EXPERIENCING THE FCAT: A STUDY OF HOW ELLs, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS RESPONDED TO A STATE MANDATED TEST IN FLORIDA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University

2011

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Abstract

In an era of raising the bar of accountability higher on state, district, and school levels, the measurement of students’ academic achievement has become the apple of the eye of the American educational system. Such a focus was raised to a new level when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was approved in 2001, aiming to strengthen assessment and accountability policies by requiring the states “to evaluate the performance of all students in all public schools in order to determine whether schools, school districts, and the State have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)” (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p 31). As a result, English Language Learners (ELLs) were impacted in a unique way as AYP includes the report of their academic performance in the state mandated tests as well. Federal funding distribution is based on such reports. Although the fact of holding schools, districts, and states accountable for students’ progress is logical, questions have surfaced in regards to the fairness of these tests being used to measure the academic progress of ELLs. A particular concern is that such tests were developed based on native English speakers’ language standards. Although this topic has gained the attention of some researchers, the focus has been on the tests themselves; little research has been done to explore the experience and perceptions of stakeholders most directly impacted by such a situation.

The present study explores the perceptions and attitudes of ELLs at elementary level, grade 3, towards Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). In addition,
the perspectives and attitudes of those who work directly with this subgroup of students, teachers and their parents, towards such a test are also examined to draw a more comprehensive picture of how a state mandated test impacted them. Eleven participants were selected for this qualitative study. The techniques that were employed to conduct this study were classroom observations/field notes, individual interviews, students’ classroom work, teachers’ teaching materials (lesson plans, instructional materials, activities), teachers’ checklists, and statistics/testing reports from school and district documents.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Hirvela

Words do not do justice to express the extent of my gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Hirvela. Without your constant support, encouragement, constructive feedbacks, grace and understanding, this study would have never seen the light. As my professor of many courses, I will always be appreciative to you for setting up a high bar of expectations and still finding nurturing ways to bring the best in me as a student.

Dr. Samimy

I am grateful to Dr. Samimy, whose gift of bringing the connection between research and personal experiences alive in her teaching has made me a better educator. I am thankful that you reached out and encouraged me to rise above the obstacles in order to fulfill this worthwhile dream.

Dr. Soter

Your insightful perspectives and support have helped me approach research with a new insight, which is, searching for my own voice as a novice researcher. I have learned so much from you and I am thankful to you for instilling in me to look at each day as a new discovery in life.
I also wish to acknowledge Dr. Bloome and Dr. James-Brown, who although are not members of my dissertation committee, they left their marks along my journey at the OSU.

I am grateful to The Ohio State University for offering the finest quality of education.

I thank my two amazing children, Kaltrin and Catherine, for their endless love, encouragement, support, and faith in me which made my doctoral experience more bearable. I am so blessed to have two wonderful children like you.

To my brother, I am thankful for always cheering me on whatever dreams I pursue in my life.

Special thanks go to the administrators at Little Gators, ESOL and Research Departments at Seminole County Public Schools for allowing me to do the research at Little Gators and for being supportive throughout the process. I am grateful to the participants of the study (teachers, students and parents) for their willingness to be part of this research study.

I want to thank all my friends who never ceased encouraging and supporting me. I will always be grateful to my best friend Liz for her constant prayers when I had no strength to pray on my own.

A special acknowledgement goes to my great friend Bona, ‘Boke’, who always modeled unconditional love and graceful forgiveness. Her memory will always be with me.
Last but not least, I thank my Heavenly Father for always making a way when it seems there is none.
DEDICATION

A special dedication goes to my parents who sacrificed all their lives, so my brother and I could have a great education. I would not be where I am today without their unselfish love. To my mother, I am thankful that she has always been a model to me of seeing life with hope and faith. Her humor and cheerful laughter bring peace and healing when I need it the most. To my father, thank you for being always supportive to my education.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Assessment, a crucial part of public education, is a broad topic to explore. At a time when accountability of schools is measured by high-stakes standardized tests such as state mandated proficiency examinations, the pressure to perform well is considerable. The complexity of this issue is revealed partly in the nature of the language and items employed in the tests themselves, in that they often lack cultural relevance to the ELLs. Unable to understand the situations and contexts represented in the test items, the ELLs are unable to respond appropriately to them. Meanwhile, these tests that many are incapable of passing are used as the yardsticks for measuring their academic ability. Although there is nothing wrong with the idea of requiring accountability from schools and states in regards to the academic growth of students, the question of how well the state mandated tests are constructed to match the language proficiency level of second language students to ensure valid measures of such growth requires further research.

Consistent with these ideas, Brady (1997) raises the issue of standardized testing being culturally biased. Reflecting the interests and reality of one group and not recognizing those of another is bound to be problematic. In concurrence, Meier (2000) and Swope (2000) stress that often such tests do not reflect the needs of diverse social class groups. The emphasis of state mandated tests as benchmarks to measure academic
To date, although research has addressed the need to take into consideration various subgroup differences in responding to state mandated tests, little has been done to explore ELLs’ perspectives and experience toward both the examination process and the outcomes of such examinations. Meanwhile, with the number of immigrants increasing each year (Wikipedia, 2009), the need to ensure fair standardized tests for second language learners is essential. This necessitates making language proficiency and culture background important components in the test development process.

