A TRIPLE QUANDARY IN CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING AS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS EXPERIENCE TRANSITIONS: THE PERCEPTIONS OF BILINGUAL TEACHERS AT FOUR ELEMENTARY CAMPUSES IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the impact of the present grade-span configuration on the sense of belonging in English Language Learners (ELLs) and on the continuity of curriculum and instruction. The teachers of ELLs were asked: (a) How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D (a pseudonym)? (b)How does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.?

The students at Adelante I.S.D. made six transitions from campus to campus during their Pre-K to twelfth grade years. They also transitioned every two years to another campus and this frequent turnover of students posed a concern for the researcher, administration, teachers, and community members of Adelante I.S.D. It was the role of the researcher to work with the district of Adelante and study the ramifications of the aforementioned concerns campus to campus.

The findings related to the first research question determined that students experienced a considerable amount of movement which the participants and researcher perceived as having a negative influence on the academic achievement of ELLs. There were minimal transitional practices in place to prepare students for the next campus and grade level leaving students ill-prepared to successfully make the transition. Students were unable to achieve an enduring sense of belonging to each campus as a result of how the campuses were configured.

The findings related to the second research question determined that grade configuration impacted the curriculum and instruction for each campus and the district as well. Some instructional strategies were inconsistent from campus to campus and follow

through to address the tenets of the District instructional plan were also of concern. The configuration also hindered the communication of teachers across the campuses as they had very little opportunity to meet and plan with one another. Overall, the teachers shared concerns that highlighted the complexity of a triple quandary in assisting ELLs in transitioning from country to country, language to language, and campus to campus.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to Haydee, my loving wife of 19 years. Without her constant prompting, support and encouragement, I would not have completed this study. From the onset, she was instrumental in my pursuit of this doctoral degree at Texas A&M University. While I was accepted to a university a lot closer to the valley, she knew that Texas A&M was the university that I preferred on attending. There were many long days, nights, and weekend travel to and from College Station and away from the family. She was very supportive and did a phenomenal job of juggling her work, our family, our home and other tasks that presented themselves to her. Nineteen years ago we were joined in marriage and she became a very significant person in my life. She was influential in the completion of my Master's degree at College Station when we first got married and she continues to positively impact my education and my life. Thank you and I love you!

I would also like to dedicate this research to our children: Reyes, Carlos, Carolina and our little Baby Angel Alyssa. You all have been a blessing to your mother and I and we are so proud of you. I hope that you will always remember how much we love and cherish each one of you. You have made us extremely happy! Always remember the importance of faith, family, education and hard work. Dream big and put forth your best effort in chasing that dream. Be patient and positive. There will be some bumps along your journey but learn from them and don't forget to buckle up and enjoy the ride!

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INTRODUCTION

The English language learner (ELLs) population is growing at a rapid rate. In fact, ELLs are the fastest growing student population in the United States (American Youth Forum Policy, 2009). The number of students identified as ELLs in public schools for the 2012-2013 school year totaled 4.4 million students (NCES, 2015). More specific to my research in these pages, the State of Texas has the second largest enrollment of ELLs (832,000) in the United States right behind California (1.1 million) (Flores, Batalova, & Fix, 2012), accounting for 10% of the public school enrollment (NCELA, 2011). According to Batalova and McHugh (2010), Spanish is the most common first language.

Seventeen percent of students in Texas' public schools were identified as ELLs compared to national statistic, this number was 70% higher compared to the national share of ELLs in the PK-12 school system at 10% (American Youth Policy Forum, 2009). According to Ghosh, Hokom, Hunt, Magdaleno, and Su (2008), 80% of the total ELL population are located in grades K-3rd. In 2007, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) identified 129 languages spoken in Texas schools, and of those, Spanish was spoken by 92% of the ELL population (Ghosh, Hokom, Hunt, Magdaleno, & Su, 2008). Subsequently, an increasing number of ELLs are enrolling in schools where a large majority are struggling to learn and are underachieving due to their limited proficiency in English. Moreover, ELLs and their families also are laboring financially. According to Flores, Batalova and Fix (2012), in their study on the educational trajectories of English language learners in Texas, ELLs experienced more economic challenges than students who were identified as non-ELLs.

Additionally, the study also concluded that 90% of Hispanic ELLs were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches compared to 65% of students identified as non-ELLs.

The achievement gap between ELLs and all public school students is significant. According to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011), many ELLs are performing poorly academically. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), eighth grade ELLs performed an average of 37 points lower on the math section of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and an average of 42 points lower on the NAEP's reading section. Hernandez, Denton and McCartney (2008) determined there are five factors that account for the low achievement of ELLs. These factors include the following: (a) parent English language proficiency, (b) mother's marital status at the time of birth, (c) parent education levels, (d) single versus dual parent homes and family income. In the next section, I identify some of the challenges ELLs and educators face in the public school system in regard to state assessment accountability measures, transition, sense of belonging and grade configuration.

Examining Practice as a Result of Politics

Due to high stakes testing, educational administrators and policy makers throughout the U.S. are examining practices and school policies in the effort to better prepare their staff and students for the ensuing school years (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). An impending concern that has begun to surface, due to academic achievement not only for ELLs but for public school children in general, is the way grade span configuration is practiced in schools (Paglin & Fager, 1997), which has had a tremendous impact on the students and staff these institutions serve (Howley, 2000, 2002). Grade span configuration is the number and range of grade levels that a campus comprises (Anderson, 2012). Student transitions from campus

to campus increases when grade level configurations are reduced. Schools are generally configured according to factors that are outside the control of school administrators (Renchler, 2002).

Grade Configuration

Before 1948, the most common schools in the U.S. were one teacher classrooms established in small rural communities (Howley, 2002). Howley (2002) goes on to point out that studies began to emerge suggesting that, in contrast to the one teacher classroom setting, large schools established in centralized locations could provide better education and resources. As a result, the K-8 configuration was created. In small rural towns, where the city population was very small, K-12 schools were established. After both World Wars, because conditions in the way that people traveled improved, highways were constructed to save travel time. As a result, many rural towns were not in close proximity to highways, causing a decline in the rural economy. School administrators in these rural areas were forced to consolidate their schools for efficiency (Howley, 2002). Due to these changes, many small schools and K-12 settings closed. During this period, many districts responded to growing enrollments by creating junior high schools serving grades 7-9 (or 7-8) (Juvonen, Kaganoff, Augustine & Constant, 2004). Advocates of this approach argued that junior highs made it possible to prepare adolescent students for the academic rigors of high school without exposing them to substantially older students (Juvonen et al.,2004).

By the late 1960s, the middle school format was introduced. There were two types of grade configurations that emerged: the 5th-8th and the 6^{th}-8^{th} grade model. Soon middle schools gained new ground and eventually replaced the junior high concept (National Middle Schools Association, 1995). In keeping student transition to a minimum and improving

student achievement, several districts have experimented with K-8 (Hough, 2005). These types of schools account for 6,205 or 9.2% of U.S. schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). The benefit of this grade configuration is that all students only undergo one transition their pre-college years, which is the transition from 8th grade to high school.

Table 1 is based on figures obtained from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2012b) that shows the number of grade-span configurations for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade in the United States for the 2009-2010 school year. With the total number of elementary schools in the United States being 67,140, the most common grade configurations in the United States in 2009-2010 were the various combinations of Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), Kindergarten (K), and/or Grade 1 to Grade 5 (n = 25,264 schools).

Table 1.

U.S. Public Elementary School by grade span: 2009-2010

Grade Span	Number of Schools	Percentage of Total Schools
Pre-K, K, or 1st grade to grades 3 or 4	4,906	7.3%
Pre-K, K, or 1st grade to grade 5	25,264	37.6%
Pre-K, K, or 1st grade to grade 6	11,207	16.8%
Pre-K, K or 1st grade to grade 8	6,205	9.2%
Grade 4, 5, or 6 to grade 6, 7, 8	13,163	19.6%
Other grade spans	6,395	9.5%
Total all elementary schools	67,140	100%

Note. Adapted from "Digest of Educational Statistics: 2011" (NCES, 2012b)

Grade Configuration and its Effects on Transition

According to Anderson (2012), "the grade-span configuration of schools within a district determines the number of school-to-school transitions students in that district will experience" (p. 3). One complication that often transpires when grade configurations are enacted in such a way that consists of small grade-spans per campus is constant transition or movement of students from campus to campus. Howley (2002), in his study, stated that "every transition from one narrowly configured school to another seems to disrupt the social structure in which learning takes place, lowering achievement and participation for many students" (p. 7). This is important to consider since ELLs experience more transition issues, as well as learning concerns, than their English speaking counterparts who reside in the U.S. Not only do ELLs have to transition from one country to another, they have to make adjustments in learning a new language, new culture and new school (Krueger, 2009). There has been documented research that demonstrates that frequent transition has a negative impact on academic achievement, self-esteem and sense of belonging, with student populations like ELLs being the most negatively impacted by these constant shifts.

Before the era of accountability and student testing, there did not seem to be a correlation between grade configuration and student achievement (Alspaugh, 1998, 2000). However, "there is a substantial amount of research that demonstrates that decreasing grade spans, thereby increasing the number of students per grade, and therefore multiplying student's transitions from school to school negatively impacts student achievement" (Gregg, 2002, p. 1). Howley (2002) concludes that the most cost efficient ways of having students perform better academically is through smaller schools with broader grades. Duncombe (2002) affirms "that small to moderately size elementary schools and high schools may best balance economies of size with the potential negative effects of large schools" (p. 245).

Disadvantaged students, especially, seem to thrive in smaller elementary schools (300-500 students) and high schools (600 to 1000 students). Howley (2000) reveals that smaller schools are more effective in disadvantaged communities because students tend to have better relations with teachers and resources are more equitable for all populations compared to larger school campuses.

Transition and Impact of School Belonging

Relationships among students and staff are an important issue that must be taken into consideration, as students must feel they are an integral part of their school. Sometimes, schools are configured in ways that do not allow for relationships between the students, staff, and the community to thrive. According to Renchler (2002), when schools are configured in ways that promote "frequent student turnover, this can negatively affect a school's identity and sense of community" (p. 2). In addition, according to Paglin and Fager (1997), in these types of one and two grade schools, it is challenging for students to develop a sense of school pride and sense of belonging when they are not given the sufficient time and opportunity to experience interactions with their school climate, the building, and staff. More specifically, participation by at-risk populations such as ELLs are adversely affected.

Goodenow and Grady (1993) define the sense of belonging in a school or classroom as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment (p. 61). In their 1993 study, they found a strong correlation relationship between the aforementioned and motivation among Hispanic students. As further support, Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004) observed that students who have a better relationship with their teacher and believe

that they are more caring and fair perform better academically and have fewer school issue problems than students who do not have an established relationship with their teacher.

According to Cemalcilar (2010), students with a greater sense of school belonging possess the following characteristics: (a) are more social, (b) more motivated, (c) participate in more activities, (d) have better attendance, (e) higher self-esteem, (f) have better relationships with teachers and peers, and (g) value education more. These are important factors to consider because students that often have low self-esteem regarding their abilities can isolate themselves from participation in school activities (Ma, 2003). This is important to consider given the difficulties and risk factors that ELLs possess. Some narrowly configured campuses lose more than 35% of their total population each year to another campus. These types of configured schools have difficulties building a caring school community.

Students have difficulty becoming effectively bonded with and dedicated to their school since they know that, in one year, they will have to move to another campus. According to McMahon, Parnes, Keys, and Viola (2008), school belonging is absolutely topical due to the number of transitions and social stressors that regularly affect students as well. These researchers also stated that the majority of the students in their study had to reexamine their sense of connection to other individuals and their campuses as they moved to their new school site, which can be an arduous task both emotionally and socially. Urban schools normally have more stressors, fewer resources and more disadvantaged youth compared to suburban schools. This is important to consider because according to Anderman (2002), the stressors and resources could contribute to the differences in school belonging. Therefore, it is important that school districts consider school size and grade configuration when making decisions as they relate to school design and use.

Transition and Impact of Continuity of Instruction

Frequent transitions also impact the continuity of instruction and curriculum from campus to campus. According to De la Rue (2012), "it is not transition that creates decline in test scores during the transition year, but a lack of preparation" (p. 5). Some campuses are limited in the number of vertical alignment curriculum preparation meetings they have with their incoming and outgoing feeder schools. Therefore, there is very little communication from previous year teachers and administration with students' current year teachers. In a study conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL, 1998.), fewer than 50% of the kindergarten teachers in their study participated in meetings with the student's future 1st grade teacher. Likewise, less than one-fourth of the teachers participated in transition meetings to help prepare students, met with parents to explain the transition process, or prepared transition activities for students with special needs.

According to Masters (2005), "the knowledge accumulated by primary teachers—about individuals' understandings, interests, motivations and learning styles, as well as documentary evidence, in the form of schoolwork, from the previous year—usually fails to make the transition from one grade to the next" (p. 4). If student information does not transfer from one grade to the next, imagine the difficulty of communicating and transferring student information from campus to campus. Frequent transitions may negatively impact the continuity and consistency of instruction and therefore, can negatively impact student achievement. In a study conducted by Alspaugh (1998), "students that were involved in a pyramid transitions of multiple elementary schools into a single middle school experienced a greater achievement loss than did students in a linear transition of a single elementary school to a middle school" (p. 24). One can conclude that students suffered these losses due to the

frequency of transitions and lack of a continuum in curriculum. These findings are of note since some of the smaller rural districts in the Rio Grande Valley incorporate these types of grade configurations where multiple elementary schools feed into a single middle school.

Local Context

The Rio Grande Valley (The Valley) is comprised of four counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy and Star) located in the southernmost tip of Texas. The "Valley" is situated in the Region One Education Service Center, which is part of the statewide system of 20 regional education service centers formed by the 59th Texas Legislature to help school districts across the state (Region One, 2014). Located in South Texas along the U.S./Mexico border, the center serves in the seven county areas of Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata (Region One, 2014). The school population for Region One is about 411,828 students, with 97.5% of the population being Hispanic, 35% ELLs and 86% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2012a). With one of the highest poverty levels in the nation (Cohen, 2012), the Rio Grande Valley is mostly comprised of rural farm communities with some cities with large populations of residents. Currently, there are eight international bridges located in this region, with recent immigrants from Mexico enrolling on a daily basis at area schools. District leaders in this area have the unique and difficult job of helping ELLs transition from their native language of Spanish to showing enough mastery of the English language to achieve a passing standard on the state assessments.

Located in Deep South Texas, Adelante I.S.D. (a pseudonym) is located in the city of Adelante, TX. The population, according to the 2012 census, was 7,325 people. This district is under the jurisdiction of the Region One Education Service Center and serves about 3,500 students. The district resides in a small 4A community that is located about 6 miles north of

the Rio Grande River. The nearest port of entry is the Los Indios Gateway Bridge, which is located about 15 miles southeast of the city. According to the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), ninety-seven percent of the total students were Hispanic and 14 percent (about 479) of the students were identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). Table 2 identifies the ethnic distribution for the District.

Table 2

Adelante I.S.D. students by Ethnic Distribution

Ethnic Distribution	Count	Percent
African American	3	.01%
Hispanic	3,472	96.5%
White	107	3.0%
American Indian	6	.02%
Asian	2	.01%
Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Two or More Races	7	.02%

Note. Adapted from T. E. A. "TAPR: 2013-2014" (T. E. A., 2014b)

The district has a stable teaching and campus administration staff. 63% percent of the faculty has more than six years of teaching experience. According to the 2014 TAPR report, there are 238 teachers employed at Adelante ISD. Of those teachers, 183 are Hispanic, accounting for 77% of the faculty population. Table 3 identifies the teachers by ethnicity and sex.

Table 3

Adelante I.S.D. teachers by Ethnicity

Teachers	Count	Percent
African American	0.0	0.0%
Hispanic	187.1	78.4%
White	47.1	19.7%
American Indian	1.0	0.4%
Asian	2.6	1.1%
Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0%
Two or more Races	1.0	0.4%

Note. Adapted from TEA "TAPR: 2013-2014" (TEA, 2014b)

The district has one alternative academy, one high school (9^{th}-12^{th}) and one middle school (grades 7^{th}/8^{th}). There are four elementary campuses in the district that are configured as 2 grade span campuses. They are: Campus One (PK-K), Campus Two (1^{st} and 2^{nd} grades), Campus Three (3^{rd} and 4^{th} grades) and Campus Four (5^{th} and 6^{th} grades). The students currently make six transitions in the Adelante I.S.D. school system, which is a considerable amount, given that most students across the country make three transitions.

Grade Span and Demographics of the District

The district has had a long history of implementing narrow grade spans, leading to the creation of many elementary campuses. Table 4 lists the name of Adelante campuses and the grade spans for which they were responsible over the past fifteen years.

Table 4

Adelante I.S.D. Schools by grade span: 1998-2015

	Sanchez		Rodriguez	Larraga		Rivera
1998-99	EE-KG		1st-2nd	3rd-5th		6th-8th
	Sanchez		Rodriguez	Larraga	Del Valle	Rivera
1999-00	EE-KG		1st	2nd-3rd	4th-5th	6th-8th
	Sanchez		Rodriguez	Larraga	Del Valle	Rivera
2000-01	EE-KG		1st	2nd-3rd	4th-5th	6th-8th
2001-02	EE-KG		1st	2nd-3rd	4th-5th	6th-8th
2002-03	PK-KG		1st	2nd-3rd	4th-5th	6th-8th
	Sanchez	Rodriguez	Del Valle	Chavez		Rivera
2003-04	PK-KG	1st	2nd-3rd	4th-6th		7th-8th
2004-05	PK-KG		1st-3rd	4th-6th		7th-8th
2005-06	PK-KG		1st-3rd	4th-6th		7th=8th
2006-07	PK-KG		1st-3rd	4th-6th		7th-8th

Table 4 Continued

	Sanchez	Sauceda	Del Valle	Chavez	Rivera
2007-08	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2008-09	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2009-10	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2010-11	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2011-12	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2012-13	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2013-14	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th
2014-15	PK-K	1st-2nd	3rd-4th	5th-6th	7th-8th

Note. Adapted from TEA "AEIS Reports: 1998-2011" (TEA, 2013b)

These grade spans are critical to note because not only does the data show which campuses are two year grade span campuses, but the spans between the campuses have changed conjointly with the grades housed on the campuses.

Based on A.E.I.S. data, student enrollment has steadily increased within the past fifteen years. Student enrollment per grade level ranges from 200 to 300 students at the elementary level. As depicted in Table 5, the Adelante I.S.D. educated a total of 2,772 students during the 2000-2001 school years. During the 2012-2013 school years, this number grew to 3,712 students, an increase of about 1000 students. With this expansion, some decisions will need to be made by the school district regarding which grade configuration is best suited for students to be successful academically. Table 5 identifies student enrollment by year and grade.

Table 5

Enrollment by year and grade from 2000-2013

Grade	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13
PK	133	125	157	153	151	162	188	191	197	201	256	309	343
K	200	196	185	222	215	230	255	267	272	250	244	255	234
1	236	222	216	206	249	253	246	284	299	285	272	278	273
2	221	251	232	214	203	238	230	260	269	294	282	263	272
3	206	213	255	232	215	232	255	252	250	255	291	286	264
4	224	193	208	243	214	212	213	268	232	250	253	292	283
5	218	236	194	214	251	236	232	224	274	247	259	264	294
6	206	219	231	196	220	249	229	237	219	278	236	256	252
7	210	213	219	233	201	240	259	246	239	233	282	241	266
8	197	194	200	218	229	205	238	250	253	234	236	290	251
9	229	253	290	265	266	287	233	268	281	289	261	264	299
10	167	193	147	197	194	200	253	214	242	235	236	225	206
11	169	138	155	158	153	154	176	177	164	195	220	216	206
12	156	159	142	140	166	175	176	216	205	200	244	254	206
Total	2,772	2,806	2,831	2,893	2,928	3,076	3,185	3,354	3,396	3,447	3,576	3,698	3,712

Note. Adapted from TEA "AEIS Reports: 1998-2011" (TEA, 2013b)

This steady increase in student enrollment may have an impact on the decision-making of administrative staff. There has been a considerable amount of increase of student enrollment especially in the lower grades, which will eventually affect the secondary campuses. In addition, there is a significant increase of students enrolling in the PK and K grades as well. This has been primarily due to the addition of the 3 year old program held in conjunction with the Los Niños Head start Program which began during the 2010-2011 school year. Previously, the Adelante I.S.D. only offered full day PK and K programs for students within the District. With the addition of Headstart and the 3-year-old program, there has been a need to hire more certified bilingual teachers to educate these students in these programs. The 3-year-old program numbers were not included in the data regarding student enrollment.

Demographics of the ELL Program

While there has been a substantial increase in the number of students, the ELL population percentage-wise has also increased within the past ten years. However, the enrollment does seem to have stabilized within the past three years. Accountability standards have changed drastically since the inception of No Child Left Behind. The assessments have become more rigorous and special populations, such as ELLs, are expected to achieve at the same level as their White counterparts. Table 6 lists the ELL student enrollment from 2000 through 2013.

Table 6.

ELL student enrollment in Adelante I.S.D. from 2001-2013

01-02	*02-03*	*03-04*	*04-05*	*05-06*	*06-07*	*07-08*	*08-09*	*09-10*	*10-11*	*11-12*	*2013*
381	*391*	*383*	*400*	*433*	*451*	*480*	*498*	*526*	*491*	*479*	*510*

Note. Adapted from TEA "AEIS Reports: 1998-2011" (TEA, 2013b)

Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences

The Adelante District is configured with one primary school (Sanchez) for Pre-K-3 through kindergarten, one campus (Sauceda) for 1st and 2nd graders, one campus (Del Valle) for third and fourth graders, one campus (Chavez) for fifth and sixth graders, one middle school (Rivera) for seventh and eighth graders, one high school (Adelante High School) campus for ninth through twelfth graders and one alternative secondary campus (Adelante Academy). The students at Adelante I.S.D. make six transitions from campus to campus during their Pre-K through 12th grade years.

It was my role as the researcher to participate in an exploratory research case study of the Adelante I.S.D. grade-span configuration. Stebbins (2001) tells us that "social science exploration is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life" (p. 3). Stebbins (2001) goes on to state that action scientists explore when there is generally little to no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they wish to study and consider that the investigation is warranted. Secondly, it was my intent to work with the district of Adelante to study this grade-span configuration issue and identify its effects on the sense of belonging of ELLs and on the continuity of instruction from campus to campus. I also hoped to identify generalizations about the topic under study and propose a new course of action to help the District improve academic achievement for all ELL populated campuses.

Statement of Problem

Grade configurations in the Rio Grande Valley vary from one district to the next. While larger districts employ neighborhood schools that house grades PK-5th grade, many

smaller districts have several narrower grade configurations due to the small enrollment of students and other reasons. As stated previously, the students in the Adelante I.S.D. make six transitions from campus to campus from PK until their high school years. According to a Bilingual report conducted by Ghosh, Hokom, Hunt, Magdaleno and SU (2008), the majority of the ELL population in Texas are enrolled in the elementary grades. In the Adelante I.S.D, the total enrollment of students of the 2012-2013 school year from PK-5th grade was 1,963 (Table 5). The ELL enrollment from PK-5th was 393 students. The total enrollment of ELLs for the District was 510 students (Table 6). The enrollment of the ELLs population in the elementary grades is equivalent to that of the Bilingual report. However, percentage wise, ELLs account for 20% of the total student population in the elementary grades, a very large number considering the state average is 16% for the entire district. Students began the administration of the state exam in the third grade, which also includes special populations like ELLs. Students in the elementary grades made four transitions from PK-5th grade, which is, as pointed out earlier in these pages, especially difficult on ELLs. Campuses lost half their student population every year to the next campus.

Inconsistency in the delivery of instruction of certain programs, discontinuity of curriculum, and horizontal alignment between campuses also exist. In addition, staff members voiced concerns regarding the lack of communication between campuses. Consistency in program implementation is vital for a program to be successful. Programs must be implemented consistently and alignment must be present if the system that supports these programs is to be adequate. A study conducted by the Texas Education Agency of the Adelante I.S.D. (Zepeda & Johnston, 2012), indicates a lack of curricular alignment that has negatively impacted the academic achievement of students with special needs, including

ELLs. When students have an opportunity to be enrolled in one campus from their early childhood years until their pre-adolescent years, they experience less stressful experiences and perform better academically than students who are enrolled in campuses that have frequent turnover in grades (Paglin & Fager, 1997; Alspaugh, 2000). Research regarding the benefits of grade-span configurations are needed (Howley, 2002) because empirical research on the relationship of grade span, transition and its effects on ELLs is scarce.

Purpose of Study/Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of the present grade-span configuration and successive school-to-school transitions on ELLs sense of belonging and to examine the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D. This researcher used qualitative data which was acquired through participant interviews, one focus group interview, and document analysis. The following research questions guided me through the study.

From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs:

1. How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D.?
2. How does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.?

Theoretical Framework

I applied Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory to this case study. Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) define transition as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). They go on to say that "a transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own perception of change"

(p. 28). In this study, I examined the relationship between grade-span configurations and transitions and how they affect ELLs' sense of belonging and the continuity of instruction.

Types of Transitions

According to Schlossberg et. al. (1995), there are three types of transitions that exist: anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and non-event transitions. Examples of anticipated transitions are events that predictably occur in the course of a life cycle, such as marriage, the birth of a child, a child leaving home to start school, getting a job, or retiring. An unanticipated transition is an event that is not predicable or scheduled in life. Examples of these types of events would involve crises and other types of unexpected events or circumstances that are not the consequences of life-cycle transitions (Pearlin & McKean, 1996). Non-event transitions are ultimately life-changing events an individual had expected to happen but did not transpire, which could be a degree that was never earned, a job that, for whatever reason, did not emerge, or the marriage that never occurred.

