered on Personal Concerns, when the change becomes a personal threat to the individual. The person involved with the innovation feels it is causing undue stress on him/her, and he/she may lack confidence in implementing a new program. Stage 3 refers to Management Concerns that are usually seen in inexperienced users of a program. These individuals tend to have more profound concerns after the first use of the innovation. Their concerns focus on time, using the materials, and coordinating all the pieces of the program. Stage 4 deals with Consequence Concerns, reflecting the individual's initial concern for how the innovation is affecting students and how potentially to make the program work better for students. Stage 5 focuses on Collaboration Concerns where a person is concerned with how to find time to collaborate with his/her colleagues in order to work more effectively for students. Finally, Stage 6 refers to Refocusing Concerns where an individual expresses a strong opinion about the innovation. S/he may be concerned that another program could have been a better choice and made more of an impact than the one being implemented. Collecting data using the SoC indicates how staff members feel about the implementation of a program at different points of the

implementation process. By analyzing the data collected using the SoC, actions can be taken to provide the appropriate support for staff members (American Institutes of Research, 2015; Hall, 1979; Hogan, Bridges, Justice, & Cain, 2011).

As the implementation of OWE was being examined in this study, the researcher used Hall's (1979) CBAM's SoC to benchmark how teachers felt about their delivery and perceived impact on student learning of the program by using the Open-Ended SoC Statement, which allowed teachers to write a description of their concerns about the program and its implementation. These data were used to determine which SoC each teacher currently fell under: Unconcerned, Informational, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration, and Refocusing.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent has the OWE program been implemented by ESL teachers as designed?
2. To what extent do ESL teachers feel competent in the delivery of the program?
3. How do the ESL teachers perceive the program impacts EL students' learning?

### **Significance of the Study**

By examining the implementation of OWE, the participants gained significant insight into their teaching practice in areas they felt competent implementing as well as in areas they felt they were weakest. This research showed the advantages and disadvantages of this particular program as it was implemented in this rural western district, which can influence other school districts as to whether they might want to use

this program for their EL students. Teacher insight on the implementation of the program and how they viewed it impacting student learning is a valuable resource for others who are looking at the program for use in their district. This study provided valuable information regarding teacher likes and dislikes of the program according to how it was implemented in the ESL classroom for EL students.

### **Overview of the OWE Reading Program**

OWE addresses the English language development standards and CCSS set for ELs. The program is designed to engage students in conversations with the teacher and their peers about what they are learning while using academic language related to the content being taught and learned. A variety of activities are used to enhance the students' oral language proficiency as well as their listening and speaking skills. Visuals such as posters and videos are used to help students build background knowledge and encourage them to talk about topics before they read about them. As these skills are being built on, reading skills are being taught through the use of theme- and content-based instruction. The selections that are read are literary and informational including articles, poems, folktales, and other types of literature from other cultures. Formative assessments are used often throughout the program to check for student understanding of concepts that are taught. Writing is incorporated into their reading experiences as well as a form of assessment; therefore, the four domains of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are integrated into every unit and every lesson of this reading program, making it a quality research-based program for ELs.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

A qualitative case study design was used to conduct the research for this

investigation. In order to determine how OWE was being implemented by the ESL teachers participating in the study, one-on-one interviews, classroom observations, and documents were used to collect data. Documents that were collected were used to associate the design of the program with the practices implemented within the program itself. Through interviews, teachers shared how confident they felt in delivering the program and how they perceived the program effectively met the needs of ELs. During interviews, teachers were also questioned about Hall's (1979) SoC regarding the implementation of the program. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and field notes were taken during classroom observations. Once the data were collected, they were reviewed carefully for commonalities among responses from the participants. These commonalities were categorized into themes and coded. The themes were reviewed again and reported in a narrative.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Academic language.** The language of the text being read, and the language used in the classroom (Lesaux, 2011b).

**Comprehension.** The understanding of what is read and constructing meaning from it (Robertson, 2009).

**Content-based instruction.** Uses a content area to integrate language instruction (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014).

**ELs.** Students who are learning ESL; one or both parents have moved to the United States from another country (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010).

**Social language.** Language used in conversations between students (Gibbons, 2017).

## **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 of this study defined the purpose of the study as well as the research questions that are addressed. In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews teachers' roles in helping students with their language acquisition, research-based instructional practices for ELs, how changes to the professional practice need to be made in order to increase language proficiency in ELs, and studies related the research. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative case study approach that was used to collect documents from the OWE program and discusses the procedures that were used to conduct the research for this study on the implementation of OWE. In Chapter 4, the researcher shares findings from field notes, documents, and interviews. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and discusses conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to examine the OWE reading program and observe if the program was being implemented as it was designed to be, using information gathered from teacher interviews and classroom observations that were analyzed to inform the investigation. The stages of literacy and language development, which can be seen within the OWE program, play an important role in all students, including ELs. Using current, research-based instructional strategies with ELs is also extremely crucial in helping these students reach proficiency in the English language. These strategies are incorporated throughout the program being studied as well. Finally, there appears to be a need to change professional practice where ELs are concerned as there seems to be many teachers who lack the knowledge of strategies to use with this particular group of students. In turn, this chapter reviews the importance of reading, teachers' roles in language acquisition for ELs, the qualities of research-based literacy programs for ELs, changing professional practice to meet the needs of ELs, and related studies that focus on program evaluations that investigate teacher perceptions of instructional strategies used with ELs. Finally, the chapter includes information regarding CBAM in relation to a change process.

### **Importance of Reading**

Far too many American and minority children are failing to read well enough to succeed outside of high school or even to be considered functionally literate (Overstreet, 2014). Gueth (2012) stated that over 70% of United States prisoners lack the basic reading or writing skills sufficient to write a letter or read a bus schedule. Although this statistic is alarming, there are still some people who describe literacy as a way out of

poverty since statistics also show that adults without a diploma earn three times less than those who earned a bachelor's degree (Gueth, 2012); therefore, the ability to read and comprehend opens a multitude of doors for future endeavors (Walker, 2008).

Reading is a way to help children and adults focus on what the author is communicating and develop their language skills as a result (Davis, 2016). Moreover, good readers tend to have better vocabulary skills and be better spellers due to the time they spend reading (Davis, 2016). They learn how words are used in different contexts by actually seeing them in different texts (Davis, 2016). Reading also allows children and adults to develop creativity and imagination since the person engaged in the text can imagine being any place during any time with anyone of their choice (Davis, 2016).

Furthermore, reading has been identified as an important component for student success across curriculums (National Reading Panel, 2000). The main goal of reading is to comprehend or gain meaning from the text (Gueth, 2012); but for students who cannot construct meaning from text, reading is not beneficial (California Department of Education, 2007). However, fluent readers can focus on comprehension skills and recognize most words automatically while reading quickly with expression (National Reading Panel, 2000) rather than focusing on decoding words as struggling readers who have difficulty understanding what they have read do (California Department of Education, 2007).

With reading being such an integral part of life, the Bush administration passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, which increased the federal role in holding schools accountable for student achievement in the areas of reading and math (Klein, 2015). Its main purpose was to close the achievement gap between the poor and

minority students and the more advantaged students (Klein, 2015). NCLB had an incredible impact on teaching, learning, and improvement of schools; and in turn, it became controversial with educators and the public in general. The act grew out of concern that the education system in the United States was not competitive enough with countries around the world (Klein, 2015). It held schools accountable for the academic achievement of all students including ELs, exceptional children, and poor and minority children (Klein, 2015).

States were not required to comply with the NCLB mandates, but they lost their federal Title 1 funding if they chose not to. As part of the law, students in Grades 3-8 must be tested in reading and math, and the results must be reported to the Department of Education as a whole and for any subgroups such as ELs or exceptional children (Klein, 2015; Lee, 2014; PBS, 2002). All students were required to be at the “proficient level” on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year; however, the states were able to decide their own “proficiency” levels and what tests to use (Klein, 2015; Lee, 2014; PBS, 2002). Schools were monitored by tracking their progress toward meeting their goals through a mechanism known as adequate yearly progress or AYP. If a school failed to meet its AYP for 2 years or more for all students or for a particular subgroup, it was subject to serious sanctions (Klein, 2015; Lee, 2014; PBS, 2002). One sanction was that students were allowed to transfer to better performing schools within the same district, while another sanction was that schools must offer free tutoring to students not meeting their goals (Klein, 2015; Lee, 2014). States could also choose to shut down low-performing schools or turn them into charter schools (Klein, 2015). A final requirement of NCLB required states to ensure that “highly qualified teachers” are present in every classroom to

maximize the instruction and learning in which students are engaged (Klein, 2015; Lee, 2014).

Several problems existed with the NCLB legislation, such as the states and districts had difficulty finding quality tutors for struggling students (Klein, 2015). The law was also criticized for relying too much on standardized tests which forced schools to spend less time teaching untested subjects such as social studies. By 2010, it was obvious that many schools were not going to meet the achievement goals of NCLB (Klein, 2015). In fact, 38% of schools were not able to make AYP in 2010. In 2011, more than 50% of schools faced failure in regard to AYP. It was then that Congress saw a need for changes to be made to the law but could not complete a bill to be passed (Klein, 2015).

That same year, the Obama administration created a series of waivers that offers the states a reprieve from many of the requirements laid out by NCLB. These waivers removed the 2013-2014 deadline for all students reaching proficiency, the public school choice, or tutoring for schools that miss AYP (Klein, 2015). In return, states had to agree to set high standards for students to prepare them for higher education and the workforce. As a result, states could choose to use CCSS or get higher education institutions to certify their standards were challenging enough (Klein, 2015). Another waiver included that the states had to institute teacher evaluation systems that include student progress on standardized tests issued by the state (Klein, 2015).

These waivers led to the development of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that was signed into law on December 10, 2015 and took the place of NCLB (Klein, 2015). This act actually took full effect in the 2017-2018 school year. States still have to

submit a plan to the Secretary of Education stating how students will work to meet their reading, math, and science achievement goals. They are able to define their own goals, short- and long-term; and the goals must address proficiency on tests, English language proficiency, and graduation rates (Klein, 2015).

According to ESSA, low-performing schools must be identified once every 3 years. States performing in the bottom 5% must identify and provide interventions (Klein, 2015; Korte, 2015). They must also intervene in high schools that have a graduation rate of 67% or less. For schools with subgroups of struggling students, they must develop an evidence-based plan to help a particular group of students who are performing below their peers, and the districts must monitor these plans (Klein, 2015; Korte, 2015). Also, like NCLB, the states have to test students in Grades 3-8 and in high school in reading and math; and the data from these tests must be broken down by whole school as well as into subgroups (Klein, 2015; Korte, 2015).

The ability to read and comprehend opens many doors for an individual's future (Walker, 2008). Many American children are not able to read proficiently enough to be successful in college, and many are only considered functionally literate (Overstreet, 2014). As a result, our country's administration has repeatedly turned their focus to the importance of early literacy (Paleologos, 2005). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute for Literacy provided our government officials with reading research pertaining to children's literacy development (Paleologos, 2005). Funds and guidance were provided to help schools lead students to be successful readers in kindergarten through third grade because of the research done by these organizations (Flindt, 2007).

## **Teachers' Roles in Language Acquisition for ELs**

Young ELs follow a similar pathway for language development to that of English speakers, and the teacher's role is critical in this process (August & Shanahan, 2006). Teachers must create an environment that is learner centered and fosters independent students who take control of their own learning. They must guide and facilitate learning so students can learn language and begin to take initiative for their own learning. ELs are motivated on tasks in which they are interested and find value; therefore, teachers should choose activities that are fun, have cultural relevance, and use authentic literature. Tasks assigned should build student self-confidence or self-efficacy (Hong, 2008).

Language, reading, and writing skills develop simultaneously and are closely linked (Zero to Three, 2003). Children must receive instruction in all forms of language including sound structures and grammatical structures of sentences (Tomblin, 2010). Language skills include reading, writing, listening, and speaking; and they play a crucial role in students' school careers. All of these language skills are interconnected and affect one another (The Center for Development and Learning, n.d.). Oral language forms the foundation for reading and writing as children go through school. A solid foundation in oral language helps students develop into successful readers (Reeder & Baxa, 2017). Younger children use oral language to learn how to read, while older children use reading skills to gather more information and learn new things (The Center for Development and Learning, n.d.).

In early language development, ELs need explicit instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness in order to build decoding skills. They are at risk for having underdeveloped phonemic awareness skills, which puts them at a greater risk for having

reading difficulties; therefore, ELs in the earliest stages of language development benefit from phonemic and phonological awareness instruction (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). Phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate sounds. This is an essential skill for any child learning to read in a first language and in a second language (Branum-Martin et al., 2006). Phonemic awareness and letter knowledge have been identified as the two best predictors at school entry of how well children will learn to read within their first 2 years of school, which corresponds to their language development. Teachers must teach children to manipulate sounds, so they will be able to learn to read, decode new words, and recognize familiar ones (National Reading Panel, 2000). Once children learn to decode one syllable words with simple spelling patterns, the educators can lead students toward decoding multi-syllable words (August & Shanahan, 2006). Kindergarten children can be taught letter names and the concept of letter sounds along with some phonological awareness (Huff, 2006). Then, all students, including ELs, begin to “pretend read” and even begin to point to words on a page and read them (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, Tarver, 2014).

Once children are able to recognize and manipulate sounds, they will begin to develop phonological awareness, which is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds including rhymes; word segments; and initial, medial, and final sounds. This awareness also includes associating letters with sounds (Carnine et al., 2014; Tomblin, 2010). As teachers instruct students on decoding skills directly, children’s language development will begin to speed up (Carnine et al., 2014). Teachers should begin by teaching rhyming words in order to help students listen for certain sounds and then help students hear syllables or word parts by clapping or tapping them out. Children who

struggle with rhyming typically have difficulty with reading acquisition as well (Moore, 2014). Next, the instruction shifts to teaching individual sounds, specifically vowels and certain consonants. Phonological awareness continues with helping students hear and discriminate between initial, medial, and final sounds in words. As students become able to associate letters with sounds, activities including letters rather than just sounds can be used (Kratky, 2011). The National Reading Panel (2000) found that providing instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness assisted with the language development in all students, including ELs.

After children develop proficient phonemic and phonological awareness, reading fluency becomes important to a child's language development. At this point, reading stories that have been heard previously increases the students' fluency (Chall, 1983). Students in second grade focus more on gaining fluency as their sight word vocabulary continues to increase (Huff, 2006). More complex words are recognized, and students are able to read more difficult texts composed of these words (Carnine et al., 2014); however, reading at this stage is not used to gain information but for confirming knowledge that the students already have (Chall, 1983). The teacher should provide books in which the content is familiar to the students in order for them to concentrate on the printed words, which are usually sight words (Chall, 1983). By doing so, the teacher is allowing the student to focus on what the story or text is saying, and the student gains courage and confidence in their reading and language skills (Chall, 1983). This is when the oral reading of children becomes more fluid and accurate as they start to recognize words automatically and read with more expression (Carnine et al., 2014). The Reading First Initiative was passed as part of NCLB in 2002 and stipulated that classroom

instruction and assessment must be focused on fluency (Shelton, Altwerger, & Jordan, 2009). Teachers need to model fluent reading that sounds effortless with good expression, or prosody, on a daily basis, so students can understand how a reader's voice helps the text make sense (Armbuster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001).

As students become more fluent in their reading, they will begin to comprehend the texts they are reading more proficiently. Teachers must equip students with a variety of strategies that allow them to learn to read proficiently including decoding recognizable words and constructing meaning of those words (Walker, 2008). Those who can read words automatically, effortlessly, and with expression can focus their concentration on understanding the text (Walker, 2008). Comprehending text is a complicated process that involves many processes including making inferences, gathering meaning from the text, and combining information being read with information that the reader already knows (Bellinger & DiPerna, 2011). In all, the main purpose for reading is to gain meaning from the text (Armbuster et al., 2001).

In the beginning years of reading development, comprehending text is hindered by the focus on decoding (Gueth, 2012). Children in the early grades depend on decoding skills for comprehension during reading (Hogan et al., 2011). Automatic word recognition skills are needed for comprehension as well (Flindt, 2007). Once decoding skills become more automatic, students' language abilities are even more important for reading comprehension (Hogan et al., 2011). Efficiently reading words automatically allows students to use their cognitive abilities for constructing meaning from the text rather than focusing on word recognition (Petscher & Kim, 2011). Once students reach third and fourth grade, they move from learning to read to reading to gain information,

which involves more comprehension skills (Hogan et al., 2011).

The National Reading Panel reported that reading comprehension is essential for the educational and lifelong learning of children (Bellinger & DiPerna, 2011).

Comprehension is reliant on many skills such as fluency, knowledge of semantics, phonological skills, memory processing abilities, vocabulary knowledge, ability to inference, prior knowledge, language skills, and knowledge of grammatical structure (Bellinger & DiPerna, 2011). Other aspects of good comprehension include visualizing the meaning of the text and understanding the words and sentence structure of the text (Hogan et al., 2011). As readers are able to move quickly through a text and maintain the meaning, their comprehension is enhanced (Walker, 2008). “The Simple View of Reading” explains that reading comprehension is produced through the process of decoding text or word reading and understanding the language of the words that are being decoded, which is known as listening comprehension (Hogan et al., 2011). In other words, children comprehend text once they are able to fluently and correctly translate the written words into a spoken language they can comprehend (Hogan et al., 2011).

Hogan et al. (2011) stated that language skills have been ignored as playing an important role in reading comprehension, which is surprising since comprehension is fundamental for life, educational success, being productive in society, and employment. In the beginning stages of reading development, children are at different stages of decoding printed text (Hogan et al., 2011). As decoding becomes automatic, comprehension becomes dependent on language comprehension (Gueth, 2012; Hogan et al., 2011), which depends on student knowledge of morphemes, semantics, and syntax (Kim, Park, & Wagner, 2014). Knowledge of these aspects of language assists students

with faster word reading and better comprehension (Kim et al., 2014).