While learning English for academic purposes, in the era of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation ELLs are expected to take state mandated tests regardless of which stage their acquisition of English might be at the time of the test administration. Under such circumstances, understanding the limitations that the current state mandated tests might have to fairly and accurately measure the academic knowledge of ELLs is a matter of considerable importance. Although it has been recognized that the standardized tests are often linguistically challenging to ELLs, few researchers (Shohamy, 2001; Menken, 2008) have explored ELLs’ experiences with such tests. Menken’s (2008) thorough study of the effects of high stakes tests on high school second language students and their perceptions of such tests is an open invitation for more studies of such a nature. This study is a response to that invitation. It focuses on examining the perceptions and
experiences of elementary school (3rd grade) second language learners with the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), including how it affected the daily classroom climate, and what it meant to the teachers and parents of these students.

Statement of the Problem

Culture and language are interrelated. Researchers point out that those students who have different language and cultural backgrounds (Weismantel & Fradd, 1989) will experience transparent diversity in their learning. It is well stated by Banks (1990) that,

> it is necessary for educators to have an in-depth and accurate knowledge of culture in order for them to help students to understand the relationship between language and culture and to incorporate important elements of ethnic cultures in the curriculum. (p 14)

This view is echoed by Hinkel (1999), who views the connection between language and culture as a key element of learning. Drawing upon this view, arguments suggesting that curriculum and instruction be culturally empowered (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 2005) are not uncommon. Another issue is teachers taking time away from the teaching and the learning process (Cullingford, 1997) when they are faced with the pressure to emphasize students’ preparation for standardized testing where “the growth of the examination industry has been matched by the huge investment in the vast machinery of inspection” (p 109). Under these conditions, “teaching to the test” rather than teaching for genuine learning becomes the dominant instructional mode. The fact that schools (and teachers)
are evaluated based on state mandated test performance reinforces this emphasis on teaching to the test and adds stress to both teachers and students.

Further complicating matters is the fact the same state mandated tests used to measure academic knowledge are administered to all subgroups of students, including ELLs, regardless of their level of readiness for such tests. This raises important questions about test fairness with respect to ELLs. As Abedi (2004) states, “although issues concerning their assessment have received attention for many years, educational inequity issues have yet to be resolved” (p 4). Contributing to that process of resolution was an important motivation underlying this study.

To measure students’ command of the academic language used tested in standardized tests, the acquisition of such language has to take place first. The No Child left Behind Act (2001) requires that all students, including ELLs, be tested on an annual basis (Abedi, 2004; Bailey and Butler, 2007; Menken, 2008) within certain grade levels, with the expectation that eventually (the year 2014) all students will perform at their grade levels. The climate of accountability generated by this legislation has led to the creation of many statewide tests of proficiency. Within this climate, some researchers have investigated the relationship between the language proficiency of ELLs and the students’ performance on the state mandated tests (Abedi, 2004; Solorzano, 2008), while Crawford (2008) calls for a closer look at the goals of NCLB (2001) specifically for the ELLs, bearing in mind that ELLs “are a highly diverse population in terms of
socioeconomic status, linguistic and cultural background, level of English proficiency, amount of prior education, and instructional program experience” (p 131).

The larger research site for this study was the state of Florida, with a particular focus on one state mandated proficiency test. 1998 marks the year when the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was administered for the first time. Initially, students took it so their academic growth was measured relative to the Sunshine State Standards for academic achievement. Although the results were not used for accountability reporting purposes, the creation of this pre-NCLB examination initiated the process of raising the bar of accountability, and in 1999 the Florida Legislature, CS/HB 751 (Florida Department of Education, 2004), decided that the FCAT would be used as an annual test to report the learning gains of students and schools.

Reporting the academic achievement of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is arranged in five levels. Level 1 is not passing; level 2 is passing, albeit below grade level; levels 3 through 5 are at or above grade level. Students should expect three categories of questions in the FCAT: low complexity, moderate complexity, and high complexity (Florida Department of Education, 2008). Even though the questions in the first category are described to measure basic understanding of simple texts, it is expected of students that they know basic words at their grade level, understand figurative language, and are able to locate certain information in the text. The moderate complex questions, which most of the test items come from, require students to understand and
process texts which are more complex than those in the first category. Some of the skills that students are required to have in order to answer these types of questions are: the ability to provide a summary, to compare and contrast, to categorize information from the texts, interpret details from the text, organize information, and use context clues to determine meanings of unfamiliar words or infer meaning from texts. The high complexity category requires high analytical thinking skills on the students’ part. Analyzing figurative language, information from visual graphs and charts, author’s perspectives, or recognizing the arguments raised in the text are some of the tasks that students face in this category.

Assigning a grade for the schools is aimed at holding them accountable for their students’ yearly academic progress. The bar of accountability for the FCAT has been raised since the launching of the NCLB (2001) Act. The plan created for using the FCAT in this way identifies the specific criteria for determining and reporting AYP for all schools (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p 31) In order to make AYP, the schools in this state must:

- “Test 95% of the students on the statewide assessment (FCAT) or via an alternate assessment method” (p 31).
- “Meet the reading proficiency target (31% of students scoring at level 3 or above on FCAT or the alternate assessments)” (p 31).
• “Meet the mathematics proficiency target (38% of students scoring at Level 3 or above on FCAT or the alternate assessment)” (p 32).

• “Improve at least 1% in the percentage of students scoring 3 and above on FCAT Writing” (p 32).

• “Improve at least 1% in the graduation rate for high schools” (p 32).

These targets match with the NCLB (2001) Act’s plan to have all students 100% proficient in two core content areas, reading and math, by 2013-2014. Consequences follow if a Title I school does not make the AYP for two consecutive years. The school is defined “in need of improvement” and “supplemental educational services” (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p 31) if the goal is not further met. Tougher actions are taken by the state if the situation does not change. This can include closing schools. In light of these pressures, the FCAT is used in part to determine students’ movement from one grade to another, beginning with promotion from the 3rd grade to the 4th grade. It was partly for this reason that the 3rd grade was chosen as the grade level of focus in this study, as this is where ELLs will have their first FCAT experience.