The authors stress the importance of identifying three main factors in understanding the meaning that transition has for a certain entity. The first factor would be to identify the type of transition whether it is an anticipated, unanticipated, or a non-event transition. The second factor would be to identify the context of the transition. For example, what is the relationship between the person and the transition and where is the transition taking place. The last factor would be to identify what type of impact the transition would have on the individual's life and would this transition have an influence on the person's routines, roles of assumptions, and relationships? When an individual is experiencing a transition, it is not the event itself that is important to consider, but the impact of the transition on the individual (Schlossberg et al., 1995)? The researchers further state that "often people in the midst of

one transition experience other transitions, which makes coping especially difficult (p. 35). This is important because ELLs are assimilating into U.S. schools and are in the process of transitioning not only into a new country, but a new language and a new school every other year. For the purpose of the study, I identified the school to school transitions that the students experience in Adelante I.S.D. as anticipated transitions because students enrolled in the District are expected to make these changes from campus to campus every other year. I hope to gain an understanding of the relationship between the transition and its impact on students and their instruction.

Boykin's Triple Quandary Theory

I also employed Boykin's triple quandary theory. This theory describes three personality types: mainstream, minority and the Black-cultural experience. According to Boykin (1986), "mainstream forces are the most pervasive, and all members of the society have contact with the mainstream realm of negotiation" (p. 65). Minority experiences are related to social, economic and political oppression. The Black cultural experience is a "culturally indigenous basis from which Afro-Americans interpret and negotiate social reality" (p. 66). I've adapted this to include ELLs and their experiences as they transition from country to country, language to language, and school to school. ELLs are in a continuous process of navigating and negotiating through multiple traditions, cultures, languages, norms and identities. Their participation and experiences have been perceived by detractors as incompatible with those norms and beliefs of U.S. society. Teachers of ELLs play and integral role in preparing students for second language acquisition and cultural adaption.

Role of the Researcher

This case study was focused on a 4A district in the Rio Grande Valley in deep South Texas, specifically ELLs enrolled in multi two-grade span elementary campuses. For the past ten years, the researcher has served in the capacity of a school administrator in three campuses within this school district. The researcher has served as an assistant principal for four years at a 4th, 5th, and 6th, grade-span campus, five years as principal at a 3rd-4th grade-span campus, and as an assistant principal at the high school campus. The researcher's current position is that of principal of Adelante High School.

I have witnessed the issues affecting ELLs relating to sense of belonging, transition, and continuity of curriculum between campuses. I also observed the difficulties that ELLs experienced transitioning to a new campus and embracing different campus philosophies and cultures as a result. I have also witnessed the difficulty in planning and aligning a consistent district bilingual curriculum from campus to campus and observed campus staff working diligently to implement best practices to aid in the scholarly success of ELLs. However, because of the many complications that arise every other year due to elementary campuses losing half of their population to the next campus, this frequent student turnover prevented campus staff from planning effective lessons consistently. It also hindered ELLs from creating lasting ties to their respective campuses, which prevented them from creating a sense of belonging with their teachers and other staff members.

My role as an administrator has given me the opportunity to see the frustrations that ELLs, bilingual teachers, and administrators experience trying to adequately serve under the debilitation of these types of grade configurations. My role will be to visit these campuses as a participant observer, gather data from the field, and report findings related to continuity of

curriculum and sense of belonging of ELLs. As previously stated, these students are not only making a transition from country to country and language to language, but also from campus to campus.

Operational Definitions

The following key terms with the description of their meanings will aid the reader in identifying their significance to the study.

Curriculum Standards

What the learner is expected to be able to do in one subject, grades K-12 (Glatthorn, 2000, p. 5).

Continuity of Curriculum

The vertical recurrence of curriculum elements in different courses over a period of time (Curriculum Overview, 2013).

ELL

"Term used to refer to students who are in the process of learning English as a second language" (Carrier, 2005, p.8).

Grade-span configuration

The range of grades that a school includes (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002, p. 189).

Horizontal alignment

The arrangement of the curriculum being taught by educators in a grade level (Tolbert, 2013, p. 1).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Federal law passed under the George Bush Administration representing legislation that attempts to accomplish standards-based education reform. The primary function of the

federal law is to close the achievement gap between groups of students by requiring greater accountability and offering increased flexibility and choice. Each state is required to administer standardized achievement assessments that must be aligned with standards in English, math and science (Tolbert, 2013; Texas Education Agency, 2013).

Sense of Belonging

"The extent to which student's feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (Goodenow and Grady 1993, p. 61).

Transition

"A student's movement from one school to another as a result of promotion to the next grade level located in another education setting; sometimes referred to as a 'school-to-school transition.' It can also mean transition into a school setting for the first time from a home environment" (Anderson, 2012, p. 19).

Triple Quandary

The perplexity or uncertainty over what to do with in at least three socio-educational contexts (Boykin, 1986). Teachers in this study, expressed concerns over how to assist their students in transitioning from country to country, language to language, and school to school.

Vertical alignment of curriculum

Planning curriculum across grade levels, from Kindergarten through high school (Tolbert, 2013).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

ELLs in public schools throughout the United States have experienced many challenging situations, such as increased testing and accountability, rigorous curriculum initiatives, local, state and federal mandates, and other issues related/non-related to education. In addition to these factors mentioned, the ELL population has experienced increased difficulties in the areas of language barriers, transition issues, limited programs availability, lack of trained staff, limited community and parental involvement and a negative campus culture (Echevarria, Short, & Powers; 2006; Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, Tinajero, 2002; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, Feinman, 1994; Verdugo & Flores, 2007). An impeding concern that has developed across the nation, as a result of the ways that districts configure their grades levels, are transition issues and their effects on students that frequently move from campus to campus due to narrow grade span configurations (Alspaugh 1998; Howley, 2002). Researchers have also shown that school transition and considerable school sizes are contributors to the decrease in academic achievement of disadvantaged and low income populations (De La Rue, 2014; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995).

An area of concern brought about by the results of grade configuration identified by this researcher is its effect on the sense of belonging of ELLs to their prospective campus(es) during their elementary experiences and the continuity of curriculum of the bilingual program in Adelante I.S.D. The literature review consists of topics that could influence the district and campus configuration, which could have implications that affect curriculum, transition, professional development, and communication between educators across grade

levels. These factors could very well affect the learning and social well-being of ELLs as well. I will outline, in the literature review, the following topics: the English Language Learner, mobility and the achievement gap, sense of belonging, transition issues and its effects on the social, cognitive and psychological system of students, continuity of curriculum, risk factors faced by minority youth, and the perceptions of educators who educate ELLs.

Texas Data on ELLs

As previously stated in Chapter I, the ELL population is growing at a rapid rate. If these numbers continue to rise, the ELL population will be the majority of students in three decades within the state of Texas (Ghosh, Hokom, Hunt, Magdaleno and Su, 2008). The majority of these students are located along the border of Mexico. However, "the number of counties with at least 5 percent LEP students increased from 117 counties in 1996-97 to 160 counties in 2006-07" (Ghosh, Hokom, Hunt, Magdaleno and Su, 2008, p. 7). There has also been an increase in ELL populations in the large urban areas like Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. As is true of the focus of this research, the majority of these students are in the elementary grades. According to the researchers, 80% of the total LEP population is enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten to the third grade. The researchers estimate that 27% of the total population in the first grade are ELL.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines an English Language Learner as a "person who is in the process of acquiring English and has another language as the first native language" (2012b, p. 1). In addition, TEA also uses the term "limited English proficient student" interchangeably with the term ELL. There are many different languages and dialects that are spoken by the diverse ELL population in the United States. A brief

published by the American Youth Policy Forum (2009) supports this claim, stating, "ELLs differ in ethnicity, language, culture, educational background, and socioeconomic strata" (p. 1). Additionally, educators and policy makers struggle to properly address this large diverse population. Compared to English speaking students, ELLs remain economically and educationally disadvantaged. Gándara (2007) asserts that ELLs are different than most low-income students because, aside from needing financial and educational support, these students also need language support. She further explains in her research that students that are financially disadvantaged need a variety of programs due to the lack of educational resources and finances in their homes and communities. There are a variety of procedures that districts must adhere to when enrolling ELLs that are new to the district. One of the procedures districts must consider is the type of bilingual program to offer their ELLs.

Bilingual Programs

There have been a number of programs that have been utilized over the years to instruct ELLs in the English language. According to Ovando, Combs and Collier (2006) "while federal and state policies have a strong impact on school programs, many policy decisions that focus on the specifics of program implementation are made at the local school level" (p. 35). Further, they sustain that the main difference between the programs is how much the primary language of the students is used for instruction.

Structured immersion is a program endorsed in the 1980's by English-only supporters and adapted from the Canadian bilingual program. However, this program did not follow the same concept as the Canadian program because it did not incorporate the use and instruction of the student's native language, but instead, provided all instruction only in English

(Ovando et al., 2006). Consequently, students were not successful in this program because it did not utilize the second language acquisition process.

Transitional or early exit has been the main model for bilingual education in the 1970s and 1980 and the most favored by federal and state funding. In these type of classes, "students who are not yet proficient in English receive instruction in their native language in all subject matters but only for a limited number of years (two to three), with a gradual transition to all English instruction" (Ovanda et al., p. 39). These programs were developed to teach English quickly with the main goal of mainstreaming students in the general classroom as quickly as possible. The main problem with this program that critics argue is that it is perceived by educators as another form of segregation because these students are taught in separate groups from the general student population. Secondly, research by Ovando (2003) and Ovando and Collier (1998) have concluded that the longer the students remain in a quality academic program, the more they are able to reach equality with native English speakers.

The maintenance model, commonly referred to as late-exit or developmental bilingual education, is the opposite of the early exit program, which does not emphasize that students be exited as quickly as possible. Instead, students are instructed in both languages in all content areas throughout their years of schooling. These programs have been implemented since the 1970 and 1980s and were primarily geared for students from grades K through fifth grade. In a study conducted by Ramirez, Yuen and Ramey (1991), the researchers found that students who were enrolled in the late-exit classes were the only students who were performing similarly with native speakers on standardized tests in English.

Two-way bilingual or dual-language education was originally developed in Canada in the 1960s for students to receive their education in both French and English. In California and Texas, the 90-10 model is a two-way program that is gaining some popularity. According to Ovando et al. (2006), "for the English speakers it is a bilingual immersion program, emphasizing the minority language first, for the language minority student it is a bilingual maintenance model, emphasizing their primary language first" (p. 42). In this model, both sets of students remain together for the entire day and serve as peer tutors for one another. Another two-way program is the 50-50 model where half of the instruction is in English and the other half is in the native language for grades K through 12. These types of programs promote bilingual proficiency and academic achievement for both sets of students.

Program and Instructional Practices (Curriculum Map)

In order for a program to be implemented consistently, it must be properly aligned from one grade to the next. There is common scope and sequence, as each grade builds on the next and knows what they are responsible for instructional wise. A study conducted by Robledo-Montecel and Danini-Cortez (2002) identified common characteristics that contribute to high academic performance of students served by bilingual programs.

With regards to the classroom level, the program model, curriculum and instruction, teacher expectations, and program articulation were considered key characteristics that must be carefully reviewed and implemented. Schools with successful program models shared the following characteristics: model was grounded in sound theory; teachers participated in selection and design of model, and exhibited best practices associated with enriched, not remedial, instructional model. Successful programs identified in this study all had the following in common with regards to curriculum and instruction: they were designed to meet

the needs of the students and there was alignment present between the standards, assessments, and professional development. Comparatively, teachers of ELLs all displayed the following characteristics: held high expectations for their students, valued diversity, and created inclusive classroom environments. Schools that excelled in program articulation had "a common program of instruction that was properly scoped, sequenced, and articulated across grade levels and had been aligned with developmentally appropriate practices" (Robledo-Montecel & Danini-Cortez, 2002, p. 18).

English Oral Development

According to Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes and Kwok (2008),"very little is known about what educators can do to accelerate oral English-language development among ELLs" (p. 1016). The researchers stated further that school personnel should exercise caution when considering which types of interventions to utilize. However, while bilingual program designs vary in terms of the use of native language, the majority of the programs recommend daily oral English language instruction for students to reach a level of English proficiency.

Researchers have suggested that ELLs require three to five years to achieve advanced proficiency in oral English (Ovando *et. a*l., 2006). When ELLs are exposed to increased amounts of English proficiency instruction, they are more likely to use English, interact and establish friendships with native-English speakers, and utilize more complex language learning strategies (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2005). In addition, there is a strong correlation between English oral proficiency and English literacy as well.

According to Genesee et al., (2005), "English use both in the classroom and outside of school is positively associated with the development of English proficiency" (p. 368). ELLs that tend to use more English in the classroom than their native language with their

peers and teachers tend to make stronger gains in English (Saville-Troike, 1984). However, it is important for teachers of ELLs to pay close attention in how they group students accordingly with native English speakers. Teachers must carefully identify the task that the students engage in, how they are pairing non-ELLs and ELLs, and also the language proficiency of the ELL student. These types of considerations will help the type of language learning experience for these students. ELLs that use English more frequently within their families tend to demonstrate higher levels of English proficiency than ELLs from families that use English less frequently (Umbal & Oller, 1994). In addition, the use of English at home was a stronger predictor of English oral proficiency than English use at school. However, when English was used at school, this served as a stronger indicator for English reading achievement than English spoken at the home (Hansen, 1989).

School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students (Best Practices)

It is imperative that educators provide supportive learning environments for their language minority students that allow natural language, academic, and cognitive development to succeed in both their native and English language (Thomas & Collier, 2002). In their study, the researchers identified several factors that influenced the success of program for ELLs.

The first factor that they identified was the potential quality of the type of program for ELLs, referring to the way such can influence student achievement. The second factor is the realized quality of the type of program for ELLs. This refers to the "degree of full effective implementation of a program in terms of administrative support, teacher skills and training to deliver the full instructional effect of the program" (Thomas & Collier, 2002, p. 304). The third factor is the breadth of program focus, which indicates the linguistic,

cognitive, and academic development to the ELLs levels of English and in the students' native language. The fourth factor is the quality of the school's instruction environment. This exemplifies the degree to which the school becomes a supportive learning environment that supports parental involvement and the instructional program. This way, the student's native language is supported and not lost during the acquisition of the second language. The fifth factor identifies the quality of available instructional time, which speaks to the degree to which instructional time is maximized fully. With this in mind, ELLs benefit from instruction driven by students' cognitive, academic, and linguistic developmental needs and *with* their English speaking counterparts as opposed to being taught in isolation.

Schools with programs that exhibit criteria reflective of these five factors are considered "long term and enriched forms of bilingual/ESL instruction that provide for most or all of the documented achievement gap to be closed in the long term (Thomas & Collier, 2002, p. 305). Conversely, schools with programs that instill little to none of these factors are considered ineffective.

Mobility and the Achievement Gap

According to research by Rumberger and Larson (1998, Rumberger, 2003), mobility occurs when students make non-promotional school changes. These types of changes occur during the school year, when students move to a school in the same district or outside the district, and can happen more than once a year. This is significant because according to Fong, Bae, and Huang (2010), ELLs were twice as likely to transfer to a school in another district as opposed to one in the same district. Rumberger (2003) concluded that low-income students and students living in single parent (namely, mother-only) are more apt to move than other groups of students. In this same study, 40% of all students that were identified

moved three to four times over two years. This proves a vital statistic because among children with limited English proficiency, about 35% of the population changed schools frequently (Skandera & Sousa, 2002). Moreover, percentages for students who are identified as migrant are higher at 40%. Factors that have led to these high rates of mobility can be attributed to family income, population density, and home ownership. As stated previously, ELLs are already identified as low-income and of low socioeconomic status (SES), and their home environments are not as stable as those families whose incomes are higher.

In a study conducted in Arizona on ELLs and patterns of mobility, researchers concluded that "1/4 of Arizona students experienced at least one mobility event in each of the four years examined and the proportion was higher for ELLs than for any other students" (Fong, et al., 2010, p. i.). Furthermore, their findings were very much comparable to national findings and research on mobility. For example, the U.S. General Accounting Office conducted a study that included 15,000 3rd grade students and found that "children from families whose native language was not English were more than likely to be mobile" (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994, p. 2). In a similar study focused on the state of North Carolina, Xu, Hannaway, and D'Souza (2009) found that ELLS had more increased rates of mobility than other students. In their study of ELLs in the Santa Ana Unified School District, researchers Mitchell, Destino and Karam (1997), concluded that mobility increases the time needed to become proficient in English. This finding is alarming since many ELLs are identified as a group of students that are extremely mobile and in need of services in order to be proficient in English. According to Zehr (2010), "our nation's schools with high rates of student mobility have larger than average percentages of students who are low-income, receive special education, and are English-language learners" (p. 1). This is

significant because researchers have indicated that student mobility is associated with lower student achievement (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Rumberger, 2003; Severns, 2010; Zehr, 2010).

Researchers studying students and mobility have concluded that there is a correlation between high rates of mobility and low student achievement (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Xu, Hannaway & D'Souza, 2009, Skandera & Sousa, 2002). In a study by the U.S. General Accounting Office (1994), it was concluded that students who have switched schools more often are more prone to be below grade level in reading and math than those who have not changed schools at all. The Accounting Office also determined that those students who made constant changes in their schooling were also more susceptible in repeating a grade compared to those students who had never changed schools. Once again, this is important to consider since research has concluded that ELLs are more mobile than other student groups. Another challenge that ELLs encounter that negatively impacts their academic achievement is their enrollment in campuses that have narrow grade spans, increasing the amount of transition or movement from campus to campus.

Sense of Belonging & Community

The way students perceive and interact with their educational community plays an important role in how they perform academically and psychologically. Students strive to identify with students, staff, school and social issues that they can relate to in order to feel a sense of affiliation. If students perceive their educational environment negatively, they can have a tendency to withdraw. For their definition and theory of "sense of community," McMillan and Chavis (1986) developed four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

First, an individual must feel the community is "safe" and that they have a personal investment to the group. Sense of belonging is an attribute of membership involving "the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group" (p. 10). Second, individuals are more likely to gravitate toward a community where they feel that they can contribute to the group and vice versa. Third, the individuals must feel supported by the community and have their needs provided. Finally, the individuals must experience a shared and emotional connection with the community. There are researchers that have shown that in order for students to identify with their schools positively and perform well academically, it is crucial for them to develop a sense of belonging in the school community (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005).

In McMahon's and Wernsman's 2009 study, students who perceived their class to be in discord, academically challenging, and competitive felt less associated with their educational community. In a study conducted by Leclair, Doll, Osborn and Jones (2009) on perceptions of the classroom environment between ELLs and non-ELLs, ELLs scored themselves significantly lower in academic efficacy than their non-ELLs peers. Sanchez, Colon, and Esparza (2005) concluded in their study that a sense of belonging was important for Latino males and females in academic outcomes such as success in English and academic motivation. They also affirmed that students who developed a greater sense of belonging with their school had less concerns attendance wise.

Battistich and Hom (1997) surmised that "higher levels of school sense of community were associated with significantly less student drug use and delinquent behavior" (p. 2000). They argued further that a helpful and caring community could possibly neutralize the

consequences of an underprivileged upbringing. Goodenow and Grady (1993) recognized the strongest correlation between belonging and motivation to be found more in Hispanic students than any of the other ethnic groups identified. They also pointed out how crucial a nurturing environment is in securing this interconnection. As mentioned, there are other issues that are affected due to transition grade configuration. While a negative sense of community and belonging can be affected by frequent transition and grade configuration, there are researchers that propose that academic achievement is also impacted adversely (Alspaugh, 1998, 2000, Howley, 2002).

Grade Configuration/span and its Effects on Academic Achievement

Studies examining the link between grade configuration and student achievement have been on the rise over the past fifteen years. Howley (2002) cites two studies based in Maine and Connecticut asserting that student achievement in grades 6 and 8 is higher when these grades are connected with elementary rather than secondary schools. In Connecticut, for example, students in sixth grade attained higher scores when that particular grade was associated with lower grades (K-6, K-8).

Alspaugh (1998) discovered in his research that sixth grade students, who had recently switched schools in fifth grade, experienced an achievement loss when compared to sixth grade students enrolled in K-8 schools. In this same school, ninth grade students who had changed from an elementary school to a middle school and then from a middle school to a high school faced a greater achievement loss than students who shifted from a K-8 to a high school (Alspaugh, 1998). Alspaugh (1998) also stated that students do not appear to adapt to transitioning over time. He also concluded that students involved in a transition of multiple elementary schools into a single middle school experienced a greater achievement loss than

did the students in transition from a single elementary school to a middle school. Finally, mixing students from multiple elementary schools in the transition may increase the transition achievement loss (Alspaugh, 1998). Alspaugh (2000) also determined that students that attended middle schools experienced greater achievement loss in the transition to high school than students that attended schools configured as (K-8) schools.

Students tend to do well academically when they are enrolled in smaller schools with many grade levels configured per school facility. Lee and Smith (1993) found that eighth grade students in schools that contained smaller classes of eighth grade students demonstrated higher achievement and were more engaged in school activities. Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, and Russo's (2002) Maryland study found that students in K-8 settings had students performing at a higher level on standardized tests, than did students in K-5 and 6^{th} -8^{th} settings. Howley (2002), in his Texas focused studies, found that schools configured in K-12 models improved performance among students of socioeconomic status and were more cost effective compared to other schools. Howley (2002) nicknamed these types of K-12 schools the "Texas Miracle" and stated that these institutions are usually established in small rural communities where they tend to be the only school in the district.

Offenberg (2001) found that K-8 students had higher levels achievement on the ninth grade exam than did students from middle schools. Moore (1984) found that both 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade reading achievement was higher for students in K-8 schools than in schools having a 6^{th} -8^{th} configuration. Franklin & Glascock (1998) found that 6^{th} and 7^{th} grade students in K-6, K-7 and K-12 schools performed higher on state achievement tests than students in 6^{th} -8^{th} and 7^{th} -9^{th} schools. After analyzing data from 232 schools, Wren (2004) determined the following three points: (1) as grade span configuration increases, so does achievement, (2)

constant transition can affect a student negatively and (3) the more grade levels that are housed in a school, the better the students do academically on assessments.

Becker's (1987) study found that the grade-span effect on academic achievement depended on the student's socioeconomic status (SES). Most students classified as ELLs are also labeled as being low SES, which specifically refers to students living in poverty or by limited financial means. SES is an economic and sociological measure based on a person's work experience and/or an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others. Common SES factors are comprised of the following: race and ethnicity, limited English proficiency, special needs, income or poverty, adult education, and the percentage of secondary schools in the district (Gregg, 2002). The study found an over-all achievement advantage for moving the sixth grade in an elementary configuration (ex. K-6, K-8) versus a middle school configuration. The students that benefited the most from these change were students low in socioeconomic status.

Lee and Smith (1993) found that eighth-grade students in schools that contained a wider grade span with fewer students per grade had higher achievement, less variance in achievement, and more engagement with academics. Eccles, Lord and Midgley (1991) found better educational outcomes in K-8 schools with the suggestion that higher K-8 outcomes are because the schools have a smaller number of pupils per grade and have an altered school environment (Eccles *et al.,* 1991).

In their Florida study, Schwerdt and West (2011) found students who attended elementary schools ending at grade 5 had an advantage over those attending K-8 schools in mathematics and language arts, but their academic performance in both subjects dropped dramatically when they switched to middle school in 6^{th} grade. After the 6^{th} grade transition,

middle school students fell by .12 standard deviations in math and .09 standard deviations in reading compared with students at K-8 schools, and then that gap continued to widen throughout middle school and into high school (Schwerdt and West, 2011). In addition to academic achievement, narrow grade configurations also increased transition issues, which can affect a student's mental state, and more specifically, the cognitive, social and psychological parts of the human system.

Instructional Discontinuities

Transitioning from one campus to the next can be especially stressful for some students. For ELL students, it can be particularly challenging due to the additional adversities that they must deal with. According to Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm and Splittgerber (2000), there are "four identified major systemic transitions that occur as people transition from home, school and the workforce: home-to-school, elementary school to middle/junior high school, middle/junior high school to high school, and high school to college, work, or the military" (p. 325). The researchers also indicated that there were two types of transitions that students generally experienced as they progressed through the educational system. A development transition is one where an individual experienced either a "physical, intellectual, and emotional change" (p. 325). In contrast, systemic transitions were configured into the organization of the public school system. For example, according to Rice (2001), "these transitions can exists within schools (e.g., changing teachers and classmates across academic years in elementary school) as well as across schools (e.g., moving from elementary to middle schools, moving from middle school to high school)" (p. 373). The researcher also indicated that sometimes students can experience both transitions at the same time.

There are documented research studies where researchers suggested that systemic transitions are especially difficult for certain groups of students (Rice, 2001; Anderson, et al., 2000; Howley, 2002). This is noteworthy given what we know about the background of ELLs and the barriers they currently face. In fact, researchers have already indicated in their studies that frequent transition has a negative impact on the academic achievement of students in general (Alspaugh, 1998, 2000; Wren, 2004; Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, & Russo's, 2002). According to Rice (2001), these two types of transitions that students experienced as they progress through the school system introduce students to three types of instructional discontinuities as they transition from middle school to high school: "discontinuity in school climate, discontinuity in educational practices and discontinuity in social structures" (p. 374).

School Climate

According to Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009), school climate refers to the quality and appeal of school life. The researchers further indicated that "this climate included norms, values, and expectations that supported people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe" (p. 182). Haynes, Emmons, and Ben-Avie (1997) define school climate "as the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influenced the children's cognitive, social and psychological development" (p. 322).