Since language skills are essential for reading comprehension, children who struggle with comprehension may have poor language skills (Hogan et al., 2011). Seventy percent of kindergarten students who had significant deficits in language skills read poorly in second grade and were lacking in their comprehension skills (Hogan et al., 2011). On the other hand, children actually begin developing higher level language skills before they receive any formal reading instruction because they are not reliant on the ability to decode and read words (Hogan et al., 2011). Language comprehension depends on language skills that support reading comprehension, which are skills needed to understand multi-step directions, stories, and conversations (Hogan et al., 2011).

Vocabulary and grammar are foundational skills that support higher level language skills necessary to comprehend text (Hogan et al., 2011). Vocabulary and grammar are actually lower level language skills since they are easily and quickly gained for most children in their early years (Hogan et al., 2011). Possessing the ability to create accurate mental images increases students' vocabulary and grammar skills (Hogan et al., 2011).

As comprehension is necessary for learning new information and sharing what one has read (Bellinger & DiPerna, 2011), proficient readers are active in the reading process (Paleologos, 2005). Teachers must teach students to make predictions and preview the text, use their prior knowledge, and monitor their own comprehension (Paleologos, 2005). Successful readers are also taught to create mental images from the text using their prior knowledge as well as monitor their own reading, check their own understanding, and make inferences as they read (Hogan et al., 2011). These readers pay

attention to story elements such as characters and settings in narratives, and they are able to develop summaries as they read nonfiction texts as a result of effective classroom instruction (Paleologos, 2005).

There are five stages of language development for ELs that correspond with the reading development process as well. The first stage is known as the Pre-production Stage or the silent period. There is very little comprehension and no verbal communication during this stage (Conroy, n.d.). During this time, students are exposed to the second language, and they are focused on listening and comprehending. Younger children stay in the silent period longer than older ones (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, n.d.). First language learners acquire much of their vocabulary through conversations and discussions (Snow, 2014). The use of visual aids, gestures, and group discussions are very helpful for students at this stage. Multimedia and visual aids greatly improve skills of ELs for mastering a second language (Halwani, 2017). Direct and explicit instruction of vocabulary is especially needed for ELs (Conroy, n.d.). The second stage is Early Production where there is limited comprehension, and student responses are 1-2 words. Using pictures and manipulatives to illustrate concepts can be especially helpful at this stage. Technology facilitates learning and makes it more effective and creates interesting lessons as well as provides better illustrations and pictures. It also provides a scaffold for students and allows them to engage in discourse (Halwani, 2017). As students move into the third stage, the Emergent Stage, there is increased comprehension, and students begin to use simple sentences; but they are unable to correct their own errors. The teacher can incorporate role-playing, skits, and debates to check student understanding during this stage. The fourth stage is called the Intermediate Fluency Stage in which the students

begin to have good comprehension and use complex sentences; they may have complex errors in speech, but they can correct the errors when they are pointed out. The final stage is the Stabilization Stage when students have no problems with fluency or comprehension, and they are able to self-correct errors they make when speaking. Dialogue journals, choral, partner, and independent readings are effective activities to use with students in these last two stages (Conroy, n.d.).

Therefore, language development of ELs is much like that of English speaking children as it begins with phonemic awareness and phonological instruction to learn letters and sounds and how they correspond with each other (Flindt, 2007). Then the students begin to use decoding skills to develop fluency and accuracy in their reading. As they become more fluent and decoding comes with more ease, student comprehension improves tremendously since they are no longer working so hard to decode the words they are reading (Walker, 2008).

### **Qualities of Research-Based Literacy Programs**

Research-based programs designed for teaching ELs should contain several features that make it a worthy, well-rounded program. One focus of the program should be teaching academic language which ELs struggle with most often when learning concepts in the subject areas of math, science, and social studies. Another feature should be that the program spends time building background knowledge for these EL students; because in many instances, they do not have any background knowledge of what the text being read is about. EL literacy programs must also contain content-based instruction centered around social studies and science topics that incorporate a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. Finally, these programs must also integrate various assessment

strategies appropriate for ELs since they may be below their English proficiency level. All of these qualities can be found within the OWE literacy program for ELs which was the focus of this case study research.

**Background knowledge.** ELs frequently have a disadvantage in school due to their school experiences. The curriculum from country to country can be quite different, and some students may have had an interrupted school experience (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). ELs encounter many challenges when faced with the task of reading new texts. It is important to apply the appropriate pre-reading strategies and spend time accessing the background knowledge of ELs (McCall, 2005). Background knowledge can be defined as what students already know that has been learned in a classroom and through life experiences (Hermann, n.d.).

ELs may have had a large degree of schooling in their first language but not be able to communicate what they know in English. Background knowledge plays a large role in reading comprehension and content learning (Hermann, n.d.). Comprehension has been found to be impacted by a limited amount of background knowledge (Linan-Thompson, 2011). Experts have stated that a learner's "knowledge of the world" provided a foundation for understanding, learning, and remembering facts and concepts in texts. Students with knowledge about the content being taught have better recall and are able to explain more aspects of the topic than those who have little or no knowledge of the content (Echevarria et al., 2017; Hermann, n.d.). ELs with little or interrupted schooling must acquire background knowledge in order to succeed in academic tasks (Hermann, n.d.). To engage ELs in actively learning new content, connecting their background knowledge to the new topic is one of the best ways to get these students

involved (Evans, 2007). Educators of ELs need to set up a learning environment where students can be academically successful (Fenner, 2013). Using sentence frames is one way to help engage ELs with using the English language to share their background knowledge. For example, one sentence frame could be “I think \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.” Using sentence frames allows ELs to build confidence as EL students are encouraged to think, write, and talk about what they already know (Evans, 2007).

Other ways to assist ELs with developing and accessing background knowledge is by bringing in real objects related to the content, which creates conversations among the students. Another way to build background knowledge for ELs is to provide short videos, pictures, illustrations, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning activities. Videos help students gain an understanding of what they will be learning (Schwenzfeier, n.d.). The teacher should pause the video frequently and have students discuss with a partner or as a whole group what they saw (McCall, 2005). Pictures and illustrations from the text to be read or related to the text can be used to spark conversations among EL students as well. They are able to discuss what they observe in pictures or illustrations based on what they already know (McCall, 2005; Schwenzfeier, n.d.).

Using graphic organizers such as KWL charts also activates background knowledge. ELs are asked to share what they know (K) about a topic and then think of questions they might want (W) to know answers to in regard to the topic. Once the text has been read, the students will complete what they learned (L) on the chart. A read aloud of a short text or a big book related to the topic being taught may be an effective method for developing background knowledge as well. This strategy can help students discuss and understand concepts related to texts (McCall, 2005). Therefore, it is of the

utmost importance that teachers use research-based strategies to assist ELs with building background knowledge and help them connect what they are familiar with to what is being taught (Echevarria et al., 2017). OWE incorporates videos, interactive boards, pictures, illustrations, and student workbooks that contain graphic organizers to activate background knowledge. Lesson plans include manipulative charts, chant posters, concept posters, and big books for each unit to activate, honor, and build student background knowledge (Rigby, 2003).

**Academic language.** Some ELs have strong academic backgrounds and are literate in their native language. Mostly what they need is to become more proficient in the English language, and they can transfer the knowledge they have already learned from other schools to their current classes that assist with learning academic language (Echevarria et al., 2017). Academic language is the language used in the classroom and in the content areas such as math, science, and social studies (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). This type of language is found in textbooks, used on a daily basis in classrooms, and used on tests students are given. Students, including ELs, must understand academic language in order to be successful in the content areas. In fact, academic language is a top indicator of academic success in ELs (Willis, 2013).

For all students, including ELs, vocabulary and reading comprehension go hand in hand since greater vocabulary knowledge increases comprehension. Research has determined that academic vocabulary or language poses more difficulty for those who struggle with comprehension, and this is particularly true for ELs. In kindergarten through second grade, only 10-28% of explicit instruction is focused on vocabulary. Efficient vocabulary instruction requires a lot of talk and practice using the language.

Students must be exposed to the words in multiple ways through reading, writing, listening, and speaking to gain a deeper understanding of them (Lesaux, 2011b).

As stated by the National Reading Panel, vocabulary is an important part of reading. The most prominent indicator of oral language proficiency is vocabulary knowledge, which is particularly important for comprehending spoken and written language (Proctor, Carlo, August, & Snow, 2005). When a word is not in a reader's oral vocabulary, the reader will not comprehend it when it is read. Teaching vocabulary before reading a text facilitates greater comprehension of the text. Students also need to be exposed to the words several times to ensure their understanding of the meanings to assist with comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

ELs benefit from explicit instruction in academic language. They need many opportunities to engage in activities using the language (Marchand-Martella, Klingner, & Martella, 2016). Academic language is a second language for *all* students. It involves using more complex, higher level vocabulary than is used in everyday conversations. This is the type of language students need to discuss complex ideas, argue a position, summarize a text, and compare and contrast points of view. ELs must develop reading skills in each content area in their second language as they learn, comprehend, and apply content area concepts using their second language (Echevarria et al., 2017).

In order to teach academic language, words or phrases must be introduced to students by saying them, providing a student-friendly definition, and writing them on the board or displaying them on a pocket chart (Lesaux, 2011a; Robertson, 2012). The students should then copy the words into a notebook. The teacher should model how the words are used in sentences and give examples of the words to help students gain a better

understanding. To further EL students' understanding of academic vocabulary, using visuals, songs, acting them out, or providing synonyms can facilitate the students' learning the meanings of the words (Robertson, 2012). Another technique to help students comprehend academic vocabulary is to have them illustrate the words and use them in sentences (Lesaux, 2011a; Robertson, 2012).

National ESL standards 2, 3, 4, and 5 specifically address academic language in the content areas. Students must know that "Find the number" means create an equation and solve it in math class. ELs may not know words related to earth science concepts such as evaluate, theory, hypothesis, and cycle, so they must be taught this language in order to understand these science concepts (Willis, 2013).

For all learners, ELs included, academic language and comprehension work together. Teachers must use thematic units that incorporate academic vocabulary in the content areas that promote oral language instruction and many opportunities for the students to use academic vocabulary in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Lesaux, 2011a). Teachers should encourage students to share any knowledge they already have of a word or any connections they can make to it, while the teachers also share their own connections to the words. Allowing students to practice using words in speaking and writing exercises helps them understand the ways words can be used (Lesaux, 2011a). OWE engages students in the use of social and academic language as well as teaching grammar in context. Students are provided with interactive vocabulary practice, and oral language development is the focus of lessons created for the program. Academic language and vocabulary are discussed before reading the content and during reading, and students are given an opportunity to use the words in writing or other activities after

reading (Rigby, 2003).

**Content-based instruction.** The instruction for ELs should be centered around thematic units that focus on content included in the curriculum. Reading, math, writing, science, and social studies are integrated into the unit where students use their language skills to develop their oral language and reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills as well (Short, 2011). This technique is known as content-based instruction, which focuses on learning a second language while using the language to learn the content of the academic subjects in school. Content-based instruction develops academic language in ELs using information and texts that are meaningful to them (Reilly, 1988).

Explicit instruction of comprehension skills is essential for students and should be embedded within the content areas by using a variety of texts (Huddle, 2014). ESL teachers have a desire to develop their students' English language proficiency by using information in their subject area classes. Content objectives are created to drive the focus of the curriculum and state what the students will be learning from the content. Additionally, the teacher creates language objectives that correlate with the content objectives and focus on learning the English language (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Echevarria et al., 2017). ESL teachers are responsible for addressing the English language proficiency standards, so they must provide direct instruction in language skills that include the domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Instruction in the elements of the English language that includes vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and conventions must also be provided for ELs (Short, 2011); however, Short (2011) stated that these skills should never be taught in isolation but in context and in conjunction with the content being taught.

Using thematic units and content-based learning links language skills to learning for EL students. Oral language activities are provided for students in order to give them opportunities to use academic language when discussing content area topics (Short, 2011). Stack (2014) stated, “Language and content develop in tandem” (p. T4). ELs need to hear meaningful comprehensible input in order to expand their language as they hear and discuss stories, poems, songs, and informational texts. The goal is to develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening proficiency while using content area related texts to do so (Stack, 2014).

Content-based instruction facilitates building students’ background knowledge, which is critical for understanding concepts and reading comprehension. This type of instruction introduces ELs to topics their peers already know. Content-based instruction employs the use of videos, pictures, hands-on activities, academic language learning, integration of science and social studies content, and a variety of authentic and meaningful texts (Short, 2011; Stack, 2014). Teaching ELs with content-based instruction offers a way to incorporate oral and written language, scaffold student learning, and engage students in learning while focusing on a concept and the language and vocabulary that surround it (Bigelow, Ranney, & Dahlman, 2006). Likewise, OWE provides ELs with opportunities for using oral and written language while focusing on content they are required to learn. Academic language is presented in its natural context through multiple exposures including songs, stories, pictures, and other texts (Rigby, 2003).

**Quality assessments.** Assessment is an important part of effective literacy instruction. Title III of NCLB requires ELs be assessed in the language domains of

listening, reading, speaking, and writing. These students have unique learning and assessment needs (Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun-Irminger, 2006). Assessment is not “one size fits all.” The data from assessments can be used to determine students’ needs and strengths; determine problem areas for students which may include language, reading, and writing; or recognize gaps in their content knowledge (Turner, 2011). Assessments should be designed to help teachers make instructional decisions as well as assist teachers with discovering what the students know and can do. The most effective assessments of student learning take place over a period of time (Lenski et al., 2006).

Authentic assessments track the progress of students over time. By using these assessments, teachers are able to focus on problem areas, adjust instruction, and intervene before the problem becomes worse (¡Colorín Colorado, 2012). Authentic assessments can be quick, on-the-spot opportunities to determine if students are learning the content being taught. These assessments may include observations, conversations, reports, and notes (Echevarria et al., 2017).

Authentic assessments include multiple forms of assessment that demonstrate student learning, performance, motivation, and attitudes of instructional activities. ELs frequently have trouble expressing what they need to say related to content areas, so authentic assessments provide opportunities for them to share their knowledge in other ways. For example, if a student is unable to write about the water cycle, s/he may demonstrate his/her understanding of the content using pictures or with a science experiment (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). Teachers can use anecdotal records, checklists, rubrics, and portfolios when using authentic assessments in order to plan and modify their instruction as needed. These assessments provide a wealth of information about students’

literacy development as well as their progress and accomplishments (Lenski et al., 2006; Turner, 2011).

Performance-based assessments are also another name for authentic assessments, which are based on classroom instruction that takes place in the EL classroom every day. They can be used to assess EL students' language proficiency or their academic achievement. Some ways to assess students are through oral reports, presentations, demonstrations, written assignments, and portfolios (¡Colorín Colorado, 2012).

Performance-based or authentic assessments allow ELs to share their knowledge and show what they are able to do (Abedi, 2010; Turner, 2011). They allow these students with different language backgrounds to participate in cognitively stimulating activities in which they must develop strategies, monitor their own work, analyze information, and apply reasoning skills (Abedi, 2010; Lenski et al., 2006).

Through authentic assessments, EL students' literacy skills are assessed more naturally and their progress is documented more thoroughly (Lenski et al., 2006). They allow students to provide a wide range of responses without having only one correct response (¡Colorín Colorado, 2012). For instance, role plays, interviews, or oral reports can be focused around summarizing a text and can be done in small groups, with partners, or individually. These are great strategies to monitor student comprehension (Licain, n.d.).

Performance-based/authentic assessments are motivators for students, which is very important for ELs because they need extra support as they go through school (Abedi, 2010). ELs must learn the academic content for their grade level as they are going through the process of learning English. When creating assessments for ELs, their

understanding of math, science, and social studies should be assessed separately from their level of English proficiency (¡Colorín Colorado, 2012). Assessing EL students' proficiency in the English language provides essential information for teachers so they are able to make sure the learning environment and instruction are available to ELs at their proficiency level (Turner, 2011).

Self-assessments should also be used in EL classrooms, so students are able to assess their own learning (Turner, 2011). Students are able to gain an understanding of how they can direct their own learning, which leads them to be more independent readers and learners. ELs may have trouble with self-assessments in the beginning, so teachers must model responses for the students and then scaffold their experiences with self-assessment in group, peer, and then independent activities (Lenski et al., 2006).

Assessment is fair when it is individualized and based on students' needs and abilities, and it promotes a positive relationship between teachers and students (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Some types of authentic or performance-based assessments include written pieces, interviews, videos, pictures, observations, artwork, discussions, role plays, and oral responses (Echevarria et al., 2017). These types of assessments provide a well-rounded view of EL students' abilities and areas of weakness (¡Colorín Colorado, 2012).

### **Changing Professional Practice**

The fastest growing student population in our schools is children of immigrants, and half of them do not speak English fluently (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Unfortunately, this rapid growth of ELs has not been met with teachers who understand the best ways to educate these young minds (Samson & Collins, 2012). Over time, the achievement gap has widened between ELs and their English speaking peers due to

teachers not knowing or understanding the importance of supporting ELs in their oral and academic language development (Samson & Collins, 2012). In fact, most ELs receive most, if not all, of their instruction from regular classroom teachers who have little to no training in the learning needs of EL students (Pritchard, 2012). In elementary school, ELs usually receive 30 minutes of instruction in an ESL class and spend the rest of the day in regular education classes, usually with teachers who are unprepared and untrained to teach them (Calderon et al., 2011).

Research has shown in order for teachers to help ELs be successful, they must emphasize oral language development through activities focused on academic language. They must develop a knowledge and understanding of language to include sounds, grammar, meaning, coherence, and a way to communicate academically and socially (Samson & Collins, 2012). Teachers must recognize oral language proficiency is important in developing reading skills. Participation during teacher “read-aloud” allows students to use vocabulary they have learned, just as open-ended questions do (Calderon et al., 2011).