Even though having a goal to increase the standards in academic performance and accountability may make sense in some regards, the expectation to have all students proficient by 2013-2014 school year is controversial and open to debate. Although there has been improvement in ELL’s academic achievement, it is obvious that they are far behind their native peers. According to Ryll (2004):
The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicates that the reading level of Hispanics in Florida, who compromise about 80% of all ELLs, is about half that of whites, with only 19% of them scoring at or above the “proficient” level of reading. Nationally, 85% of all Hispanics read at or below the “basic” level. And unfortunately, there has been no significant improvement in reading skills since 1998. (p 2)

As the bar of the accountability raises to meet the national assessment standards, so does the need to provide more empirical evidence that helps answer important questions about the achievement gap among Native English speakers and ELLs. However, at present, it appears that despite a desire for equity and fairness, it is far from being accomplished. What is known is that ELLs continue to achieve well below their native English speaking peers. What is not known is how, in this climate of intense accountability, they experience and respond to the pressures and demands of an examination like the FCAT, particularly in the crucial formative years of the early school grades. Very little research has examined a test like the FCAT from the perspectives of those who take the test as well as those who teach them and their parents, i.e., crucial stakeholders in the exam process (Menken, 2008; Shohamy, 2001). In an attempt to fill this gap, this study focuses on what the experience of preparing and taking a state mandated test like the FCAT mean to some elementary school teachers, to the ELLs, and to their parents.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study probes and portrays the experience, perceptions and attitudes of second language learners as well as of their teachers and parents in regards to a state mandated test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), in the state of Florida. Its
purpose is to shed new light on the ecology of an examination like the FCAT by foregrounding the voices and experiences of the examination’s primary stakeholders. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do elementary ELL students, teachers, and parents perceive the FCAT?
2. How does the FCAT impact the classroom climate on a daily basis?
3. To what extent are ELLs prepared to take a state mandated test like the FCAT?
4. Can a state mandated test, given in one standard language, be a fair measure of ELLs’ academic knowledge?

Significance of the Study

One area of significance consists of the study’s methodological perspective. Currently, the majority of related research has been of a quantitative nature and has analyzed the academic performance of ELLs in state mandated tests. Statistics gathered from state and district documents will be presented in this research, but the methodology used in this study is predominantly qualitative in nature in an effort to give a voice to those directly affected by a test like the FCAT on a daily basis. It is hoped that this methodological approach will encourage future qualitative research on this topic.

From a pedagogical point of view, the study will be relevant to second language learners and instructors as it attempts to draw attention to the reality of daily classroom
life for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers as well as their students. Of particular interest in the study was the crucial issue of how teachers modify their instructional practices to enhance ELLs’ learning and to what extent ELLs benefit from such modifications. Thus, this study will hopefully shed valuable light on the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches used to assist ELLs in an era of accountability and possibly lead to the development of new and better approaches.

Last but not least, this study will provide test developers valuable insights into some of the challenges involved in making standardized tests responsive to the needs and realities of minority groups of test takers such as ELLs. These insights will hopefully be valuable to policy makers as well.

**Definition of the Terms**

Accommodations—adjustments made in examination procedures which allow ELLs to take the FCAT under conditions which account for their linguistic limitations, such as the use of a bilingual dictionary and additional time to complete the exam.

Assessment – refers to the process of evaluation where knowledge and skills are measured.

Attitudes – a person’s predispositions toward a person or thing.
Culture – set of behaviors reflected in the ways of thinking, beliefs, communication, writing, reading which are embedded in one’s upbringing.

Cultural Diversity – different ways of thinking, acting, beliefs and interest of many cultures.

Perceptions – the ways how a person approaches and understands certain concepts.

Portfolio – a systematic, ongoing collection of students’ best work over the school year.

Modifications—adjustments teachers make in their instructional practices to allow ELLs to learn under conditions better suited to enhance their learning.

Second Language Learners – learners who already know one language and learn a second language for academic purpose. Their first language is referred as L1 and the second language is referred as L2.

Standardized Tests – are tests that the content, administration of them and the interpretation of the scores are standard and consistent.
Important Acronyms

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress

BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CELLA – Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment

CALP – Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

ELL – English Language Learners

ESOL – English Speakers of Other Languages

FCAT – Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

HLS – Home Language Survey

IPT – IDEA Proficiency Test

LEP – Language Enrichment Plan

L1 – student’s native language

L2 – student’s second, target language

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

SLD – Special Learning Disability
Limitations

Limitations of this study have been considered and are detailed below. First is the small number of participants used in this study (4 teachers, 4 students, and 3 parents). Due to the nature of its small size, it is not possible to make generalizations to the larger population of ELLs. The second limitation exists because of the participants coming from one school district in the state of Florida, so the findings cannot be generalized to other school districts. Third, the study focused on just one grade level: the 3rd grade. FCAT-related experiences and perceptions could be different at other grade levels. Finally, since the participants were not randomly selected, it leaves room for biased interpretations on the part of the researcher, who was herself a teacher at the research site.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the participants, who participated on a voluntary basis, would be active participants during classroom observations and open to respond to interview questions to the best of their knowledge. In addition, it was assumed that the data from various sources such as classroom observations, field notes, teachers’ materials, students’ classroom work, interviews, statistics from school, state and district documents would reduce the researcher’s bias given her connections to the research site and her own involvement as a teacher of ELLs.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Research addressing second language acquisition issues is enormous. The understanding of such issues helps to better meet the needs of ELLs and the use of the right tools to assess them. Meanwhile, although ideally the equality of educational opportunities is promoted in our society, concern about the fairness of these tests to various minority students, such as English language learners (ELLs), for whom English is a foreign language, has triggered the interest of educational researchers (Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003; Abedi, 2004; Lee, 2005; Duran, 2008; Menken, 2008; Solorzano, 2008). They argue that the validity and the equitability of such tests in reference to being transparent to different subgroups of students, including ELLs, are questionable.