Cohen, McCabe, Michelli and Pickeral (2009) further indicate that a good school climate promoted a better connection to school. They also indicated that an important aspect of school climate "is that it's relational and involves how "connected" people are to one another in school" (p. 185). For students enrolled in narrow grade-span configurations, relationships between students and teachers can be quite challenging to develop due to the

frequent turnover of students, a point that can be corroborated in Paglin and Pager's (1997) assessment that "one and two grade schools present the challenge of how to preserve a sense of continuity and stability when all or half of the student population turns over every year" (p. 11). Constant transition and turnover inhibit the consistency of relations with the educational community, resulting in bonds with the school community that are short term and suffer from not being given sufficient time to strengthen. This, of course, negatively affects the school climate. Narrow grade configurations also influence, to a degree, the type of family school partnerships that arise in the academic setting. Since there is such recurrent turnover of students at these campuses, it is difficult to develop partnerships that are sustaining. As far as community support is concerned, Moffit, in his dissertation (1996), concludes that "narrow grade configurations have a negative impact on family school partnerships" (p. 195).

Rice (2001), stated that "the degree to which members of the school community feel safe is one indicator of the quality of the interactions in the school" (p. 375). With the increase in school violence across the United States, school safety is an issue that is receiving much attention from school administration and policy makers. Both students and staff have indicated that safety in schools is a top priority that should be taken into consideration. However, ELLs experience additional safety concerns because of the areas where they live and the experiences that they and/or their families encountered in Mexico. These experiences have influenced their participation in the school setting. According to a policy brief from Van Roekel (2008), two-thirds of the ELLs population comes from low-income families, which stands to reason given that ELLs normally live within impoverished communities.

Educational Transitional Practices

As students make the transition to different settings, they are faced with an increased number of educational practices. For students that make frequent transitions from school to school, this can be especially problematic due to the number of discontinuities that exist between the campuses. According to Margetts (2002), "discontinuities are associated with the changes in the physical environment of buildings and classrooms; differences in the curricula; differences among the teaching staff; changes to the peer group; and changes related to parents" (p. 105). Some examples of changes in the physical environment are the location of the campuses within the school district, the size of the buildings/classrooms, size of the playground, staff to child ratios, age group of children associated with the school, and the size of the school population (Margetts, 1997).

Herrera and Murray (2005) indicate that "curriculum and instruction is one of the most contemporary, harmful, and emergent academic challenges for ELLs and the trend is toward increasingly reductionistic curricula driven by a strict focus on high stakes assessment at the national, state, or local levels" (p. 47). An additional challenge for curriculum and instruction for ELLs is the irregularity in curriculum content amongst narrow grade campuses. Margetts (2002) states that "discontinuities associated with the curriculum and educational goals generally involve the move from a developmental approach to a cognitive approach" (p. 105). The researcher further identified other differences, such as rules and routines, verbal instruction, a focus on numeracy and literacy, and changes to the daily schedule (Margetts, 2002).

Vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment between all campuses is key for instruction to be sustaining, efficient and continuous. Narrow grade span campuses do not

offer many opportunities for effective curriculum planning practices between schools. For bilingual programs and the students that they serve, alignment is significant. A pivotal finding in Abelardo Villarreal's (1999) study is that "curriculum and instructional alignment between primary and elementary school, elementary school and middle school, middle school and high school, and high school to university is critical for the smooth transition of ELLs from one level to the next" (p. 34). He also explains that "fragmentation of curriculum and philosophical difference creates an ethos of confusion and disconnectedness" (p. 34). Unfortunately, in narrow grade campuses, effective education practices in planning and alignment are difficult to implement.

Transition and its Effects on the Social Structure

The literature has also indicated that a student's social development skills are also hindered by frequent transitions. Social development skills are features in a student's behavior that allows a student to grasp and acclimate across a variety of settings (Steedly, Schwartz, Levin & Luke, 2008). Walker (1983) defines social skills as a collection of capabilities that allows an individual to start and uphold social relationships and manage effectively with the larger school environment. According to Howley (2002), "every transition from one narrowly configured school to another seems to disrupt the social structure in which learning takes place, lowering achievement and participation for many students" (p. 7). Howley (2002) also specifies that the students most negatively impacted by these practices are students from impoverished backgrounds.

According to various researchers, girls tend to have a harder time dealing with transition than boys (Crocket, Petersen, Graber, Schuleners & Ebata, 1989; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). For example, girls enrolled in a middle school with grades

configured 7th to 9th grade showed a decline in self-esteem levels compared to 7th grades girls enrolled in a K-8th grade setting. A contributing factor to this study is the change in classroom structures from elementary to secondary setting. Students who spent the entire day together in elementary school might have little contact with one another once they reach middle school, which leads to a decrease in opportunity for interactions and has an impact on the stability of friendships (Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002).

According to Wertlieb & Weigel (1987), children who experience various stressful life events within a short time span are at risk for behavioral and academic difficulties. According to the researchers (1987), these events include such experiences as "entry into a new school, move to a new home, death of a loved one, family disruption due to marital conflict serious illness and so on" (p. 204). Rutter (1979) identified six family variables, which were related to child psychiatric disorder: "low social status, overcrowding or large family size, severe marital discord, paternal criminality, maternal psychiatric disorder and admission into the care of the local authority" (p. 325). The researchers further concluded that those children who experienced any three of the stresses together saw their risk increase significantly. Moreover, "children who were deprived and disadvantaged were more than likely to have multiple admissions and were more likely to suffer from the long term adverse effects" (p. 326). This is significant because ELLs and their families have already been identified as possessing many of the family variables identified by the researcher. These stress factors attributed to school transitions pose additional stressful experiences for ELLs already experiencing a variety of life altering events, such as learning a new language, assimilating into a new culture, living in poverty and in single-parent households.

Transition and its Effect on Psychological Development

Students entering middle grades are normally entering the period of adolescence. This period in itself can be considered a transition due to the fact that students are experiencing a period of self-discovery, growth both emotionally and physically, and the need to express their individuality (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Gutman and Midgley (2000) further reveal that "early adolescence not only encompasses the biological and psychological changes associated with puberty but, also for many children, includes the social and learning environment changes that characterize the transition from elementary to middle school" (p. 224). Many young adolescents become more negative about school and themselves after the transition to junior high school. Studies have generated evidence and supportive conclusions that state changes in adolescent's attitudes and beliefs are due in part to differences between the elementary and junior high school environments (Blyth, Simmons, & Ford, 1983; Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

Transitions affect many complex domains within the brain. Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, Feinman (1994) examined the effects of school transitions during adolescence on the self-system and perceived school and poor social contexts on disadvantaged Latino, white and black students. "The self-system is a vital person-centered mediator of long-term developmental outcomes; it consists of affective, cognitive or motivational, and behavioral domains" (Seidman, et al., p. 508). The researchers (1994) concluded that the self-esteem, class preparation, and grade point average of urban minority students dropped considerably after the middle school transition. What's more, "the more intensely youth experienced daily hassles with the transition to a new school, the lower their expectations of academic efficacy, the less they prepared for class, and the poorer their grades" (Seidman, et al., p. 520).

A contributing factor for the negative psychological changes related to adolescence is attributed to the incompatibility between their needs and social environments in the school system (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & Mac Iver, 1993). This method was phrased the "stage-environment fit" approach by Eccles and Midgley (1989). The basis of this method was for teachers to identify their student's needs and the classroom environment that is afforded to them and make the appropriate changes so that students feel comfortable while maneuvering the educational setting (Eccles, et al., 1993).

Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) indicate in their study that many types of classroom environmental changes exist in middle schools. For example, their studies document changes such as "an increase in teacher control, and a decrease in teacher efficacy and in the quality of teacher-student relationships" (p. 538). The researchers further concluded in their study that these classroom environmental changes contributed to negative impact on student motivation. Students in this adolescent period require constant nurturing and personalized attention, greater independence and a less controlling nature of the middle school structure (Eccles et al., 1991). Unfortunately, the secondary structure at narrow grade level configurations does not offer these types of services for ELLs due to grade arrangements. Students who have the greatest difficulty making systemic transitions are those who simply are not academically prepared for the next school level (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000). Unfortunately, those students who fall under this category are ELLs as a result of their documented academic struggles.

Exposure to Violence & Perceptions

As stated previously, adolescence is a difficult time period of transition for most individuals as they make the move from elementary to secondary settings. However, it seems

that youth from economically challenging environments have a tougher time making this transition as compared to their white counterparts. Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Kleanov and Sealand (1993) stated in their study that "neighborhoods are commonly believed to influence behaviors, attitudes, values and opportunities" (p. 353).

ELLs, specifically those residing around the border areas, are experiencing additional challenges due to the increased levels of violence by the drug wars in Mexico. Over 28,000 people have died in Mexico due to drug-related violence since 2006 (Casey, 2010). The drug violence has taken a toll not only on the people of the Mexico but those who are educated in U.S. schools. Unruh (2012), specified that "because of the escalating violence in Mexico, stories that ELLs who have lived there and/or travel between Mexico and U.S. may include incidents such as kidnapping, extortion, rape, sieges, and assassinations" (p. 1). These factors have placed these students at risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to the researcher. According to Unruh (2012), "PTSD can negatively impact the achievement and behavior of immigrant children in U.S. schools" (p. 1). These issues have led to an additional encumbrance that ELLs must confront as they progress through the school system.

According to a report published by the Child Trends Data Bank (2013), children are more prone to be exposed to violence and crime than are adults. The report also states that 60 percent of children were exposed to violence in 2011 as either victims or witnesses to the incident. The report also indicates that "children exposed to violence are more likely to suffer from attachment problems, regressive behavior, anxiety, and depression and to have aggression and cognitive problem" (p. 2). This is alarming because challenged communities are often located in areas that are unsafe and where students are witness to violent activities.

Aisenberg and Herrenkohl (2008) state that class and race are in relation to exposure to violence. Researchers have indicated that exposure to violence is more prevalent in those who are disadvantaged, reside in large urban areas, and are of African American and/or Latino origin (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008, Gutman & Midgley, 2000, Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis & Ramierez, 2001). Researchers have also indicated that children who are raised in these environments are more likely to experience cognitive deficiencies, absenteeism, and drop out of school than children from comparable families living in more wealthy neighborhoods (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Sealand, 1991; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; McLoyd, 1998).

Educators play a very influential part in the lives of students. The classroom teacher, a central figure in the educational community, plays a pivotal role in motivating students. The teacher is not only responsible for inspiring students to become lifelong learners but also for creating a positive atmosphere where student needs are met. The following section will identify teacher beliefs on bilingual education, teacher efficacy, teaching practices for serving ELLs, and how these beliefs influence the way that ELLs learn and thrive in a school system.

Teacher Efficacy

Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Koy (2001) found that trust was an integral factor in creating strong relationships between teacher and student. The researchers further stated that students perform better academically when teachers report greater trust, which can be paralleled with student socioeconomic status. They concluded “the larger proportion of poor students in the school, the lower teacher’s perceptions of trust” (p. 13). In addition, they

claimed that poverty plays a negative role in the relationships between students and parents and the educators.

Barber and Mourshed (2007) stated in their report that the top school systems all shared three common attributes. These school systems agreed that (a) recruitment and retention of top teachers was key, (b) development of teachers into instructional leaders was extremely crucial, and (c) the school system is performing at optimum levels where delivery of instruction is achieved by all students. Teachers in such systems have the engrained belief that, regardless of race, language spoken, or background, students can learn. This "belief" has been coined "self-efficacy." Similarly, teacher efficacy has been defined and studied by many researchers. Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman (1977) see teachers' sense of efficacy as "a belief that the teacher can help even the most difficult or unmotivated student" (p. 136). Teacher efficacy is especially important for ELLs because they are disadvantaged students who are not very fluent in English, are of another race, and are often poor. These are the types of students are often challenging to teach and represent those who teachers have difficulty closing the achievement gap for.

Attitudes towards Teaching ELLs

The way a teacher interacts and creates relationships with students has a large impact on a student's success at school. Researchers have shown that some teachers tend to have negative attitudes towards and low expectations for disadvantaged students than more financially stable or affluent students (McLoyd, 1998; Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford & Arias, 2005). In a study conducted by Farkas, Sheehan, Grobe and Shuan (1990), they discuss the theory of "perceptual bias." As stated in this theory, "teachers perceive lower levels of performance when evaluating poor, African-American, or female students, and give lower

grades even when the students' actual performance is no different from that of children with more favored characteristics" (p. 128). This has greatly affected how students perceive and perform in the educational community.

An additional concept that was discussed in Rist's (1970) study was that of the self-fulfilling prophecy. The belief is if the teacher demands and expects high performance, the student will obtain it. Conversely, if the teacher has low expectations for the student, he or she will disengage from school and thus perform poorly academically (Rist, 1970, Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shuan, 1990). Teachers and their own social/status background and origin tend to play a factor on how they perceive and relate to students. According to a study by Alexander, Entwisle and Thompson (1987), "teachers from high status backgrounds will be less familiar with, and perhaps less comfortable with, the social surroundings of working class and poverty level youngsters" (p. 13). The researchers also indicate that the teacher's lack of background experience with their students will make it difficult for them to forge bonds with their student. Farkas et al. (1990) concluded that African American teachers reported better work habits from their Hispanic and African-American students compared to their white counterparts. Alexander et al. (1987) concluded that high SES background teachers had a difficult time relating to minority and low SES students, and as a result, teachers held lower expectations for these students and assessed the educational community negatively when working with these types of students.

Karabenick and Noda (2004) reported that teachers are considerably less confident about teaching ELLs in comparison with non-ELLs, and many monolingual teachers are not prepared to adequately meet the needs of ELLs. The study also reported that 66% of the teachers surveyed thought ELLs "took up more of their time than non-ELLs" (p. 65). 30% of

the teachers surveyed believed ELLs were regarded less favorably by their fellow teachers and administration. The researchers assert that there was a need in the district to "focus training on building skills, expanding resources, and enhancing teachers' sense of efficacy and confidence, and, therefore, motivation to work with the ELL student population" (p. 73).

In a case study conducted by Yoon (2008), the researcher concluded that it is a teachers approach and belief that matters the most when educating ELLs. The study further reported that ELLs need teachers who care and who are culturally sensitive to their needs. The study found that non-ELLs (students) tend to follow the teacher's practice in relating to ELLs. For example, in one class where the teacher encouraged ELLs to participate in the classroom activities, non-ELLs tended to interact with ELLs. On the other hand, the researcher observed a classroom where the teacher was non-inclusive of ELLs, and the mainstream students in this class did not interact or participate with ELLs in classroom activities. The researchers concluded that "teachers' active or passive involvement played in a role in the mainstream peers' interactive positioning of the ELLs as acceptable or inacceptable" (p. 517).

Teachers have acknowledged that students from impoverished background are hard to teach (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Rist 1970). Further, teachers believed these students come from broken homes, poor housing conditions, abuse and neglect, and other factors that make life more difficult. Such factors have led teachers to believe that their efforts in teaching are insignificant due to the fact that most of a student's motivation and performance in learning depends on his or her home environment. For example, in a study conducted by Flores and Clark (2004), 30% of the population sampled had low teaching efficacy in their capability to teach. The main contributing factor to this issue was the population sample's belief "that

what happens in their classroom is affected by factors beyond their control" (p. 249). Dee (2005) concluded that "racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics between students and teachers have consistently large effects on teacher perceptions of student performance" (p. 163). Interestingly, these concerns seem to emerge more frequently among students of low socioeconomic status and students in the South. Specifically, the study reported that among students from low socioeconomic status, "the odds of being seen negatively are thirty-five to fifty-seven percent higher when evaluated by a teacher who does not share the race/ethnicity/gender of the student" (p. 162).

Further, the attitudes towards immigration, ELLs, and the educational programs that serve them have increasingly been portrayed negatively in the U.S. These attitudes have been displayed through the media in states such as California, Arizona, and Massachusetts where voters have banned bilingual education and placed ELLs in one-year full immersion programs that do not utilize the native language as part of the instructional program (Proposition 227 California 1998, English for Children 203 Arizona 2000, and Chapter 71A, Question 2, Massachusetts, 2002). The voters and supporters in these states have been largely swayed by the public opinion that "English-Only" educational programs are the correct ones to employ for ELLs as opposed to research based ones (Krashen, 2003).

Horencyzk and Tatar (2002) stated that "teacher's approaches and behaviors toward culturally diverse populations do not exist in a social vacuum; rather they tend to reflect and be affected by the norms and values both of the larger society and of the educational settings in which the interactions take place" (p. 436). Furthermore, Nieto, in her textbook *Affirming Diversity* (2008), indicates that people in general "take in the ideologies and beliefs in our society and act on them whether they actively believe them or not" (p. 8). According to a

study conducted by Walker, Shafer, and Liams, (2004), "negative attitudes, especially those resulting from negative experiences with ELLs and those based on ethnocentric bias, are difficult to change" (p. 154). Further, the researchers report that "entrenched community attitudes may be the most difficult to change" (p. 156). Teachers and administrators need to pay close attention to the attitudes in their communities and seek to evaluate whether these mindsets are culturally positive and accurate. If educators seek to adopt attitudes that are culturally incongruent and carry these outlooks into the educational community, this can be very difficult for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome. In addition to educational challenges ELLs must deal with, they must also struggle with society's misconceptions and attitudes on race and background.

In a study conducted by Byrnes, Kiger and Manning (1997), teachers who exhibited the most positive attitudes towards ELLs, displayed the following characteristics: (a) they had received some type of formal training in teaching linguistically diverse children, (b) completed a graduate degree, (c) had experience in working with ELLs, and (d) came from a region that had a large language minority population. In this study, teacher attitudes were most progressive in Arizona, followed by Utah, and then Virginia. In a comparable study conducted by Youngs and Youngs (2001), the researchers found that the more teachers were given exposure to cultural diversity through "foreign language courses, courses in multicultural education, ESL training, and work with culturally diverse ESL students, the more positive teachers were likely to be about working with ESL students" (p. 117). According to Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford & Arias (2005), bilingual certified teachers tended to more conscious and supportive of the use of Spanish in the classroom for instruction than monolingual teachers or ESL teachers. The authors contributed the following factors as

reasons behind their research: more familiarity with language and culture and the availability of training and resources. In this same study, the researchers also indicated that "Latino teachers tended to have more positive attitudes toward ELLs' native language, compared with non-Latino teachers, and teachers who are bilingual had more positive attitudes than teacher who are monolingual" (p. 311).

Interestingly, teachers who were racially biased held a belief that disadvantaged students came to school with too much shortfalls that made teaching them virtually impossible (Pang, 2001). Campus leaders who have teachers with such mindsets on their respective campuses should be leery of employing such teachers. This type of negative attitude and lowered sense of efficacy can be contagious and could gain access and spread like a disease into the campus culture. There are some types of discrimination and racism that can be easily detected and taken care of, while other forms are hidden and harder to detect due to the way such is on display in the workplace amongst students of color. According to Pang (2001), prejudice that is shown through name calling and other related actions are more noticeable and easier to suppress. However, there are attitudes demonstrated by people who are deceitful and practice these behaviors in more concealed areas. These are the most difficult kind of prejudice to defend against and eradicate from the workplace and classroom. This type of racism has been labeled cultural racism. According to Walker et al. (2004), this is defined as "a way of thinking, speaking, and responding that becomes so pervasive in the mainstream culture that it is almost invisible to the masses in the mainstream culture" (p. 135).

Even the best of teachers can get frustrated if they are not properly trained to work with special needs student, curriculum or assessment. These feelings of apprehension and

unpreparedness can quickly turn to negative attitudes and behaviors. Teachers who were unaccustomed and uncomfortable with working with ELLs may, in time, begin to blame their negative feelings on the ELL population they are serving (Walker et al, 2004).

Perceptions on Professional Development for ELLs

The past few years have demonstrated that the U.S. is currently undergoing tough economic times. Because of this period of financial uncertainty, school districts across the states have cut their budgets to prepare for the worst, which could very well come in the form of less financial aid from state and federal governments. With state and federal funds in short supply, hiring certified, endorsed specialists in certain disciplines is not a practical answer at this time. The consequence of not being able to hire these specialists is that students who are in dire need of teachers who can effectively teach them will have to do without these professionals. The student population that normally feels this type of "neglect" are the linguistically challenged. Unfortunately, the age of school accountability and high stakes testing has brought additional burdens and stresses to teachers and administrators throughout the United States. With the initiation of NCLB, every student and student sub-populations count towards state and federal ratings.

Walker et al. (2004) reported that teachers experienced an increase in frustration due to the inclusion of special population students, having to adjust to new state standards and the pressure to prepare students for the state assessment. Teachers throughout the states spend more time in the classroom teaching and less time in professional development activities that would prepare them to meet the demands and needs of the diverse student population they serve (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This has greatly affected teachers who lack the preparation and skills to work with students with diverse learning and language needs. This has begun to

take its toll on ELLs who are enrolled in public schools throughout the United States. Current perceptions from educators are that teachers are in need of staff development to properly serve ELLs (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Walker, Shafer & Liams 2004; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). According to Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford and Arias (2005), "teachers who are not properly trained can cause emotional and psychological impairment in student's educational futures" (p. 296). In a study conducted by Karabenick & Noda (2004), teachers felt self-assured in their ability to teach most students, however, these same teachers lacked confidence in teaching ELLs. The teachers conveyed a willingness to work with ELLs, however, but lacked the preparation to serve them due to a shortage of quality professional development programs. In a similar study conducted by Walker et al. (2004), 87% of the teachers surveyed stated that they never received any type of preparation program in working with ELLs. 70% of the mainstream teachers were not enthusiastically interested in having ELLs in their classroom. 25% of the teachers felt it was the responsibility of the student to acculturate and adapt to the American way of life. Teachers in this same study attributed reluctance to work with ELLs to a lack of time and training. While teachers are justified in feeling overwhelmed due to acclimating to new standards and assessments, their actions are not justified for their refusal to work with ELLs due to lack of time and training.

According to McCloskey (2002), statistics regarding teachers who have never received training are pretty standard across the United States. He projected that 45% of teachers throughout the United States work with ELLs in their classrooms, but only 12% of these teachers have had trainings to work with these types of students. These figures are alarming especially due to the large numbers of ELLs that are currently enrolled throughout the nation. Not to mention, monolingual teachers who have not had the opportunity to work

with ELLs often exhibit high anxiety and frustrations when an ELL is enrolled in their classes. Teachers who were not properly trained stated that they felt unprepared and useless in working with these types of students (Walker et al., 2004).

In a study conducted by Batt (2008), teachers felt that not all of their colleagues who work with ELLs on their campus were qualified to work with them. The participants also indicated that this was one of their campus' greatest obstacles. They further indicated that teacher who service ELLs were deficient in understanding diversity and multicultural education. The participants also stated there was a shortage of ESL and bilingual teachers employed in their school, and due to the large workload and demands of teaching second language acquisition, many teachers were leaving the profession. This is especially disheartening because a shortage already exists among teachers who serve ELLs. **Heritage Language and its Use in Educating ELLs and Prospective Teachers**

As teachers, it is extremely important that one is knowledgeable in one's content area. In today's teacher certification programs, teachers can no longer gain one time certification for teaching all subjects and all levels of students. Instead, in college and teacher preparation programs, teachers are required to focus their studies in specific pedagogy levels and specializations. The same is true for prospective bilingual teachers who are preparing to enter the work force. However, their preparations are more demanding because they are not just focusing on certification tests and student pedagogy. In addition to these content areas, they are also taking foreign language courses to help them develop the correct academic language and grammar to properly communicate with recent immigrants. On some elementary campuses, bilingual teachers are in self-contained classrooms where they are responsible for teaching all core areas to bilingual students.

Hispanics comprise 44.7% of the student population in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2005). In the Rio Grande Valley alone, Hispanics account for 96% of the total student population. In addition, 36% of the total student population are currently registered into bilingual or ESL (English as a second language) classes (Texas Education Agency, 2003). Due to these large numbers, bilingual education teachers who are competent in Spanish academic languages are highly sought after, especially due to the stringent requirements and demands of NCLB and high stakes accountability.

As stated previously in the introduction of this research, there are a variety of programs utilized to service ELLs. The students are normally placed in a particular bilingual program, depending on both the number of years living in the United States and the school district. In a study conducted by Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey (1991), it was discovered that when students are enrolled in classes which utilize their heritage language, they tend to perform better in all content areas compared to ELLs who did not receive instruction in their heritage language. After performing a series of longitudinal studies, Collier (1992) concluded that "the greater amount of L1(heritage language) instructional support for language-minority students, combined with balanced L2 (English) support, the higher they are able to achieve academically in L2 in each succeeding academic year, in comparison to matched groups being school monolingually in L2" (p. 205).

Rodriguez (2007) conducted a study which involved 40 University of Texas at Brownsville students enrolled in classes to prepare them for a degree in bilingual education. The study focused on their experiences with the Spanish language, their perceptions of the importance of Spanish as part of the preparation program and the importance of academic Spanish in their future use as teachers. However, the results were mixed because some of the

participants had elementary schooling in Mexico while the rest had their education in the United States. Obviously, those participants who were educated in Mexico had higher levels of academic Spanish proficiency than their American counterparts. While the majority of the American teachers grew up speaking Spanish and having one or both parents who spoke only Spanish, the introduction of English in elementary school caused them to eventually only speak English in schools. Therefore, by transitioning to English in their primary years, they lost some of their academic proficiency in Spanish. However, both groups of teachers felt that the Spanish courses that they took as part of the teacher preparation program were adequate and useful in the development and maintenance of the Spanish language (Rodriguez, 2007).

Perceptions on Parental Involvement of Latino Parents

It has been stated, in the world of education, that it takes a village to raise a child. This message has been an underlying principle that has stressed the importance of the involvement of teachers, administrators, the community and parents in the education of students. In fact, NCLB has dedicated section 1118, Title 1 of the Act solely for incorporating parental involvement into the education system (NCLB, 2001). It is clear that the national government has mandated that schools work to involve parents to work towards the development of a child.