To be successful, ELs need teachers who engage them in language-rich practices. Unfortunately, some teachers believe that English language development occurs for ELs only once a day with the ESL teacher (WestEd, 2015). ELs need opportunities to engage in academic talk as often as possible. The development of oral language is a cumulative process and should be connected to reading and writing. Promoting discussions based on readings is an excellent way to develop effective language use for ELs. Practicing language use with peers is key to language acquisition for ELs (Francis et al., 2006).

Teachers must also be aware of the similarities and differences between students’

first and second language development (Samson & Collins, 2012). Sometimes teachers focus only on what ELs are not proficient in and forget to consider what they bring with them from their native language. Oral language development that occurs in the home of ELs in their first language can transfer to learning academic language. This includes phonemic awareness, phonics, cognates, knowledge of affixes and roots, and listening comprehension strategies (Echevarria et al., 2017). Teachers must also understand that students who are able to read and write in their native language assist with learning these same skills in English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genessee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). Within their homes, ELs participate in language and cultural activities that the students can tell about in class. Then teachers can plan classroom assignments around these personal experiences that connect with the curriculum and even invite parents in to speak to the class (Gonzalez, Mole, & Amanti, 2005).

ELs find it to be a challenge to transition from home to school due to their diverse backgrounds (August & Shanahan, 2006; Samson & Collins, 2012). Teachers must be cognizant of students' backgrounds so their learning experiences may be enhanced, which is known as culturally responsive teaching (Marchand-Martella et al., 2016). They should acknowledge all the experiences of EL students including social, cultural, and historical (Park, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012). Opportunities to connect with a variety of cultures can be done through multicultural reading materials, assembly programs, and serving food that represents all cultures (Samson & Collins, 2012). The classroom environment needs to feel safe for ELs and be a low-anxiety environment so the students feel comfortable with using their oral language. The students must feel nurtured and supported by the teacher and their peers (Guccione, 2013).

Furthermore, all classrooms must increase the amount of time spent developing academic vocabulary in ELs. It is estimated that only 5-10% of instructional time in classrooms is spent on vocabulary instruction, and most of these lessons do not focus on word meanings and students gaining an understanding of them (Francis et al., 2006). Academic language is often decontextualized when it should be taught within the context of a content area. It is also abstract and technical, which makes it difficult for ELs and all students to learn (Samson & Collins, 2012). Most ELs quickly develop their social language or basic interpersonal communicative skills within 1 to 3 years inside and outside the classroom, yet their academic language or cognitive academic language proficiency develops much more slowly in the classroom environment because of its complexity. ELs may take 4 to 7 years to develop academic language proficiency, depending on their backgrounds, individual needs, and sociocultural factors (Echevarria et al., 2017).

Academic English should begin at an early age, be consistent, and be taught simultaneously with the content in the subject areas of the curriculum (Francis et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). As teachers help ELs acquire knowledge of academic English, they are able to gain a perspective on what they read and write more effectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Vocabulary instruction contributes to students developing better phonological awareness in earlier grades, which leads to better reading comprehension. Particularly for ELs, vocabulary must be taught in all subject areas before, during, and after reading a text. Students gain the most benefits when teachers teach individual words and word-learning strategies such as prefixes and root words. Teachers must also provide examples of words in sentences, phrases, and other

forms to help ELs develop a true understanding of the language (Calderon et al., 2011; Francis et al., 2006). Students must not only be taught the actual word, but they must have knowledge of concepts related to the word (Francis et al., 2006).

Effective instruction for ELs must encompass teaching and instructional approaches where content instruction is interwoven with language development activities (Dolson & Burnham-Massey, 2016). With content-based learning, the teacher must adapt activities that encourage ELs to think about and learn the content (Park, 2009). ELs need time to talk about and engage in conversations about the content areas in order to develop their language proficiency. Teachers must first model the use of academic language, so students understand what they are expected to produce (Echevarria et al., 2017; Ferlazzo, 2016; Kaplan, Lavadenz, & Armas, 2011). Encouraging students to read, practice, and discuss responses with partners and in small groups reduces their anxiety and allows them to hear language spoken by their peers (Calderon et al., 2011; Guccione, 2013). Cooperative learning is an effective strategy for teachers to use with ELs because it encourages interactions among students at all proficiency levels and leads to student independence (Norman, n.d.). In a content-based approach, the content is taught in English as the students develop their language skills. Teachers should modify instruction and content, reevaluate strategies, and reteach material as needed based on continuous observations in class (Park, 2009).

Teachers should also develop content objectives focused on the curriculum to be taught as well as create language objectives (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Markos & Himmel, 2016). Content objectives should be taken from the state standards, but teachers need to write them in student-friendly language. They should share these objectives with

EL students orally and in written form, so they will know what they will be learning. Only one or two content objectives should be written for each lesson, and they should be reviewed at the end of the lesson to determine who has mastered them (Echevarria et al., 2017). Writing content objectives leads teachers to addressing the needs of ELs better in the subject areas. Language objectives, on the other hand, should focus on the academic language ELs need to understand the content and complete activities in the lesson (Echevarria et al., 2017; Markos & Himmel, 2016). These objectives can include practice with words, reading comprehension, higher order thinking skills, summarizing text, or analyzing the author's purpose. All of these are related to language objectives. Just like content objectives, they should be expressed orally to EL students as well as in written form (Echevarria et al., 2017; Markos & Himmel, 2016).

Once teachers have created content and language objectives, they must use a variety of formative assessments to fairly assess their students' language and academic growth and to plan instruction (Lenski et al., 2006). Formative assessment is an ongoing cycle that allows teachers to gather evidence on student learning so instruction can be modified as needed based on student experiences (Alvarez, Ananda, Walqui, Sato, & Rabinowitz, 2014; Montalvo-Balbed, 2012; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Teachers who conduct frequent assessments of their EL students are able to use the data collected to meet the academic and language needs of these students and help them be more successful (Alvarez et al., 2014).

Summative assessments, given once a year, or benchmark assessments, given every quarter or semester, only provide "snapshots" of what ELs are able to do and are not reliable or valid for this group of students. Formative assessments are flexible,

natural, and personalized for each student (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Ottow, 2016). ELs are a diverse group with unique backgrounds and other factors affecting their performance. Teachers must implement formative assessments with the appropriate language supports so they can better understand their students and become more sophisticated teachers of academic language (Alvarez et al., 2014; Ottow, 2016).

Formative assessment can be planned or it can happen spontaneously in response to a "teachable moment" (Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 3). As teachers plan their instruction, they decide on the goals that are the focus of a lesson. After the learning goals are communicated to the students, formative assessment throughout instruction can show evidence of student learning and progress toward language proficiency (Markos & Himmel, 2016; Ottow, 2016). Teacher observations are more informal and spontaneous in which the teacher observes ELs interacting with peers and responding to the assigned task (Echevarria et al., 2017; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). An abundance of information can be learned simply by watching and listening to ELs in the classroom (Turner, 2011).

Using formative assessments also allows teachers to provide ELs with immediate feedback, which further promotes student learning. Feedback provides information about the students' current levels of learning and the levels of learning they must reach (Ottow, 2016). It corrects misconceptions and misunderstandings as well as clears up any confusing points for students (Echevarria et al., 2017).

With formative assessments, teachers are able to evaluate ELs in natural settings and situations and record their progress effectively. Along with observations, journals, portfolios, interviews, retellings, writing samples, projects, demonstrations, reports, graphic organizers, and experiments are other types of formative assessments (Lenski et

al., 2006; Montalvo-Balbed, 2012; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). These assessments foster student participation in a nonthreatening manner (Lenski et al., 2006). Formative assessments should never present language barriers for EL students. If a student is unable to write a response in the English language, the teacher can give the option of drawing a picture for a response (Ottow, 2016). Teachers must offer opportunities for students to show and practice their knowledge based on their individual needs (Lenski et al., 2006).

In order to change the teaching practices in classrooms filled with ELs, teachers must focus on the oral language development of ELs (Samson & Collins, 2012). Much of the time, EL students' oral language development is dependent on their home, cultural, and social experiences, which is critical for teachers to understand (Marchand-Martella et al., 2016; Park, 2009). In addition, teachers must devote more time to teaching academic language with content-based instruction, so students are able to see and use the vocabulary in context (Francis et al., 2006). In order to keep students focused, educators need to develop content and language objectives for each lesson (Echevarria et al., 2017). As the objectives are taught, teachers should use formative assessments to determine if students are meeting the goals set for them (Alvarez et al., 2014).

### **Related Studies**

The following studies investigate teacher perceptions of instructional strategies used with ELs. Some of the strategies used are considered interventions in order to meet the individual needs of the ELs. These strategies and interventions are some of the same instructional strategies that are implemented in the OWE literacy program. Although the research is plentiful in regard to teacher perceptions on instructional strategies for ELs

and how they impact their learning, there is a limited amount of research that focuses solely on literacy programs designed particularly for ELs. The following studies discuss instructional practices used with ELs and interviews conducted with teachers concerning their thoughts and feelings about these strategies.

**Sprayberry-King study.** One study completed by Sprayberry-King (2015) investigated the perceptions of EL teachers regarding instructional practices they believed to be successful for their students. The study sought to answer three questions: (a) How do EL teachers perceive instructional methods that influence the success of EL students; (b) How do teachers perceive existing EL programs for EL students; and (c) What factors do teachers perceive to be a contributing factor to how quickly EL students learn? The goal of the investigation was to gain a better understanding of what teachers perceived to be the most effective strategies to use with ELs (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

Sixteen teachers in prekindergarten through fifth grade at five charter schools participated in the study. A survey containing open-ended questions was used to collect data. Some examples of questions were “What strategies have you found to be effective in prompting language acquisition with ELs? Why?” and “Describe any research-based programs/methods your school has employed to specifically target ELs learning needs” (Sprayberry-King, 2015, p. 84). The data were organized by commonalities of responses, and the similarities were used to create themes. Codes were created for each theme, which allowed for analysis of the data (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

The results of the study showed that the majority of the participants felt the most effective instructional strategies to use with ELs to ensure success were ones where the students were engaged in learning such as cooperative learning exercises, role-playing,

and partner reading. Teachers also stated that interacting with students in a variety of ways was beneficial for ELs as they acquire a second language. Singing songs, having conversations with them about their pets, and using rhymes encourage them to speak and engage in meaningful learning (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

In addition, the teachers in this study felt that combining learning activities with meaningful content improved EL students' learning outcomes. They commented on how using vocabulary in context is a more effective way to teach new words to ELs. They also expressed how ELs must be able to hear, see, and use vocabulary multiple times to truly comprehend it; therefore, students need increased exposure and immersion through reading, which includes exposing them to books and language all day. Several teachers commented on the use of visuals to promote language acquisition in ELs as well. Visuals included pictures, flash cards, modeling, graphic organizers, and videos (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

In order to aid in language acquisition, a few teachers expressed that a student's use of his/her first language is helpful in learning a second language. The student is able to use his/her prior knowledge in his/her native language to make connections to the new language. Giving these students opportunities to read and write in their first language is helpful in language acquisition as well as was noted by the teachers in this study (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

Teachers were asked their opinions on factors that may affect how quickly EL students learn, which included their opinions of federal and state mandated testing. Their responses indicated thoughts that mandated tests were biased and did not measure the knowledge of ELs sufficiently. They believed these tests were biased against EL students

because ELs do not have the background knowledge necessary to succeed on these tests (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

Similar remarks were made by teachers concerning federal programs such as NCLB. One teacher noted that NCLB focused on the language, not the learner. Other teachers stated that the goals set by the program were impractical and unrealistic for ELs, and NCLB does not assess what it was intended to assess (Sprayberry-King, 2015).

In conclusion, the teachers who participated in this study revealed that when EL students are engaged in activities that are related to content, they tend to be much more successful. The teachers felt that federal and state assessments did not take into account the EL students' backgrounds, cultures, or languages. Some of the participants felt strongly about allowing ELs to use their first language in class to help strengthen the second language. These instructional strategies were perceived to be most useful when working with ELs.

**Owen-Tittsworth study.** Another related study conducted by Owen-Tittsworth (2013) examined how teachers perceived long-term EL students' proficiency after implementing the Frayer Model and think-pair-share (TPS) charting instructional strategies. The researcher also investigated the teachers' confidence and perceived ability to effectively instruct ELs with academic language development following a specifically designed professional development (PD). Finally, the teachers were asked to describe any changes they noticed in their students in regard to academic language development as a result of using the Frayer Model and TPS charting strategies (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The Frayer Model is a graphic organizer used to explicitly teach academic vocabulary. The target word is placed in the center of the organizer, while examples of

the word are placed in the bottom left box and non-examples are placed in the bottom right box. The definition of the word should be written in the top left box of the organizer. The top right box is used to record characteristics that relate to the word. This strategy allows students to connect new learning with prior knowledge in order to develop their academic language (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The TPS charting strategy works to help students develop academic oral language. Students are asked to think about a question and write their answer on paper. They then discuss their answer with a partner and record their partner's answer on paper. They select an answer to share with the class as a result. This activity incorporates reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

This study used a descriptive survey design, which involved 16 classroom teachers who worked at a large elementary school in a densely populated urban community. The school was comprised of 93.9% Hispanic students. A PD workshop series was designed for the study and the Frayer Model and TPS charting strategies were implemented. A 15-question survey was given to teachers after the strategies had been implemented for 3 months (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The researcher was investigating to find out what the teachers had learned about their long-term EL students' oral language skills, listening abilities, and needs. She also questioned how the teachers rated their efficacy once they implemented the Frayer Model and the TPS charting strategies. Another question the researcher wanted to answer was how confident the teachers felt in their abilities to assist in the academic language development of long-term ELs after participating in the series of workshops. The final question the researcher sought to answer was if the teachers observed any changes in the

academic language development of their students after implementing the strategies they were trained to use (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The data for the study were collected through an online survey. The researcher coded the data by highlighting reoccurring words or phrases and then wrote those words and phrases on post-it notes which were placed on a poster board in clusters based on commonalities. The clusters were then analyzed and categorized by themes. The researcher then looked at the frequency of the themes and explained the themes in narratives (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

As the teachers were asked to rate their effectiveness in implementing the Frayer Model with long-term ELs after attending the workshop explaining how to use it, the majority of them were comfortable with selecting key terms, and a few stated they needed more time to develop more confidence in selecting key words. When asked about creating examples for the key words, five of 11 claimed they were becoming more comfortable with this task, and four of 11 were comfortable doing this. The teachers were then asked how confident they felt in creating non-examples for the key terms. The most common response was the teachers were becoming more comfortable with creating non-examples, and three of 11 stated they needed more time to work on this task. Finally, the teachers were questioned about their confidence in developing a definition with the students when using this strategy. Most of them felt they were becoming more comfortable with this task, and some were already comfortable with it (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The researcher also sought to answer how the teachers rate their efficacy once they implemented the TPS charting with long-term ELs after participating in the

workshop explaining how to use it. The participants were asked to rate their confidence in creating open-ended questions. Most were in the process of becoming more comfortable with developing these questions, while a few were already comfortable, and a few teachers needed more time to create open-ended questions. The teachers were then asked about their ability in helping students develop written responses. Four of 11 stated they were becoming more comfortable with assisting students with their responses, and four of 11 were comfortable doing this. Next, the respondents had to rate their ability and confidence assisting partners in sharing their responses with each other. Five of 11 teachers claimed they were becoming more comfortable with this, three of 11 needed more time to work on this, and three of 11 were comfortable doing this already. The last part consisted of asking the teachers to rate their ability and confidence helping students combine their answers with their partner's answer. Four of 11 said they needed more time helping students do this, and four of 11 said they were comfortable doing this (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

Another question Owen-Tittsworth (2013) wanted to answer was how the teachers rated their ability and confidence in working to develop academic language in long-term ELs. The first part of the question asked teachers about their perceived confidence and ability in using the Frayer Model to support the EL students' academic language development. Four of 11 teachers were becoming more confident with using the Frayer Model to help develop academic language, while three of 11 needed more time, and three of 11 were already confident using the Frayer Model. The second part of the question asked teachers how they felt about using the TPS charting to support academic language development. Six of 11 teachers stated they were becoming more confident in using the

TPS charting, and three of 11 needed more time to develop their confidence (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

The final research question Owen-Tittsworth (2013) asked noted what changes teachers observed in the development of the students' academic language after implementing the Frayer Model and TPS charting. The data revealed that teachers noticed an increase in student talk and student accountability. Teachers claimed that the strategies tended to increase the use of academic language in the core subjects. Some teachers indicated the strategies were beneficial to students, but there were a few who did not notice a change in student performance and that more PD was needed (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

To summarize, Owen-Tittsworth (2013) designed a PD workshop for teachers to attend and learn how to use the Frayer Model and TPS charting strategies to help develop academic language in long-term ELs. Teachers were asked to rate their efficacy, confidence, and ability in using these strategies to develop academic language in their students. Many teachers were comfortable using the strategies, some felt they needed more time to become comfortable with using the strategies, and others felt they were becoming comfortable with using them. For the most part, the teachers perceived the strategies to be beneficial to the students (Owen-Tittsworth, 2013).

**Evans study.** Evans (2013) also conducted a study to identify teacher perceptions of instructional practices that assist long-term ELs to develop language, increase their comprehension, and build vocabulary. The study took place in an elementary school district where 95% of the student population was Latino. The AYP under NCLB legislation was not met for ELs. Only 46% of the district's ELs were

proficient in English language arts (ELA). Due to the lack of proficiency in ELA and math, the district saw a need to ask the teachers for their opinions on how to effectively help ELs meet their target goals, so they invited the researcher to conduct this case study (Evans, 2013).