Though a definition per se of test fairness does not come across in many studies that address such complex issue, the discussions focus on being a significant aspect of validity, often referred to as a synonym of validity (Willingham & Cole 1997, Willingham 1999). Shifting the attention on the social aspect of language testing, a generally known discretion between bias and fairness becomes a debatable issue. According to Willingham (1999),

“bias is advanced as a technical term used by professionals and is more likely to be associated with the test itself. Fairness is associated with the use of tests and is evaluated by more subjective means in a political context.” (p 218)
In the same line of argument of fairness being related to political covenant, Garrison (2009) views “standards-based reforms” (p 104) as failure to provide equality in educational opportunities, improvement in the public school system, or absolute facts about public school’s capacity.

Furthermore, challenging the validity of standardized tests as a fair opportunity to diverse learners, Ginther and Stevens (1998) voice not to assume that the test scores are uniformly applicable across all students because “considering the diversity of the test-takers and acknowledging that individuals with different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds may evidence achievement in different ways, suggest that standardized tests may not reflect the same information for all students” (p 190).

In addition, arguing that a second language learner cannot be similar with a native speaker learner, Valdés and Figueroa (1994) encourage not using the standardized tests to make educational decisions for these students. In order to give a fair opportunity to diverse test-takers to perform to their fullest of their knowledge, personality and experience Norton and Stein (1998) suggest to instructors of these students to take in consideration the individual differences that test-takers represent in their identities and personal histories.

On the other hand, distinctions between acquisition and learning (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1979), are crucial contributing factors that need to be taken in consideration in making decisions about second language learners’
academic progress, placement or any other academic decisions. However, more empirical evidence of the impact of these variables in the second language learners’ performance on assessments is needed.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is The Natural Approach Theory (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) with focus on Affective Filter Hypothesis. In addition, the literature review will focus on the areas that will support the exploration of the topic being addressed: acquiring a second language, distinction between academic and interpersonal competence, contextual learning, cultural and social competence, facing a new academic language, language learning and anxiety, and prior instruction.

**Acquiring a second language**

The role of input/output in second language acquisition Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggests that second language learners as they acquire English will go through five stages; *preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency*. The following table adapted from Krashen and Terrell (1983), Hill and Flynn (2006), and Haynes (2007) reflects the characteristics of second language learners as they acquire language in each stage.
Table 1. Stages of SLA and expected academic performance of ELLs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of SLA</th>
<th>Expected Behaviors of ELLs</th>
<th>Length of Time Acquiring L2</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preproduction</td>
<td>Silent period. Can repeat back without comprehending. Can point and draw. Can receive up to 500 words.</td>
<td>One to six months.</td>
<td>Learning should not be forced. TPR. Use of visuals. Repetitions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
A clear understanding of the process how a learner acquires a second language through these stages can be gained by approaching a well-known theory in second language acquisition research; The Natural Approach Theory (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In describing how acquisition takes place, a significant element of this theoretical perspective is the distinction between acquisition and learning (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). One of the five hypotheses that compile this theoretical view, *the Acquisition-Learning*
Hypothesis, points out that the difference is that “acquiring a language is “picking it up,” i.e., developing ability in a language by using it in natural, communicative situations” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983, p18). Such distinction pinpoints that acquisition of a second language takes place subconsciously, most likely similar to the L1 acquisition process. While acquiring a second language, children just naturally absorb without thinking about the standards of it. On contrary, “language learning is “knowing the rules,” having a conscious knowledge about grammar” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983, p18), it occurs consciously. Such knowledge is not gained naturally, but it should be taught by explaining the grammar rules and correcting when errors occur.

On the other hand, The Input Hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), suggests that the compelling impact of second language acquisition is comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In order for the learner to move beyond the language proficiency level s/he currently is, the input in L2 should be understandable to that learner. Such learning takes place not only with explicit instruction, but also the use of visuals and contextual linguistic input. A visual formula, i + 1, illustrates the fundamental principle of this hypothesis where i is the current level of learner’s language proficiency and i+1 is the stage past i. The core underpinning is that a second language learner should understand the input s/he takes in and it should be meaningful for them in order for the acquisition to occur. Such learning should take place within low anxiety which will be an application of The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).
Meanwhile, more studies (Schmidt, 1983; Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier, 2001; Gass and Selinker, 2004; Long, 1985; Brown, 1985; Chaundron, 1985; Day, 1985; Wigglesworth, 2005; Bigelow, Delmas, Hansen, and Tarone, 2006) in SLA have been done maintaining the claim that input is a key factor in second language acquisition and the extent to which this input is meaningful to ELLs to become intake. In Brown’s (1985) words “anything the learner draws in becomes intake” (p 275), interaction has been examined as a significant variable in facilitating an understandable intake. Nakahama et al., 2001 brings to attention two different interactions between Native Speakers (NS) and Non-Native Speakers (NNS) interlocutors as they share the burden to be equal contributors during meaning negotiation process. Analyzing the conversational activity and the information gap activity, it was observed that in the latter the interactions were more challenging for NS because they did not have as many opportunities to use the language as they did in the conversational activity.