Researchers have shown that there is a positive correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement (Flaxman & Inger, 1992; Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995). A primary concern regarding disadvantaged parental involvement is that it is nonexistent in some schools (Moles, 1993). According to Moles (1993), the lack of involvement could be attributed to the following factors: “limited skills and knowledge

among parents and educators on which to build collaboration, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools" (p. 30). There are many added benefits for involving parents into their child's education. Besides academic achievement and higher self-esteem, the opportunity to engage with partnerships with parents can promote social and emotional growth for children (Dunlap & Alva, 1999). In the same study, teachers stated that discipline also improved due to parent's presence, which created accountability in the school and in the public.

Teacher perceptions regarding the lack of parent involvement has led to a belief that disadvantaged parents are not interested in the education of their children (Floyd, 1998; Moles, 1993). In a study conducted by DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho (2005), the researchers found that the bulk of pre-service and in-service teachers "continue to blame the home environment and the parents' lack of value toward education for culturally and linguistically diverse students' low academic performance" (p. 45). However, Floyd (1998) states that "low turnouts at meetings, workshops, and other elaborately planned programs are common" (p. 123). These types of incidents in schools have continued to shape teachers' attitudes that parents are not concerned in their child's education. Unfortunately, teachers often see this lack of involvement in the traditional school setting as a lack of caring (Lopez, 2001).

Conclusion

Hispanics are currently the fastest growing ethnic group and trends forecast that this group will soon be the majority. Hispanics are also an under-educated group that has one of the highest drop-out rates in the United States. The ethnic composition of ELLs is largely of Hispanic origin. ELLs are currently well below the achievement gap in many content areas.

The factors for their low academic achievement can be contributed to the low expectations of teachers, poverty, racism and language.

The way that a school is configured can have many positive and negative influences on students and their achievement. When a school has fewer grades per campus, students will have to make many transitions before entering high school. The broader the grades configured on a campus, the better learning environment it is for the student. Constant movement or transitions can harm a student in a variety of ways. Research has stated that frequent transitions can impose negative factors upon students such as low self-esteem, loss of academic achievement, and a student's inability to socialize.

ELLs are currently undergoing many new developments of their own, transitioning into a new country, culture, language and schooling system. These students already have some challenges in front of them before they even set foot in a classroom. Many are living below the poverty line, reside in low-income housings areas, and are struggling academically. These students are still expected to perform on state assessments and some of them will be expected to take these them in English within a year or two of moving to the United States despite possessing limited skills in English. With these factors in mind, ELLs need to be enrolled in campuses where they can make the least amount of transitions.

Teachers who educate ELLs need to have a belief that students are capable of learning and making advancement in their education. Researchers have recommended practices regarding teachers' attitudes, professional development and the use of native language in instructions. The majority of monolingual teachers do not feel prepared enough to work with ELLs, while some teachers do not want to work with these types of students due to a variety of beliefs. Bilingual teachers are the most prepared to work with these types of

students; however, many leave the teaching profession due to burn-out. ELLs tend to do better academically if their native language is used alongside the second language (English).

ELLs can maximize their potential in an environment where they do not feel threatened, are accepted because of their background and culture and the staff are properly trained. These types of environments do exist, namely in districts where administrators, along with school board members, are willing to create campuses that have broad grade levels and students make the least amount of transitions. ELLs are able to succeed in these environments because the instructional programs are consistent, the staff is trained in multicultural education, teachers are able to plan vertically and horizontally, and students are able to develop roots and a sense of identity within the campus.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to explain the research methods used to respond to the questions set forth in the research. That said, I used a qualitative case study design to address the focuses addressed in my questions. According to Stebbin (2001), in order for the researcher to be effective in the field, they must be flexible and open-minded while looking for data. It is my role as researcher to "acquire an intimate, firsthand understanding of the human acts being observed" (Stebbins, p. 6). I will then disaggregate the data and determine generalizations about the object(s) being studied. Yin (2003) states that the goal of an exploratory case study is "to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry" (p. 6). The researcher further indicates that case studies rely on interviews from people involved in the study and direct observations of events being studied.

I presented in the previous Chapter research on grade configuration and its effect on academic achievement, instruction discontinuities, mobility and educational practices. I also provided research on transition and violence and its effects on ELLs. I further identified research on teacher's perception of bilingual education, teacher efficacy, and teaching practices for serving ELLs. The results from this study are meant for administrators, teachers and educational practitioners who have the privilege of educating ELLs and for those who have the responsibility of making decisions that affect their educational environment.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to identify the impact of the present grade-span configuration and successive school-to-school transitions on ELL's sense of belonging and

the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of the Adelante I.S.D. This case study used qualitative data acquired through participant interviews, a focus group interview, and document analysis. This study was classified under the epistemological philosophical assumption. In correlation with this paradigm, the researcher was a participant in the study and spent time in the field with the subjects being studied (Creswell, 1998). I collaborated with participants at Adelante I.S.D. and sought to identify issues that affect ELLs as a result of disruptions in their educational environment due to transition.

The following research questions were designed and helped guide the researcher through the study. From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs:

1. How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for the ELLs in Adelante I.S.D.?
2. How does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses for the Adelante I.S.D.?

As stated in the first Chapter, this exploratory case study will be located within the paradigm of Schlossberg's et al. (1995) transition theory.

Research Design

To best serve my research topic, I conducted a qualitative research study. According to Creswell (1998), **"**qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher built a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Merriam (1998), states that qualitative research is "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us

understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Merriam (1998) also identified several characteristics of what constitutes qualitative research.

I was the primary individual for collecting and analyzing data. I also served as a participant investigator in the field which allowed me to be physically present in the location of the study in order to observe and document behavior in the natural setting. I was able to utilize the findings and conclusions from the study to construct theories, concepts, and/or hypotheses. My research was rich in descriptive data, included detailed accounts of interviews from the participants, and coding and analysis of participant's accounts and citations. The study was conducted in the elementary campuses within the Adelante I.S.D. in order to study the students and the educational environment they were educated in. The research design for this study utilized a case study approach. Yin (2003) defined case study in the following manner: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 13). As stated in Chapter I, it is the role of the researcher to participate in an exploratory case study of the Adelante I.S.D. grade-span configuration. Exploration focuses on developing theory from data where qualitative research stresses methodology and the collection of data (Stebbins, 2001).

Site Selection

As the setting of my study, it is essential to recognize that Adelante I.S.D. is configured with one school for students in preschool and kindergarten, one school for students in 1st and 2nd grade, one school for students in 3rd and 4th grade, one school for students in 5th and 6th grade, one junior high for students in 7th and 8th grade, one high school

for students in 9th -12th grade and one alternative secondary academy. The students at Adelante I.S.D. made six transitions from campus to campus during their PK to their 12th grade years. Students in the elementary grades made four transitions from pk-5th grade, which is especially hard on the ELLs due to many factors described in the previous Chapters. Campuses lose half their student population every year to the next campus, making it difficult for these students to create relationships with the learning community.

I interviewed bilingual educators from the following campuses: Sanchez Elementary, Sauceda Elementary, Del Valle Elementary and Chavez Elementary (pseudonyms). The schools district was selected for the following reasons: the grade configuration of the elementary campuses, the enrollment of ELLs in the district, and the District's Performance-Based Monitoring Intervention Staging (PBMIS) from TEA, specifically the Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language component.

Grade Configuration

As depicted in Table 4 of Chapter I, the district has utilized different grade configuration practices within the past 15 years. Currently, the district employs the following grade configuration system for their elementary campuses: Sanchez Elementary (PK-K), Sauceda (1st – 2nd), Del Valle Elementary (3rd-4th) and Chavez Elementary (5th-6th). As previously affirmed in Chapter I, the students in Adelante I.S.D. complete six transitions from campus to campus upon graduation from the high school. The method in which the district is configured is significant because the students are constantly transitioning from campus to campus, and the research identified has established that this movement can be detrimental to student achievement and success, especially to students from second language acquisition backgrounds.

Enrollment of ELLs in Adelante I.S.D.

Adelante I.S.D. is situated in Deep South Texas and in close proximity to the Texas/Mexico Border. According to recent data from TEA, there are 510 students identified as ELLs in the district, representing 14% of the total student enrollment. Additional data from TEA also indicates that 82% of the total student population is economically disadvantaged, and 96.2% of that population is Hispanic. As depicted in Table 6 in Chapter I, the ELL population has steadily increased over the past ten years. Because of the recent guidelines enforced as to how ELLs are calculated in both state and federal accountability, it is significant that pro-active measures are implemented to help these students succeed.

Adelante I.S.D. Bilingual Program Design

The mission statement of the Adelante I.S.D. bilingual program is to insure that all students of limited English proficiency achieve their full academic potential. English Language Learner students will learn to read, write, and speak English so that they can effectively and fully compete in the world they live in.

The bilingual program design that is utilized in Adelante I.S.D. is the Transitional Bilingual Program (TBP) Early Exit model. According to the definition utilized by Adelante's program design, the TBP model is a bilingual program whereby English Language Learner students receive native language instruction for concept development while acquiring English. English instruction in the TBP model gradually increases as the students begin to transition into English instruction. Upon meeting the program exit requirements, the students are mainstreamed into an all-English curriculum. The TBP model is primarily designed for ELL students in grades Pre-K through sixth grade who have their parent or guardian's permission to attend bilingual programs.

Students are identified as beginning, intermediate or advanced in accord with their level of language proficiency. The identification of beginner is utilized if they speak little or no English (LAS 1), are so limited in English that written achievement tests (required upon entry for students entering grades 2-12) cannot be taken or considered as valid, and may demonstrate literacy skills in native language appropriate to grade level. The intermediate classification is identified for ELLs who have some oral English (LAS 2), have minimal reading and writing skills, and if able to take English achievement tests, scores at very low percentile on either total reading or total language and demonstrates mastery of beginning level objectives. Lastly, students are identified as advanced if they have good oral English skills (LAS 3-4), have English reading and writing skills but have not reached 40% on both total reading and total language subtest of the English achievement test, and demonstrate mastery of the intermediate level objectives.

TEA Performance Based Monitoring Intervention Staging (PBMIS)

According to the TEA website (TEA, 2014a), the Program Monitoring and Interventions (PMI) Division reviews, evaluates, monitors, and intervenes with campuses and districts to make sure that students are succeeding in the local setting. One of their major responsibilities is to monitor and intervene in bilingual education/English as a second language, career and technical education, NCLB and special education programs. Additional information for these activities are identified in 19 Texas Administrative Code §97.1071, *Special Program Performance; Intervention Stages.* For the purpose of this study, the research will present the district's information as it relates solely to bilingual education/English as a Second Language (BE/ESL). From time to time, the TEA PMI

Division will conduct on-site visits to identified school districts to address concerns revealed in longitudinal data from the district.

According to the Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings for Adelante I.S.D. (Zepeda & Johnston, 2012), the PMI division assigns stages of interventions to the school district based "on an assessment of risk for low performance for students served in special programs, and on the longitudinal history for low performance for students served in special programs" (p. 3). Stage 1 is the lowest stage of intervention assigned, while stage 4 is the highest. Table 7 lists Adelante I.S.D.'s staging in the PBM intervention system.

Table 7.

Staging in the PBM intervention system for Adelante I.S.D.

Program	Staging	Year
BE/ESL	3	2007-2008
BE/ESL	4 (On-site visit & review)	2008-2009
BE/ESL	4 (Year after On-site Review)	2009-2010
BE/ESL	3	2010-2011
BE/ESL	3 (On-site visit and review)	2011-2012
BE/ESL	3	2012-2013
BE/ESL	3	2013-2014

Note. Adapted from Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings for Adelante I.S.D. (Zepeda & Johnston, 2012)

As the data indicates, Adelante I.S.D. has been staged for interventions for the BE/ESL for the past few years, including staging at level 4. According to the report, the state

team was particularly concerned about the "continued low performance of students served in the BE/ESL program" (p. 4).

Participants

Six elementary bilingual teachers from Adelante I.S.D. were selected through a purposeful random sample (Patton, 1990). According to Patton (1990), these types of sampling strategies are beneficial for credibility purposes, but they are not intended for generalizations or representations. Participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria: number of years' of teaching experience in bilingual education, years of teaching experience in the Adelante School District, and teacher recommendations from district central office personnel. I interviewed at least one bilingual teacher from each elementary campus up to sixth grade. Campuses that are subjected to STAAR testing could have more than one bilingual teacher interviewed. Sixth grade is the first year that identified ELLs are administered the state assessment in English and not in their native language as in the previous grades ($3^{rd} – 5^{th}$). The participants were interviewed twice and also participated in a focus group interview forum with the researcher. I expected to identify perceptions of the bilingual teachers as they relate to the issues presented in the literature review and guided by the research questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected utilizing the following field methods: open-ended semi-structured participant interviews and a focus group interview. Permission was requested from the superintendent of schools through a formal proposal letter and meeting. Once permission and approval were granted, I then met with each campus building principal to brief them about the study and to solicit recommendations on potential bilingual teachers who might

serve as participants in the study. Once recommendations were made, I reviewed their teacher service record to identify both years of elementary teaching and bilingual classroom experience. Next, I sent a letter of invitation to participate to each participant. I then met with each participant and explained, in person, the purpose of the study and reviewed the participant consent form with them. I procured the necessary signatures on the forms and proceeded to set times and dates for their interviews. I conducted two interviews with each participant. Each interview session lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. I also conducted one focus group interview with all the participants collectively. The focus group interview was scheduled to last for one hour to one-and-a-half hours. Finally, I analyzed a TEA report as a source of evidence.

Interviews

I utilized interviews as a means to collect data from participants. According to Merriam (1998), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 72). Moreover, the researcher posits that interviewing is the preferred technique among researchers when conducting case studies that involve few identified participants. According to Seidman (1998), "interviewing allows the investigator to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action" (p. 4). According to research by Seidman (1998) and Merriam (1998), the primary way that a researcher can study the educational setting or process of a school district is through the experiences of the participants. Therefore, I conducted at least two interviews with the participants identified. I also employed semi-structured interviewing questions in the study (See Appendix A-C).

According to Merriam (1998), in this type of interview, normally "all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 74). I also utilized a list of questions and topics to guide the interview process and employed common vocabulary throughout the interview process with the respondent. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, (1993), words and expressions have different significance in different cultures, and individuals exchange these verbal values to communicate" (p. 87). I attempted to identify those common terms and vocabulary and the culture of the school district that is being studied. I also attempted to display awareness towards the culture of the school district and applied these common terms and vocabulary before, during, and after the interviewing process. I also operated a recording device to document the meetings between the researcher and participant. Erlandson, et al. (1993) states that one advantage in using audio-recorded devices is the "researcher can reflect on ways to improve his or her interviewing strategies after listening to or viewing a tape" (p. 90).

I also utilized an interviewing protocol when meeting with the participant. According to Creswell (1998), the interview protocol is "a predetermined sheet on which one logs information learned during the observation or interview" (p. 126). The use of the protocol is advantageous because it allows the researcher the opportunity to document responses and observations during the interviewing process. Creswell (1998) further explains that protocols are useful because it allows the researcher to organize views and beliefs "on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondent" (p. 126). I also created a protocol that asked standard questions with an option for open-ended questions. The interview questions were

constructed so that they link back to the research questions posed by the researcher. A preliminary analysis of the interviews was conducted prior to the scheduling of the focus group.

Focus Group Interview

In addition to interviewing the respondents individually, I also met with the respondents collectively in a focus group interview setting. According to Frey and Fontana (1998), this option can "provide another level of data gathering or a perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviews" (p. 53-54). The focus group interview has the following advantages: flexible, cumulative, data rich and stimulating to respondents (Frey and Fontana, 1998). Furthermore, this process can be used in both formal and informal settings. Lofland and Lofland (1984) recommend the use of focus group interviewing as a complement to individual interviewing. This process can encourage recall and allow for views and attitudes to be expanded by the respondents. Frey and Fontana (1998) affirm that group interviews aid in the process of "indefinite triangulation." This process allows for views and ideas by the respondents to be generated, shared, and modified by the group rather than a final account from a single interviewer. Group interviews also grants the researcher additional access to the lives and the experiences of the participants. Frey and Fontana (1998) state that "in a group setting actors are able to obtain feedback on their views of reality; they can respond to other or differing views; and the researcher can vicariously experience reality in the same manner as the respondents" (p. 179).

I conducted one exploratory focus group interview in a school setting. The purpose of such was to set an atmosphere of collegiality so that participants were comfortable sharing with one another. I utilized preplanned structured interviews, with an option for open ended

questions and discussion. The purpose of the focus group interview was for exploratory (develop familiarity and understand setting) and triangulation (use multiple methods to ensure validity) reasons. The group interview included six individuals and lasted between 60-90 minutes. My principal role during the group interview was facilitator and as a participant whose primary role was that of keeping the group on track and the discussion focused on the specific contexts of the study. The group interview was also audio-recorded for reflection and transcribing purposes.

Documents served as a third source of evidence in the gathering of data. According to Erlandson, et al. (1993), "document refers to the broad range of written and symbolic records, as well as any available materials and data" (p. 99). These documents include anything in existence before and during the investigation. According to Merriam (1988), "documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (p. 133). Some documents in consideration of data mining are TEA reports pertaining to the school district. For example, the Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings for Adelante I.S.D. (Zepeda & Johnston, 2012), will be reviewed and summarized by the researcher.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1982), a researcher, in the naturalist paradigm, has an obligation to justify four naturalistic terms for the trustworthiness of findings that emerge from the study. According to Schwandt (2001), trustworthiness is defined as "that quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences" (p. 258). These four naturalistic terms are as follows: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability

Credibility

According to Schwandt (2001), "credibility addresses the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of same" (p. 258). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified ways that would strengthen the possibility that such a credible finding would be produced. These activities, as identified by the researcher, are as follows: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member checking.

I approached this study as an insider researcher. According to Brannick and Coghlan, (2007), insider research is "research by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organizations" (p. 59). The researchers additionally stated that an advantage to this type of research is that "insider researchers are native to the setting and so have insight from the lived experiences" (p. 60). While this study is an exploratory study, it does have implications for action research in the future. According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007), action research provides the best example for insider researcher, as "it involves change experiments on real problems in social systems within organizations (and) focuses on a particular problem and seeks to provide assistance to the client system" (p. 66). According to Adler and Adler (1987), there are three categories of membership positions in ethnographic field research: peripheral member, active member, and complete member. I embraced the role of a complete member. A complete member adopts the lived experiences, thereby enhancing the data gathering process. As an insider researcher, one is "already is immersed in the organization and has built up knowledge of the organization from being an actor in the process being studied" (Brannick and Goghlan, 2007, p. 66).

This insider researcher experience will aid in the prolonged engagement and persistent observation piece that is so important for the credibility aspect of research by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I have participated in both teacher and administrator roles in the district which helped me gain access to areas otherwise inaccessible to other investigators. According to Brannick and Goghlan (2007), primary access is the ability to gain access to an organizational system and gain admittance to undertake the study. Secondary access, on the other hand, means the ability to have access to people, documentation, data, and meetings. Since I am already a member of the organization, as the researcher, I was able to gain primary and secondary access. Also, in this role, I had the advantage of having an awareness of the demographics, culture, and language of the region. Gummesson (2000) confirms that "pre-understanding refers to such things as people's knowledge, insights and experience before they engage in research programme" (p. 57).

The researcher has an understanding of the culture within both the district and region, is fluent in the language (Spanish and code switching lingo of the region), and is familiar with the past and present experiences associated with the issues presented in the research questions. Data in this research was collected from interviews, peer debriefing, member checking, group interviews, and document analysis. The information gathered from these various sources will help aid the process of triangulation. According to Schwandt (2001), "triangulation is a procedure to establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met" (p. 257). Schwandt reveals this as the process of checking the integrity of the inferences one obtains, which can be attained via multiple methods, data sources, investigators, and perspectives.

Transferability

Schwandt (2001), refers to transferability as the capability of research to be transferred from one setting to another. Therefore, conclusions and findings from the study also need to have the ability to be transferred as well. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide a thick description of their study, which will allow the reader to make a conclusion that transferability does indeed exist or is nonexistent. As mentioned previously, I utilized multiple sources of data gathering techniques, which allowed for a detailed description of the study proposed by the research questions. The use of the multiple sources of data by the researcher will help the reader make an informed decision on whether or not the findings of this study are applicable to other case studies.

Dependability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1982), "a naturalist researcher defines the concept of dependability to mean stability after discounting such conscious and unpredictable changes" (p. 247). Schwandt (2001) also points out that it is the "inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented" (p. 258). According to Erlandson et al. (1993), a dependability audit can be utilized by the researcher to check for dependability. These "audit trails" provide documentation and a running account of the process of the inquiry. Examples of these types of documentation could be in the form of interview notes, daily journals, critical incidents, and the like.

Confirmability

In a naturalistic study, according to Erlandson et al. (1993), "the researcher does not attempt to ensure that observations are free from contamination by the researcher, but rather to trust in the 'confirmability' of the data themselves" (p. 34). Data can be traced back to

their sources, and the reasoning used to draw conclusions and inferences is both explicit and implicit (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Guba and Lincoln (1982) recommend that triangulation, practice reflexivity, and confirmability audits be used to assure confirmability. The researcher has stated previously that triangulation will be utilized to check for credibility. I utilized different data methods and sources for this technique. Additionally, I utilized a journal to document activities related to the study. Finally, I used audit trails to check for confirmability. This audit is similar to the one utilized to check for dependability.

Contexts of the Study

This exploratory case study contained some conditions to be explained by the researcher. As previously stated, I approached this study as an insider researcher. First, I have been employed with the school district of my research focus for close to fifteen years in the roles of teacher and administrator. I was a teacher and assistant principal for a campus with a grade span from 4th to 6th grade for four years. At the end of the fourth year, the campus was reconfigured to a 5th to 6th grade campus. The researcher then served as a principal for five years in a school with a grade span from 3rd to 4th grade. The administrator also served as an assistant principal at the high school and presently serves as a principal at the local high school with a grade configuration from 9th to 12th grade. Students who were in the 3rd and 4th grade when the administrator first served as a principal are now students at the high school.

The context of this study involves a person who has a rich sense of commitment to this school district. I have strong convictions that my experiences as a teacher and administrator on more than one campus in the district will help me develop relevant educational findings. I also have the advantage of having had field experiences as an administrator on three differently configured campuses, all with enrollments of ELLs.

The second contextual factor is there could possibly be a participant(s) in both the individual and group interviewing process who is a teacher I have supervised in the past. There also exists the possibility that there could be a potential interviewee who I hired as a teacher. I understand that insider research is typically perceived not to follow the standards of academic rigor because researchers commonly have a personal and emotional investment into the research (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). However, research has also shown that these types of studies are valid and needed because they can provide important information as to what institutions are really like, which customary inquiries may not be able to reveal (Adler & Adler, 1987, Bartunek & Louis, 1996, Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

As the principal investigator of this study, I have a sense of responsibility to be reflexive in my thoughts and processes and make key decisions based on theoretical knowledge and best research practices. I also understand that being an insider will allow me to have a head start on possessing many of the key attributes a naturalist inquirer should have. My experiences have given me a great amount of prolonged engagement and observational understating. I have both primary and secondary access to the organization, the people, documents, data, meetings, and more. This allows the researcher to carefully navigate the organization and organizational politics that could otherwise hinder outside researchers trying to perform the same study. I also have a pre-understanding of the people, culture, and problems explained in the research question.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done concurrently with the data collection. Erlandson *et al*. (1993) state that data collection and analysis should have an inseparable relationship. They further

indicate that data analysis is a process where data is constantly reviewed and revised and further analyzed. As a result of this process, there is a collection of rich, raw data which produces "alternate hypotheses and provide the basis for shared constructions of reality" (Erlandson *et al.*, p. 114). According to Schwandt (2001), analysis "begins with the processes of organizing, reducing, and describing the data and continues through the activity of drawing conclusions or interpretations from the data and warranting those interpretations" (p. 6). I utilized coding strategies to identify information about the data, such as themes and other issues related to the research. Coding refers to how passages of text are labeled according to content (Erlandson et al., 1993). Interviews, field notes, and documents were identified with notations so they can be organized and easily accessible to the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

I also utilized the category construction technique as described by Merriam (1998). This technique involves breaking down data into smaller amounts of information and then assigning the information to categories based on their similarities. Merriam (1998) explains that categories should be exhaustive, mutually inclusive, sensitizing, conceptually congruent, and reflect the purpose of the research. A computer software program designed for the qualitative researcher and utilized for managing data was considered for use by the researcher. Some examples of software programs that could be utilized are the following: ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, NVivo, Transana and QDA Miner. Computer data management was distributed into three phases: data preparation, data identification and data manipulation (Merriam, 1998).

I utilized a series of steps while conducting the data analysis of the research. In the first phase, I transcribed the interviews, typed the notes and inputted the data. Additionally,

the researcher edited and formatted the data as well. In the second phase, I followed the strategy proposed by (Reid, 1992) which is "to divide text data into analytically meaningful and easily locatable segments"(p. 126). The final phase involved the researcher searching, sorting, retrieving, and rearranging these "segments".

I conducted the first interview with the participants and then conducted a preliminary analysis involving theme based on the interviews. I followed up with a second interview with the participants individually two weeks after the first interviews were completed. Two weeks after the second interviews were complete; I followed up with a focus group interview with all the participants at a school setting.

Summary

Chapter III provided information on the research questions as well as the research design for this exploratory case study. The Chapter also presented a description of the site selection, grade configuration, and the ELL student enrollment in the Adelante I.S.D. This Chapter also gave a detailed description of TEA performance-based monitoring intervention staging, its implications toward student performance, student success in bilingual education, and a history of PBM intervention system for Adelante I.S.D. In this Chapter, the participants were introduced as well as data collection gathering methods. Interviews, a focus group interview, and document analysis will serve as the methods for data collection. The Chapter also gave an in-depth description of Lincoln and Guba's (1982) work on trustworthiness and the associated terms: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Information regarding limitations of the study was also presented as well as methods for data analysis.