The participants in the study were a group of teachers who taught a variety of subjects in Grades 4-8. They participated in focus group interviews, individual interviews, and surveys. Field notes were taken during the interviews, and the data were then transcribed and reviewed. It was divided into categories based on similarities. Using those categories, themes were established, and codes were established for each theme. These themes and codes were discussed with district stakeholders in order to get their thoughts on the data collected (Evans, 2013).

As a result of the group discussions, interviews, and surveys, one theme that emerged was that Individual Plans for Student Achievement (IPSA) play a critical role in guiding instruction for long-term ELs. Each of the teachers in the study wrote an IPSA goal for every EL in their class. New goals were set three times a year and reviewed at the end of every 12 weeks. These goals ensured that ELs were not overlooked in regular classrooms and their needs were addressed, according to teacher responses. Teachers also stated the IPSA goals helped with planning as well as collecting data, so they could identify additional support the students may need (Evans, 2013).

Teachers from all grade levels reported that building academic language and teaching this language explicitly were extremely important in promoting language acquisition in ELs. The teachers used strategies such as developing background information before starting a lesson, using pictures and objects, using synonyms to help

students understand words with similar meanings, and highlighting key words in the text. They also stated they used concept maps to access language, sentence frames, and cloze exercises (Evans, 2013).

A third theme emerged which revealed that all the teachers felt that verbal engagement with adults and peers was necessary for long-term ELs to progress in their language development. Teachers reported that students needed many opportunities to engage in dialogue. They also reported that asking challenging questions and modeling responses to them was helpful for ELs as well. Cooperative learning was a strategy teachers felt encouraged language development as well (Evans, 2013).

Furthermore, Evans (2013) gathered data on teacher perceptions of individualized instruction for ELs. Three themes were evident from the data collected, with the first being there was routine use of district-wide programs to support EL students' learning which included interventions and other services during the school day. The teachers referred to the Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) program that was computer based. It provided assessment data and measured reading comprehension. The program provided individual reading lessons for EL students according to their assessment results. The level of difficulty increased as the students showed progress. Teachers also claimed to use Study Island, an online formative assessment. This program used the same language seen on tests and allowed the teachers to determine what standards needed to be taught again (Evans, 2013).

A second theme related to individualized instruction reported by teachers was they needed more instructional time to focus on language development for ELs. The teachers shared a desire to understand the California English Language Development

Test better, so they could prepare their ELs for the test more adequately. They also felt they could use additional time to effectively implement the comprehensive English language development, English 3D by Scholastic, which includes reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities (Evans, 2013).

The last theme related to individualized instruction teachers revealed was that not only was there a need for IPSA goals for content areas, but ELs also needed goals set for language development. Teachers reported that academic and language goals impact one another. Since language proficiency and academic achievement are both determinants for reclassifying ELs, teachers expressed that support was necessary for ELs in order for them to meet academic and language goals (Evans, 2013).

Through individual interviews, Evans (2013) analyzed data to determine what instructional strategies were used with ELs across the grade levels four through eight. The first theme to emerge was the teachers spoke of using the goals of the EL students' IPSA to ensure they are meeting the academic goals and state standards. The data gathered relating to these goals are kept in folders, so teachers can access information from the files and look at student progress over a period of time. The teachers reported using data from these files to modify their instruction to meet the needs of ELs (Evans, 2013).

The next theme related to instructional strategies teachers reported important was creating positive and strong relationships with their ELs. One teacher commented on how students will do anything if they are made to feel special or if they feel liked. The teachers repeatedly spoke of students whose test scores improved, and they perceived the reasons to be encouraging them, having lunch with them, talking to them after school, or

speaking to them in the hallways (Evans, 2013).

The final theme related to instructional strategies focused on how teachers spoke of helping ELs learn grade-level material without watering down the content. One teacher spoke of how the achievement gap between ELs and English speaking students needed narrowing by teaching ELs grade-level content. Another teacher expressed the importance of having confidence in all the students. As a result, the teachers felt that high expectations and a rigorous curriculum were critical for promoting success for ELs (Evans, 2013).

Therefore, Evans (2013) looked at how teachers perceived instructional practices that helped ELs acquire language, increase their comprehension, and build academic vocabulary. The results showed that teachers realized the importance of setting academic and language goals for their EL students as well as explicitly teaching academic language to promote language development. Teachers also reported that student engagement was critical in EL students' language development. The strategies used to help EL students with these tasks were the DORA program and Study Island. Teachers also felt they needed more instructional time to devote to addressing the needs of EL students. Setting academic and language goals for their students allowed the teachers to collect data and analyze it to see how students are progressing over time. The teachers also perceived their relationships with their students to be important since positive, encouraging relationships lead to more student success as students were taught rigorous grade-level content (Evans, 2013).

**Arens et al. study.** Arens et al. (2012) began a study of OWE and a PD program for teachers of ELs known as Responsive Instruction for Success in English (RISE). She

found that 67% of teachers from urban communities, 58% from central cities, and 82% from rural communities had never participated in PD trainings that addressed the needs of ELs. As a result, she decided to study if training in RISE and using OWE would effectively raise teacher knowledge about and skills in teaching ELs. Arens et al. developed the following research questions:

- Does implementation of RISE in conjunction with the use of OWE have a significant impact on the acquisition of English language skills in vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension, grammar use, writing, and listening?
- Does the use of OWE in combination with RISE participation change teacher pedagogical practices, reflected in teacher behaviors and skills related to English language learner students?
  - Do teachers connect principles of learning theory to second language development, and if so how?
  - Do teachers use small group instruction for reading and writing with their English language learner students and if so, how?
  - Do teachers use student assessment data to inform or guide their teaching, and if so, how?

Within the study, 53 elementary schools were recruited and randomly assigned to a treatment or control condition. The study would take place over 2 years in a variety of schools: rural, urban, and suburban. A “trained trainer” at the treatment schools received the RISE training and then delivered the training to his/her colleagues during the first year of the study. Also during the first year, the teachers received the OWE materials and were expected to use them for at least 30 minutes a day to become accustomed to using

them. In the second year, they would be expected to fully implement the program (Arens et al., 2012).

The data Arens et al. (2012) planned to collect began with assessing students by using the IDEA proficiency tests. Students in Grades 1-4 were tested in year 1 during the fall and again in the spring. They were tested in the spring of year 2 after they had been exposed to the OWE intervention. Teacher data were recorded using an online log, a classroom observation protocol, and an interview protocol. The online log included teachers sharing practices they used to teach ELs, checklists, and rating scales on best practices and sharing details about activities, accommodations, and strategies used during classroom instruction. The logs also allowed teachers to express how they used student data to drive their instruction and their beliefs about the program and how it impacted student learning. Arens et al. planned to analyze the data based on the effects of the combined RISE and OWE programs and the achievement of the EL students in the 2-year study at the treatment and control sites; however, the results of the study have not yet been published.

**Parnell study.** A final study conducted by Parnell (2008) examined the impact of the restructuring of the English language development program at two elementary schools as EL students participated in a language arts intervention known as Target Time that includes research-based strategies and an accountability system. Teachers who participated were interviewed and walk-through observations were used to monitor the implementation of strategies (Parnell, 2008).

During the Target Time intervention, EL students were assigned to groups based on their level of proficiency in the English language. The teachers provided instruction

based on the students' individual needs. Target Time was specifically designed to provide additional support for ELs as they acquire a second language. The teachers used metacognitive skills for teaching students and daily formative assessments to drive instruction. Throughout their lessons, they utilized checks for understanding, Bloom's taxonomy, and higher order thinking skills to allow students to develop metacognitive skills (Parnell, 2008).

To make students accountable for their learning, teachers used activities in which students were highly engaged and responsible for their learning. Such activities included TPS, white board responses, and summarizing activities. When necessary, teachers would reteach the content (Parnell, 2008).

Parnell (2008) collected qualitative data by conducting one-on-one interviews with the teachers and administration. The teachers were questioned about their ideology of instruction, the implementation of research-based strategies, and the monitoring of EL student progress during content instruction. Once the data were collected from the interviews, they were analyzed to determine common themes. These themes were then described in detail and interpreted (Parnell, 2008).

The quantitative performance data from pre to posttest showed a slight increase in EL students in Grades 2-6 scoring at the basic and above levels on the California Standards Test (CST). Second grade had a -3% change for students achieving basic and above in the 2006-2007 school year. Third grade had a -12% change achieving basic and above, and a -28% difference in students reaching proficient and above on the CST-ELA. Sixth grade showed a 13% increase in students scoring at the basic and above levels on the CST, and a 13% change in EL students achieving at proficient or above on the CST-

ELA (Parnell, 2008).

When Parnell (2008) compared the two schools being studied, the control school had 22.1% of ELs who achieved grade-level proficiency in Grades 2-6 on the 2006 CST-ELA, but only 20.8% of ELs at the experimental school reached proficiency on the same test. In regard to AYP for 2007 for both schools, 24.4% of ELs were proficient in reading and surpassed the AYP target (Parnell, 2008).

The qualitative part of the study consisted of questioning teachers at the beginning and end of the year about using Target Time and their confidence with implementing the program. Teachers began by sharing how difficult it was trying to serve all proficiency levels at one time. Once Target Time made it possible to work with a small group of students on their level of need; the teachers shared their excitement in working with EL students and how they felt more confident in their work. They were also able to monitor their students' progress more efficiently (Parnell, 2008).

The interviews continued with asking the teachers which research-based strategies they had implemented throughout the year to assist ELs with language development and which strategies were the most successful. Teachers reported that they focused on student engagement with activities such as checks for understanding and TPS. They modified their lessons in order to clear up misunderstandings or reteach material. The teachers also spoke of using graphic organizers to connect background knowledge to new information. The administration observed and noted the students being more accountable for their work with the use of these strategies (Parnell, 2008).

The last part of the interviews questioned teachers about the accountability process they utilize to ensure students are progressing and to improve their instruction to

meet the needs of ELs. The teachers realized after teaching a “concept” and giving the ELs independent practice that the students needed more modeling and guided practice. As a result, they began using more checks for understanding strategies. The teachers also implemented assessments on a regular basis in order to design lessons and drive instruction. They reported that these assessments allowed them to conduct more focused small group instruction. The teachers realized that regular assessments made planning and grouping of ELs an easier task (Parnell, 2008).

In conclusion, Parnell (2008) conducted a mixed methods study looking at EL student assessment data that led to the implementation of the Target Time language arts intervention program. The EL students at two schools as a whole showed some improvement from pre to posttest scores, but there was not a significant improvement. Target Time interventions were focused on working with small groups of ELs and targeting their individual learning needs. When interviewed at the end of the year, teachers reported they were excited about using the student engagement strategies with their small groups of students and being able to monitor their progress more easily. They felt more comfortable with adjusting their instruction to meet student needs as well. The administrators reported seeing more student engagement among the EL students which led to language development (Parnell, 2008).

There are several studies investigating programs designed for ELs and asking teachers their perceptions on how the program has been implemented, how well it is working for ELs, and what strategies are being used within the program. Each of the studies used interviews and/or surveys to gain insight from the teachers involved in the programs. Teachers shared positive aspects of each program being studied, and they also

reported areas that needed improvement. By examining the programs in these studies, teachers were able to realize the strengths and weaknesses of the programs that could be modified later.

### **A Description of OWE**

When creating a Logic Model of OWE, one must first consider the inputs or what was and is invested into the program as it is implemented. The inputs include the staff who will be involved with implementing the program, the materials the program supplies, the technology needed for the online portion of the program, the money needed to purchase the program, the time ESL teachers spend planning and implementing the program, and the research base the program was designed around (Taylor-Powell, Jones, & Henert, 2002). What is put into the program leads to the outputs within the Logic Model which include the activities and participation involved. Activities include what the teachers do inside and outside the class related to OWE including attending workshops or meetings, delivering ESL services, assessing their work and student work, and facilitating learning. With the inputs and outputs in place, short-term and long-term outcomes can be seen in the classroom with the use of the program. Teachers are able to see their students learning and gaining new skills and knowledge. As they learn, they become more motivated to take action and become more independent learners. The students then start to make decisions on their own and express their opinions more freely; therefore, the Logic Model provides a cause and effect scenario for how all aspects of the OWE program lead to positive outcomes for ELs (Taylor-Powell et al., 2002).

The literacy program this study examined, OWE, addressed the English language development standards and CCSS. The components of the program can be used to

address the specific needs of ELs. It supports student engagement in conversations and collaborating with each other. The instruction is scaffolded for differing levels of proficiency and is organized around science and social studies themes that provide opportunities for students to learn and use academic language. The program also includes a balance of literary and informational selections to read that are complex and grade-level appropriate. The content of these selections allows students plenty of practice with academic language. The program provides tools to teach students to make appropriate language choices such as graphic novels to show the use of social language, dialogue, and idioms. The writing instruction allows students practice best language for certain purposes, and the teamwork section has strategies to help students produce the best language. Language is taught in meaningful contexts for the ELs in order to help them become proficient in the English language.

Each unit of study in the textbooks begins with a “Let’s Talk” section to engage students in conversations that integrate academic vocabulary related to the science or social studies theme of the unit. The units contain a “Learn the Words” portion as well that supports the students’ learning of new vocabulary words that will be found within the content of the texts the students will be reading. The program provides visuals for each vocabulary word along with many opportunities to practice using the words in context. There are interactive whiteboard activities that explain the words and visuals to help students understand the words, and the students are able to touch the words to see examples.

In addition to these resources, the student and teacher editions of the texts are available online through a link known as “Think Central.” Students are able to listen to

selections online while the text is highlighted word by word. The genres of the texts are familiar stories, traditional stories from different cultures, poems, plays, and informational texts. The program employs multiple readings of texts through the use of teacher read-alouds, students listening to the story online, partner reading, small group reading, and independent reading. Retelling strategies are used where students are asked questions about the beginning, middle, and end of texts. Students are taught self-monitoring strategies throughout the program in order to check their own comprehension of the selection they are reading.

The writing instruction portion of the program includes models and organizers that support students as they write for specific reasons and is known as the gradual release model. First, the teacher begins by modeling how to write a piece on a topic, whether it be a letter, a persuasive writing, or a narrative. The second step is to complete a shared writing where the students and the teacher complete a writing together. The final step is for the students to complete an independent writing on a given topic for a specific purpose.

The program is designed with units that last for 4 weeks. For each day, a lesson plan is explicitly laid out beginning with a 5-minute Language Workout where students work on building collaboration, developing stronger vocabulary, building their confidence, and developing social language. The teacher continues the lesson by teaching grammar, phonics, and vocabulary to achieve automaticity with the use of these language structures. As the students work on these skills and concepts, they develop oral language skills. Each lesson also has a grammar mini-lesson that teaches concepts such as pronouns, adjectives, and subject-verb agreement. Then the lesson focuses on a

phonics concept such as teaching the short e sound and practicing recognizing and using it. Next, the lesson allows for students to work on their academic language development in a variety of ways. Vocabulary cards are provided with visuals to help students visualize the meanings of words, and interactive board activities are available to help gain a better understanding of the words. There are also games suggested in the lessons that students can play to strengthen their academic vocabulary. The students then interact with the text by reading selections multiple times, answering comprehension questions provided in the teacher's edition, and discussing the language and genre of the selections. After the first reading of a selection, the teacher's edition suggests differentiated activities for students working on different levels and at differing levels of language proficiency.

Therefore, OWE is a literacy program created to teach ELs and help them become more proficient in speaking, reading, and writing the English language. The program incorporates oral language activities that give students the opportunity to listen to and engage in conversations with their peers. It also stresses the importance of developing academic vocabulary and using these words within the context of the selections they are reading. Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the units in the textbooks to help students develop language proficiency. Writing strategies are employed to increase the students' written language proficiency to meet the English language development standards as well.

## **CBAM**

The educational system is constantly faced with changes being thrust upon teachers, and then there are dilemmas with the management and facilitation of the change

process. As a result, there is a need for a mechanism to assist educators and other personnel adapt to change effectively (Hall, 1979). This led to the development of CBAM to help understand the process of change in schools. Hall and Hord's (2015) CBAM is based on several change principles:

1. Change is learning.
2. Change is a process, not an event.
3. The school is the primary organizational unit for change.
4. Organizations adopt change – individuals implement change.
5. Interventions are key to the success of the change process.
6. Appropriate interventions reduce resistance to change.
7. District- and school-based leadership is essential to long-term change success.
8. Facilitating change is a team effort.
9. Mandates can work.
10. Both internal and external factors greatly influence implementation success.
11. Adopting, implementing, and sustaining are different phases of the change process.
12. Focus! Focus! Focus!

As suggested by these principles, anyone involved in a change, whether they use it or they are supporting others using it, is learning a “new” way of doing things that is more effective and productive (Hall & Hord, 2015).

In order to understand these principles, one must understand that change is not a one-time process but a long-term process that may take several years to be successful. The district may “oversee” the change, but the individuals are responsible for

implementing it. Until every member of the school has successfully implemented the change, the change cannot be effectively implemented (Hall & Hord, 2015). As the change is implemented in the organization, the teachers will have specific concerns about the change and their position within the change process, which becomes apparent in the SoC of the CBAM (Hall & Hord, 2015).

**SoC.** Feelings and perceptions about a change assist or disrupt those going through a change process. These personal feelings are related to the SoC. When teachers are excited about a change, they are more apt to try it. If they feel the change is a threat, teachers will back off from implementing the change. The feelings and perceptions associated with the change are called concerns (Hall & Hord, 2015). These concerns begin with *unrelated concerns* about the change, which are usually common among student teachers. As teachers gain a little more experience, their concerns become *self-concerns*. They start to think about how the teaching experience will affect them. Their focus is on themselves rather than on the children (Hall & Hord, 2015). Eventually, teachers become focused on *task concerns* where they think about getting paperwork completed, lessons planned, and getting materials together for their classes. Finally, the last stage teachers go through is *impact concerns* when they become concerned with how to become more effective teachers and how to help their students be successful (Hall & Hord, 2015).