While Nakahama et al., (2001) reveal that language use is controlled by the nature of the activity, in like manner, Bigelow et al., (2006) argue that negotiation of meaning is controlled by the level of literacy of interlocutors. They discuss the recast as a form of negotiating meaning where speakers clarify and reformulate ones’ errors in the language use. The feedback is not expected to be at the same level among different interlocutors. Taking it further, Wigglesworth, (2005) explains that during the interactions NNS will benefit from the interactive feedback from NS by becoming aware of the linguistic errors and correct them.
From a different standpoint, Schmidt (1983) argues that communication competence does not always necessarily work in favor of grammatical competency. By providing a descriptive description of a case study of a highly motivated adult to promote his art and build social interactions with people in the target language, the researcher analyzes four competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategies competence. The findings of this study suggest that an adult learner cannot gain grammatical competence at acquisition level through interaction and communication only without formal instruction. In order for acquisition of linguistic skills to be mastered, feedback should be at a cognitive level by providing a correct model of grammar.

Brown (1985) and Day (1985) point out the significance in the quality and the amount of input a learner is receiving. In a similar way, Chaundron (1985) examines which forms of input mostly drive the ELLs acquisition of L2. While Brown (1985) invites not to focus as much at how often the occurrences of interactions take place, but at their essence that contributes to the English proficiency of ELLs, Day (1985) take another standpoint by looking at how the older and younger second language learners differ in the ways they request things in the L2. The participants, respectively 18-25 years old (young group) and 50 years or older (old group), trained to become missionaries, were learning Spanish in an 8 week intensive language learning class. The study reports considerable differences in the ways young and old learners inquire input which revealed that younger learners were more attentive to the input, they were more driven to how much input to
acquire, and requested more specific clarifications on vocabulary words, or how to ask for certain things in Spanish language.

However, although the importance of comprehensible input in apprehending language acquisition is significant, Swain (1985) suggests that an important piece is missing, which is *comprehensible output*. Although she agrees with the crucial role of comprehensible input to acquiring of second language “it is not enough to ensure that the outcome will be native like performance” (p 236). In her study, sixty nine students with English as L1 were learning French as L2 in immersion programs in Montreal, Canada. Although the students had spent years in the immersion programs, from kindergarten to sixth grade, their grammatical skills were not quite at the level of the native speakers’ skills which she indicated it was due to the lack of the occasions to use the language with focus on linguistic competence. The findings of this study imply that comprehensible input and comprehensible output go hand to hand in language acquisition. While comprehensible input provides the comprehension piece of the language, on the other hand the comprehensible output is the piece to glue it syntactically.

**Distinction between Academic and Interpersonal Competence**

In the meantime, as comprehensible input and comprehensible output increase, so do the thinking process skills in the target language. Along with the acquisition-learning distinction Cummins’ (1979, 2000), insightful contribution of the distinction between two aspects of the language, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive
Academic Language (CALP), is supportive evidence of the complex nature of second language development. Highlighting the “significant aspects of how conversational registers of language differs from those typically used in academic contexts” (Cummins, 2000, p 60), he suggests being cautious about the academic challenges that the second language learners face. A second language learner acquires academic proficiency in a much longer time frame compared to the conversational language proficiency level. Such development is influenced by many factors as the nature of task performance is more demanding cognitively and contextually in the academic setting than in the conversational one.

And yet, in order to for second language learners to be successful in the academic context beside the social language proficiency they should attain the academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1979; Cummins, 2000; Herrerra, Murry, and Cabral, 2007; Bailey, 2007). The later demand a higher cognitive and linguistic processing skills as it requires the learner to do different cognitive and linguistic converting such as “inquiring, classifying, describing, comparing, contrasting, explaining, analyzing, inferring, supporting one’s opinions, persuading, synthesizing, and evaluating” (Herrerra et al., 2007, p 141). As Cummins (2000) argues, failing to recognize such distinction will translate into academic adversities for second language learners who fairly require five years to catch up the academic proficiency level in the target language.
Similarly, reinforcing the distinction between social and academic language Bailey (2007) recognizes two features of the academic language. First, language of academic setting has to be of a certain academic format and learners should display such knowledge. Second, students have less chance to acquire understanding in academic contexts than in social contexts. In other words, the language used in a social context is not as a complicated and not as cognitively complex as the language used in the academic context. Therefore “it is perhaps most accurate to speak of the difference between BICS and CALP as differences in the relative frequency of complex grammatical structures, specialized vocabulary, and uncommon language functions” (Bailey, 2007, p 9).

Likewise, the study from Butler, Stevens, and Castellon, (2007) analyzing the language used in a test, Language Assessment Scale (LAS), used to measure language proficiency level of elementary and high school students in Southern California, and the Stanford 9 a state standardized test which were administered one month apart from one another. This study reports that there is a distinction between the language used in the language proficiency test and the language used in state standardized test. Thus, the data from this study suggests that a competent score in LAS does not necessarily mean that a second language learner has reached the academic language proficiency to enable him/her to grasp the content of standardized tests. The researchers observe that second language students experience less exposures to content languages used in standardized tests than native speakers due to the fact that ELLs were pulled in programs that focused on English language proficiency. Nonetheless, the second language learners are taking
standardized tests even though they are not empowered with linguistic skills of English language. Therefore, the validity of such tests is questionable so “appropriate language measures are needed to help determine the degree to which language demands interfere with content performance and to establish test-taker readiness” (Butler et al., 2007, p 46). Meanwhile, the context where the language is acquired has to be looked closely how it affects the process.