Chapter IV will present the findings of the study as a result of the data gathering techniques and analysis presented.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of the present grade-span configuration and successive school-to-school transitions on ELLs sense of belonging and the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D. This exploratory research case study includes qualitative data acquired through participant interviews, one focus group interview, and document analysis. As stated previously in Chapter III, the researcher collaborated with participants at Adelante I.S.D. and sought to identify issues that affect ELLs as a result of disruptions in their educational environment due to transition.

Chapter IV is organized into a number of sections that includes a description of the participants, findings related to the research questions associated with this study, and individual and focus group interview responses based on issues related to the research topic. The sections that follow are guided by the research questions where recurring themes were identified. Based on data analysis, these themes were determined by the frequency of responses from participants during both the individual and focus group interview.

The following research questions have been identified and will help guide the researcher through the study. From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs:

1. How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D.?
2. How does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.?

Participants

This case study focused on six participants, all of whom were bilingual educators in Adelante I.S.D. These participants included five Hispanic females and one Hispanic male. These participants were between the ages of forty to sixty years of age. All participants possessed a college degree and were bilingually certified, while one participant possessed a graduate degree in educational administration. All participants were currently employed as bilingual educators at one of the following elementary campuses in Adelante I.S.D.: Sanchez, Sauceda, Del Valle, and Chavez. Their educational experience ranged from 12-24 years. In order to ensure confidentiality, the researcher used aliases to identify each of the participants interviewed. Of the participants interviewed, each served as bilingual educators in a title school district with a 98% Hispanic enrollment. Table 8 below provides information on each participant:

Table 8.

Participant information

Participant Name	Classroom Experience	Campus
Alberto Castillo	12	Del Valle
Xochitl Castellanos	17	Chavez
Selena Sanchez	17	Chavez
Aracely Fuentes	11	Sanchez
Janell Cuellar	24	Del Valle
Sara Rodriguez	15	Sauceda

Table 9 below provides detailed information on each participant interview:

Table 9

Participant interview information

Participant	**Interview #1**	**Interview #2**	**Focus Group**
Alberto Castillo	9/2/15	9/15/15	10/28/15
Xochitl Castellanos	9/3/15	9/23/15	10/28/15
Selena Sanchez	9/3/15	9/23/15	n/a
Aracely Fuentes	9/7/15	9/25/15	10/28/15
Sara Rodriguez	9/8/15	10/2/15	10/28/15
Janell Cuellar	9/17/15	10/1/15	n/a

Alberto Castillo

The first participant interviewed was Alberto Castillo, who has a total of twelve years' experience teaching bilingual education at Adelante I.S.D. He served as a bilingual teacher at Chavez Elementary and is currently a fourth grade teacher at Del Valle Elementary. Mr. Castillo possesses a Master's Degree in Educational Administration and has taught all subject areas in the area of bilingual education. Mr. Castillo decided to pursue a career in education as a result of his own personal experiences as a bilingual student. Mr. Castillo relayed during his interview that he had encountered many successful experiences with his students in regard to instruction. He intimated:

> My most gratifying moment has been my ability to provide work in the linguistics for my students, bringing them from the beginner level to intermediate and advanced levels. My educational journey has been a pleasant experience.

However, he has also encountered challenging experiences with student instruction as well. Mr. Castillo shared the following:

> The most challenging experience has been the inability to continue curriculum-based education. There is no curriculum attached per grade level in our bilingual program. For example, if I started a student, a beginner student, at the beginning level, and I begin with sight wording, sentence structure. I move the student up to writing a paragraph, the following teacher, might start the student off with the same thing that I was doing with this student. There is no continuity.

Xochitl Castellanos

The second participant interviewed was Xochitl Castellanos. She has a total of 17 years of bilingual teaching experience, and twelve of those have been with Adelante I.S.D. She has taught first through sixth grade and has taught all subjects in the area of elementary bilingual education. She has taught at Del Valle Elementary, Sauceda Elementary, and is currently a sixth grade teacher at Chavez Elementary. According to the participant, she also decided to pursue a career in bilingual education due to personal experiences. Mrs. Castellanos shared the following:

> When I was at Texas Women's University, there was a teacher that we had to take a class with for a cultural awareness course; she was a big advocate for bilingual students and their education. She taught with a lot of passion and motivated me to pursue a career in this field. In addition, I came from a bilingual background, and I just felt that I was a good candidate to help children who share a similar background like me.

Mrs. Castellanos's own experiences as a former bilingual student have definitely influenced how she teaches her students. Of her successful experiences with students, she shared the following:

> I would say that my most successful experiences would be getting them to succeed with the state tests. Our bilingual children are very hesitant and afraid and the majority of them know that they struggle, and it is a very big challenge to overcome these assessments. I am in the journey with them. When they are successful, it is a very great thing both for the student and me.

Regarding challenging experiences she has encountered as a teacher of bilingual learners, Mrs. Castellanos revealed:

> Transitioning…the transitioning of our bilingual students from different campuses and the transitioning in language from Spanish to English. This has been a challenge in this school district for many years and affects all our students.

Selena Sanchez

The third participant interviewed was Selena Sanchez. She has a total of seventeen years of teaching experience, with the first two years having been spent in northwest Houston and the last fifteen in Adelante I.S.D. This is her sixth year teaching bilingual education courses. She has taught second grade, fourth grade, and is currently teaching fifth grade bilingual education at Chavez Elementary. She has also taught all of the core content subject matter in bilingual education in both monolingual and team teaching formats. According to the participant, she decided to pursue a career in education due to her migrant background, sharing the following:

> When I went to school, I decided that I wanted to go into teaching. I think a lot of it came from my migrant background. We were migrants from the time that I was in kindergarten to my freshman year in high school. We migrated up north and we spent the majority of our time going to school in Ohio. I was just much immersed in the migrant culture, so I figured I had roots in the area and I kind of wanted to see if I could do something in this area to make a difference.

Mrs. Sanchez has also experienced success with her students, which she attributes to them because of their positive attitude and strong work ethic. Of them, she proudly shares:

> I remember it very clearly; I had a lot of struggling readers. I had kids at the pre-primer level when they started the year in fourth grade. I had everything from pre-primer kids to kids that were reading on-level and it was very difficult and challenging. I saw big growth at the end of the year, I did have some kids that were not successful on the TAAS test, but they made such large gains that it was very evident that they were learning. There were kids reading aloud to me and just having the kids remember and thank me at the end of the year, I'll never forget that.

However, just like the rest of our participants, Mrs. Sanchez has also experienced her share of challenging experiences. She attributed these challenging experiences of transitioning from monolingual teaching back to bilingual teaching, lack of parental support and motivation. The description of her experience is as follows:

> Last year was a challenging year for me. I was transitioning from monolingual and back to the bilingual education. I had some kids that had so much potential and I could see it and it was so frustrating to me that I did not have parental support. You would build them up but they would go home for the weekend and come Monday it

> seemed that we were back to square one. They seemed to lack motivation, lack of incentive, the lack of anything. I would make phone calls, wouldn't receive any support from the home and it was very hard for me.

Aracely Fuentes

The fourth person interviewed was Aracely Fuentes. Mrs. Fuentes had eleven years of teaching bilingual education, all in Adelante I.S.D. and all in Kindergarten. She has taught all content subjects in her area and currently teaches at Sanchez Elementary. Just like the rest of the participants, Mrs. Fuentes decided to pursue a career in bilingual education because of inspiration from her own personal experiences. Mrs. Fuentes recounted:

> I can relate to the students since I was a bilingual student myself. I know how bilingual students learn, we learn a little bit differently from monolingual students. We have to think, process, and then be able to understand what they are saying and then be able to speak it. That is what motivated me to be a bilingual teacher.

Mrs. Fuentes described a personal success story involving her own children learning phonics and making the connection to reading and one of a student frustrated with his inability to read. She imparted:

> I guess it's when my students start to read. In one occasion, I remember one of my students who was struggling to read and he started crying because we were talking about our goals for the end of the year. I remember bringing him into the office so that one of our administrators could speak with him and he started crying even more because he could not read. I remember my school administrator shared with him some personal stories of things that she could not do when she was younger but she worked at it. Well, the story seemed to pick him up and motivate him. After this

event, he was one of my students who was reading sixty words per minute at the end of the school year.

Mrs. Fuentes corroborated the challenges mentioned by the other participants in the study regarding recent immigrants who have not had the opportunity to receive a suitable educational foundation because of no previous schooling or frequent mobility from one city to the next that disabled the ability to create lasting ties to school. She shared the following:

> Well, being a bilingual teacher, we get students from everywhere. Sometimes, we get students who have never been in school, and therefore have no prior knowledge, no vocabulary; they don't know how to hold a pencil and they don't have any words or academic language. In order for them to develop that language, it takes a long time especially social vocabulary. This is very challenging for bilingual teachers.

Sara Rodriguez

The fifth participant interviewed was Sara Rodriguez. Mrs. Rodriguez has fifteen years of teaching experience, all in bilingual education. Ten of those years have been with Adelante I.S.D., three were in Carrol, Tennessee and two in Donna, TX. She has taught all core subjects in bilingual education. Mrs. Rodriguez also stated that the personal experiences of her youth had an influence on her choice to teach bilingual education. She stated:

> I'm a big supporter of the bilingual program. I was a bilingual student growing up. I grew up in a Spanish speaking family, we all spoke Spanish at the home. English was cool so I thought okay, I could do this, and I liked it, and I believed in it, and I still do and that is basically why I decided to teach bilingual.

Mrs. Rodriguez described her most successful experience as one that found her students picking up English fairly quickly and learning to read by the end of the year. Mrs. Rodriguez described her experience as follows:

> I guess I consider all my years to be successful. I have seen the growth in my students every year. I think the most that I saw student growth was when I taught pre-K. I was challenged that year, and by the time the end of the year came around at least 60% of my class was already reading English. It was just a different program they had at that district. It was an early exit program but it was a very early exit program compared to some of the other districts that I worked in.

Mrs. Rodriguez has experienced some challenging situations in her years of teaching as well. However, according to the participant, this school year has been exceptionally challenging due to the co-mingling approach that Adelante I.S.D. is practicing. Both bilingual and monolingual students are placed together for instructional purposes in self-contained classrooms in the elementary settings. Mrs. Rodriguez described her experiences as follows:

> Of all the years I have been teaching, I have always done Spanish and I have been able to take Spanish Speaking students and transition them into English. However, this year I'm challenged with a large class of monolingual students mixed with bilingual students. I think that this will be a challenge for me.

Janell Cuellar

The last participant interviewed was Janell Cuellar. Mrs. Cuellar had twenty-four years of teaching experience, all in bilingual education, with 23 years in the Adelante School District and one in a nearby neighboring city. She has taught all content areas from third to fifth grade and served as a teacher at Del Valle and Larraga Elementary. Currently serving as

a third grade teacher, Mrs. Cuellar also decided to pursue a career in bilingual education because of her personal background and positive experiences in education.

> When I was in grade school, back in Weslaco, I was placed in bilingual education myself and I was successful. I thought maybe I would be able to do the same thing as a bilingual classroom teacher. I remember the teachers being very happy for me. They would compare me to my older brother who was a year and half older than me. They had a full immersion English program. I would read very fluently, however, I had a hard time comprehending what I read. I guess the teacher saw how I struggled and decided to place me in bilingual education.

Mrs. Cuellar shared with me a particular experience that involved a recent immigrant's success in transitioning from Spanish to English.

> About four to five years ago, there was a former student that I had many years ago that came to visit me at the campus. During the visit she thanked and hugged me and told me all the things that I had done for her brothers and sisters. To me that's when I see what I have done for my students. I don't really see it in the room at that time. I mean I see it, and the kids tell me that they are learning but to me I guess I consider it more successful when they get older and are able to transition from Spanish to English. The young lady told me that because of what I had done, she was able to go to school and receive a two year post-secondary degree.

Mrs. Cuellar also shared with me a recent experience that involved her students struggling academically with reading and phonics and her profound concern regarding their lack of progress. She shared:

> I remember last year was pretty tough. I had many bilingual students enrolled in my class. These students were struggling academically. I was teaching reading and language arts to these students. What I had to do was divide myself like an octopus here with these group of kids and then over there with those students and so on. It was very tough. They were reading probably at first grade level. I remember I had to do a lot of phonics with them. I still remember when the STAAR results came in and I had 53% of the students pass the 3rd grade Reading STAAR. Given the circumstances, I thought the students performed well.

First Research Question

The first research question is as stated: From the perspective of teachers of ELLs, how do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D.? Based on code analysis, there were prevailing and recurring emergent themes based on the individual and focus group interviews. These themes were identified as excessive movement, deficient transitional activities, and the lack of a sense of belonging. The participants spoke frequently with concern regarding the number of times students had to move from campus and to campus because of the narrow grade span campuses incorporated in Adelante I.S.D. Further, the participants revealed that their respective campuses did not have a sufficient plan to help these students transition and adjust to their campuses. As a result, students were not prepared to make the transition and this affected how they responded to the school environment. These findings and themes are supported by the research of Howley (2002), who claims that "every transition from one narrowly configured school to another seems to disrupt the social structure in which learning takes place, lowering achievement and participation for many

students" (p. 7). The participants also expressed concern regarding the amount of outside factors (economic, academic, and coping difficulties) their students had to manage in addition to frequent transition.

The participants expressed additional concern for their students because these factors influenced how their students performed in school, specifically in the area of language development. The participants stated that their students lacked confidence in their second language and were often isolated into their own groups. This theme of isolation and lack of confidence is supported by the research of Ma (2003), whose research speaks to a relationship between low self-esteem regarding one's abilities and self-imposed isolation in the academic setting.

Interviews

Each candidate was interviewed twice between the months of September and October 2015. In addition to the individual interviews, four of the six participants participated in a focus group interview in October. The interviews, on average, lasted about 30 minutes, while the focus group interview lasted about 45 minutes. The interviews each took place in the campus where the participants taught, while the focus group interview took place in a conference room at Adelante High School. All interviews took place in a designated school facility in Adelante I.S.D.

Excessive Movement

The participants interviewed believed students moved too often from campus to campus. Every other year, they transitioned into a new campus, and the participants' perception was this practice was less than ideal for any student, specifically ELLs. The participants also felt their students struggled more academically and frequently needed

additional help more so than the monolingual students they taught. Additionally, ELLs experienced more issues in their home lives and participants felt that the excessive movement added to their student's burdens. Mrs. Sanchez, in her account, compared this constant movement of campuses to repeatedly moving from home to home. She went on to mention that these students needed stability in their lives and the constant movement was not helping.

> I compare our student's movement to that of getting and living in a new home. It's as if you were at one place for two years and then you would move to another home and you would have a whole new person in charge and a whole new way of doing things and learning it all over again. You are not at that comfort anymore. It really does make a difference. A lot of these kids need stability and to me once again it's like jumping from home to home. Every two years to a new home, every two years you are starting over. I think that's a challenge for those students.

Mrs. Castellanos, in her account, stated that the constant movement added additional stress to students who were already overwhelmed. In addition, the excessive change also had an impact on their academic achievement and she felt that the movement placed them further behind educationally. She described their ordeal as follows:

> The transition and the constant movement create unnecessary stress for our students. They have to adjust to a new school, and then prepare to move again the following year and learn a new routine. I think this is just stressful for them. The way I see it, I feel that the students would academically fall behind due to the stress, the change, and the movement from once school to the next. I feel that the transition would create an academic loss. By the time they would be able to catch up the following year, they would have to transition again to another campus.

Mrs. Fuentes also shared her concerns regarding the student's constant movement.

> The students are all separated. First they are here for pre-K and K and then they move to first and second and then they move to third and fourth and then they move to fifth and sixth. There is a lot of movement. This constant change is not good for our students.

Mrs. Sanchez thought that the constant movement hindered the bilingual program and collaboration between teachers, revealing:

> I think that the constant movement from campus to campus has had a negative effect on the bilingual program. I think that our ELLs need more help than our monolingual students. For whatever reasons, ELLs tend to struggle more and there is not much collaboration between teachers currently from campus to campus. Not having the curriculum vertically aligned has been difficult.

Mr. Castillo went so far as to state that the constant movement kept ELLs from expanding their horizons and from building any outside relationships with other student groups besides ELLs. What's more, he insisted that the constant movement even impeded second language acquisition.

> I don't believe that ELLs are prepared. I think that it's one of the disadvantages that we have with our bilingual program with having the schools split up. What this creates is that it limits the ability to build up outside relationships with the student populations. So just for the simple fact of moving from one campus, they (ELLs) start building their own little groups because they are comfortable with each other. They don't expand their friendships and relationships. We have a problem where they can continue using their native language in those comfortable little groups

> because they are having difficulty coping with moving frequently every other year. This constant movement limits their ability to expand. Additionally, it inhibits the development of the English language.

Mrs. Castellanos, in her statements, felt the constant movement affected the student's sense of belonging and the development of a school community for disadvantaged populations like ELLS. She also felt that administrators did not have an opportunity to build a rapport with their students and the excessive movement also affected the school community in general.

> The constant movement is a disadvantage for our students. There is no sense of belonging, community or consistency. I just think that the principal does not get to know that child because there is constant turnover every other year and we just don't have that consistency, that family aspect. A lot of kids come from broken backgrounds, their lives are very dysfunctional. This just adds to the student's difficulties and our students need that sense of belonging. I think that helps, because they become part of a family, and the students are able to be at the campus for an extended amount of time, not just two years.

Mr. Castillo, in his interview, mentioned that the excessive movement hindered the continuance of curriculum and involvement of students, teachers and parents. Additionally, he stated that all parties involved did not have a chance to develop lasting ties to their respective campuses.

> The constant movement hinders the continuance of curriculum (curriculum based and informational based) and information dissemination. It also affects the following: lack of familiarity and lack of ownership by both students and staff. Staff is not able to know students well enough to know their needs. There is not a chance for

> community and parental involvement to develop. Parents and students have to constantly get to know different administration, different staff members and different rules every two years. When you have to switch every other year the relationships never really get a chance to develop. This does not leave the ability for parents to contribute to the schools.

Mrs. Cuellar professed that the constant movement also placed a burden on the teachers because they did not have an opportunity to really get to know their students. She also asserted that the movement of second graders to third grade placed pressure on both student and teacher due to state testing. She explains:

> Since the students move from campus to campus every two years they really do not get to know their teachers too well. Students that enter third grade are introduced to taking the STAAR test in the spring. I feel there is a lot of pressure for our students and teachers in tested areas. It is very difficult.

Mrs. Sanchez also observed that the constant movement did not provide a stable environment for her students. She also believed that her students struggled more with instability in their home environment and that frequent changes in their environment was a constant in their lives.

> I feel that two years in one place and then moving to another doesn't provide enough stability for them. The consistency that they need, that a lot of what these kids need, I think it is more of a disadvantage for them that every two years they are uprooted again. A lot of our kids, if you look into their personal history, moving is a constant, moving homes, moving towns, I think if it happens in the school environment, it becomes just one more instability in their life.

Mrs. Castellanos, in her interview, felt that ELLs had more difficulties than any other student group and that her students suffered more academically and socially due to the excessive movements. Consequently, in her estimation, these adversities disconnected them from the learning environment.

> ELLs lose that sense of community, security, stability due to constant movement. It also causes academic and social disruptions. Our bilingual students are a unique bunch of students that we know have a lot of economic issues. All children in every group have difficulties but these students as a group tend to have more economic difficulties, family issues and they bring all this into school and I think that it disconnects them from that family school environment.

The excessive movement also prompted teachers to focus more of their time to help students transition into their classrooms. Mrs. Cuellar stated that she spent a substantial amount of time getting her students accustomed to her classroom and school procedures at the beginning of the school year.

> I really spend a considerable amount of time getting the students used to a routine. I would play songs for the students during breakfast. The kids enjoy this and they have an opportunity to use their REACH book and follow along. It was an on-going process all year long.

Mr. Castillo also believed that the constant movement hindered student's learning and teacher-relationship. He felt that a large amount of time was dedicated to familiarizing students with the school environment.

> Because the students move from campus to campus we have to start all over. Not only do we have to allocate time in having students get used to their surroundings but

> we also allocate a lot of time getting to know their learning levels. We don't have the transition in the grades, as far as one after each other at the campus. So, we have to spend a considerable amount of time getting to know the students and try to accommodate their learning according to their needs.

Mrs. Rodriguez stated that she would also spend a considerable amount of time helping students to adapt to both campus and classroom procedures. Additionally, once she began a routine she would not change it until the second semester, however, she observed that some of her students still struggled as a result when a routine was altered. She stated:

> I spend some time having my students get used to the rules, routines and procedures of my classroom and of the campus. I would take them for little walks around the buildings and show them where everything was and explaining lunch routines and other procedures. As far as the classroom, I would start a routine and I would not change it. I would not change it until I thought they were ready until the second semester. They were some students that still had difficulty when I would change a routine.

In her interview, Mrs. Sanchez revealed that she, too, spent considerable time acclimating students to campus wide and classroom routines. She also stated that she believed her campus to be one of the last where students could still feel somewhat sheltered before making the transition to middle school.

> As far as my expectation in the classroom, I want to say that it's almost like it might take the entire first six weeks, the first couple of months. I get them used to my expectations, the way my classroom is run and campus expectations. I feel that our campus is the final campus that our students get to experience that "mother-hen"

> philosophy before they transition to middle school. I feel like I need to be there for my students; more like a supportive role.

Consequently, as noted by participants in the next section, there were limited activities and programs provided for these students to aid them in transitioning from campus to campus every other year. Not only did ELLs experience excessive movement, but there were limited procedures in place on the majority of campuses to help the students successfully transition into their new environments.

Deficient Transitional Practices

There was a common sentiment among the interviewees that there were not enough practices in place at their campuses to help the ELLs transition smoothly. While some campuses might have incorporated one transitional activity for these students, the participants thought that more activities needed to be initiated in order to support the creation of an identity and a sense of belonging on campuses for students. When asked a question about what activities her campus participated in to help the ease of transition for ELLs in and out of the campus, Mrs. Fuentes stated that her school coordinated a tour for the entire kindergarten class to the first grade campus.

> The Pre-K students come to our wing (kindergarten) and meet with the teachers for next year. We also take our kindergarten students on the bus and transport them to the first and second grade campus to tour the school and meet the principal and also the teachers. This is done normally in May.

Mrs. Cuellar stated that her campus did not offer any transitional activities for the students, remarking:

> No, there were not any activities that I was aware of for the second graders coming to third grade. As far as I know, there were not any transitional activities in place for the fourth graders going to the next campus.

Mrs. Rodriguez shared her experiences dealing with these transitional activities, mentioning that her campus did not have a specific activity set aside to accommodate a smooth transition for ELLs. However, she did say the lower grades from the previous school were able to participate in a campus visit, but still, there were flaws.

> As far as any trips that we participated, we did not. I remember I would constantly remind my students that they were going to have to use their English more. I would get them prepared as much as I could. I knew, from my previous years, that they (ELLs) were just getting mainstreamed in monolingual classes without any Spanish support and they were having a hard time. Now the kindergarteners from the other campus would come over for a type of field trip. However, it was an entire class of students and not just a specific group of students. This was a onetime event.

Mr. Castillo stated that providing transitional activities for students should be a priority for all campuses. However, he stated that his campus did not provide any support and found fault with the grading configuration. He shared the following sentiments:

> Not many. Other than offering a bilingual program and ensuring that every child is receiving the required language acquisition resources, there isn't much. I think that it's because the same reasons: switching from campus to campus. We just don't happen to develop a relationship with the stakeholder who in this case happens to be the students and their parents. We as teachers and administrators don't become very familiar with those families and those students. I don't think that we are doing a very

> good job of easing that transition. We just have not made it a priority. We do not provide the support, which I think is needed in order to send them off to the next campus.

Mrs. Sanchez also stated that there were not any activities designed for preparing incoming ELL for the forthcoming new campus environment. She reported:

> I can't think of any activity that I know that we participated to help transition 4th graders to our campus. I don't feel like we have anything set in place. There's not one specific area, or one specific resource or activity that we do that I know of that helps these kids, aside from what I said earlier, what sixth grade does to prepare the students for junior high. Other than that, I really haven't heard of any activity or curriculum or anything that is done to help support the kids from transitioning from grade to grade or campus to campus.

Mrs. Castellanos did state that her grade level coordinated a trip for sixth grade ELLs to the junior high, but nonetheless, there was still a lack of activities in place for ELLs coming onto her campus. She also mentioned there was more communication between bilingual teachers since they were on the same campus. She shared the following account:

> When I used to teach fifth grade, there was not any type of transition activity to help the fourth graders transition into the fifth grade. However, between fifth grade and sixth grade, yes, because there is a lot of communication between the two teachers since we are on the same campus. From sixth to seventh, we kind of help them out at the end of the year; we set a date with the junior high teachers. We walk the students over there where they receive an introduction to junior high. The students are given a brief orientation followed by a tour. When the students come back to their home

> campus, they feel like they know a little more than the monolinguals. Just with a little visit, they feel more prepared than the other students because they had this little special trip. It's very little and I know that we could do more, but it made a large impact on our students.

As a result in the lack of transitional activities, many of the participants believed that ELLs were not prepared to make the school-to-school transitions. However, the participants also perceived that at least part of the reason was attributed to the way that the schools were configured. Mrs. Rodriguez elucidated:

> No, they are not prepared at all, not even the school is making it friendly for them like taking them for a campus activity or anything like that. I know we should because everything is so different and new for the students when they would leave. Usually in a new environment, the majority of the students are shy and apprehensive. I think it's hard for them because they see a new school and new teachers, everything is new to them and they start all over again with each campus that they enter. Just as they get to know a campus and staff they have to leave. I think this is a big problem.

Mrs. Cuellar also made similar comments, as she felt that it was harder for those ELLs transitioning from second to third grade academically because third grade was a testing year for STAAR.