There are seven SoCs teachers go through during a change process. These stages are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*SoC: Explanation of Stages*

Stage	Concerns	Explanation
6	Refocusing	The individual focuses on exploring more universal benefits from the innovation, including major changes or replacements with a better alternative.
5	Collaboration	The individual is focused on coordinating and cooperating with others about using the innovation.
4	Consequence	The individual focuses attention on the impact of the innovation on “clients” that are influenced by the change.
3	Management	The individual is focused on using the innovation and the best use of information and resources. Issues are related to organizing, managing, scheduling, and time demands.
2	Personal	The individual is uncertain about the demands of the innovation, his/her inadequacy to meet the demands, and his/her role with the innovation. The individual asks, “How will using it affect me?”
1	Informational	The individual has a general awareness of the innovation and has an interest in learning more about it.
0	Unconcerned	The individual has little concern or involvement with the innovation. He/she is more concerned about other things.

The concerns that make up the seven stages have a strong influence on the change process. Individuals cannot be forced through these stages, but knowledge of CBAM allows the change facilitator to support members of the organization and assist them as they grow and develop with the implementation of the innovation.

### **Summary**

Language development is a long process for ELs that requires teachers to design instruction to help students develop phonemic and phonological awareness to break words into smaller parts. As children learn to decode words, their reading will become

more automatic and fluent, and their comprehension will progress as the teacher instructs students to use strategies to assist them with understanding texts. As teachers use literacy programs designed for ELs, there should be certain qualities of these programs that specifically assist this subgroup of students with language development. These qualities consist of developing background knowledge, explicitly teaching academic language, using content-based instruction, and using quality assessments on a regular basis to gather data about student progress. There are many studies examining the implementation of programs for ELs that specifically investigate instructional practices used with these students and how effective they are. These studies interview teachers to gather information about their perceptions about how the programs are being implemented and how successful students are in their academics as a result of these programs. Finally, the researcher presented a narrative explaining CBAM and SoC that served as a benchmark to explore teacher adaptation to change. The following chapter will explain the methodology that will be used for the current study on the implementation of the OWE literacy program for ELs.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which the OWE reading program was being implemented as designed in a rural western region North Carolina public school while gathering information from teachers through interviews and classroom observations that were analyzed and interpreted through the lens of CBAM. Through this study, qualities of the program and how it affects EL students' academic success were reviewed. This chapter explains not only how the researcher endeavored to address questions about how the OWE literacy program was implemented but also was perceived to have been effective in assisting ELs with being more successful in their academics. In short, the purpose of this chapter is to articulate the study methods.

#### **The Case Study Research Design**

As its methodological approach, this study utilized the case study research design. A case study involves the examination of a program or event within a context over a period of time through a collection of data from a variety of sources such as interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2014). This methodology was chosen in order to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of the implementation of the OWE program for ELs. Using Hall's (1979) SoC, the researcher interviewed and recorded ESL teachers to gain their perspectives on how OWE was being implemented and how successful students and the teachers themselves were being with the use of the program. Classroom observations and documents related to the program were also collected as a source of data. After all data were collected, the interviews were transcribed to develop a chart of commonalities the teachers spoke of during their interviews. These commonalities were then categorized into themes that were explained in detail in a

narrative. The classroom observations and documents were also described in relation to teacher perspectives and the impact of the program on student achievement.

### **Research Site**

This study was conducted in a rural western region North Carolina school district within 10 elementary schools. The researcher visited four ESL classrooms to conduct observations of OWE as it was implemented with ELs. In an attempt to create a more authentic experience for the participants of the study, the four ESL teachers were interviewed at their school site at a time convenient for them (Creswell, 2014).

### **Participants**

Target participants in the study consisted of four elementary ESL teachers who had implemented the OWE program for ELs. Two of the participants had taught ESL for 2 years, and the other two participants had taught ESL for 5 years. Three of the participants taught Grades K-5, and only one taught second, fourth, and fifth grades. After receiving permission to conduct the research from district leaders, the district's ESL program director provided the researcher a list of elementary ESL teachers willing to participate in the study. The researcher communicated by email to set up a time to meet them and conduct classroom observations and interviews with each of the ESL teachers.

### **Instruments and Materials**

First, documents such as district communication with school-based professionals that included emails and letters, training agendas, assessments related to the program, actual pages from the program manuals and student workbooks, and lesson plans were collected and reviewed. These helped to gain insight into the OWE program and its

fidelity of implementation and contributed to the researcher's understanding of the program as a benchmark against which to analyze and interpret other data collected.

Second, a researcher-developed interview protocol and questions (Appendix A) was the first data collection instrument. The interview protocol was developed by first aligning the interview questions with the research questions which can be seen in Table 4 (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Each interview question was also designed by looking at the SoC and framing the questions around those stages as well. Next, the questions were formed in a conversational language unlike the research questions so the interviewees felt comfortable as if they were having a regular conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The fourth step to the protocol was to pilot the interview questions with three of the researcher's colleagues and decide if further improvements needed to be made (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). One change that was made was the researcher, with suggestions from her colleagues, combined interview questions 5 and 6. The researcher and her colleagues decided to create one question that asked, "What are some instructional strategies of the program that are implemented across classrooms and grade levels?" Together, they felt that asking about the strategies of the program implemented across classrooms separately from grade levels seemed redundant. Once the questions were piloted and changes were made, the researcher proceeded with interviewing the participants in the study.

According to Seidman (2013), interviewing is taking an interest in the experiences of other people and gaining an understanding of the meaning those people make of their experiences. The interview questions for this study helped to investigate a process as the ESL teachers viewed it through their experience of implementing OWE for ELs (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol and questions are shown in Appendix A.

Third, the researcher used a two column note-taking format described by Creswell (2013) for classroom observation field notes. On the left side of the chart, the researcher recorded empirical facts (describing what is seen or heard); on the right side, the researcher recorded her initial feelings or attitudes evoked by the factual occurrences (reflecting). There were four observations conducted, each lasting an average of 1 hour in length. During these 1-hour observations, the researcher was able to observe two to three groups of EL students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The participants in this study each gave their consent to be a part of this research by signing a consent form. They also received a copy of the consent form and were informed they could discontinue their participation at any time. In order to respect the privacy and anonymity of participants, all names were replaced with pseudonyms (Creswell, 2014). To ensure confidentiality of all documents, all documents were stored on the researcher's personal computer that was password protected and only used by the researcher. Each document itself was also password protected. Any paper documents collected, raw data, and tape recordings of interviews were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. Audio recordings were assigned a code number, and the list connecting the participants' names to their code numbers were stored in a locked file.

### **Procedures**

The researcher began by piloting the interview questions with three ESL teachers to ensure the questions were clearly written and understandable. The researcher worked with ESL teachers in her own district to interview them about the current literacy

program they used with their own EL students. By doing so, the researcher determined if questions need to be amended to better fit this study.

The researcher then contacted the four elementary ESL teachers at the research site by email to set up a time to visit their classrooms to conduct observations. The researcher visited the classrooms at the scheduled times to observe the OWE program being implemented during ESL class time. The researcher planned to visit classes during times when different grade levels were being taught in order to experience the program at all elementary (K-5) levels. The researcher had each participant sign a consent form (Appendix B) to participate in the study before the observation began. As the researcher observed, field notes were taken in a two column note-taking format for descriptive notes and reflective notes (Creswell, 2013). A checklist of strategies (Appendix C) was created by the researcher of what she was looking and listening for throughout the observations as designed by the program developers. These strategies included building background knowledge, teaching academic language, using content-based instruction, and using assessments that inform instruction. At the conclusion of each observation, the researcher reminded the teacher that their participation would remain anonymous.

The ESL teachers were also contacted by email to schedule a time to conduct a one-on-one interview to ask about their perceptions of the OWE reading program for ELs that they implement in their classrooms. These interviews were conducted at the school site where the teachers work, where they are most comfortable, and at a time of their choosing. They were asked 18 questions in regard to the program, and their responses were recorded. The recordings were then transcribed and coded in order to determine common themes among teacher responses. Coding involved listening to the recordings

and listing the commonalities mentioned within them (Creswell, 2013). As the interviews were transcribed and listened to, the researcher paid close attention to which SoC (Awareness, Informational, Personal, Management, Consequence, Collaboration, or Refocusing Stage) each ESL teacher was in with their implementation of the program. Any commonalities detected during the transcriptions were grouped into themes and described in detail in a narrative. After the themes were established and described in writing, the researcher used “member checking” to determine the accuracy of the information that was provided during the interviews (Creswell, 2014). This allowed the interviewees to review the final report and themes in conjunction with the SoC to ensure that the information the researcher had recorded was accurate.

#### **Data Sources Linked to Research Questions**

This study utilized several sources of data for analysis in order to compare the sources of data. Table 4 displays how each source of data was linked to the research questions as well as to the interview questions.

Table 4

*Data Sources Linked to Research Questions*

Research Question	Data Collection Methods	Interview Questions
To what extent has the OWE program been implemented as designed?	Document Analysis	What are some instructional strategies of the program that are implemented across classrooms?
	Interview	What are some instructional strategies that are consistently implemented with ELs across grade level and content areas?
	Observation	What was the PD provided for the program?
		Do you implement the program as designed? How?
		How do you coordinate with other colleagues to use the program or design lessons for ELs?
To what extent do ESL teachers feel competent in the delivery of the program?	Interview	How competent do you feel in your abilities to implement the program effectively?
	Observation	What concerns do you have about the program or any of its aspects?
		What changes are you planning to make next year when you implement the program again with your ELs?
How do teachers perceive the program impacts EL students' learning?	Document Analysis	What specific instructional strategies does the program implement that have been effective for EL students?
	Interview	How is the program customized to provide ELs access to language development? Provide examples.
	Observation	How does the program address vocabulary instruction for ELs? Provide examples.
		Describe how the program addresses reading comprehension for ELs.
		What strategies provided by the program seem to result in positive academic outcomes for ELs?
		How do you know these instructional strategies are impacting student learning? What is your evidence?
		What concerns do you have about the program or any of its aspects?

## Data Analysis Procedures

First, documents including emails and letters from district leaders related to the program, training agendas, assessments related to the program, actual pages from the program manuals and student workbooks, and lesson plans as well as field notes from the observations were reviewed thoroughly to determine any common themes. As field notes were reviewed, the researcher looked for evidence of which SoC and Level of Use the teachers had reached. The teachers were asked 14 interview questions, and their responses were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were evaluated for evidence of which SoC the teachers reached at that point in time. The responses were also reviewed to identify themes that were coded. Creswell (2014) described the coding process in eight steps:

1. Read the transcriptions of the interviews carefully and jot down ideas as you read.
2. Pick one document to go through and decide what it is about. Write notes in the margin as you go through it.
3. After completing step 2 for several participants, make a list of topics. Cluster together similar topics and put them into columns.
4. Take the list of topics and go back to the data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to appropriate parts of the text.
5. Create a descriptive wording for the topics and turn them into categories.  
Reduce the list of categories by combining groups of topics that are connected to one another.
6. Decide on the final codes for each category and put them in alphabetical

order.

7. Gather the data for each category in one place and begin an analysis.
8. If necessary, recode data.

Once the final analysis of category was completed, the researcher wrote a detailed narrative to convey the findings. This discussion shared information about the comparison of the data collected from each teacher and what the data meant for ELs and ESL teachers using the program in the future (Creswell, 2014).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. A limitation to the study was the small number of participants in this small district. The small sample limits the amount of data the researcher was able to collect about the program being investigated.
2. Being an ESL teacher, the researcher came with a personal bias about effective EL literacy programs that could affect the results of the study.
3. The researcher was only observing the program being used in context during several classroom observations. This limited amount of observations impacted the study since the teachers implement this program throughout the school year.
4. The researcher only collected data from the 2018-2019 school year. This limitation may have impacted how comfortable teachers were with implementing the program as well as affected teacher perceptions of the program.

The following delimitations were present in the study:

1. The study was conducted in only one small school district. This limited the amount of data collected that could be used in the data analysis.
2. The program has been implemented for several years in this district. This may impact teacher perspectives on the effectiveness of the program and its impact on student learning.

### **Subjectivity Disclosure**

As the researcher, it is important to maintain objectivity and recognize biases related to the study. The researcher currently teaches EL students and has taught this subgroup of students for 3 years. She uses a program named National Geographic Reach™ that employs the same types of strategies that OWE, which is being examined in this study, uses to develop language proficiency in ELs. “Whatever the substance of one’s persuasions at a given point, one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). As Peshkin (1988) suggested, it is difficult to remove our opinions and biases, so we must make a conscious effort to be subjective as we collect data and conduct research. The background experience and knowledge the researcher has in the field of teaching ELs cannot interfere with the collection or processing of data. The researcher must remain unbiased and collect and report all positive and negative data alike (Creswell, 2014). The researcher has a deep background knowledge of the research-based strategies that should be used with ELs that created an interest in studying the OWE program. At every stage of interview data collection and analysis, the researcher reflected on the bias she may be bringing to the research by using member checking.

An investigation of the reading program OWE for ELs became an interest to the

researcher as a teacher of ELs who uses a program similar to the one that is being studied. Having experience using a similar program, the researcher has worked with students on developing language proficiency through student engagement and oral language activities. Academic vocabulary is also taught by the researcher as different types of texts are taught and comprehension exercises are used to increase the students' academic language proficiency. The program used by the researcher teaches grammar, phonics, academic vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing in much the same way OWE is designed. Many of the resources provided by both programs are the same to help the ELs gain a better understanding of words and concepts. As the researcher learned of OWE, curiosity built of what the program entailed and how it was being implemented.

The researcher has also attended many PD trainings focused on the language development of ELs, which sparked an interest in other programs districts use to teach ELs and assist them with becoming proficient in the English language. Many of these PD opportunities relayed information on teaching academic language to ELs. The researcher learned many of the same strategies for teaching academic vocabulary the program being studied uses including using visual aids, giving examples of words, using words in sentences, and providing students ample practice with using the words in context. These PD trainings offered also discussed allowing EL students to use their first language when speaking, reading, and writing as a bridge to learning a second language. The researcher learned that encouraging ELs to use their first language benefits them when learning a new language and can actually speed up their learning of a second language. This new information led the researcher to choose research programs that incorporate these techniques.

As a teacher of EL students, the researcher was anxious to learn about programs that are specifically designed to teach reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills that lead to English language proficiency in these students. This study was designed to look at OWE and see how it was implemented by teachers. When the researcher found this program during her research, she felt it would be a good fit for the study due to it having many of the research-based qualities of a literacy program for ELs. Due to the many experiences the researcher has had with teaching EL students in her own district using a different program with similar characteristics, she needed to remain objective and unbiased as data were collected through classroom observations, field notes, and interviews. Positive and negative findings needed to be recorded regardless of the researcher's thoughts and feelings.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this case study was designed to investigate program implementation and teacher perception of competency and impact of OWE in a rural western region public school district. The methodology of the study consisted of using documents related to the program and conducting classroom observations and teacher interviews to gather data on teacher perspectives of the effectiveness of the program and their competence with using the program. Four elementary ESL teachers were the participants in the study on a voluntary basis. Through interviews, data from their responses were analyzed through the coding process and the findings were described in a written narrative. Chapter 4 discusses the data that were collected through documents collected, field notes taken during observations, and interviews with participants used to examine the implementation of OWE.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the OWE reading program for ELs in a rural western region North Carolina public school district and determine if the program was being implemented as designed. The study also examined how teachers perceived their own competency of the program and the program's impact on student learning. Information from teacher interviews and classroom observations were analyzed to inform the study. OWE included the stages of literacy and language development, which play an important part in this reading program for ELs. Research-based instructional strategies were present throughout the program as well. In this chapter, the evidence of how the program was being implemented and many instructional strategies will be shared as the classroom observations, transcripts from interviews with teachers, and documents are reviewed. These evidences will also lead to a better understanding of teacher perspectives of the program and their competence in teaching the program.

### **Overview of the Chapter**

Having used a qualitative case study design, one-on-one interviews were conducted, classroom observations were performed, and documents were collected from the ESL teachers in order to collect data. Four ESL teachers in a rural western region public school district of North Carolina were interviewed and observed while using the OWE program with their ELs. Table 5 provides demographic data for each participant.

Table 5

*Participant Demographics*

Participant Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Years Teaching Using OWE Program	Grades Taught
1	Mrs. Smith	Female	5-6 years	K-5
2	Mrs. Roads	Female	5 years	K-5
3	Mrs. Street	Female	2 years	2, 4, 5
4	Mrs. Jones	Female	2 years	K-5

The interviews were transcribed and the data from those interviews are shared in this chapter. The information from these interviews revealed how confident the teachers felt with delivering the OWE program and how they perceived it met the needs of their ELs. The classroom observations and documents are discussed in response to how the program was implemented and the instructional strategies used to implement it. The information from these data sources was analyzed and reported in response to each of the three research questions posed by the study.

**Results for Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, “To what extent has the OWE program been implemented as designed?” To answer this question, the researcher observed four ESL teachers implementing the program and scribed field notes; examined lesson plans, PLC documents, and other OWE documents; and individually interviewed the participants.

Table 6

*Evidence of OWE Components Used by Research Participants*

Participant Names	Components of OWE					
	Oral language	Phonics	Academic Vocabulary	Reading/ Comprehension	Writing	Assessment
Mrs. Smith	Students used sentence frames to speak sentences using vocabulary words; Kindergarten began class by going over calendar, days, weather, and sight words.	Not observed	Students repeated vocabulary words; Used sentence frames to speak sentences using vocabulary words; She explained “community” to students using floor map and showed vocabulary cards of community helpers.	Students read a book on body parts; teacher asked questions about body parts; Students previewed book about community helpers as teacher asked guiding questions.	Students used sentence frames to write about body parts.	Teacher used writing as a formative assessment.
Mrs. Roads	Students repeated vocabulary words and shared what they knew about each word.	Not observed	Vocabulary cards were shown, students repeated words 3 times, teacher asked students what they knew about each word related to senses.	Students were asked what they remembered about a story; teacher read story aloud and asked questions about grandmother and senses; Students choral read directions to paper craft.		Students cut out pictures to be used for assessment activity; Teacher gave unit assessment to group and read test to one student.
Mrs. Street	Students repeated vocabulary words and used them in sentences.	Not observed	Vocabulary cards were used; teacher modeled using words in sentences; Teacher reviewed what a postcard was.	Students listened to a story online about sending postcard and teacher asked questions.		Students worked on formative assessment of present/past tense verbs.