**Contextual Learning**

“The context of language use refers to the degree to which the environment is rich with meaningful clues that help the language learner decipher and interpret the language being used” (McKeon, 1994, p 23). A distinction that can be brought to attention is the *decontextualized context reduced context – embedded* and *contextualized language* (McKeon, 1994; Gibbons, 1993; Cummins, 2000). The fundamental principle of this distinction is that linguistic and cognitive extent of the language is influenced by the context where it takes place. Contextualized language such as conversations, social activities, has more opportunities for mediation of meanings to take place through clues such body language, nonverbal gestures versus decontextualized language in the tasks as academic tasks. Such distinctive difference becomes linguistically and cognitively challenging for ELLs.

An evidence of decontextualization of the language according to Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez (1994) is when the opportunities for ELLs to practice language in the
classroom context are reduced by the fact of the teachers doing mainly the talking. Thus, when the opportunities are not created for these students to acquire language through social interactions, the academic acquisition might be affected. Further support comes from Hudelson (1994) and Met (1994) who implicate that the learning context of the classrooms for ELLs should provide learning opportunities that promote linguistically and cognitively the acquisition of second language learners. Such opportunities are recommended through literacy activities where ELLs construct meaning and their potential to use at the fullest. The activities should be rich and connected to the content being studied in the classroom where the acquisition of second language takes place in a close connection to the content.

An illustration is the ethnographic study by Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, (1991) of the junior and high school assessment of vocabulary knowledge on Metropolitan Survey Battery Reading subtests of Norwich school district which provides data that students will not perform at grade level if exposure to such words does not take place in multiple contexts. Home and school conversations school in different social contexts varied from the language of the text materials on different subjects.

In like manner, Met (1994) further suggests that the assessment of ELLs should be “classroom –based assessment of students’ language skills” (p 176) which reflects the objectives of the classroom instructional content. Further support comes from Genesse and Hamayan (1994), Coelho (1994), who as well recommend classroom-based
assessment for ELLs being affective to measure their language development versus standardized tests which assume that the second language learners have been in the present cultural and instructional context for a long time. After the progression of the context-embedded language, second language learners should be supported to develop context-reduced language which is required of them to perform in higher cognitive and linguistic tasks such as assessment, lectures where negotiation takes place through language.

Hence, second language learners who are acquiring a language in a new context, experience frustration in context-reduced tasks because of the cognitively and linguistically demanding in nature. The context-embedded in the classroom supported by visual clues, manipulative, or visual organizers, make the input understandable. A descriptive illustration of the nature of context-reduced task such as assessment is provided by Snow et al., (1991) stating that “the vocabulary that junior and senior high school students are expected to know include such literary words as “consuming,” “wrath,” and “arrogant,” and words from content areas like “perpendicular,” “peninsula,” and “barricade.” (p 205). Such difficulty of context-reduced tasks for ELLs is provided by Zamel (2001), of an undergraduate student, a writing tutor, whose narrative well-captures the high cognitive of academic work.

Academic discourse is a foreign language for a lot of people ....It is like traveling to different parts of the world. Every student, like a tourist or foreigner in another land, needs time to adjust to the academic world, to learn the language, the culture. I think a lot of professors are aware that
learning academic discourse can be powerful but from my own experiences, I think that some professors’ methods don’t allow students enough time to “play” in and question this new language and other world. (p 16)

Adjacent to, further affirmation comes from Garcia’s (1991) study of fifty one Hispanic and fifty three native English speaking fifth-sixth grade students on a reading test which consisted of six expository texts, varied in level of difficulty, selected from California Achievement Test CTB/McGraw Hill 1970 and 1975. What study reports is that although Hispanic students had two years prior instruction in English and were fluent English speakers, they scored significantly lower than native speaking peers. The findings suggest that the major linguistic challenge appeared to be the unknown vocabulary words both in questions and answer discretion. Interestingly enough when translation was provided for questions as well as answer selection some of the Spanish bilingual students were able to provide the correct answers.

Likewise, a significant remark is made by Corson (1997) who argues that the vocabulary words in English language Graeco-Latin origin are mostly used in the literary context. Native speakers of English are exposed to such vocabulary words in upper primary level and secondary level of school. The lack of use of vocabulary words (Corson, 1997; Haynes, 2007) of such nature in conversational contexts limit the opportunities to students whose backgrounds varied culturally and linguistically. In assessment, as a context-reduced language task, ELLs encounter difficulties even though the students might know word by word the definition of new vocabulary. They might still
not be able to have an understanding at comprehension level of a text since “CALP is more than understanding vocabulary and learning facts for a test; it also requires students to sharpen their cognitive abilities and learn new concepts” (Haynes, 2007 p 21). For this reason, teachers should not be misled by the native like oral proficiency of the ELLs and take them off the language programs.

Thus, the educators should be well informed of the distinction of the competent function in social conversations that should not be inferred that the students are acclimated to perform academically in context-reduced tasks. Consequently, the features of spoken language (Gibbons, 1993) reinforce the fact that there is a distinction between spoken discourse and language required to read a text. According to her analysis, conversational discourse is contextual. In other words, its functions will vary depending on the context it takes place.

The fact is that conversational discourse takes place unpredictably and spontaneously where interaction strategies takes place and the participants do not have prior knowledge how and what will occur. Unlike the conversational discourse where ideas, thoughts and perspectives are clarified and feedback is provided, on contrary “to read with meaning requires an understanding of words and grammatical forms which are often quite different from those encountered in everyday chat about concrete experiences, or from the sort of language that children may use while they are engaged in ‘hands-on’
activities” (Gibbons, 1993, p 30). Hence, in addition language learning needs to be conceptualized (Pierce, 1995) in close relation to social processes.