> Really, if you think about it, our ELLs really did not have a choice. They had to move and adjust because that's the way our system is currently set up. Like I stated before, I believe it was tough for students making the move to another campus at the end of the second grade year and entering a new campus as a third grader. It's a testing year and I believe the students were just not prepared and ready to make such

a big move. Some of the students did not come with any test taking strategies or the academic vocabulary that is required for them to be prepared for the state assessment. Mrs. Fuentes also thought having second graders transition to another campus for third grade (a testing year) was not conducive for the students. She also felt that there was a lack of preparedness. She shared the following account:

> Well, here at Sanchez, the students stay with us for three years. I think they are ready when they go to Sauceda. However, I don't think that they are prepared to make the jump from second grade to the third and fourth grade campus because as soon as they get to Del Valle, those are testing grades already. I guess it's because I think they still need that specialized attention they get when they are younger. I think the ELLs still need more time; this is the age level when the students start making that transition into English. I think when the students make the move from second to third grade from one campus to another; it disrupts some of the language acquisition.

Mrs. Sanchez stated that some campuses have different expectations than other campuses, which can be quite confusing to students.

> I don't believe they are prepared enough to enter our campus. I think that is due to the way that the campuses are configured. These students spend a whole year with a teacher or set of teachers and their expectations and the expectations of the campus may vary from our expectations. Our school is a very well-oiled machine. There is a certain expectation, set of guidelines that are non-negotiable. I just don't feel the maturity level is there and that kind of holds us back because we spend a lot of time trying to redirect and reteach these new responsibilities that they don't have.

Consequently, the over-all sentiment from the participants was that ELLs were not prepared to make the frequent transition from campus to campus due to an array of issues. As a result of this frequency, the participants felt that the students experienced too much movement and this affected their sense of belonging.

Sense of Belonging

As previously mentioned in Chapter I, Goodenow and Grady (1993) define the sense of belonging in a school or classroom as "the extent to which student's feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment (p. 61). Based on the participant responses, the majority felt the ELLs on their respective campuses did not have a sense of belonging to their assigned schools based on the frequent movement from campus to campus. However, there were two participants who felt that their students felt a sense of belonging to their campus after the first year of being enrolled in that particular campus. Some participants even felt there was a label placed on ELLs inhibiting their acceptance because of their native language and/or status of coming from another country. Mrs. Fuentes believed that her students felt a sense of belonging to her campus; however, she mentioned that it was not easy for them and it required many years for a sense of belonging to develop. She believed in the importance of instilling pride about their first culture and language and recognized that it was not an easy task for recent immigrants to adjust.

> It takes many years for a recent immigrant to feel that they belong, especially in the upper grade levels. We need to support them and not make them feel different from the others. One activity that we do here at out campus to embrace their culture is we

> celebrate Cinco de Mayo. Even though we are not in Mexico, we can't forget their culture. We also celebrate the traditional Mexican Mother's Day which is May 10th. We want them to feel that they belong to our campus. We do have an advantage at our campus with our ELLs. We get to have them for three years instead of two like the other campuses.

Mrs. Rodriguez remarked that the first year is always tough on the students starting first grade. However, by year two, they get more accustomed to the campus. She also observed that the ELLs always seemed to find one another and solely interact among themselves.

> I think the first year is scary for them but after the first semester they were good and by the time they became second graders, they knew the campus really good. They feel pretty comfortable until it is time to go to third grade. They are comfortable within their own. We would have functions like a dance and I would go in to see them and I always found them sitting together in a corner somewhere. They would never go and venture out.

Mrs. Cuellar observed that many times ELLs were stigmatized and made fun of by other students as a result of their differences in language and possibly because of their country of origin. She shared the following experiences:

> No, unfortunately the students do not feel a sense of belonging. The students are always grouped with one another. You see them out in the playground with each other and not mixing in with the monolingual students. I remember the students would come in after recess and say that the monolingual students were making fun of them and calling them the "Spanish kids" or whatever because they were always

together. So, I think they felt that they did not belong because they were not as fluent in English like the other students. This would happen every year with my students.

Mr. Castillo attributed this feeling of not belonging to the often frustrating process immigrants endure assimilating into the new culture. He felt it took time, and that sadly, the constant movement that accompanies grade configuration does little to help matters. ELLs remain isolated in their groups and are fearful of mixing with others. Mr. Castillo shared his experiences as follows:

> Unfortunately, no they do not feel that they belong. The ELLs are learning a new culture, learning a new language, and we are just not providing that environment where they are comfortable to be able to explore. Every other year, they have to learn, they have to adapt, and they have to learn a new environment. Therefore, I think the biggest issue is they start building their comfort groups and we can't expand their horizons, we can't separate them. When they stay in their isolated groups amongst their fellow ELL peers they don't get to develop their language acquisition which requires a lot of oral practice and unfortunately they are speaking their native language in their groups.

Mrs. Castellanos also made similar observations about how ELLs were sometimes labeled. She felt because of her own personal experiences as an ELL, she needed to be an advocate for her students.

> Being an ex-bilingual student, I know their needs. I know their issues and so I try to not so much be like a mother but I try to help them feel welcome and special. I know that sometimes they (ELLs) don't always feel welcome. There are others that say, "Oh, those are the Spanish kids." I try to correct that type of behavior from other kids

> because I don't want them (ELLs) to feel like they are different because they are bilingual.

Mr. Castillo also stated that teachers get stigmatized for teaching ELLs. He also expressed concern about there being an unfairness correlated with and an unjust burden placed on his students for having to transition to English so quickly just to accommodate testing guidelines.

> We have to prepare these students to be proficient in English in a short amount of time and I think that this is unfair. We try to move our students into the English language because they get stigmatized for testing in Spanish. Even teachers get stigmatized because you are testing kids in Spanish. The relationship between testing and ELLs is not very beneficial.

Mrs. Sanchez also made similar observations about her ELLs. She agreed that students that were labeled ELL/bilingual were stereotyped and criticized by some members of the student body. Additionally, she stated that this label also makes the transition with these students as they move from campus to campus.

> I feel that it takes a while for students to feel a sense of belonging to the campus. Unfortunately, these kids still carry with them the stigma of being the "bilingual kids" or the "Spanish kids". There is a stigma to that and it's like you know I actually heard other students say "I can't be in that class because that's where the Spanish kids are or that's where the bilingual kids are". There is still a label that transitions with them and I think that our ELLs feel more separate or segregated. It's like they are in a little clique. I don't believe they ever feel that they are ever at the top of their class, or if they are ever at the top of their group or their grade level. I always feel that because of the negative connotation that they unfortunately carry, and you see it in

> the classroom, a lot of these kids have this sense of negativity towards themselves of being inferior to others. This in itself poses a challenge of trying to get them to just mentally let go of that and let them know that they are just a regular student like everybody else.

Mr. Castillo wanted to reiterate the harm frequent movement does to ELLs and how they navigate the campus atmosphere and their inability to take chances. In addition, he stated that, in his opinion, frequent changes influence language acquisition, comfort levels, and socialization.

> I think that one of the issues that the separation of campuses creates is it makes the students remain isolated in their groups. Let's say at one campus, you get the students going, they feel safe in taking chances with their learning. They excel in reading and writing and start speaking English and start mingling with other student groups. You make a change to another school and just like anybody would do when you go to a new place you go back to your comfort zone. This is what happens many times with our student population. They feel comfortable with their peers who understand their culture and language. This happens every single year or every other year.

On the other hand, Mrs. Castellanos had a more optimistic response in her interview regarding bilingual students. She felt "bilingual" is a label that should be embraced as opposed to being shunned. In contrast to many of her peers' experiences, she had the opportunity to engage in some consistency with her ELLs, as she was able to see them twice having served as their fifth grade teacher the previous year and their sixth grade teacher this year.

I think that they do. Our kids know us so well. I don't think that they feel uncomfortable. As far as myself, I previously taught the fifth grade bilingual students and now I was moved to sixth grade, so I am getting my students again so they already know me. We make them feel welcome in the classroom. Being bilingual, there should be a sense of pride not like a label that demeans them. Again like I mentioned, I was a bilingual student and I can relate to the way that they feel so it's really easy for me to focus on those areas that I need to help them with.

Second Research Question

The second research question addressed the following: From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs, how does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.? Based on code analysis, there were emergent themes that prevailed and recurred based on the individual and focus group interviews. These themes identified as instructional continuity and patterns of communication. Most notably, participants in the study were primarily concerned with the lack of the instructional continuity between the elementary schools in the district. They noted that an underlying contributor to this discontinuity was the way schools were configured. These disparities support the research by Margetts (2002) that states "discontinuities are associated with the changes in the physical environment of buildings and classrooms, difference in the curricula; differences among the teaching staff; changes to the peer groups; and changes related to parents" (p. 105). The participants felt that these fractures in grade configuration contributed to many of the academic deficiencies affecting their students. These concerns regarding transition and academic loss are supported by research (Alspaugh, 1998, 2000; Howley, 2002; Renchler 2002), which mentions that

transitions between campuses may have an effect on the academic achievement of students. Finally, the participants mentioned that there was a lack of communication between educators across the elementary campuses, affecting the transfer of information and continuity as well. According to Ackesjö (2014), "a lack of communication between teachers can contribute to a lack of educational continuity" (p. 10). As indicated in Chapter I, frequent transition will negatively impact the continuity and consistency of instruction, and as a result, negatively impact student achievement in the process.

Instructional Continuity

Some participants felt that instructional strategies were not consistent between campuses. The participants professed that each campus implemented different strategies or curriculum, which was made evident in their instruction. These differences in these strategies subsequently affected students academically. For example, Mrs. Rodriguez stated the following:

> Our students are exposed to different teachers and different styles. Even though a campus might have strategies in place and this is what you are supposed to be doing, the practice was not there, the devotion to the strategies were not done. Some of the teachers might have watered down the strategies a bit or maybe this teacher did this strategy very well, while this teacher did not do it at all. You have different teaching styles and this has to do a lot with the children.

Mrs. Castellanos professed that some of her colleagues tempered their expectations for students and tremendously affected overall instruction as a result.

> You know I don't know why sometimes, it seems that some educators seem to water it down, instead of challenging our students and hold high expectations for them. The

> strategies are not consistent from campus to campus and they are different as well and this is adding to the program. The students learn one thing and then we teach them another. The students naturally get confused. We come up with acronyms to memorize certain things and the students might have been taught a different set of acronyms to learn a similar objective. It's just keeping consistent with the different strategies so that we can help our students.

One participant observed that because of lowered expectations on their previous campus, some of her students were lacking in the areas of phonics and phonetic awareness and attributed these deficiencies to the lack of implementing English Oral Instructional Strategies. Mrs. Rodriguez stated the following:

> I think continuity is very important because if the campuses do not follow the same oral language strategies, we will not be connected and we are going to have gaps and the children are going to slip through the cracks and will not be exposed to the knowledge. I think through my experiences here as a former first grade teacher and the children that I received from the campus below, my students did not know a single sound. They knew the days of the week, the months of the year but that was as far as their daily oral language went. They had difficulty with individual sounds.

Mrs. Rodriguez, in her account, expressed frustration in regard to how some of her former students were taught bilingual instruction in English without any support in the native language as a consequence of different instructional strategies.

> Sometimes some campuses and teachers expose the kids to more strategies than others. The campuses are different, the teachers are different. It all depends on how much information the teacher wants them to know. I remember I had some students

> come back and tell me that when they were in third grade they received all instruction in English without any support. So, it was sink or swim. Several students informed me of this and so did their parents. This was a big issue when they transitioned to third grade.

In summary, the participants strongly believed there were some inconsistencies when it came to the delivery of the adopted curriculum. Consequently, the participants felt that there was not sufficient continuity as it relates to delivery of instruction, thus impairing student learning.

Curricular Alignment

Based on the data collected from the interviews, some of the participants felt that there were some underlying issues that led to curriculum alignment issues between campuses. A few attributed this problem to grade configuration, while others felt their fellow peers were just as responsible for this issue. One participant did feel the curricular misalignment was due to the separation of campuses and was to blame for the inability to implement a viable curriculum from campus to campus. Mr. Castillo stated the following:

> The problem with the separation of campuses is that we do not have the continuance of the ability to implement the strategies; our strategies are not the same from campus to campus. This is one of the most prolific problems in our district…the ability to continue curriculum from one campus to the next. In fact we could be teaching the same thing from year to year and not make a dent in the instruction for the child because of it.

Mrs. Rodriguez believed that some of her fellow peers as well as other teachers from other campuses were not fully committed to the district curriculum and this lack of fidelity regarding the district's plan affected the alignment of the curriculum from campus to campus.

> We followed the year at a glance (YAG) from the South Texas Curriculum Project. In years passed we were trying to follow this as well, however, some teachers liked them and some were not very comfortable with the curriculum. This was an issue that I felt affected the program in many of the elementary campuses. Some would follow the curriculum which at that time was called C-Scope. There were lesson plans, unit lessons, timelines and assessments. However, some teachers would want to follow the Reading Basal or other resources instead of following the curriculum.

One participant observed a lack of implementation of the bilingual reading curriculum program, particularly as it related to the reading basal. Mrs. Cuellar shared the following account:

> Last year, while teaching third grade, I know that some of the strategies and lessons from our third grade Reach book were not being consistently followed. I consider this resource very helpful. This textbook has the skills that integrate the reading. This basal is currently in our adoption. If these resources were utilized and followed, our students would be successful. We are missing that connection piece from campus to campus and it is affecting our kids.

Another participant perceived that this separation of campuses led to the misalignment of curriculum. Mrs. Fuentes reported the following:

> I think that we are supposed to be doing the same thing, supposed to be aligned but to be honest, I really don't think that we are aligned and doing the same thing. One

> campus is doing this, another campus is doing something else and this campus is doing something completely different as well. So, each campus is basically doing whatever they want. As far as the bilingual program, I think that it is affecting our bilingual students because like I said every campus is doing their own thing and it's basically because we are all separated in our own campus.

Patterns of Communication

During their interviews, the participants acknowledged a clear lack of communication between professionals from campus to campus, which, in turn, also affected the continuity of curriculum from campus to campus. While at times there were required grade level meetings between the campuses, these collaborations were sporadic at best. The purpose of these meetings was to share common instructional strategies, best practices, and lessons, for example. However, some of the participants stated that these meetings only emerged to satisfy campus plans or district plans and were not very productive. Mrs. Rodriguez shared the following account:

> We met at the most, maybe twice a year but even that was rare. They were called grade level meetings and we would meet and discuss with the campus below and above. The campus below would tell us what their students learned at their campus and we communicated with them what we expected their students to come to our grade level with and we also met with the campus above which was third. Our relationship with third grade was always very good but when it came down to the lower grades, some of the teachers would argue that their students were still too young to expose them to the content and knowledge that our campus expected. To

me some of their students were just not exposed and they just kept them in the first language.

Other participants revealed they hardly ever met with teachers from the other campuses; a practice they acknowledged was less than common in the first place. Mrs. Sanchez shared her account in relation to the frequency of meeting with other bilingual educators from other campuses:

> Rarely, rarely, do I mean if anything maybe when we run into each other at bilingual meetings or just general meetings. Other than that, it is just not something that is done on a regular basis.

Mrs. Castellanos also shared similar experiences regarding meeting with other educators from other campuses.

> Oh my gosh, honestly, we don't. We do have bilingual meetings as a whole district. We might meet once as far as meeting with the campus above and below. However, there is not much collaboration and opportunities to meet once during the school year.

Mrs. Cuellar also declared occurrences comparable to the other participant's experiences regarding collaboration between bilingual educators on the district's campuses, disclosing:

> Not very often, maybe once and when we did meet it was a general meeting not really a meeting to discuss bilingual needs. I felt that it was not very productive. We did not really accomplish anything during the meeting.

Mr. Castillo, too, shared the sentiments of his peers about bilingual educators working together across the district.

> The highest amount that we have met is once and the lowest amount is none. It is just not a common practice that is done at the campus level very frequently. Many teachers feel that it is done only because it is written in the campus plan.

Mrs. Fuentes shared experiences that aligned with those stated by the other participants, commenting:

> Maybe twice a year, we don't really have the opportunity to meet and plan together. I wish that we could meet more. The meetings are not really organized meetings between the campuses but more like District professional development meetings where we happen to all meet at one campus for ease of planning. It is difficult to meet and plan with the other campuses.

Mrs. Rodriguez shared an additional account of her perceptions of grade-level meetings, and the frequency of contact with other bilingual educators.

> I am a member of the LPAC committee and we reviewed data on each bilingual student at our campus. However, it is very rare for us to meet with the third grade teacher or kindergarten teacher. Going back only to the grade level meetings, at these meetings once again, it was also not very positive, a lot of finger pointing as to who was not doing what. I remember our department thought "you know what we are not even going to say anything at these meetings; we will do just what we got to do." These meetings weren't very fun or productive.

Mrs. Castellanos, in her account, pointed out the necessity of vertical meetings across the district among bilingual educators. However, she also stated that teachers needed to come to these meetings with solutions instead of complaints only.

> We do need vertical team meetings where we have to put aside our little sensitive feelings and emotions and pointing fingers and work together. We are not going to get better unless we face and realize our weaknesses and come up with solutions. We just can't blame administration or lack of administrative support.

Mrs. Fuentes also mentioned the importance of keeping in touch with former students to see how they were progressing, but how she was seldom afforded the opportunity to meet with them. She shared the following account:

> We don't really get to see the other teachers or get to see how our former students are doing unless we hear from the parent or we see the kids and ask how they are doing but to be honest, it's only small percentage of kids that we get to see again through the years. I believe that we, as former teachers, need to know how they are doing, how they are progressing and perhaps to offer assistance to those who need additional help. These students were our students to begin with in kindergarten. I would like to know more about them and how they are doing.

As a result of the campuses being separated at every other grade level, teachers were unable to have the opportunities to meet, plan, and share information. Despite there being certain documents that teachers completed at the end of the year for each student that traveled to the next campus for administrators and teachers when considering grade placement, the common sentiment was that these documents were not enough to bridge the gap between campuses. They admitted that more effort towards communication needed to be achieved in order to make the process of transition more successful for students. Because of this lack of communication, teachers felt that the placement decisions made could lack validity. Mrs. Rodriguez commented:

> As stated, we rarely met with the other teachers. We do send documents with our students to the next grade and the campus below would send their students to us with information as well. Here at this campus we rank our students based on their TELPAS levels: beginners, intermediate, advanced and advanced high. We would put this information on the cards and also place their benchmark scores on the cards. Other than that, this would be the only type of input we have with future teachers.

Mr. Castillo also had similar accounts regarding the placement of his students with future teachers, observing:

> I have never met with any future teachers on my students regarding their placement to the next campus. Information about students is placed on index cards and we either send off to the next campus or we receive it from the lower campus. Some of the information placed on these cards is generic information; other information is assessment information like benchmark scores, STAAR, TELPAS. I have met with the bilingual teachers from other campuses at LPAC meetings, bilingual educational information meetings or trainings, never to discuss individual students.

Mrs. Fuentes, in the same vein of thought as her peers, felt these documents were not utilized or followed, remarking:

> As far as collaborating with the next grade campus teacher, we only communicate through a paper, our placement cards. For example, we place promotion on the sheet, the name of the child, strengths and weaknesses, medical and behavioral issues, and placement comments as to which teaching style is best fit for the student. We also make recommendations as far as which students not to place with another student due

to a past history. To me however, sometimes these documents do not make a difference because sometimes the advice of the former teacher is not followed.

Although the sentiment from the participants indicated that there was little or no communication between the campuses, many of the participants felt that there was a considerable amount of collaboration on their own campuses between grade levels. Teachers were able to plan accordingly, provide input, and make instructional decisions. Mrs. Sanchez explained:

> Last year, I was involved because I also know the teachers in the sixth grade at my campuses. I knew some of the teachers that were going to teach in a bilingual setting. We filled out these placement cards where we put information for next year's teacher to view. I felt that I shared sufficient information with the teacher above. I would write down the information such as: this student doesn't work out well with these students or these kids need to be separated. I felt for the most part a lot of my suggestions were taken into consideration. In addition, I just feel that there is more collaboration with the teachers at my campus than with teachers at other campuses.

Mrs. Cuellar also had similar experiences as the other participants.

> I do give input to the teachers that are here at my campus. Since 4th grade is housed here, I am able to meet and give some input to those teachers. The information is easier communicated to them and I am able to see them personally.

Mrs. Rodriguez shared positive experiences similar to the other participants with respect to the benefits of collaborating with educators at the same campus.

> However, our relationship with first grade, since we are housed in the same campus, has always been very close. I remember one year that they wanted to follow the

> children they had in first to second grade as their teachers. We tried this and oh my gosh it was great, because you would see the growth and you knew where they left off in first grade so you knew what skills they were lacking or had already acquired. These kids were ready for English by the end of the year. Our teachers have a great relationship and we were able to communicate and discuss about our students.

Mrs. Castellanos also was very optimistic when describing her experiences involving the discussion of instructional decisions with colleagues at the same campus.

> However, at my campus level, we do meet with the 5th grade teacher. It is very informal. We meet with the counselor, we do speak about the placement of our students and we are careful as to which students we place with which teacher based on compatibility and teaching styles. There is a lot of communication since we are at the same campus.

Curriculum Maps

During the focus group interview conducted on October 28, 2015, curriculum maps materialized as a topic that generated much discussion. The participants were concerned that a bilingual curriculum map did not exist in the district. The participants defined the map as a type of chart, timeline, or guide teachers could utilize and implement as an instructional tool. This tool would offer instructional strategies and give a detailed list of instructional assignments to an ELL depending on their grade level, their TELPAS composite score, English language skills, and phonetic levels, to name a few areas of interest. Adelante I.S.D. has a history of ELLs who have been enrolled in the district since their elementary years only to struggle in their academic secondary public years. While discussing this topic with the

participants, they offered their opinions and insights on the reasoning behind this academic issue.

> **Mr. Castillo**: I personally believe that we just don't have a map that allows us to continue the growth of each student. Let's say Student A enrolled in my class and has been in the U.S. for two years. So, automatically, I gauge where he is at, however, there is no record of his phonics of where he is at, there is no record of his fluency, there's no record of how far or how deep he is behind academically. So I go back to the beginning with Student A. Let's say it takes me about two months to gauge where that student is and try and make an advancement. That student will go to the next school and that teacher will practically do the same thing that I just did the previous year. This same process is done again and again and again. We do not have an accurate record keeping system, an accurate design or an adequate instructional map that will benefit all of us to input where the student left off the previous year. We have a system for our regular education students. They have a curriculum map, a curriculum design they know where they need to pick up after each six weeks. When it comes to bilingual, I am picking up wherever the student is at. This is one of the things that I would like to see.
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: Just reiterating what Mr. Castillo said. As the students move, there is an academic loss and you have to go back, catch them up, but you've already lost so much instructional time. This affects them because you don't tend to do that with a monolingual student and so that loss there is just really hard to catch up especially when they get to sixth grade.

Mrs. Rodriguez: It's just our guidance that we need. We need that map like Mr. Castillo mentioned. We have the TELPAS rating of the students when they enter but it's so hard to try to get the support that they need. Basically, all of us (teachers) are left each to their own way instead of a community of teachers.

Mrs. Rodriguez mentioned the TELPAS rating of a student in her post. TELPAS is an acronym for the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System. The TELPAS is a state and federally required assessment designed to measure the annual progress that ELLs make in learning the English language. It assesses K-12 ELLs and encompasses four language domains, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and four proficiency levels, which are beginning, intermediate, advanced and advanced high. Mr. Castillo is constantly referring to a bilingual curriculum map to help address the needs of students who are placed together but have different proficiency levels. While students that are advanced high and advanced are more proficient in the English language, there are beginner students mixed in the class who struggle. Mr. Castillo and Mrs. Castellanos, who teach fourth and sixth grade respectively, are concerned about those beginning students being placed in these blended classes with no form of blueprint available to get them caught up with English language proficiency.

Mr. Castillo: When you get a first grade student, you know exactly what you need to do for that student. But yet, I get a beginner student in fourth grade and Mrs. Castellanos gets a beginner student in sixth grade and neither one of us are going to do the same thing for that child. We might do similar things but neither one of us have a map that states we must take a beginner student to this place. If you get a monolingual student new to the district that enrolls and comes into sixth grade you

know where to go, you know the things that child needs to learn, you know until what point that student needs phonetic awareness and up to what point that child needs to be reading. If you are lucky and get a beginner in first grade, you are at least catching them up in time. Our design does not call for a curriculum process or clarification. I believe this is something that needs to be looked at and addressed.

An additional concern for our ELLs is that upon entering the sixth grade, all instruction is in English in all content areas. While their native language is used somewhat to clarify certain instructional topics, the majority of the instructional delivery is in English. While students can take the state assessment in Spanish from their third to fifth grade years, ELLs who qualify must take the assessment in English their sixth grade year. State assessments are no longer offered in Spanish from sixth grade on up. While recent immigrants will be exempt from state testing to some degree, they will be required to test in English within the next couple of years, depending on certain criteria. Mrs. Castellanos, currently a sixth grade ELL teacher, is worried for those recent immigrants she has to prepare for transition to the English language. Since Adelante, an open district that enrolls students who live within its boundaries, is in close proximity to the Mexican border, ELLs enroll year round. This places additional stress on teachers to get their students prepared.

Mrs. Castellanos: Last week I received a recent immigrant in sixth grade. Everything is in English. I can do TPR (Total Physical Response strategies), all my CAVI (teaching) strategies, but the student does not understand what I am doing. The student might understand some of my gestures, the pictures, etc. I can put her on Rosetta stone. How then am I going to teach her basic phonics? Hopefully, she has

some background knowledge and education, so I teach her phonics and then where are those materials for me to take her further.