(continued)

Participant Names	Components of OWE					
	Oral language	Phonics	Academic Vocabulary	Reading/ Comprehension	Writing	Assessment
Mrs. Jones	Students echo read poems about animals.	Not observed	Students looked at vocabulary cards, repeated words, teacher gave examples, and used words in context.	Students echo read poems about animals while the teacher asked questions.	Students wrote vocabulary words and meanings in their notebooks.	

**Field note results.** During the fall of 2018, the researcher visited four ESL classrooms to conduct observations of the OWE program focusing on how it was implemented. The researcher used a two column recording method to keep track of field notes. The first column was used to document actual observations, and the second column was used to record the researcher's reflections. A premade checklist (Appendix C) was also used to record the OWE research-based strategies that were used by the participants during the observations.

As seen during the classroom observations, the four participants implemented the OWE reading program using many of the strategies the OWE program regards as best practice for teaching ELs. During the first observation, Mrs. Smith was teaching second- and third-grade newcomers about body parts using real objects, repetition of vocabulary words, sentence frames, and academic language in context. She gave each student a small plastic skeleton taped to a piece of paper and asked them to label the eyes and ears on it. While doing this, she also pointed to the body parts on her own body and asked the students to repeat the body part names. Mrs. Smith continued this process with the students through many other body parts until they came to the feet. She then emphasized

the singular and plural form of “foot” and “feet.” Finally, the students read a book on body parts, and Mrs. Smith asked questions as to why they used their body parts. She then modeled creating sentences about the body parts using a sentence frame and guided the students to create their sentences such as “I use my hands to touch the fruit.” As a result, this lesson taught from the OWE program showed this teacher had reached Stage 4 of the CBAM’s SoC where the teacher is concerned with how the change implementation is affecting the students.

Mrs. Smith was also observed teaching a kindergarten class using real objects and illustrations, displaying vocabulary words, giving student-friendly definitions, using visuals, and using oral language activities along with the reading text. The class began with going over the calendar, days of the week, the weather, the season, and sight words. She then asked the students what retell means, which was a concept learned earlier. Next, she asked the students what community means, which was the focus of the lesson. Mrs. Smith showed them a floor map with buildings on it, and they talked about the buildings. She took all the buildings off so the students could only see the streets. She explained the definition of a community and had the students repeat “community” three times to help learn the word. Then she asked about places in the community and discussed community helpers with the students. The students previewed a book about community helpers and discussed any of whom they were unfamiliar. Mrs. Smith showed vocabulary cards that matched the community helpers in the book and asked guiding questions about the pictures to build background knowledge. Again, this lesson was evidence of this teacher being at Stage 4 of the SoC and being concerned with how the program implementation was affecting her students’ learning about communities.

During the second observation, Mrs. Roads used pictures/illustrations, introduced new words by saying them, gave student friendly definitions, gave examples of the words, and used them in sentences as part of the OWE program. She also used many oral language activities connected with reading texts that used academic language within the content area of science. The teacher used conversations and discussions to elicit oral responses from students to check their understanding of what was being taught.

As the first lesson was taught, Mrs. Roads was seen using the OWE vocabulary cards dealing with senses with her first graders. She showed the students the word cards and had the students repeat the words three times each. She then explained each word and asked the students what they knew about the words. For the word “smell,” Mrs. Roads asked the students if flowers smell sweet. She also asked, “What is the boy tasting?” and “What did we taste yesterday?” to give examples for the vocabulary word “taste.” She continued this process with the other vocabulary words. The next part of the lesson consisted of her reminding the students of the story they listened to the day before, which was titled “My Grandmother’s Hands.” Mrs. Roads read the story to the students; and as she did, she asked comprehension questions such as which senses the grandmother used, what wrinkly meant, and how grandma’s hands worked hard. She incorporated math by having the students show on their fingers how much 5 cents and 2 cents makes altogether. As they read, she asked the students to refer to the pictures to help them answer questions. Finally, the students cut out pictures that were related to the story and placed them in a Ziploc bag to be used for an activity the next day in class.

Mrs. Road’s second class was a group of second graders who had been reading a book about a character named Paty and a Mexican celebration. The students were going

to be making traditional Mexican paper crafts, so the teacher had the students feel tissue paper. She read the instructions to make a paper design from their book. She then asked the students to choral read the materials that were needed. Next, Mrs. Roads asked the students to put their finger on step 1 and choral read the step, which stated to fold the paper in fourths. The teacher asked the students what fourths were, and they responded with different answers. The students continued by choral reading about the traditional Mexican paper craft, which was compared to making a paper snowflake and were used for decorations. Mrs. Roads showed her own paper design as an example and allowed the students to pick their choice of paper color. She instructed them to fold their paper like a taco or hamburger and then fold it in half again. The students watched the teacher draw designs on the closed edge of the paper and cut them out. She also instructed them to wait to open their papers until everyone was done cutting so they could unfold them together. They then carefully unfolded their designs to show each other their paper crafts.

The researcher also observed Mrs. Roads conducting a test with her fourth grade group of students. As the students came into the classroom, she guided one student to get a clipboard and work on his test independently in her chair. In the meantime, she read the test questions and answers on part one of the test to another student. On part two of the test, Mrs. Roads told the student she must read the answer choices on her own. As the student progressed to the reading portion of the test, the teacher instructed the student to read this part of the test on her own.

During her three observations, Mrs. Roads also showed evidence of reaching Stage 4 of CBAM's SoC as she showed concern for her students' reading skills by asking

them questions as they read about a grandmother. She also had her second group of students read along with her to practice their reading fluency and expression showing concern for their reading abilities. In her last group, she was concerned about the progress her students were making as she gave them an assessment that she explained she would use to determine what she needed to reteach.

In the course of the third observation, Mrs. Street used many of the same strategies of the OWE program as the first two teachers. She too introduced vocabulary words by saying them, displayed the words on the wall, modeled how the words were used in sentences, used visuals with the words, and asked students to use the words in sentences. She used several oral language activities along with the text they were reading, which contained academic language and integrated social studies content. Through discussions and student oral responses, the teacher was able to gauge the students' understanding of the material being taught. Mrs. Street showed concern for her students' learning as in Stage 4 of the SoC by asking them to use the words they were learning in sentences to assess their comprehension.

Mrs. Street began her second-grade class by showing the story they were reading on the SmartBoard. She reviewed the story with the group using the vocabulary cards hung on the wall. The teacher asked what a postcard was and proceeded to explain to the students what a postcard was to build background knowledge. The students listened to the story online as the computer highlighted each word being read. Mrs. Street asked the group what the address of the postcard was as she pointed to it and explained that who you write to is whose address you put on the postcard. The students listened to the next postcard, "Carlsbad Caverns," and the teacher asked who wrote the postcard and to

whom she wrote it. She then circled the words “went” and “walked” to review past tense verbs from the last class. In addition, Mrs. Street showed a United States map and discussed directions: north, south, east, and west. The postcard mentioned going west, so the teacher asked the students which way is west. The class listened to the next postcard which referred to tall buildings, and the teacher asked what tall buildings were called. The students could not recall the answer, so she referred back to the first postcard in the story where the word skyscrapers was used. The class moved on to the last postcard in the story, and the teacher asked what day it was. Using the pictures, the students responded July 4<sup>th</sup> based on the fireworks in the pictures. The teacher asked how many days it took for this family to get to their final destination, so they looked back to the first postcard which began on June 25. The teacher guided the students in counting from June 25 to July 4 and found that the family traveled for 10 days to get to their destination.

For the final activity, Mrs. Street called the students over to the table and asked them to read the verbs on the sheet she had provided for them. The students were asked to match the present tense verbs to the past tense verbs ending with -ed. Once they had matched all the present and past tense verbs, the students filled in the past tense verbs in sentences to complete the activity.

During the last part of the observation, the teacher expressed a concern for the students’ learning as in Stage 4 of the SoC by asking guiding questions while reading a text and then having students complete an activity on verb tenses to assess their learning in order to determine if reteaching was needed.

The last participant, Mrs. Jones began a new unit on “Crafty Creatures” with her students. She started the lesson by having the students wave their arms, stomp their feet,

and show what they look like when they are angry. She introduced the “Big Question” which was “How do animals adapt to the world?” She then discussed with the students what it means to “adapt.” The group discussed how bears adapt by hibernating in winter. The teacher shared the sentence frame: “I know that \_\_\_\_\_ use their \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_.” She asked the students to look at a frog in a book and complete the sentence. Several students responded with valid answers. Next, the teacher showed the class pictures of a pelican, polar bear, and a spider and asked them what they know about each one. The teacher then asked the students to choral read one poem about an ostrich and one about a penguin. She asked them questions about what they read. Finally, the teacher shared the vocabulary words “unique,” “trait,” and “nature” with the students. As they talked about the meaning of these words and discussed examples of them, the students were instructed to write the words in their notebooks. This last participant also seemed to be at Stage 4 of the SoC as she discussed vocabulary words and assessed their knowledge of them during the lesson. She showed evidence of being concerned about the students’ learning as she questioned them about the animals they were discussing and the vocabulary words they were learning.

When coding the results from the field notes and observations, four themes emerged: vocabulary, reading, content-based learning, and student engagement. Each participant used strategies to teach the students new vocabulary and practice using the words. Reading strategies included using a text to help the students see the vocabulary words in context as well as work on comprehension by asking the students questions as they read the text. Furthermore, each participant included content-based learning by introducing science, social studies, and math topics within the texts they were reading

with the students. They also engaged students in discussions about these topics to build their background knowledge.

**Document review results.** In addition to analyzing field notes from observations, the researcher reviewed a variety of documents provided by the participants related to the OWE program. The first document was an agenda from a district-wide ESL meeting where the OWE program was introduced and explained to the teachers. This agenda provides proof that some of the teachers did engage in PD to learn how to implement the program. Another related document was a PowerPoint presentation showing how to use the online version of the program known as “Think Central.” This document walked the teachers step-by-step through the website and the links to go to for different features of the program.

Mrs. Smith also shared a document the ESL teachers in the district use for teaching vocabulary known as “Six Step Process for Building Academic Vocabulary” by Robert Marzano, which is the vocabulary instruction OWE stresses. Step 1 states that the teacher will give a description, explanation, or example of the new word as well as ask the students what they know about the word. This step recommends not using the definition of the words but only giving descriptions and examples because definitions are not a natural way to learn new words. The second step requires the students to give a description, explanation, or example of the new word in their own words. Next, step 3 asks for the student to draw a picture or symbol to represent the word. For step 4, students will participate in activities such as creating word maps or identifying prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, etc. in their vocabulary notebooks. Then, step 5 asks for the students to discuss their descriptions and pictures with a peer. Finally, step 6 will have the

students playing games and completing activities with the new word. These six steps help students gain a better understanding of new words they are learning. Thus, these six steps correlate with the vocabulary instruction in the OWE program.

Other documents the researcher received were planning ideas from Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that were developed on a PD day. Planning ideas were provided for grades K, 1, and 2. Each plan listed essential objectives to be taught during the lesson based on the CCSS objectives. Essential activities to be used in the lesson are also listed such as review high frequency words, discuss parts of a book, discuss characters and setting, and complete a modeled writing. Other essential activities included using vocabulary cards to go over new words, work on making connections using the poster provided, and using the Big Book to talk about characters and setting. These lists of ideas were created to help the teachers as they planned their lessons for particular units in order to assist them with focusing on certain skills and objectives. The lessons created in the PLCs included the components of the OWE program with the exception of the phonics component.

Another document the researcher reviewed was a unit plan designed by first-grade teachers for Unit 8 in the first grade OWE text. Oral objectives were created for learning prepositions and the content vocabulary: Flashcards will be used to help the students learn prepositions and then they will play a game using these words; the students will learn the content vocabulary by looking at the vocabulary pictures, completing a practice game with the words, create a graphic organizer with the words, and then look for illustrations to match the words, which satisfies the vocabulary component of OWE. The reading objectives for Unit 8 consisted of working with the students on asking wh-

questions as they are reading and practicing high frequency words that effectively meet the criteria of the reading component of OWE. Last, writing objectives were developed which included using the Shared Writing Poster and graphic organizers to help the students develop their ideas as OWE recommends; therefore, this document revealed the use of OWE research-based components that are effective for EL students with the exception of the phonics element as referenced in Table 6.

These lessons and units created by teachers for the students were evidence of teachers being at Stages 4 and 5 of CBAM's SoC. The teachers were concerned with developing activities that impacted student learning related to vocabulary, reading, and writing. In turn, they were also collaborating with one another and relating what they were doing with other teachers at other schools.

Mrs. Smith provided a lesson plan where she used the text "A Pocketful of Opossums" with her students. In her plan, she explained that the children would identify the body parts of opossums. They also used a graphic organizer to share adjectives to describe opossums. In order to build background knowledge, the children looked at the book cover and discussed what an opossum looks like, which builds the students' oral language. They then previewed the pictures in the book to predict what it might be about. As an OWE reading strategy, Mrs. Smith modeled how to ask questions such as, "I wonder what scaly tail means. How could I find out?" She then used the vocabulary cards to help the students visualize the term. She also used the vocabulary cards to label the parts of the opossum. Once the students pointed out the opossum's body parts, they practiced reading the words. Finally, Mrs. Smith gave them a picture of an opossum to label the body parts, which focuses on the vocabulary and reading elements of the OWE

program.

Mrs. Roads provided the researcher with a photo of the Shared Writing Poster included in the OWE program, which includes five pictures the students are asked to write about. The poster shared with the researcher contains a picture of a boy with his hand to his ear at the top and pictures of a red bird, a bell, a guitar, and a baby crying below him. The students were given a word bank of words related to the pictures and asked to “write 3 sentences about the things John hears.” This was used as a writing assessment for first grade in Unit 2 of the OWE program.

Mrs. Jones also shared a lesson plan she created for the theme: Faces and Places-7 Continents on the World Map. The big question for the unit was, “How are the people and places in our world alike and different?” A portion of her lesson was focused on the students using gestures, restating words, and rewriting meanings to help them demonstrate an understanding of the vocabulary words. She also spent some time reviewing high-frequency words. Mrs. Jones then asked students how people and places in the world are alike and different to place focus on big question of the unit. Next, she focused on new vocabulary words by showing each word and explaining them to the students. After providing an explanation for each word, she asked them to point to the picture for each word and restate the meaning for each word. Finally, the students recorded the words in their vocabulary notebooks, which focuses on the vocabulary component of OWE. The lesson then moved to the students reading the high-frequency words several times. The students completed a sentence frame: “I would like to visit \_\_\_\_\_.” They discussed each other’s answers and then wrote each answer down in their notebooks. These activities correlate to the oral language and writing

components of OWE. The next part of the lesson involved Mrs. Jones drawing a map of the classroom on the board and labeling the directions. They read a chant about maps and acted out parts of it. In addition, they watched a Flocabulary video using the vocabulary words: compass rose, key, scale, continents, north, south, east, and west. To conclude the lesson, Mrs. Jones asked some questions about the compass rose and the continents to check for understanding, which is a formative assessment tool that OWE encourages.

Each of these teachers describes in their lessons activities involving vocabulary, reading, and writing, which were aligned with the OWE program. These activities evidenced these teachers reaching Stage 4 of SoC as they planned lessons that affected their students' success. Reading texts and learning new vocabulary are key components of the OWE program as well as concerns of these teachers. The teacher participants led the students in discussions about new words and encouraged them to write about what they had learned.

As the data from the documents were coded, three emerging themes became apparent. The first was vocabulary, as each document showed evidence of teaching EL students new words through a variety of ways to build a better understanding of the words. A second theme was reading that the participants used with the students which included reading a selection with students and completing a variety of activities along with the text. A final theme that could be seen was writing including labeling, filling in sentence frames, and writing sentences in response to pictures. As referenced in Table 6, vocabulary, reading/comprehension, and writing are important components of the OWE program that the participants showed evidence of implementing through documents.

**Interview results.** Interviews were conducted with four participants to gain information about the implementation of the OWE program and teacher perceptions about the program and their own competence in implementing the program as it was designed.

In response to Research Question 1, “To what extent has the OWE program been implemented as designed,” the researcher asked about PD provided in order to prepare them for using OWE. Mrs. Smith shared that the company came to the district to introduce the program and the products that came with it and to show how to use it. Mrs. Roads and Mrs. Street explained that there was no PD, they just had to dive in and use the program because it was already being used by the district when they became ESL teachers. Mrs. Jones stated that “other teachers showed me how to use it, and I observed other teachers using OWE.” She also said that “the materials are self-explanatory” as well.

The researcher also questioned the participants about how they implemented the program. Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Roads, and Mrs. Street stated in their interviews that they implemented the program with fidelity, but they had to leave out the phonics element because of time limits. Mrs. Jones claimed that she followed the program as it was written. All of the participants expressed concerns with the time constraints that limited their time for teaching the OWE program and its elements. Mrs. Smith explained that “it is hard to use the stories provided by the program due to seeing my students only 30 minutes twice a week, and each story usually takes 3 weeks to cover effectively.” Mrs. Roads expressed how difficult it was to cover all elements including vocabulary, reading, and phonics in a 30-minute class. She stated she simply “didn’t have time for the

phonics, which included chants and songs to help with language development.” Mrs. Street also described that “every unit has three weeks’ worth of material to cover, and I only see them for 30 minutes a few days a week.” She stated the program seemed to be designed more for a 30-45-minute class that met every day. Last, Mrs. Jones said that there was so much to do and just not enough time to do it all, as the other teachers shared. Although the participants appeared to be at Stage 4 of SoC (Consequence), they also appeared to have some time management issues that caused them to be caught in Stage 3 (Management) of SoC.