**Cultural and Social Competence**

Variety in linguistic skills of second language learners cannot be apart from variety of their cultural backgrounds. An explanation why language is a cultural and social phenomenon is beautifully stated by Brooks (1997) that “no individual could create culture by himself; no individual escapes having the imprint of his culture deeply pressed upon him. One of the purest examples of the results of man’s association with man is language” (p 25). The role that individuals play in the society and the power relations they have with one another in a particular context mold the language they use to communicate ideas orally and in written form.

Thus, the cultural community we belong to has a significant influence on the ways we communicate in different social and academic contexts. Therefore, ELLs might manifest behaviors that are different from the ones in the context where the second language acquisition takes place. Coelho (1994), Herrera et al., (2007) provide examples of various cultural standards such as not having eye contact with the speaker is a sign of respect, finding it disrespectful to answer a question that seems straightforward, the way how different cultures approach or address the teacher (by name or title), dress code, or how discipline problems are handled. ELLs might experience difficulty of making a point
in the conversation due to the patterns of their discourse being different from English’s. Therefore, what might be not a norm in American cultural context, it might be acceptable in another cultural context.

Meanwhile, immigrating to a new country where adjustment are demanded at cultural, social, language, and educational levels can be a stressful experience for ELLs as well as their families. Hence, empowered with a sociocultural background of ELLs is a significant factor in ensuring an instruction that will meet their diversity in how they learn and interact in different contexts. Lantof (2000), Hall and Verplaetse (2000) offer an application of sociocultural theory that is relevant to language learning and language teaching. Language learning takes place through interactions in a context with meaningful activities. The three main aspects that these researchers extract from the sociocultural theory are: mediation, scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development, and repetition. Lantof (2000), as he finds the sociocultural theory applicable to the first as well as to the second language, states that “as children develop they gain increasing control over meditatinal means made available by their culture, including language, for interpersonal (social interaction) and intrapersonal (thinking) purposes” (p 6). When non-English speaking students arrive to a new school they face a new context, culture, and form of language and at the beginning, they have to rely on their peers’ clues. It is a mental transformation and identity formation that second language learners go through.
This observation is supported by Hall and Verplaetse (2000) stating that learning cannot be presumed as an individual single act but as “a fundamentally social enterprise, jointly constructed and intrinsically linked to learners’ repeated and regular participation in their classroom activities” (p 11). These researchers stress that learning takes place through interactions in the contexts that learners are participating. In order for this to happen, Lantof (2000), Hall and Verplaetse (2000) point out the importance of scaffolding where in order for the learning to be affective it has to take place within the Zone of Proximal of Development.

While participating in centers or small group activities under the supervision of a teacher ELLs create “a linguistic scaffold” (Lantof, 2000, p 10) providing help through instruction to ELL students how to carry on assignments on their own. The activities are chosen based on what ELL students are able to do independently and how the help from more proficient peers along with teachers’ can contribute to language learning of low proficient students. The repetition of directions, or new terms and concepts that are unfamiliar for ELL students is used “to ensure students’ cognitive involvement in the instructional discourse” (Hall and Verplaetse, 2000, p 113). Repetitions along with the feedback ensure that ELL students are learning the correct linguistic forms.

At length, Pavlenko and Lantof (2000) discuss the border cultural crossings of second language adult learners. Through analytical process of personal narratives, while their study intends to offer an understanding of the reconstruction of identity on social
personal level, Hall and Verplaetse, 2000 and Haneda (2008) capture the identity reconstruction in a new context that of classroom through teacher-student interaction. All these researchers provide perspectives on how interactions are crucial in reconstructing process of oneself while encouraging involvement of the second language learners in the culture and community of the target language. Needless to say, the feeling of not belonging to a cultural group is not a pleasant one. It takes time to adjust and adopt the new culture, reconstructing a new identity during the second language learning process. Haneda (2008) explains it clearly the core of this process as she refers to ELLs that they “face an enormous task in navigating divergent classroom practices and negotiating assigned identities across classes” (p 12). Furthermore, the process of becoming acculturated to the new context is a process of rearranging of one’s own beliefs and to which class group ones belong to the new cultural context. While Hall and Verplaetse (2000) believe that this is “a relational identity actively constructed by the group” (p 217), it similarly supported by Pavlenko and Lantof (2000) who claim that a new cultural context means ‘renarratizing’ a life.

In addition of lacking the proficiency of the language, the customs of the new culture are unknown which as Coelho (1994) points out might “force” some of the ELLs to group with the peers from the same background. Acknowledgement of the differences in the educational systems around the world acclimates us on the academic level with the learning norm in different contexts. While the American educational system promotes student-centered schooling style, many cultures do not recognize such approach, but are
based on teacher-centered structure. Misunderstanding can occur as result of such cultural differences which might contribute in creating the classroom an incomprehensible terrain for some ELLs as they withdraw from it, or becomes a field to test the limits. The notion of producing academic discourse in harmony with cultural values is richly examined by Heath (1983) and Rogoff (2003) also. Sharing rich stories of Roadville and Tracton communities either from church congregation songs or text books, textile mills, and daily routine Heath (1983) transmits the idea that academic discourse is not a sole, separate product from the community discourse. The language learning patterns observed either in young or adult members of the two communities was sculptured within their cultural context. Knowledge was knitted by exposure to daily events and interactions with one another.