Mr. Castillo: This is my point. Those designs can be made. You are going to schedule four weeks for phonetic awareness, three weeks on sight wording, then after that you are going to spend this time on this and this time on that. We just don't have that starting point. This is the first step process and this is the second step and so forth. These are the books and the map that goes with beginners, these resources go with intermediates.

Mrs. Castellanos What I am worried about is that the student is in sixth grade and she will be testing soon. I believe she is exempt for two to three years. So come her eighth grade and freshman year, she gets tested and she counts. How is she going to perform, how much will the teachers be able to help her?

Mr. Castillo: That's assuming that the seventh and eighth grades pick up where you left off. What if the student withdraws or she becomes reclusive because she is having trouble with learning the language? All these things are challenges.

Another student group mentioned in the discussion was migrant students. Adelante I.S.D. does have students who migrate north with their families and generally enroll in late fall to Adelante. The concern here was not only the late enrollment of these students but their language proficiency or lack thereof. Many of these students do not have a strong foundation in English or Spanish, and therefore struggle in both languages in the areas of reading and comprehension. Teachers have to diagnose this problem and make instructional modifications to their lessons to accommodate this obstacle. During this dialogue, another trend emerged in the discourse surrounding the culture in the border area where Adelante is

located in. As mentioned in Chapter I, this area is located in the one of the poorest areas in the U.S. where many families live well below the poverty level and the heads of household have low levels of educational attainment. The language in this area is an amalgam of Spanish and English, resulting in a hybrid language known as Tex-Mex. Educators are concerned that as a result of this language spoken, students are not as strong in academic vocabulary in either English or Spanish.

> **Mrs. Rodriguez**: We are also forgetting about the migrant students. Some of these students don't have either language. I have one parent tell me he doesn't know Spanish and he doesn't know English. So which language am I going to start them on? Well, English comes first but the child has no foundation on either language. It's just one of those things where I am thinking what am I going to do? Where am I going to go?
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: Going back to the issue regarding "lifers" (students who have remained in the bilingual program since their elementary years in Adelante I.S.D.). I think that here in the Valley, it's very cultural, I mean if parents are not educated, they are not going to speak proper cognitive fluent Spanish to their child. However, they get tested on it and then the students come to us and we are trying to teach them. It is very hard. Many of our parents, their main goal is survival.
>
> **Mrs. Rodriguez**: In either language.

Bilingual Grouping

As previously stated in Chapter III, Adelante I.S.D is currently implementing the Transitional Bilingual Program (TBP) early exit model. This year, however, the district implemented a co-mingling approach in the elementary grades. Until now, ELLs in Adelante

had never been grouped accordingly. Instead, they have always been educated and grouped with only other ELLs. The goal of this co-mingling initiative was to provide ELLs with opportunities in the following areas: instructional equality, authentic language instruction, and interaction. During the aforementioned focus group interview on October 28th, the participants engaged in a discussion regarding this approach. While the teachers experienced some challenges with the implementation, they did have a positive outlook on the program and offered some ways to revamp the program design.

> **Mrs.Fuentes**: I think that ELLs should be grouped as follows: Pre-K, K and 1st grade all bilingual students should be grouped together, to develop academic language in their native language. Second and third grade bilingual students should be mixed with monolingual students; this will help bilingual students with their second language.
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: In my opinion, well, I have had all my ELLs grouped together and now I have them co-mingled as well. If you are going to have the ELLs all grouped together you need to have very efficient teachers. They have to be able to communicate in their native language and properly trained. It has to be a teacher 100% dedicated to them. If you are going to have them co-mingled, this also works because you have peers who are also modeling besides teachers. There is a positive there.

Mrs. Castellanos mentioned the importance of having certified teachers being able to communicate effectively and efficiently in native Spanish. Since there is an influx of immigrants from Mexico, it is important to employ educators who are well-versed in proper academic Spanish instead of the previously discussed Tex-Mex hybridization because state

assessments in Spanish are written in proper academic Spanish. Therefore, there is a need to teach those students taking these Spanish assessments the proper language and vocabulary. Additionally, the participants mentioned that students transition faster to a second language when they have a strong first language background. This is important to consider and aligns with the research by (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991) where they concluded when students are enrolled in classes that utilize their heritage language, they tend to perform better in all content areas compared to ELLs who did not receive instruction in their heritage language.

> **Mr. Castillo**: I think a blend of both of these programs would be very successful for our students. These co-mingling approaches where you are grouping bilingual with monolingual students sometimes hinder our ELLs. They are not functioning with peers. In fact, sometimes they retreat and become reclusive and don't explore anything outside their comfort zones. On the other hand, just putting all the ELLs in the classroom can also be ineffective. I think that you can take the best of both worlds and co-mingle the advanced and advanced high student in the regular classroom and yet still offer the support for the beginners and intermediate students into another classroom which ideally would be the most beneficial in my opinion.

Here, Mr. Castillo is referring to the proficiency levels assessed by the TELPAS assessment. He would like to see those students scoring at advanced high and advanced levels placed in the regular classroom with monolingual students. These students are highly proficient in the English language and would be successful in a regular academic environment. Those scoring at the intermediate and beginning level need more instructional time, and therefore, would be grouped together to ensure a more efficient and effective path to profiency. The teachers interviewed felt a mixture of all proficiency levels to be less than potent. Often times, the

advanced students tend to get bored with the instructional pace designated for those students struggling with English language mastery, which resulted in a deterioration of some student's behavior. Teachers also mentioned that beginning students would sometimes get reclusive and shy away from participating due to lack of confidence. Mr. Castillo also mentioned that grouping solely only ELLs together was not conducive for learning.

> **Mrs. Rodriguez**: I agree with that. I think that they should be grouped by levels. If you have the beginners grouped with the highs, sometimes the highs get bored and they don't want to do anything and they become disruptive and your beginners will be the ones who suffer. It's better to have the highs grouped with the monolinguals that way you can focus and concentrate on the foundation for those students who really need it.
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: And just adding to that, especially when you have recent immigrant that's a huge gap, especially when they are enrolled in sixth grade. It would be nice to have a class that just helps our recent immigrants just with the foundation of the English language, the phonics.
>
> **Mr. Castillo**: And the key to that is what Mrs. Castellanos mentioned. Having a proficient teacher who is able to build that foundation before they transition into a co-mingling classroom that way the students will be more prepared.

Mr. Castillo and Mrs. Castellanos discussed the importance of transition programs for their recent immigrants and other bilingual students preparing to enter co-mingling classes to help with their preparation for mastery of the English language. There are some classes at the secondary level at Adelante I.S.D. that use Rosetta Stone, a software program for the

development of language learning, for recent immigrants to help with the acquisition of the English language.

Traits of an Effective Bilingual Program

While there are many facets to a successful bilingual program, a well written bilingual design that is consistently adhered to by all educators is significant. During the focus group interview, the participants spoke about the integral components of a bilingual program. The following is an open dialogue between the participants about what they believe the characteristics of a successful bilingual program should be comprise of. They stated the following:

> **Mrs. Fuentes**:A bilingual program should have administrators that will support and design an effective bilingual program and especially people that have knowledge of the bilingual program. Secondly, the program should employ highly qualified bilingual teachers that will speak and pronounce their student's native language correctly. Last, there should be meetings that educate parents about the benefits of the bilingual program.
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: One, you need to have administration and personnel that support you. Second, you need highly qualified teachers not only strong academically but also strong in their Spanish language because the better that the teacher is proficient in the Spanish language the better the teacher will be able to help his/her students. Third, I feel that you need a lot more parental support. There is such a huge lack of parental involvement for this population of students and I believe it hinders their (ELLs) growth. Last, you need a very well written bilingual program design that is consistently aligned and followed.

In both dialogues, Mrs. Fuentes and Mrs. Castellanos stated the importance of a well-written bilingual program that is consistently aligned and followed with fidelity. This is significant and supports the research of Villarreal (1999), who stated that "curriculum and instructional alignment between primary and elementary school, elementary school and middle school, middle school and high school, and high school to university is critical for the smooth transition of ELLs from one level to the next" (p. 34). They both agreed it is paramount to employ highly qualified teachers who are strong in the Spanish language, as such is crucial for the advancement of their students in the area of language acquisition. Verdugo and Flores (2007) articulate that "the use of student's native language in the instructional process is an important part of the teaching and learning environment" (p. 172).

> **Mrs. Rodriguez**: I would just like to add to that sometimes we lack the resources for our students. For example, we need more technology for our children. Nowadays, we need more technology to keep them engaged. Maybe if we could afford to purchase more software and hardware that focuses on language and phonics, the student would be able to advance in their language.
>
> **Mr. Castillo**: I would add that for our students to be successful you do need parental involvement and it's something that we really lack. If we had a parental liaison that would be able to create activities for our parents to participate, this would really benefit the District. With regards to our bilingual design, we need more identifiable directions that you can easily access and input and utilize according to the levels of your students.

Parental involvement was another recognizable aspect that was lacking with our ELLs. The participants attributed this to the design of the grade configuration of each school and stated

that the constant moving from school to school did not provide an opportunity for parents to create long lasting ties. Mr. Castillo, while also speaking to the importance of a well-written bilingual design, stressed the need for a parental liaison to work more closely with the parents of our ELLs.

English Oral Language Strategies

The researcher included, in this section, responses from the participants on the importance of the implementation of English Oral Strategies. These instructional approaches are a type of instructional strategy that bilingual teachers employ for second language acquisition. The researcher wanted to include the information the participants provided on the importance of these strategies. As mentioned in Chapter III, Adelante I.S.D. incorporates the (TBP) model. One of the components of this model is to provide daily opportunities for ELLs to practice oral development in the second language. The amount of instruction in both languages shall be specifically controlled to ensure the development of the student's native language as well as allow for developmentally and linguistically appropriate progression toward the English language. Depending on the grade level and subject area, the curriculum determines the amount of time bilingual teachers should employ daily to provide instruction in the student's native language and English.

Mrs. Cuellar revealed in her statement, that these strategies were very important for ELLs. In addition, she stated that this student group is behind academically and therefore these strategies are vital for implementation.

> These strategies are important, they are really important because we need them here because more than likely these strategies are not being implemented at home. So, if we do not do them here, you know these kids will just fall further and further behind

than what they already are. It's not because they cannot learn, it's because their experiences are very limited. So, it's very important that we do them here.

Mr. Castillo also stressed the importance of these strategies in the classroom.

> These English Oral Strategies are important because it promotes language acquisition, it ensures for students to grow yearly in their linguistics. It is also very important that it be implemented consistently from campus to campus.

Mrs. Castellanos focused on the importance of these strategies and continuity from campus to campus.

> These strategies are very important. It is important that they continue from campus to campus because our students, for some reason or another, are always lacking in comparison to our monolingual students.

Mrs. Sanchez also believed in the importance of continuity of these strategies from campus to campus. Further, she elaborated why consistency is important from teacher to teacher as well.

> Well, I think the continuity is very important, you know the kids need that consistency in order to grasp the concept. When the kids come to school, this is a for sure thing for a lot of them and we need to model for them because a lot of these kids don't receive that modeling at home. There is not someone there who effectively or sufficiently serves as a role model for their oral language development. So, I think that consistency is very important from teacher to teacher and campus to campus even from within a grade level for making sure that oral language strategies are used in every content area.

Mrs. Fuentes stated that since she teaches the primary grades, she uses a lot of hand gestures and sounds in order to teach strategies to her kids.

> I guess the upper grade levels expect more each year. They want the kids to have developed comprehension skills. We have to do a lot for the students in order for them to develop these skills. So we do have these strategies in order for students to have comprehension skills. In kindergarten, I use a lot of sound and gestures and once they get the sound based on the gestures that I use I tell the students that I am not going to use anymore gestures and they are going to have to listen and make the connections in order to write.

During the focus group interview, participants revealed the importance of these strategies in the instruction of their students. What follows is an open dialogue between the participants concerning their views on the incorporation of these strategies in the classroom.

> **Mrs. Fuentes**: Oral language practice happens through the whole day, but I still feel that we should have an Oral language lab for Pre-K3 through the first grade.
>
> **Mrs. Rodriguez**: Daily Oral Language…if you are teaching like writing, it needs to be whole and not just isolated by itself because then it's not going to be very beneficial, it will be mechanics but not really the writing process.
>
> **Mrs. Castellanos**: It is good if it is done continuously and at some point added to your writing component. In the lower grades when I used to do it in second grade, to kind of help them with the writing test later on, yes they knew capital letters and punctuation but when it came down to them writing an actual sentence, they weren't able to complete the task effectively. So it has its pros and cons. If it is done continuously and then later on implemented with the writing, it is good.

It is well documented that students who struggle in reading also struggle in writing. They have limited vocabulary and difficulty expressing their ideas. They also have difficulty with grammatical structures and verb tenses. In the state of Texas, students in the fourth, seventh, ninth and tenth grades are subjected to a writing assessment even though the lower grades set the foundation for writing. The participants discussed the importance of incorporating these strategies within the writing component and why such should be implemented continuously.

> **Mr. Castillo**: Yes, Mrs. Castellanos hit it on point. If it is going to be done, it has to be done continuously because there are some grammatical skills that will help them. It has to be fluid and it has to be done correctly. One of the advantages because when we do it in the fourth grade, is that they are able to learn the past, present and future tenses and terms and subject/verb agreement. This is especially important for our ELLs because they have such a hard time acquiring that linguistic ability to learn the tenses.

In summary, the participants revealed that oral development strategies are important for second language development and that consistency is imperative for successful implementation. In the next section, the researcher will provide a document analysis of a preliminary report completed by TEA. The document analysis will include components of the report and findings as they relate to the bilingual program of Adelante I.S.D.

Document Analysis (Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings, TEA)

During the dates of December 12-16, 2011, Adelante I.S.D. was visited by Oscar Zepeda (Performance-Based Monitoring) and Larry Johnston (Program Access Review) from the Texas Education Agency Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions. As mentioned in Chapter III, the TEA division of Program Monitoring analyzes PBMAS

results annually and assigns stages of intervention to LEAs (Local Education Authority) based on an assessment of the risk for below standard performance for students in special populations. At the end of their visit, Mr. Zepeda and Mr. Johnston wrote and submitted a Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings to be sent to and kept on file at TEA. This report was also submitted to the Adelante I.S.D. for consideration and implementation. Table 9 below provides a five year history of Adelante ISD's staging as printed in the on-site report (Bilingual Education Only):

Table 10.

Adelante I.S.D. Staging

Year	Staging	
2007-2008	3	
2008-2009	4	On-site Review
2009-2010	4	Year after On-site Review
2010-2011	3	
2011-2012	3	
2012-2013	3	
2013-2014	3	

Adelante I.S.D. was staged for interventions in the bilingual program for five consecutive years, with three years at stage three and two at stage four. As noted in the table, TEA had previously done an on-site review back in 2009 due to low student performance. Adelante was once again visited by TEA in 2011-2012 because of the continued low performance of students in bilingual education.

The intended audience for this report was district administration, school board trustees, curriculum and instruction personnel, campus administration, and the teachers of Adelante I.S.D.

The document is organized in a table format with three columns labeled in the following format: areas for improvement, specific issues/trends identified, and LEA required actions. The document goes on to identify systemic issues, such as curriculum, use of the professional development and appraisal system (PDAS), instructional leadership, the bilingual program, the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC), and campus-to-campus transition. It also goes into detail about each systemic issue identified and lists a required action for the LEA to implement for improvement. For the purpose of this paper, the researcher will only include findings as they relate to the Bilingual Program.

This document was written so that the LEA can address issues that have hindered the academic development of students in the bilingual program. One of the findings of the document was a lack of curricular alignment that may negatively impact the standing of the district and certain campuses in regard to academic accountability and the academic achievement of students with special needs, such as ELLs. Also, the report concluded that the district could not continue with a "patchwork curriculum" where certain campuses were not fully implementing the C-Scope curriculum. Therefore, the District decided to fully implement C-Scope starting with the 2012-2013 school year.

A second finding reported by the document was the lack of an established process to successfully transition students from school to school. It was noted back in the 2009 TEA site visit that this was also an issue. TEA also documented that due to the lack of transition activities, the receiving teacher and at-risk students were placed at a huge disadvantage.

TEA also reported, through teacher interviews, that instructional time was lost as a result of the following factors: the absence of campus transition procedures and receiving teachers not having sufficient information on their students, which resulted in teachers not knowing the most effective teaching strategies to help them succeed academically. It was noted, also through teacher interviews, that some teachers lost many weeks of instructional time to assess the levels of their students. It was recommended that the district ensure effective transitions for their at-risk populations as they moved from grade to grade and campus to campus.

A third finding reported by the TEA document was that the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) had not followed guidance and training to properly identify and effectively address the unique needs of their ELLs. TEA recommended that LPAC meetings include a critical review of academic performance data for each ELL student and the committee should craft linguistic, cognitive, and affective strategies for the coming year. In addition, TEA recommended that the district develop a plan that ensures each LPAC operates according to the requirements set forth by 19 TAC §89.1220.

A further requirement of the district by TEA was to present this report to the Board of Trustees during an open meeting. In addition, using the most current data, the district had to revise their campus and district improvement plans to update activities, resources, and timelines. Adelante I.S.D. also had to submit monthly reports to TEA on the progress of their improvement plans and implementation through the next school year. Further, Adelante ISD had to submit a copy of their improvement plans to TEA by September 2012.

The researcher identified many recurring themes in this report that were similar to some of the responses and opinions of the participants, specifically those related to the

implementation and the delivery of curriculum and instruction. There were also many similarities between TEA's findings regarding lack of transition activities and participants' responses. Furthermore, there were also parallels between findings in the report and statements in the interviews regarding the amount of instructional time used to assess learners and the time allotted to help them acclimate to the new classroom and school.

Summary

This Chapter presented informational data from the views and beliefs of the participants through two individual interview settings: one focus group and a document analysis. The data that was collected via these settings revealed information regarding grade configuration, transitions and its effects, sense of belonging, and campus practices and procedures. Participants were able to dialogue and share their insights on traits of a successful bilingual program, bilingual grouping, implementation of oral language development strategies, and the development of curricular maps to help with instruction and planning.

The first research question focuses on how grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs in the Adelante I.S.D. The researcher determined that ELLs experienced excessive movement from campus to campus and how this practice impacted their education and well-being with tremendous influence. Additionally, campuses had very limited transitional practices and procedures in place to meet the needs of ELLs as they moved from campus to campus. The excessive movement, coupled with the lack of transitional activities, resulted in these students having the inability to create a sense of identity or belonging within the classroom, on campus, or both.

The second research question reflects on how grade-span configuration affects the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D. The researcher determined that the way the schools were configured had a negative influence on the continuity of the instructional programs of Adelante I.S.D. The participants placed great importance on English oral strategies, which are imperative for second language acquisition, however, the participants reported that due to the separation of campuses, many of the strategies were inconsistent or not followed with the utmost fidelity. In addition, the participants revealed that the same case could be made with the implementation of curriculum. Grading configuration also negatively influenced the ways that teachers communicated with one another. Since there was separation, there was also a lack of suitable dialogue between educators about instruction, best practices, and the placement of students.

The Preliminary On-Site Report of Findings by the Texas Education Agency Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions of Adelante I.S.D., based on their on-site visit during 2011-2012, was analyzed by the researcher. There were several findings in the report that were similar to the responses by the participants in the interviews conducted. The most notable comparisons included the lack of transitional activities for at-risk students and the issues that transpire due to the absence of these types of practices. Another comparison that emerged was the lack of the continuity of instruction between the campuses because of inconsistencies related to district sanctioned curriculum and other factors that were related to instruction.

Chapter V will present inferences drawn from these results and its implications on teachers and administrators. It will also include recommendations for implementation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter V presents a brief summary of the results of this research study and discusses the major findings as they relate to the research questions. The research questions were answered by prevailing themes that arose from the interviews and were described in Chapter IV. This chapter concludes with considerations for possible implementation by Adelante I.S.D. for the overall success of students, educators, and the community

Overview of the Study

The Adelante District is configured with one primary school (Sanchez) for Pre-K-through kindergarten, one campus (Sauceda) for 1st and 2nd grade, one campus (Del Valle) for third and fourth grade, one campus (Chavez) for fifth and sixth grade, one middle school (Rivera) for seventh and eighth grade, one high school (Adelante High School) campus for ninth through twelfth grade and one alternative secondary campus (Adelante Academy). The students at Adelante I.S.D. make six transitions from campus to campus during their Pre-K to their 12th grade years.

The students at Adelante I.S.D. transition every two years to another campus, and this frequent turnover of students appears to pose a major concern for administration, teachers and community members of Adelante I.S.D. The ELL population in Adelante has been increasing over the past few years and their academic struggles have been well-documented. Furthermore, Adelante I.S.D. has been visited by TEA in recent years due to a lack of progress that may be attributable to issues. Additionally, educators are concerned and feel that there is a relationship between how the schools are configured and the difficulties that their ELLs are experiencing. There is also expressed apprehension concerning the ways in which schools are configured and how such has a direct impact on the lack of consistency in

the delivery of instruction, the continuity of curriculum-specifically in the bilingual program, and lack of a sense of belonging for ELLs. When students have an opportunity to be enrolled in one campus from their early childhood years until their pre-adolescent years, they undergo fewer transitions, experience less stressful experiences, and perform better academically than students who are enrolled in campuses that have frequent turnover in grades (Paglin & Fager, 1997; Alspaugh, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of the present grade-span configuration and successive school-to-school transitions on ELLs' sense of belonging and the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are identified as such on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D. This exploratory research case study will use qualitative data acquired by way of participant interviews, one focus group interview, and document analysis. The following research questions were identified and helped guide the researcher through the study. From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs:

1. How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D.?
2. How does the grade-span configuration affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.?

The way the district is configured is significant because students are constantly transitioning from campus to campus, and research has established that this frequent movement can be detrimental to student achievement and success, especially to students from second language acquisition backgrounds.

Research Question One

(From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs :) How do the grade-span configurations and successive school-to-school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs of the Adelante I.S.D? This question was proposed by the researcher to identify how grade configuration and school transitions affect the sense of belonging for students who are ELLs in the school district. As previously stated, ELLs, along with other students, transition to another campus every two years, and this frequent turnover has triggered some difficulties for these students. One of these difficulties identified by the researcher and the participants interviewed was their student's (ELLs) lack of a sense of belonging. Goodenow and Grady (1993) define the sense of belonging in the school or classroom as "the extent to which student's feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (p. 61). Due to the frequency in which ELLs transition from campus to campus and the inability for them to create a permanent bond to that particular campus (es), the researcher felt that this topic was of significant importance to consider and examine through a qualitative study lens.

Finding One. *The participants believed that their students moved too often from campus to campus, and therefore experienced too much transition from campus to campus. This excessive movement seemed to negatively affect the student's academic and social development.*

It was determined that participants believed that students experienced excessive movement from campus to campus. The participants correlated a negative outcome with the way the schools were configured. As stated in Chapter I, the elementary campuses in Adelante were configured in two grade configurations, and each year the campuses lost fifty

percent of their student population to the next campus. The data specified in Chapter I also indicated that the district had a history of creating various narrow grade campuses through the years. As a result, the students were required to make many transitions during their educational career in the Adelante I.S.D. Renchler (2000) states that "narrow grade spans impose on students the stress of frequent school transitions" (p. 3). Howley (2002) indicates that "creating more narrowly configured schools in a system increases the number of transitions students must experiences in their K-12 careers" (p. 6-7). In addition, he goes on to remark that each time students make a transition from one narrowly configured school to another, it disrupts the student's learning and participation. He also points out that the students most affected by these disruptions are those from impoverished backgrounds.

The participants had already indicated that they saw their students function solely in their isolated group, become withdrawn, and speaking largely in their native language as a means of coping with their insecurities. Rice (2001) specified in her study that students participate in systemic transition when they change classrooms, buildings, teachers, and schools, and that these transitions can adversely affect students' social networks as well as their academic achievement. In addition, she stated that students who have the greatest difficulty making these transitions are those who are not academically prepared for the next grade and who also come from low income backgrounds. According to Simmons and Blyth (1987), students arriving to campuses with lower grade point averages tend to experience greater difficulty adjusting to school. What's more, students who are unable to successfully navigate through these systemic transitions often become disengaged and lose interest in their schooling. The participants observed that their students had more difficulties than any other

student group, and they suffered more academically and socially as a result of these constant changes.

Based on the participants' individual responses, the researcher determined that they devoted a considerable amount of time to getting their students adjusted to the new classroom, campus rules and procedures, and the environment in general. Participants noted that the preparation devoted to these students upon arrival from other campuses devoured a substantial amount of instructional time as well. They also stated that campuses differed on student expectations and other campus procedures, affecting students tremendously in the transitional process. Each time the students made the required transitions, they had to get used to a new administrator, new staff, new campus structure, and a new environment. This finding is aligned with the research of Burkham, Michaels and Lee (2007), who stated in their study that "during such transitions, students must contend not only with a new physical environment but must also adapt to a new school culture with its host of learning and social experiences" (p. 290).

Constant movement managed to hinder the development of student and parents' relationships to the campus as well. As stated throughout the responses and focus group interview, students did not have an opportunity to create lasting ties to their campus due to the constant movement and the narrow grade span of each campus.

Finding Two. *Based on the participant's responses, there was a lack of school transition activities to help students make the adjustment from campus to campus.*

While there were some activities planned and coordinated, the participants did not think there were enough of them organized to truly benefit their students in preparation each school transition. Frequent school visits, for example, have been identified by research as a

positive means for students to begin preparation for the next grade level or campus. According to Pianta et al. (1999), school visits may help reduce the achievement decline that many students experience as they transition between campuses and programs. Paglin and Fager (1997) stress that student experiences resulting from transition can be "mitigated by practices such as between school visits, mentoring by students from the school at the more advanced level, special assemblies for new students, communication between the faculties and administrations of the two schools, and grouping students into teams or houses in large school" (p. 11). While some campuses conducted one school visit, there were other campuses that did not have any planned visits or activities prepared. However, the participants still felt the main cause for their student's academic and social disruptions was attributed to the way that the schools were configured.