In addition, the participants discussed how some elements of the OWE program can be seen across classrooms and grade levels. Mrs. Smith stated that the vocabulary learned within the program is implemented across the classrooms. She also shared that the writing done as part of OWE and the graphic organizers used in OWE are implemented across many grade levels and content areas such as science and social studies. In addition, Mrs. Roads explained that the reading strategies used in the program are implemented across classrooms, grade levels, and content areas as well. Mrs. Street mentioned “conversation starters, also known as sentence frames, can be found hanging in some classrooms.” She gave an example of how the content reaches across classrooms by explaining in second grade, they study the water cycle in her ESL class, which is also part of the CCSS science curriculum at the end of second grade. Another example she provided was that fifth grade studied adaptations in the ESL classroom, and this is part of the fifth-grade curriculum. Furthermore, Mrs. Jones expressed that the comprehension strategies the program uses were used across other classrooms. She also claimed the “vocabulary, repetition, pictures, definitions, posters, and books that are part of OWE

repeat what we do in their regular classrooms.”

Furthermore, all four participants described being part of a virtual PLC that meets using FaceTime. Mrs. Smith explained that “each year we choose a grade level to focus on and share materials. This year we chose second grade.” Mrs. Street discussed how they had planned to use the story and poster in one unit and finish with writing a letter about a trip they took. She planned to provide fake pictures of places for the students, since many of them may not have been on a trip or vacation. She shared she was going to take the students’ pictures and glue their faces to the fake vacation pictures in order to help them write about going on a trip. These were the types of ideas they shared in their PLCs. Mrs. Jones added that they discuss supplemental materials they might have to use in the unit they are teaching. Mrs. Roads spoke of coordinating with the PLCs within her school by having them fill out a Curriculum Corner telling what they are teaching the next week, so she can try to tie it into what she is teaching in the ESL classroom. Within this PLC meeting, they incorporated oral language, vocabulary, reading, and writing activities as suggested by OWE. As part of the SoC, this relates to Stage 5 (Collaboration), since the teachers were talking with other teachers about creating lesson plans and the use of supplemental materials to use with their students.

### **Results for Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 investigated, “To what extent do ESL teachers feel competent in the delivery of the OWE program?” During her interview, Mrs. Smith expressed that she was very confident with using the program because she could “move a non-English speaker to become a more advanced English speaker by using the vocabulary cards and leveled readers” that the program provides, which she used during

her observation. Mrs. Roads stated that she “tried my best to implement everything but it was hard to do because of time” constraints. She continued by saying that “when you only have 30 minutes to work with the kids, it’s hard to get the vocabulary, reading, and phonics in.” Next, Mrs. Street was comfortable using the program, and it acts as her curriculum since there is no set curriculum for the ESL program. She added that the “OWE materials tell me what to do” and then she teaches it how she feels is most beneficial to her students. Likewise, Mrs. Jones also stated that she was comfortable using the OWE program.

However, Mrs. Smith expressed concerns about the comprehension piece of the program because she claimed there “needed to be more passages with comprehension activities” to help the EL students develop their comprehension skills. She did not feel the program focused enough on comprehension. Mrs. Roads then expressed that “some of the material was a little outdated and some of the picture cards were very easy.” She gave the example of the word “see” and explained that “this is a sight word that most of them are already reading.” Furthermore, she stated that she thought that some of the words should be more Tier 2 vocabulary. Mrs. Street shared that there are “some units and themes that are not aligned with the grade level curriculums” which she would like to see changed; but other than that, she had no concerns. Finally, Mrs. Jones stated some concerns about some of the units needing to be updated. She spoke of a kindergarten unit that requires them to cut cards apart, but her concern was that “these students are unable to cut and this activity would take up my entire 30 minute class period.” She also expressed concerns about the time frame that the program is created for because “I only see my kids a few times a week for 30 minutes and the units in the OWE program are

designed for teachers and students who see each other every day for a longer time.”

In order to help them feel more confident in implementing the program with fidelity, Mrs. Smith shared that she would “like to gather more reading passages with comprehension materials” to use with her students in order to reinforce comprehension skills with her students. She also stated she would like to “create my own comprehension activities to go with the stories we read.” Mrs. Roads mentioned the leveled readers and kits that come with the OWE program. She expressed that “I have access to the students’ TRC levels and I would like to start using the leveled readers with them.” Mrs. Street claimed that she may “start with a different unit other than Unit 1 since I have the freedom to start anywhere in the OWE program.” In addition, she would like to look at the curriculum for the grade levels and try to align the unit of OWE with it. Last, Mrs. Jones shared that she was working on creating a database of supplementary materials that she uses with OWE, so she plans to continue to add more materials to this database.

As a result, these responses correlate to Stage 6 (Refocusing) of the SoC as the teachers discussed things they would like to see done with the OWE program. Mrs. Smith expressed needing more comprehension passages to use with the students. Mrs. Roads claimed that some of the materials needed to be updated in order to make the program better. Furthermore, Mrs. Street mentioned she would like the OWE program to be better aligned to the CCSS. As the teachers spoke of these ideas, they were concerned with refocusing the change implementation to make it better.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

The final research question of this study examined, “How do teachers perceive the OWE program impacts EL students’ learning?” During the first interview, Mrs. Smith

explained that the vocabulary strategies used in the OWE program are based on Marzano's strategy, which is where they have a group discussion about the vocabulary words using pictures; she explains the definition; they reflect on the word's meaning and refine their thinking about the word; and finally, they write using the word. She stated, "I love this strategy because it was very effective for helping the students learn new words." This statement revealed that this participant was at Stage 4 of the SoC as she was concerned with her students learning new words.

Mrs. Roads shared that she liked the comprehension strategies the program incorporated into the units. For instance, she mentioned that her fourth graders were working on the skill of synthesizing, and the fifth graders were making inferences correlated with what they were doing in their classrooms. During the third interview, Mrs. Street focused on how the writing strategies of the program were effective for the EL students. She stated that the program "walks the students through the writing process from brainstorming, using graphic organizers, planning, and then to writing and editing." Mrs. Jones also expressed that she felt the writing and comprehension pieces of the program worked well.

Next, the participants discussed how the program assists with language development. Mrs. Smith claimed it was customized by "providing leveled readers, which is nice for newcomers who are just learning English." She explained, "I start with teaching vocabulary and then relate it to themes and finally move into reading the stories to develop the language in EL students." Likewise, Mrs. Roads also spoke of using the vocabulary to develop language in her students. She gave the example of her fourth graders working on a unit about immigrants. They first

discussed what “immigrant” meant, and then we made a connection with someone who was an immigrant. We developed interview questions and asked an immigrant our questions. The students brought their information back to class and wrote about the immigrant they interviewed.

On the other hand, Mrs. Street shared that OWE develops the students’ language through the introduction of different types of writing they read such as friendly letters and diaries. She expressed that

writing letters and keeping diaries are cultural things that many of the EL students are unfamiliar with and they have never been exposed to. The OWE program introduces them to different cultures and helps develop their language in that way.

Mrs. Jones did not have a response for this question.

In addition, the participants discussed how vocabulary instruction impacted the EL students’ success. Mrs. Smith expressed that the vocabulary instruction was her favorite part. She again mentioned how the program uses Marzano’s six steps for learning vocabulary: draw, write, discuss, reflect, refine, and apply in writing. During the second interview, Mrs. Roads shared that she used the vocabulary cards, and “I like those because they have pictures to go with the words which helps the students visualize what the words mean.” She also stated that they have progress tests that are part of the OWE program that she uses to assess their students’ needs. In addition, Mrs. Street expressed her partiality toward the vocabulary cards as well and how helpful the pictures are for helping students learn new words. She stated that she “has the students look at the picture before seeing the word and share what they see in the picture.” She explained that the students will sometimes guess the vocabulary word just from looking at the

pictures. An example she used was with the word and picture of “island.” She expressed, “I may ask them why they think it is an island, and they might say because it has water around it. Then I can explain that an island is surrounded by water.”

Furthermore, Mrs. Jones shared that the OWE program is very visual and has good examples of the vocabulary words. She stated that all the stories in the program use the vocabulary as well as the books and posters, so everything is connected.

Reading comprehension was another component that the participants discussed in regard to student achievement. Mrs. Smith expressed that reading comprehension was a weak area of the program. She stated that OWE provided reading cards that she used with the stories they read, but it was not enough to develop their comprehension skills. Additionally, she shared that “the reading passages that are provided through OWE are more for newcomers or the advanced students.” She was concerned that there was not enough support for comprehension skills since she only sees her students for 45 minutes a day, three times a week; and each story they read takes 3 weeks to cover. On the other hand, Mrs. Roads stated that OWE provided strategies to focus on with the students for each story including ways to build background knowledge. She explained that “there is a ‘big question’ for each unit to help the students develop a central theme to look for throughout the unit and guide their understanding.” Mrs. Street claimed, “I’m not sure if the program provides comprehension questions to ask the students as we read a story, but I ask my own questions as we read.” She shared that the teacher’s manual offers a daily planner to follow, but she had not been through it to see how they addressed reading comprehension. She did explain that she has the students look at the pictures in the stories and say words they see, and she pinpoints the vocabulary words as they read as

well as asks questions about what they are reading. In the final interview, Mrs. Jones simply stated that the program provided stories, posters, and skills master worksheets to help with reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Mrs. Smith said as she had mentioned before, the vocabulary, writing, and K-2 stories were wonderful. She did say, "I like the unit tests for each grade level which I use as a pretest and posttest." Mrs. Street claimed that since the students were introduced to content such as science and social studies, this resulted in positive outcomes for these students. She shared how the second graders learn about the water cycle in her class, and they also learn about it in their regular classrooms. The students are then able to make connections between their classes. Last, Mrs. Jones shared that the students are learning to use social language as well as learning academic discussion strategies. She also stated that "writing skills are difficult for these students, so the writing skills taught in the program are very helpful for the students."

Finally, the participants evidenced the students' academic growth through the use of assessments. Mrs. Roads stated, "I can see student progress by seeing how the students perform at the end of a unit on performance tests or unit assessments." She also shared that she used writing assessments; and for the lower grades, she used writing assessments that focused on basic skills like conventions. Mrs. Roads also explained an assessment the district uses for EL students known as PDSA, which stands for Plan, Do, Study, Act: "A pretest is given at the beginning of the year to see where the students are in their language development, and a posttest is given at the end of the year to see what growth they have made." Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Street, and Mrs. Jones did not respond to this question.

As the interview results were coded, several themes emerged including curriculum alignment, implementation, personal affect, phonics, reading strategies, scheduling, writing strategies, and vocabulary strategies. The participants mentioned aligning the CCSS curriculum to their ESL curriculum as well as the difficulties they have with implementing all parts of the OWE program. Their self-confidence and self-competence in implementing the program provided the evidence for the personal affect theme. The participants spoke of the phonics aspect of the program and the small amount of time they had for this portion of OWE. The reading strategies were the same as were found in the observation and document review as were the writing and vocabulary strategies. Finally, each participant discussed the struggles with scheduling in order to meet their students' needs.

In conclusion, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Roads each spoke of the vocabulary strategies that OWE encourages ESL teachers to use to develop their language proficiency and how those strategies impacted their learning. This directly correlates to Stage 4 of the SoC (Consequence) where teachers become concerned about how the change implementation affects their students (Hall & Hord, 2015). Mrs. Smith also shared a concern about the reading comprehension piece of the OWE program and how there was not enough of it. Again, this showed her concern for how the program is affecting her students' growth. On the other hand, Mrs. Roads talked about using the OWE assessments to learn what growth the students had made and the weaknesses they still had and needed more time to work on. As a result, these concerns about their students' progress are evidence these teachers have reached Stage 4 of the SoC.

## Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of OWE and the perceptions of ESL teachers of how the program impacts student learning in a rural western region North Carolina school community. The results of the study were determined through classroom observations; one-on-one interviews; and documents such as meeting agendas, lesson plans, activities, and pictures. The teachers who participated in the research appeared to have implemented certain components of the program as it was designed, using many of the elements of the program in their lessons, and shared how the program impacted their students' learning during their interviews. Through the coding process, the most dominant themes seen among the documents, field notes, and interview data were the use of vocabulary, reading, and writing strategies offered by OWE and used by the participants with their EL students as referenced in Table 6. Chapter 5 discusses and analyzes the results from the data collected from the research. The researcher also makes recommendations on how the participants and other stakeholders can use this research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This study examined the program implementation as well as teacher perceptions of competency and impact of OWE in a rural western region public school district in North Carolina. Through this study, the researcher sought to determine if the program was being implemented as designed for use by ESL teachers. Using CBAM (Hall, 1979), the researcher also gathered information on the ESL teachers' perceptions on their confidence in delivering the content of OWE and their thoughts on how the program impacts EL students' academic outcomes.

### Summary of Findings

**Research Question 1: To what extent has the OWE program been implemented by ESL teachers as designed?** The coded data from the field notes, documents, and observations revealed four primary themes: vocabulary, reading, content-based learning, and student engagement. Study participants used these components to build EL students' language proficiency. In order to increase students' vocabulary or academic language, Robertson (2012), who has published many articles about teaching ELs for the ¡Colorín Colorado bilingual website, stated that words must be introduced and then reinforced, and they can be from more than one content area. Robertson also suggested using visuals, acting words out, and using synonyms to help students understand the meaning of these new words. Finally, Robertson (2012) claimed the new vocabulary needs to be reinforced by having students draw it or use it in a sentence. During each observation, the researcher witnessed the ESL teachers using these elements to teach and reinforce learning new words. Willis (2013) stated, "Academic Language is believed to be one of the most important factors in the academic success of English

Language learners (ELLs)” (p. 2), which is a significant element of OWE.

Furthermore, the participants in this study were engaged in using content-based learning with their EL students. Research supports this by stating that “teaching thematically offers the teacher a natural way to offer English language development instruction while building on a student’s prior knowledge, incorporating oral and written language, building natural scaffold for student learning, engaging students in learning, using cooperative learning situations” (Wolfe, 2013, p. 1). Content-based instruction promotes English language acquisition and cognitive development at the same time. It motivates ELs to learn a new language through authentic content materials (Park, 2009). During the first observation, Mrs. Smith was teaching parts of the body to the students, which involved teaching science content. She used the small skeletons as an authentic method for the students to label the body parts as well as point to their own body parts as they discussed them. The students were engaged in their learning and actively participated while learning the vocabulary related to the body parts.

In addition, the reading strategies employed by the research participants included shared reading. Shared reading is an interactive reading experience where the students join in with the teacher as he/she reads a story that is employed by OWE. The teacher models fluency and using expression (Klemek, n.d.). The students who were observed by the researcher were engaged in their learning as the teacher read a story and stopped to ask the students to read a section of the story and talk about it. During each observation conducted by the researcher, the participants read a text with the students and stopped throughout the reading to question the students about what had been read. For example, Mrs. Smith read the book about body parts with her students, and Mrs. Roads read the

book about the grandmother to her group of students. Each teacher asked the students questions about the books. Some questions centered around basic details in the texts, while others were more higher order thinking questions. The participants also asked questions related to the vocabulary that was connected to the text which they had gone over before reading. As a result, guided discussions with students during reading that encourage more elaborate responses using vocabulary they have learned fosters literacy and oral language growth in EL students (DeGregoriis, 2006). In turn, oral language development, vocabulary, and reading/comprehension are key components of OWE as referenced in Table 6.

In regard to CBAM used as the theoretical framework for this study, the participants, based on these coded themes, were at Stage 4 of the SoC. This stage refers to Consequence Concerns that reflect on the participant's concern for how the program is affecting the students' growth and how to make it better so students could be successful. As referenced in Table 6 in Chapter 4, the participants used a variety of strategies for the study of oral language, vocabulary words, reading skills, and writing skills and incorporated content from the science and social studies curriculums. The participants appeared to show a concern for the students' academic progress based on the various strategies used in order to meet all learning styles.

**Research Question 2: To what extent do ESL teachers feel competent in their delivery of the program?** All participants in the study expressed feeling confident in implementing the program due to how the program was set up. OWE was designed so teachers could follow a step-by-step plan including oral language, vocabulary, reading, writing, and phonics on a daily basis (Rigby, 2003); however, the participants did express

that the program contained too much content for them to use in a 30-45-minute class period. They explained that they focus more on teaching the vocabulary and reading skills than on the phonics because it is hard to fit every aspect of the program in such a short amount of class time. The participants were comfortable with how the program used techniques to make instruction understandable to EL students and provided oral language practice as they developed their academic vocabulary (Rigby, 2003). The researcher notes that OWE is designed to foster literacy and oral language development in ELs through phonics, vocabulary, and reading instruction (Rigby, 2003), but time constraints in the classroom create considerable hardships on teachers to include all of these aspects in their lessons.

Some concerns expressed during the interviews with participants were the need for more comprehension passages to allow students to work on comprehension skills as well as some updated material. OWE provides a guided reading sequence especially designed for ELs to help with comprehension that includes Teaching Focus, Setting the Scene, Reading the Text, Returning to the Text, and Responding to the Text (Rigby, 2003). The plans include introducing the text to the students and looking at visuals/pictures and discussing what they see in order to build background knowledge and build on their prior knowledge. A purpose for reading is then set. The students will read the text with the teacher or with a partner next for the first reading. The students will then read the text again for a second time but will answer comprehension questions as they read (Freeman et al., 2014). The researcher notes that OWE scaffolds activities for the EL students as well as provides differentiated instruction for students at different levels to develop comprehension strategies. As with any reading program, the researcher

recognizes that the material becomes outdated yet can still be found useful.

Another concern with implementing the program the participants mentioned was its alignment to the curriculum. A few participants spoke of wanting to spend some time aligning the units to the CCSS used in the regular classrooms; however, OWE was “created to support the more rigorous demands of the Common Core State Standards” (Freeman et al., 2014, p. T4).

In connection with CBAM’s SoC, the participants fell under Stage 3, Management Concerns, as they shared about how competent they felt with implementing OWE. Participants in Stage 3 usually have concerns about time management, using the materials that are part of the program, and coordinating all parts of the program (Hall & Hord, 2015). Although all the participants expressed confidence in presenting the materials in the OWE program, each of them shared concerns about finding time to incorporate all the parts of the program as well as concerns about different aspects of the program.

**Research Question 3: How do the ESL teachers perceive the program impacts EL students’ learning?** The most prominent themes that emerged from coding were phonics, reading strategies, writing strategies, vocabulary strategies, and scheduling. OWE appears to help ELs develop phonemic awareness and phonics skills which provide a strong foundation for literacy achievement (Rigby, 2003). Evidence suggests that phonemic awareness is necessary for reading regardless of which language a student speaks (Leafstedt, Richards, & Gerber, 2004); however, the research participants explained they left out this part of the program due to lack of time to cover the phonics aspects in the daily lessons in OWE. The program relies heavily on teaching phonics in

kindergarten through second grade. The researcher recognizes that the OWE daily lesson plans are designed for a 45-minute to 1-hour class period each day, which does not allow for regular ESL teachers to fulfill all the parts of the lesson.

Again, the participants mentioned that the comprehension strategies in the program were lacking. They did not feel like there were enough comprehension passages or questions. Francis et al. (2006) stated that making predictions before reading gives students time to discuss the text during and after reading. The research participants allowed the students to look at pictures and discuss them before reading, which led to discussions after they had read. This strategy built on their knowledge as they continued to read. Furthermore, students should be monitored and asked questions as they are reading to determine how well they are comprehending and what difficulties they may be having (Francis et al., 2006). The participants in this study continuously asked questions as they read a text with their students checking for their level of understanding. They asked the students to retell what they had read on several occasions.

Furthermore, the research participants felt strongly that the OWE program offered excellent writing strategies to help EL students develop their English proficiency. Performance-based assessments through writing allow students to share their knowledge and show their achievement level in an authentic way as well as allow teachers to monitor their progress (Abedi, 2010). The participants of this study mentioned OWE providing shared writing activities where the students look at pictures and write about them using graphic organizers. The researcher notes that the OWE program also incorporates a writing activity within each unit based on the texts the students are reading such as writing a personal narrative. The program guides them through reading examples

of personal narratives, using graphic organizers to plan their own narratives, and finally writing their personal narrative (Freeman et al., 2014).

As noted in the coded themes, vocabulary was the most common theme seen during observations and that was spoken of during the interviews with the researcher. Each participant spent time discussing vocabulary words related to the text they were reading with their students during the observations conducted. The students were given ample time to practice using the words in sentences to develop their understanding of them. The National Reading Panel (2000) claimed that teaching vocabulary before reading a text leads to greater comprehension of that text for all students. In fact, students need several exposures to unfamiliar words to ensure their understanding of the meanings to help with comprehending a text (National Reading Panel, 2000). With ELs, academic vocabulary tends to lead to more difficulty regarding comprehension, so explicit instruction of vocabulary is necessary for these students (Lesaux, 2011a).

As mentioned earlier, scheduling and the amount of class time spent with their students was a concern of the participants in this study in regard to their academic achievement. Each of the participants see their students on average for 30 minutes a day, and some teachers only see their students two to three times a week. This limited time creates a challenge in covering all the material and standards that are in OWE. The participants spoke of the lack of time to teach the phonics portion of the program; however, ELs in the early grades benefit from instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness (Francis et al., 2006). Once students develop phonemic and phonological awareness, reading fluency begins to develop (Chall, 1983). Due to a limited amount of class time, the ESL teachers felt they did not have time to focus on the phonics portion of

the OWE program. The concern of not having time to teach phonics affects student learning because students in the early grades are aided by phonics instruction as they learn to read.

As related to CBAM, the themes that were dominant for this last research question also qualify as Stage 3 and Stage 4 concerns. Stage 3, referring to Management Concerns, deals with the participants again mentioning the time constraints put on their class periods. They shared how difficult it was to meet all the goals of the OWE program, especially the phonics portion, in their short class periods. In addition, Stage 4, referring to Consequence Concerns, deals with the participants' concerns for how their students are progressing and how to increase their growth (Hall & Hord, 2015). They spoke of the vocabulary and writing strategies that worked well with students, but they expressed concerns about the comprehension strategies offered in the program and how they could be improved.

### **Limitations**

There were four specific limitations to the study which are listed as follows:

1. There were only four participants, which limited the amount of data the researcher was able to collect in regarding the OWE program being investigated. If the researcher had been able to collect more data from more participants, the study and data would be more reliable.
2. The program was used throughout the entire school year, but the researcher only observed the program being used in context during several classroom observations. If the researcher had been able to collect more data from more class periods throughout the year, the study would be more trustworthy.

3. The data collected by the researcher were only from the 2018-2019 school year. This limitation could affect how confident the teachers are with implementing the program as well as impact the perceptions of the program. As the participants use the program more throughout the years, they most likely will become more confident in their abilities to use the OWE program accurately, which, in turn, could affect the reliability of the data collected.
4. The researcher was also an ESL teacher. This factor meant that the researcher came with a personal bias about effective EL literacy programs that could impact the results of the study. This bias could play a part when the researcher discusses the results of the study.

### **Delimitations**

There are two delimitations of this study listed below:

1. The OWE program had been implemented in this school district for several years. Being so, this may impact the teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of the program as well as its impact on student learning.
2. The study was also conducted in only one small school district, which limits the study to one district and limits the amount of data that was collected and analyzed. Again, this affects the reliability of the data analysis.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, the researcher of this study has examined the OWE literacy program for ELs in a rural western region North Carolina public school district as was implemented by four participants. The researcher investigated how the participants perceived their competence in implementing the program as well as how well the

program impacted student learning.

Through analyses of class observation field notes; teacher, school, and district-crafted documents; and transcripts of teacher interviews, the researcher concludes the following:

1. The participants appeared to implement certain components of the OWE program with fidelity as they implemented the oral language, vocabulary, reading/comprehension, writing, and assessment components of the program.
2. The participants appeared competent in the delivery of the OWE program as they discussed the use of the vocabulary, reading, and writing strategies the program offered for teaching EL students.
3. The participants expressed that the program appeared to have a positive impact on student achievement as they learned vocabulary through content-based reading as well as through writing activities.

Referring back to the theoretical basis for this study, CBAM's SoC (Hall, 1979), the researcher found that when speaking with the participants, a few did mention being at Stage 0, Awareness Concerns, when they first began using OWE since they were new to teaching ESL and to using the program. With the help of colleagues and a representative from the company that produces OWE, they were able to learn the program and move toward Stage 1, Information Concerns. They discussed working in PLCs to learn more about the program as they gained confidence in implementing it, which leads the participants into Stage 2, Personal Concerns. The participants of this study spoke to the researcher of how they felt competent in using OWE since it was scripted and easy to follow. In addition, as the participants became comfortable with using the program, they

expressed concerns with time management issues such as having to eliminate the phonics portion of OWE due to lack of time to include it, which complies with Stage 3, Management Concerns. The participants appeared to have moved to Stage 4, Consequence Concerns, as well, as they shared parts of the program that work well for students and other parts that needed improvement. During interviews and through PLC documentation, the participants revealed some Collaboration Concerns of Stage 5. They discussed meeting virtually with colleagues to plan units for students, and some mentioned that they would like to have more time to collaborate with other teachers to plan effective strategies and skills to use with their students; therefore, the researcher found the participants in this study had gone through Stages 0-5 of Hall's (1979) CBAM's SoC. They have not yet reached Stage 6, Refocusing Concerns, where they share that another program may be a better choice to use with students.

### **Recommendations**

When considering further research, this researcher suggests a larger sample of participants to observe using OWE and to interview about the implementation of the program. A larger number of participants would allow for more data collection and may yield a greater variety of responses. More responses from participants would create more reliable data. This study also focused only on the 2018-2019 school year. The inclusion of other school years could expand the amount of data collected as well.

Another recommendation for further research would be to interview participants with more experience using the OWE program. The participants in the study had used the program for 5 years or less. Most of them were unfamiliar with how OWE is aligned with the CCSS, although the program has these standards aligned with every lesson in the

teacher's manual.

The researcher also offers recommendations for teachers and district leaders. Several of the participants' concerns about OWE centered around the comprehension strategies offered by OWE. The participants felt there was a lack of strategies to assist students with developing their comprehension skills. As a result, the researcher recommends the OWE teachers using Bloom's Taxonomy to create questions that help these students develop critical-thinking skills. A further resource could be for the participants to use the online leveled readers offered by OWE to allow students to read passages on their instructional levels, answer comprehension questions, and complete writing activities that go along with what they have read. The researcher further suggests working in their PLCs to create higher order thinking questions for each text they read. Additionally, the researcher recognizes the importance of teaching phonics, especially in kindergarten through second grade. The participants expressed how they had very little time in their classes to focus on phonics, although this is part of the OWE program. The researcher suggests reviewing lesson plans for the lower grades and scheduling a 5- to 10-minute mini-lesson for phonics since students must be able to decode words in order to read fluently (Carnine et al., 2014).

Last, the researcher suggests that the program designers rethink their lesson designs to fit more to an ESL teacher's schedule. The lessons in the OWE program are designed for 45-minute to 1-hour class periods; however, the average ESL teacher only sees his/her students for 30 minutes. The researcher recommends shortening the lessons to fit a typical teacher's daily schedule.

## **Closing Thoughts**

By completing this study, the researcher has concluded that ELs need explicit and extensive instruction in vocabulary. As they learn new academic language, there are many strategies offered by OWE as well as other researchers that can be helpful in teaching vocabulary to ELs. Learning academic language is imperative for EL students' reading comprehension. Many ELs struggle with reading comprehension due to their lack of understanding of the academic language within a text; therefore, the language and vocabulary must be taught explicitly before comprehension can take place.

Also, just like "change is a process, not an event" (Hall & Hord, 2015, p. 10), language development is a process. Acquiring a new language for ELs requires them to have tasks scaffolded to meet their individualized needs. It also requires much repetition. ELs process new ideas and information at a slower rate than their non-EL peers since they are learning a new language on top of the information they are learning; therefore, their language development can take years.

Finally, no ESL literacy program is perfect. OWE has many great qualities and contains the basic components of what a good ESL literacy program should consist. It addresses oral language, phonics, vocabulary, reading, writing, and formal and informal assessment; however, there were components of the program that some teachers did not like or did not have time for. Some participants were not satisfied with the reading component, whereas some liked it. Others did not feel it aligned well with the CCSS, but the standards were at the bottom of each page in the teacher's manual; therefore, opinions vary about different programs even when it appears to be a fantastic one.

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Appendix A  
Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:**

**Instructions:**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview about the OWE reading program. I am Regina King, a doctoral candidate with Gardner-Webb University, and I will be examining the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the OWE program and the effect it has on EL students' achievement. I will be using an audio recording device to record the interview to ensure accuracy. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. During the interview, you will be asked several questions in regard to your use of the OWE program. Please respond to the questions as honestly and accurately as possible in order to provide a description of your experiences. If, at any time, you wish to withdraw from the interview, you may do so. When this study is published, pseudonyms will be used in place of your names to maintain confidentiality.

1. Please state your name, what you teach, and the grade levels you teach.
2. How long have you been using OWE?
3. What professional development was provided for the program?
4. Do you implement the program as designed? How?
5. What specific instructional strategies does the program implement that have been effective for EL students? (SoC 4 – Consequence)

6. Which instructional strategies of the program do you think could be improved and why? (SoC 6 – Refocusing)
7. What are some instructional strategies of the program that are implemented across classrooms and grade levels? (SoC 5 – Collaboration)
8. How is the program customized to provide ELs access to language development? Provide examples. (SoC 4 – Consequence)
9. How does the program address vocabulary instruction for ELs? Provide examples. (SoC 4 – Consequence)
10. Describe how the program addresses reading comprehension for ELs. (SoC 4 – Consequence)
11. What strategies provided by the program seem to result in positive academic outcomes for ELs? (SoC 4 – Consequence)
12. How do you know these instructional strategies are impacting student learning? What is your evidence? (SoC 4 – Consequence)
13. How do you coordinate with other colleagues to use the program or design lessons for ELs? (SoC 5 – Collaboration)
14. How does using the program affect you personally? (SoC – Personal)
15. How competent do you feel in your own abilities to implement the program effectively? (SoC 3- Management)
16. What concerns do you have about the program or any of its aspects? (SoC – Personal)
17. What changes are you planning to make next year when you implement the program again with your ELs? (SoC 6 – Refocusing)

Note: The researcher may ask the participants to explain their answers in more detail or clarify their responses if needed. The researcher will also use prompts, if necessary, to refocus participants if they veer away from the focus of the question.

Thank you for your time and participation in this research study. Your responses are important to the study as we investigate the implementation of the On Our Way to English® program. Your responses will remain anonymous in this study. Again, I appreciate your support with my research.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Research

## **Informed Consent Form for Research**

Dear Educator:

During the 2018-19 school year, I will be conducting research examining ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of the On Our Way to English® literacy program and the impact it has on student learning. The title of the study is "An Investigation of the Reading Program, On Our Way to English, designed for English Learners in a Rural Western Region North Carolina Public School District." The following three questions will guide my research: 1) To what extent has the On Our Way to English® program been implemented as designed by ESL teachers? 2) To what extent do the ESL teachers feel competent in their delivery of the program? 3) How do the ESL teachers perceive the program impacts the EL students' learning?

**Title of Study:**

An Investigation of the Reading Program, On Our Way to English®, designed for English Learners in a Rural Western Region North Carolina Public School District

**Researcher:**

Regina King  
Doctoral Candidate  
Gardner-Webb University/School of Education

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to study the implementation of the On Our Way to English® reading program in elementary ESL classrooms and investigate if the program is being implemented as it was designed to be. Also, information will be gathered from teachers about their perceptions on the implementation of the program and how it impacts the students' learning and achievement.

**Procedure:**

**What you will do in the study:** Participants will be asked to voluntarily open their classrooms to the researcher to conduct observations in order to watch the program being implemented. Participants will be informed that these observations will not be a critique of their teaching practices, but only an observation of the program itself. A checklist will be used to identify aspects of the program during the observation.

Participants will also be asked to participate in an interview session to answer questions regarding the implementation of the reading program, On Our Way to English® and their perceptions on how the program impacts student learning. The interviews will be recorded. Participants can choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

**Time Required:**

It is anticipated that the study will require about 1 hour of your time. The classroom observation will require approximately 30 minutes. However, this will not interfere with instructional time. The interview session will also take 20-30 minutes to complete.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

**Confidentiality:**

All participants names will be replaced with pseudonyms during this study to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All data stored on the computer will be stored on the researcher's computer that is password protected and used only by the researcher. All other data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home.

Data collected on audio tapes will be stored in locked files. This information will be handled confidentially and assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. The audio tapes will also be destroyed once the final reports have been written. Because of the nature of the audio data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

**Risks:**

This research poses minimal risk to the participants as they may be concerned that their interview question responses might be the wrong answers although there are no wrong answers as their answers are only their perceptions and feelings about the program they are implementing in their classrooms. The subjects will continuously be reassured that there are no wrong answers and their answers are acceptable.

**Benefits:**

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand how the implementation of the reading program, On Our Way to English®, impacts student achievement. It may also help us understand how teachers perceive the program to work, what works best, and what parts of the program may need improvement.

**Payment:**

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

**Right to Withdraw From the Study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**How to Withdraw From the Study:**

- If you want to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Regina King at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.**

Regina King  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Gardner-Webb University  
 Boiling Springs, NC 28017  
 XXXXXXXX

Dr. Steven Bingham  
 School of Education  
 Gardner-Webb University  
 Boiling Springs, NC 28017  
 XXXXXXXX

**If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.**

Dr. Jeffrey S. Rogers  
 IRB Institutional Administrator  
 Gardner-Webb University  
 Boiling Springs, NC 28017  
 XXXXXXXX

**Voluntary Consent by Participant**

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I agree to allow the researcher to observe my classroom to watch On Our Way to English® being implemented.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the classroom observations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in the interview session. I understand that this interview may be audio recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to participate in the interview session.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Checklist for Qualities of a Research-Based Reading Program

<b>Qualities to look for:</b>		<b>Observed</b>	<b>Not Observed</b>
<b>Building Background Knowledge:</b>			
• Uses sentence frames			
• Uses real objects			
• Uses pictures & illustrations			
• Uses videos			
• Uses graphic organizers			
• Uses cooperative learning			
• Uses interactive board			
<b>Builds Academic Language:</b>			
• Introduces new words by saying them			
• Uses student-friendly definitions			
• Displays words (on board or pocket chart)			
• Students copy words into notebooks			
• Teacher models how words are used in sentences			
• Teacher gives examples of words			
• Uses visuals			
• Sings songs			
• Acts out words			
• Provides synonyms			
• Students illustrate words			
• Students use words in sentences			
<b>Content-Based Instruction:</b>			
• Content objectives are created and shared			
• Language objectives are created and shared			
• Uses oral language activities along with reading texts			
• Is integration of science and social studies content			
• Academic language is presented in context			
<b>Quality Assessments</b>			
<b>Observations</b>			
• Conversations/Discussions			
• Notes			
• Reports			
• Portfolios			
• Drawings/Pictures			
• Oral reports			
• Presentations			
• Writing pieces			
• Role playing			
• Oral responses			
• Self-assessments			