As a result of a lack of planned transition activities, the students were not adequately prepared to make the school-to-school transitions. According to Rice (2001), "as students progress from one level of education to the next, they can experience major changes in school climate, educational practices, and social structures" (p. 373). The move from a non-tested grade level campus to a tested grade level campus was especially difficult for the students, as noted by the participants. They go on to state that their students were still very young and needed another year at their respective campuses before making the change. Furthermore, they indicated that the transition to the tested grade campus even hindered the second language acquisition of their students. According to Crockett et al. (1989), "school transitions that occur too early, at an age when adolescents have not yet developed sufficient personal coping resources, may prove more disruptive than transitions occurring at a later time" (p. 184). Not to mention, when students made multiple school changes that required

continual readjustments, their coping efforts may be suppressed. This is important to consider because, as noted previously, the ELLs are subjected to constant transition. Moreover, according to research (Alspaugh, 1998, 2000; Howley, 2002), there tends to be a decline in assessment scores and achievement the year a student makes a transition.

Finding Three: *Based on their responses, the participants did not think their students felt a sense of belonging to the campus or district.*

Overall, the participants felt that their students did not have a sense of belonging to their campus because of the frequent movement from campus to campus. Many believed their students were unfairly labeled and stigmatized due to their ELL status, which had a negative impact on their learning. Furthermore, some of the participants noted that this sense of belonging was not something that could be developed overnight but, on the contrary, takes years to develop. So, by the time their students started to become comfortable with the campus and its culture, it would be time for them to move on to the next campus.

Finding three is aligned with research that states that constant turnover negatively influences a sense of community and belonging. According to Renchler (2000), "schools with very narrow grade spans experience frequent student turnover, which can influence the schools identity and sense of community" (p. 2). This was highly noted by the participants in their respective interviews. Students seemed to be affected and frustrated by the movement and did not seem comfortable in their environment. Additionally, the participants stated that the frequent movement and lack of belonging hindered their student's second language movement and self-esteem. Furthermore, their students remained with their fellow ELL peers and remained isolated from the student body. In their "groups," they immersed themselves solely in their first language when amongst each other, which, in turn, did not

allow them to expand beyond their native tongues. This finding aligns with the research of Goodenow and Grady (1993) which states that a student's friends can influence one's academic motivation in a negative fashion. Furthermore, according to Finn (1989), it is quite common for students of low SES to associate with other students who are also non-participants in order to renew their self-esteem. Finn (1989) also surmises that if students did not identify well with their school, their participation in educational activities would be severely limited. Consequently, there were many studies that indicated that a lack of belonging led to other crucial factors like juvenile delinquency and increased school drop-out rates (Ma, 2003; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanchez, Colon & Esparza, 2005).

Students who were identified as ELL appeared to be negatively affected by being grouped accordingly. Participants observed that their students were stigmatized negatively by their monolingual peers, which led to feelings of inferiority in those ELLs. According to Walton and Cohen (2007), in academic settings, "members of socially stigmatized groups are more uncertain of the quality of their social bonds and thus more sensitive to issues of social belonging (p. 82). The researchers additionally coined this term *belonging uncertainty* and suggested that it contributed to racial inequalities in achievement. The participants also observed that their students often saw themselves as a lesser student in comparison to their monolingual counterparts due to their first language, recent immigrant status, and being identified in a marginalized group. This finding aligned research by Walton and Cohen (2007) explaining that "minority individuals are aware that their group is under-represented and stigmatized in both academic settings and elsewhere (p. 94). The participants further stated the label ELLs unfortunately bear is hindering them from belonging and expanding their horizons, as well. This is important to consider because according to Goodenow and

Grady (1993), a sense of belonging has an effect on a student's devotion to school and other educational standards.

As previously stated, the campuses were configured as two grade span schools, and therefore the students had to make changes every two years. According to Sanchez, Colon and Esparza (2005), a sense of belonging required membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs. Furthermore, a shared emotional connection must exist where individuals have a common history and experience. The narrow grade span did not give the students and staff the necessary amount of time to develop a lasting relationship with one another. Additionally, by the time their students started to get comfortable with the campus and its culture, it was time for them to move on to the next campus. By year two on each campus, participants felt that their students were starting to get used to the campus culture and procedures. Participants further noted that some students had successfully adapted and felt safe in their school climate. According to Rice (2001), "the degree to which members of the school community feel safe is one indicator of the quality of the interactions in the school" (p. 375). While it seemed that each campus had an inclusive school community, it could not balance the effects the narrow grade span impaired on the students' sense of belonging to each campus.

Research Question Two

From the perspectives of teachers of ELLs, how do the grade-span configurations affect the continuity of curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs on the elementary campuses of Adelante I.S.D.? This question was proposed by the researcher to identify how the grade configuration and school transitions affect the curriculum and instruction for students who are ELLs in the school district. As previously stated, ELLs transition to

another campus every two years, causing concern amongst educators about the lack of instructional continuity between the campuses. They noted that an underlying contributor to this discontinuity was the way that the schools were configured. The participants were concerned that this discontinuity between the campuses contributed to many academic deficiencies in their students. In addition, the way the schools were configured also impacted the way that educators communicated across the elementary campuses.

Finding Four. *Based on their responses, the participants felt the grade configuration affected the instructional continuity between the primary and elementary schools in the district.*

It was determined by the participants that there was a discontinuity of the bilingual curriculum and instruction between each campus. This haphazard curriculum alignment negatively affected the delivery of instruction and teachers' expectations. The participants attributed this dilemma to the way that the campuses were configured as two grade schools. According to Paglin and Fager (1997), "one and two grade schools present the challenge of how to preserve a sense of continuity and stability when all or half of the student population turns over every year "(p. 11). Various participants hinted that while they taught English oral strategies one way, their counterparts on other campuses taught it another. In addition, while the TBP (Transitional Bilingual Program) was taught according to the district's plan by some of the participants, other participants taught a different version of the program, resulting in misaligned practices that have had a negative impact on ELL's academic achievement.

According to Rice (1997), there are two types of institutional discontinuities that exist: organizational and social. Organizational include changes in the school size, self-contained/ departmentalized classrooms, school standards, and teacher expectations. Social

discontinuities include changes in the student demographics, sense of belonging, and teacher relationships. The ELLs in the Adelante I.S.D. experienced both types of discontinuities.

The students experienced changes in the school size and location of each campus. While three of the campuses were fairly new and averaged about ten years in building age, one of the campuses was older and incorporated the use of separate wings mixed with building structures that were over forty years old. Also, while students in the primary grades were exposed to a self-contained type format, as they reached the third/fourth grade campus and fifth/sixth grade campus, these classes became more subject specific and departmentalized. There were different educational practices being applied and implemented in the elementary campuses in Adelante as well. According to Rice (2001), this is a common occurrence when there are transitions between schools. The participants perceived that educators across the campuses differed with one another on their expectations of their students. Rice (2001) also found in her study that the degree to which teachers challenged their students academically also changed as a result of the transitions. Carolan (2013) states that "not only must children adapt to a new physical setting, but they must also adjust to new academic and normative expectations that are likely dissimilar and more demanding than their previous school" (p. 374). Furthermore, not only did students have to make adjustments to the schools' academic climates but had to do so while also coping with an assortment of developmental changes that they were undergoing.

The participants also observed that not all their fellow peers followed the District scope and sequence in certain subject areas more fully than others. They acknowledged there were some instructional disruptions in the fidelity of the TBP as well. According to Rice (2001), "disruptions cause distraction that can undermine academic progress" (p. 389). The

participants had acknowledged previously that the grade span affected the continuity of instruction from campus to campus, which in turn negated the advancement of their students in their second language.

The participants also commented that their students experienced social discontinuities, as well, as every other year, the students experienced changes in their administrative, teaching, custodial, cafeteria and auxiliary staff. While they were able to create relationships with the staff members of that particular campus, it was difficult to sustain such a connection beyond the years following the move to the next campus. Some of the participants indicated that they wondered what became of their students once they left their campus.

Finding Five. *Based on their responses, the participants felt that the grade configuration affected the communication between staff members amongst the different elementary campuses.*

The participants determined that there was a lack of communication between one another from campus to campus, which they also felt affected the continuity of curriculum from campus to campus. While at times there were required grade level meetings between the campuses, the participants believed more collaboration needed to occur. Based on these interviews and discussions, the researcher and participants indicated that interactions among educators across the campuses might be related to the organization of the grade configurations. Although the sentiment from the participants was little to no communication between the campuses, many of them felt there was a considerable amount of collaboration on their own campuses between the grade levels. Teachers were able to plan accordingly, provide input, and make collaborative instructional decisions.

The participants also acknowledge that they communicated their student's cumulative information with the grade above through certain placement documents. These documents would have state assessment results, TELPAS testing information, teacher recommendations, and other types of student history. Some of the participant admitted they were not involved as much as they would like to be in the placement of their students to the next grade level campus. In addition, some of the participants were not sure that their placement information or their recommendations were even considered by administrators and teachers of the next grade campus. This is a legitimate concern, as Margetts (2003) reports that student information is sometimes not utilized from the previous year due to the systemic changes students and teachers undergo from year to year and campus to campus. He also stated that "in elementary schools, children move from one teacher to the next year. Every year we trash a year's worth of relationships built between children and their teacher, and we throw away all the knowledge the teacher has gained about what each child needs and can do. Each year we tell every child and teacher to start over again" (p. 229). According to Masters (2005), this is a common practice and occurs each year as the students' progress to the next grade level. He mentions in his research that student's past efforts from the previous year are forgotten, as educators focus on the curriculum and standards for the next grade.

While participants acknowledged that they collaborated well with educators at their own campus, they did not have that same collaborative relationship with either the campus below or above. While the participants were receptive of being able to foster and develop this type of relationship, they perceived that the grade configuration hampered the development of an efficient professional learning community or communities of practice between the campuses. According to Wenger-Trayner (2015), these types of communities

require time, member engagement, and sustained interactions in order to be successful. Furthermore, these types of communities could thrive better in campuses with broad grade spans. According to McPartland, Coldiron, and Braddock (1987), educators who teach in campuses with more grade levels in that particular school delivered a more continuous curriculum than educators in schools with fewer grade levels. Teachers employed in schools with broad grade spans enjoyed the ability to meet regularly and teach with their colleagues in the same building. In addition, these interactions and collaborations could impact the instruction and achievement of their students. According to research conducted by Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran (2007), collaborative efforts between educators can have a positive impact on the academic achievement of their students and their own instructional practices.

Finding Six. *Based on their responses, the participants felt that a bilingual curriculum map and the TBP needed to be developed and/or modified across the grades to address the diverse needs of the ELL population in Adelante I.S.D.*

In the bilingual classes in the Adelante Independent School District, students are enrolled across linguistic levels and many are objectively different. It is challenging to work with these ELLs because of this differentiation in language development levels and also depending on whether they are recent immigrants or have been in the program for a few years already.

The participants revealed there was not a type of curricular map that existed to help address the needs of the varying levels of English proficiency their students possessed when entering their classrooms. While some students were identified as advanced high or advanced on TELPAS, there were other students that were rated as intermediate or below

enrolled in the same classrooms. The participants who were teachers at the upper elementary grades were concerned with the instructional decisions they would have to make in regard to those recent immigrants or students who have been enrolled in the bilingual program for quite some time. This was especially true if those students were already in the tested grade levels where the participants believed it was difficult to get them caught up with their fellow peers and ready for the state assessments in a timely fashion. There appeared to be a sense of uncertainty and frustration voiced by the participants in attempting to address all their students' needs. This was particularly true of those students identified as beginners. In addition, they were also concerned with the amount of time it would take to assess their students' levels, identify their instructional needs, and develop plan of action. This is important to consider because according to Ovando (2003), the "time allocation for the child's first language and the second language, the sociocultural and educational background of the community, and the general school curriculum and climate can have a negative effect on the outcome of a particular bilingual program" (p. 16). They were also especially worried for their students making the transition and starting year one at that particular campus.

The participants also indicated that this school year was rather difficult because the district implemented the comingling of bilingual students with monolingual students. Traditionally in the past, bilingual students were placed together and separated by either teacher recommendation and/or TELPAS level. Those students identified as advanced or advanced high were placed in classes where the classroom teacher utilized more English in the instructional delivery, while those students who were identified as beginner or intermediate were placed in classes where the native language was utilized more mixed with the second language.

This school year, bilingual students were no longer placed separately with one another but placed in all English speaking classrooms. The participants agreed that while it was challenging, this instructional setting was ideal for their students. However, the participants did indicate that it needed to be modified. One participant believed that bilingual students in Pre-K, Kindergarten, and first grade needed to be grouped all together to develop academic language in their native tongue. She also specified that second and third grade would be more ideal for students to be mixed with monolingual students. Three of the participants called for the need of efficient bilingual teachers who were very proficient in the native language and properly trained. There was concern for the co-mingling of all bilingual students in an all-English environment. Some felt that their students became reclusive due to their lack of English speaking skills and achievement compared to their fellow peers in the classroom. However, they also indicated that just having ELLs grouped together in the classroom was not effective either. They called for students scoring advanced and advanced-high to be co-mingled with other students in all English classes. They felt that students rated at beginning or intermediate needed more time in the classroom taught with their native language mixed with their second language. This type of environment would help their students with the foundation of the English language and phonics. According to many research studies (Villarreal, 1999; Ovando, 2003; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Verdugo & Flores, 2007), the grouping of bilingual students is a much debated topic. There are a variety of bilingual programs that can be made available to students and each one has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to Verdugo & Flores (2007), "in meeting the needs of ELL students, staff should be involved in the design of the learning environment so that it reflects both the school and the community" (p. 172).

Recommendations for Action

As stated in Chapter I, it was the role of the researcher to participate in an exploratory research case study of the Adelante I.S.D. grade-span configuration. The researcher was able to work with the district of Adelante and study the grade-span configuration of its elementary campuses and identify its effects on the sense of belonging of ELLs and on the continuity of instruction from campus to campus. The researcher has generated the following recommendations to help the District address the issues associated with the findings.

Recommendation One

The District must implement a variety of transition activities and programs in place at each campus to ensure that both students and parents are prepared to make the change from campus to campus.

Transition programs, activities, and practices should be implemented routinely to ensure smooth transitions for students of Adelante I.S.D. These activities can help minimize the achievement decline and other factors associated with transitioning. While scheduled school visits and subsequent tours were identified as common practices implemented by some of the campuses, they were offered only once at the end of the school year and were the only type of transition activity offered to ELLs. In addition, some of the campuses did not offer any type of activity to help curb the ill-effects of transitioning on students at all. Transition practices can help students adjust faster to the campus and promote a sense of belonging. Some specific activities that the District should consider are three mandatory school visits between the campuses, especially for those grades that transition to the next campus. These three school visits should be included in both the district and campus plans.

The district should also consider scheduling parent informational nights for those students that will be making the transition. Finally, the campuses should also schedule student orientation day(s) or camps. Activities would include tours of the facilities, meet and greet with teachers, presentation of classroom rules, and expectations, for example. While these activities are important to help prepare students for the eventual change, parental activities must also be considered. Studies have shown that increased parental involvement has a positive influence on student achievement (Epstein, 1995; Dunlap & Alva, 1999).

Recommendation Two

In order for ELLs to feel a sense of belonging, it must be communicated that they, their native language, and culture are valued and appreciated.

Students from different cultures and backgrounds must realize that they are an integral part of their school if they are to feel a sense of identify with their particular campus. The participants were very concerned with the social well-being of their students, especially with regards to their self-esteem. With the many transitions that the students have to complete at Adelante I.S.D., it is imperative that the district focuses part of their campus and district plan to identify ways to ease the transition and develop ways to create activities where ELLs can feel more at ease on their respective campuses. ELLs are unlike any other student because not only are they transitioning from campus to campus like all the other students, they are also transitioning from another country, language and culture.

The placement, grouping, and scheduling of bilingual students should be considered and evaluated before decisions are to be made. Based on the participant's responses, it seemed that ELLs were grouped and instructed together so they had minimal interaction with their English monolingual peers. Consequently, when interactions between these two groups

of students did occur, ELLs were often ridiculed or alienated by their classmates due to their culture and first language, which led ELLs to feel inferior to the rest of the student population. It has been well documented that when students do not feel a connection to their school, they end up withdrawing completely from the learning environment. All school districts should implement practices that are in the best interest of their students and should curtail practices that are belittling and demeaning to students of other cultures, minority races, or ethnicities.

Recommendation Three

Increased opportunities for instructional planning between the campuses must exist in order for consistent and aligned instructional practices to prevail.

The district and campuses need to develop opportunities for increased interactions between the campuses, specifically as it relates to curriculum and instruction. Instructional planning across the campuses needs to take place and should be scheduled often to ensure that instructional strategies are consistent between all grade levels and content areas. These planning meetings should be productive and function with the sole purpose of improving the academic achievement of all their students. The district should consider scheduling a minimum of three mandatory meetings between the campuses. These visits should also be included in both the district and campus plans. Currently, the requirement is that campuses hold one meeting with both the campus above and the campus below. The participants believed that one meeting was not enough to effectively collaborate and plan with their fellow peers. In addition to these meetings, there should be additional scheduled meetings between bilingual teachers across the district to ensure proper implementation of the bilingual program and design. All staff members should be held accountable for ensuring

they follow the district's scope and sequence and all aspects as they relate to instruction with fidelity. Teachers of ELLs from the sending and receiving campuses must schedule meetings when placing students into their first year at the transitioning campus. This will help ensure that the best placement and instructional decisions are made in the best interests of the student. In addition, the learning styles of students will be discussed and decisions regarding preferred teaching styles that will complement these different methods of learning will also be discussed and evaluated.

Recommendation Four

The district's current elementary grade configuration must be reviewed and evaluated by all stakeholders to determine if this system is the most appropriate and in the best interest of the students of Adelante. Additionally, schools with broader grade-spans should be researched and implemented to help reduce the number of times students must transition from campus to campus, increase communication between the teaching community, and enhance instructional practices.

As one of the participants, Mrs. Castellanos, observed, "I think a neighborhood school setting would benefit all our students but especially our ELLs. They will have the advantage of being placed on campuses for a longer period of time and not just two years." According to research, it has been suggested that smaller schools are associated with higher levels of student achievement (Paglin & Fager, 1997, Howley, 2002). In addition, while larger schools have more activities and opportunities to offer, students are more likely to participate in activities in smaller schools (Lay, 2007). While the elementary campuses in Adelante could be considered as small schools due to their narrow grade campus, their student enrollment per grade level exceeds two hundred students and some had numbers as

high as three hundred students per grade level. This is significant considering that some neighborhood schools in the local area had grade levels with student enrollment as little as one hundred students or less. According to Howley (2002), the number of students per grade level in today's narrow grade span configuration is higher than it has been in past years. In addition, Ready (2008) also indicated that schools that have narrow grade spans have more students and classes per grade. This research aligns with the student enrollment figures per grade level in Adelante, which is important because both student enrollment and school size serve as an important variable for school climate. Therefore, schools with broader grade levels are needed in Adelante I.S.D. Paglin and Fager (1997) assess that schools with broad grade levels have more opportunities for students to participate in school activities and develop a sense of community. They go on to comment that schools with large grade spans are able to sustain more parental involvement.

The researcher proposes that the next logical step for Adelante I.S.D. is to create elementary neighborhood schools for the students of Adelante I.S.D. There are a multitude of items that need to be considered and studied before making a change of this magnitude, such as economic and financial factors, transportation and zoning issues, the physical plant, staffing issues, enrollment projections, and facilities to name a few. It is not an easy decision and one that requires the input of administration, board members, and community members. However, decisions need to be made to allow our students to succeed academically.

The students in Adelante I.S.D. would benefit from the establishment of neighborhood schools. They would, first and foremost, make less transitions from school to school and have the opportunity to stay longer at a particular campus where they would develop and foster significant relationships with all staff members. This would help

tremendously in assisting students to achieve a sense of belonging. Teachers would have the opportunity to meet and plan with one another and discuss instructional issues more often to ensure consistency. Student enrollment at each grade level would be considerably smaller and manageable for administration and teaching and support staff. Parental involvement would be sustainable for a period of time longer than two years. Students would not be transitioning to different campuses at important physical and emotional developmental stages or at critical grade levels.

Summary

The researcher began this study in earnest to identify the grade configuration history of Adelante and to identify the impact it had on ELLs, their sense of belonging, and the continuity of curriculum and instruction on the bilingual program in the elementary grades. The researcher was primarily concerned with the number of transitions students had to make at campuses in Adelante I.S.D., which totaled to six from Pre-K to high school. Two research questions were posed and six participants, all of whom serve as bilingual educators, took part in the study. The researcher incorporated the use of individual interviews, one focus group interview, and a document analysis of a TEA report.

The data collected through these research tools indicated that students experienced a considerable amount of movement, which the participants and researcher perceived as having a negative influence on the academic achievement of ELLs. In addition, there were minimal transitional practices in place to prepare students for the next campus and grade level, leaving students unprepared to succeed in making the transition effectively. Furthermore, the students were unable to achieve an enduring sense of belonging to each campus as a result of how the campuses were configured. Consequently, the grade configuration also impacted the

curriculum and instruction for each campus and the district. Some instructional strategies were inconsistent from campus to campus and fidelity and follow-through of the district plan were also of concern. The configuration also hindered the communication of teachers across the campuses, as they had very little opportunity to meet and plan with one another.

The researcher offered recommendations to help alleviate some of the issues that were identified through the findings. However, a long-term solution would be to incorporate a neighborhood school setting(s) for the students and stakeholders of Adelante I.S.D. In meeting with the Superintendent of Schools, central office, curriculum and instruction, board members, and teachers throughout the district, it is evident that they are hardworking individuals who want the best for their students. The district has had a long history of incorporating narrow graded campuses. While they were created with a certain objective in mind, it is time for the District to evaluate its effectiveness and determine a more viable and sustainable configuration. The literature review in both Chapters One and Two presented the advantages of schools with broader grade levels and the impact it would have on the academic achievement and emotional well-being of students. Most importantly, students would not have to go through the constant transitions they are currently experiencing. By conducting feasibility studies and initiating meetings with administration, teachers, parents and community members regarding neighborhood schools, it seems this could be a reality that would greatly benefit the ELLs of the Adelante Independent School District.

The Rio Grande Valley is a unique area that is rich in Mexican culture and heritage. Spanish is prevalent in the "Valley" and is spoken by ELLs and their families in their households. The culture and bilingualism of our students is unique, distinctive and should be valued. As an educator and an administrator that has had the privilege of serving ELLs at

three of the campuses in this school district, I am optimistic that progressive change is on the forefront. The ELLs in Rio Grande Valley have experienced many obstacles and have endured many encumbrances but it has not deterred them or their families from abandoning hope. The students and their families are a proud people who are aware that to succeed in life the attainment of an education is significant.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1

How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching bilingual education?

What areas have you taught since you began as a teacher?

Why did you decide to teach in a bilingual program?

Tell me about your most successful experiences as you consider instruction among your bilingual learners?

Tell me about your most challenging experiences as you consider instruction among your bilingual learners?

1. Why are English Oral Language Strategies important for second language acquisition among ELLs to ensure curriculum continuity campus to campus?
2. How often do you meet with bilingual teachers from other campuses to ensure common teaching practices in bilingual education are being implemented in the classroom?
3. Do you think there is a connection between the continuity of instruction of the bilingual program and the way that our elementary schools are configured?
4. How involved are you in the placement of your former ELLs in the next grade? Do you meet with bilingual teachers from other campuses? If so, how often do you meet?
5. Are you familiar with the objectives taught the year prior and following among your ELLs? How familiar are you with the features of curriculum instruction that will affect student achievement at the next grade level/campus?

6. Do you have the opportunity to provide input to future teachers who instruct your former ELLs?
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages in the way that elementary schools are configured in Adelante I.S.D. as it relates to the bilingual program?
8. How involved are you with the curriculum development and alignment?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2

1. Is it advantageous for your ELLs to move from campus to campus every other year (transitioning)? Please explain.
2. Is it disadvantageous for your ELLs to transition from campus to campus (transitioning)? Please explain.
3. Do you think that ELLs are prepared for the school to school transitions that are presented to them in the movement from campus to campus? Why/Why not? What are the challenges?
4. How much time do you allocate for helping ELLs adjust to the classroom/school? How does the school leadership support that time?
5. What activities does your campus participate to help the ease of transition for ELLs into your campus?
6. What activities does your campus participate to help ease the transition for ELLs out of your campus?
7. Talk to me about the support provided to help ELLs as they make the transition from campus to campus?
8. Do ELLs feel a sense of belonging on the campus? Please share examples.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

1. Let's begin by giving introductions at this time. Can each of you tell the group your name, campus that you are associated with, years of experience in the district and years of experience of working with ELLs.
2. What is your philosophy of our Transition Early Exit Model that we incorporate for our English Language Leaners at Adelante I.S.D.? How do you think English Language Learners should be grouped?
3. What components do you think that a successful bilingual program should have?
4. What are your thoughts about our current grading configuration system? What are your thoughts about a pk-4th/5th type of grading configuration?
5. The district has a history of English Language Learners who have been enrolled in the district since their elementary years, however struggle in their latter academic secondary public school years. In your opinion, what are the reasons why they have been unsuccessful in our current educational system at Adelante I.S.D.
6. What is your opinion on the current state standards and the way English Language Learners are assessed in the State of Texas? How do you think they impact our ELLs? How is it positive? How is it negative?
7. What is your view on daily oral language classroom practices? How often do you think it should be implemented?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say or share with the group about English Language learners in Adelante I.S.D. regarding their education, the bilingual program, their placement in campuses, transition, and sense of belonging?