An advocate for culturally relevant teaching Ladson-Billings (1994), challenges the notion that African American students are less academically capable than white students. Culturally relevant teaching is what these students need as it empowers them “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” (p 18). Relating to L2 students as well, she notes that a teacher who teaches culturally relevant to her students help them become critical thinkers, and teaches content with passion as she differentiates it based on individual differences and diversity of the classroom. During teacher and student interactions both parties learn reciprocally.
The inclination of language acquisition closely related to the culture of ELLs is further investigated by Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez (1994) whose description of Mexican community in Eastside of San Francisco area offer insights of how cultural socialization is reflected in the language acquisition. This study found that parents took pride and responsibility in maintaining their Mexican culture, language range and patterns while acquiring the new culture and language. In the process, the conflict arose as patterns of language and culture of Mexican community were not integrated in the academic context. For example, the American educational setting encourages “the individual rights over the collective rights of the family” (p 93). Therefore, the employment of language exercises becomes defiance to the authoritative figure of the parent and family structure of this subgroup. Another illustration of cultural and learning conflict is provided by Johnson (1994) who points out the unfamiliarity of ELLs with language learning activities and tasks in the American educational context. For example, the cooperative learning, a powerful procedure to learn language in context, is evidence that many of these students are not able to visualize procedures of activities and tasks in the L2 context because of the nonexistence in their L1 one.

**Facing a new Academic Language**

Researchers in second language acquisition offer insights about differences and similarities about other languages’ rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966; Leki, 1991; Connor, 1996; Scollon, 1997; Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1997; Soter, 1988; Purves, 1998; Reynolds, 2001).
Individuals will produce different written text depending on their perceptions of what is expected in their native language academic context. Carlson (1988), Indrasuta (1988), Kachru (1988), Kadar-Fulop (1988), Kaplan (1988), Park (1988), and Soter (1988) pursue to uncover the extent to which factors such as writing purpose, text variety, and audiences, social setting in different cultural communities influence individual’s writing. Carlson’s (1988) observed that in the early years, in the American academic writing context, L2 students will display complexion to produce reflecting the way of their thinking and style in their L1 culture. Donahue’s (1988) seem to be in agreement with Soter’s (1988) conviction of writing as a product shaped by cultural context. The findings of their studies of Japanese, Vietnamese and English students suggest that the audience and purpose of creating text are regulated by the society and culture of the writers and will dictate the organization of the academic written discourse.

Reinforcement of cultural and social aspects scopes come from Comfort (2001) who finds similarities to a certain extent between the ways of how African American women experience challenges with the graduate writing and L2 student writers’ challenges in the American context. The confirmation comes from this study that there is a dichotomy between academic and nonacademic written discourse, ways how African American graduate women approach texts, dichotomy between writing for academic audience/purpose and nonacademic audience/purpose.
Furthermore, Bickner and Peyasantiwong (1988), Silva, Reichelt, Chikuma, Duval-Couetil, Mo, Velez_Rendon and Wood (2003) revealed that differences that ELL writers reflect in their themes of essays are a manifestation of the writers’ cultural beliefs of their upbringing. Bickner and Peyasantiwong’s (1988), study reports the ways how Thai students approached essays were more neutral and impersonal compared to English writers. These differences did not solely consisted of only linguistic competence of language, but in the stance the writers took in creating text in details’ elaboration. Through stories from Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and American of student writers, Silva et al., (2003) take the same stance and point out the challenges L2 writers face in English academic context consisting in textual structure organization, audience (teachers and peers), new strategies and processes in creating text.

On the other hand, as Demel (1990) and Koda (2005) suggest, the approach to text structures is affected by the cultural background linguistic knowledge. Demel (1990) study suggests that comprehension of an L2 reader can be affected by unfamiliarity with the descriptor which is the antecedent of a coreferential pronoun as well as the unfamiliarity with cultural terms and expressions in the target language. The linguistic knowledge of an L2 might be limited by differences in the culture of the target language in regards of usage of phrases or slang that he/she is not familiar in L1. The way how an L2 learner uses pronouns in L1 might guide the usage of them in L2 in different language backgrounds like Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, Italian, Korean, Malaysian, Chinese and
Japanese. On contrary, English native speakers had no difficulty understanding the usage of pronouns and concepts they were related to.

Similarly, Koda (2005) states regardless the language proficiency the comprehension of L2 readers will not improve if they do not develop the ability to use text-structure cues. Moreover, linguistic knowledge in L1 is important in word processing in L2 especially when languages share many similarities orthographically, phonologically, and semantically. The linguistic knowledge of an L2 might be limited by differences in the culture of the target language in regards of usage of phrases or slang that s/he is not familiar in L1. The author states that it is important to keep in mind the rhetorical distance between L1 and L2. Learning of a language “depends on experience, and its process is constructive” (p167). The social and cultural learning of the language affect the way how we approach text. The way in which people understand the structural organization of discourse differs across languages and cultures depending on the experiences and domain knowledge.

**Language Learning and Anxiety**

Several studies (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Ganschow, Sparks, Anderson, Javorsky, Skinner and Patton, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1996; Saito and Samimy, 1996; Oxford, 1999; Chen, Warden and Chang, 2005) show that there is a close correlation between language performance and anxiety. They have argued about the detrimental influence of anxiety on performance and tests. Ganschow et al., (1994), as they studied
college students in introductory Spanish classes, suggested that the relationship between language learning and anxiety is complex and if the later is in high levels, it might result in learning difficulties.

What motivates the second language learners though varies in different cultural learning contexts (Chen et al., 2005). Thus, it is essential not to assume that ELLs are motivated in a universal way in all learning environments. Therefore, as Churchill (2006) suggests when language learners participate in a new learning context, they are socially, culturally and politically faced with new aspects of that language which will affect their input. Likewise, Pierce (1995) and Isabelli-García (2006) confirm that motivation of language learners is influenced by the social interactions within the learning environment and power relations that take place in that context.

Correlating poor performance to anxiety, researchers encourage construction of a learning environment where anxiety is reduced; therefore, the cognitive energy is used for the language input. Arnold and Brown (1999) warn that “anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension” (p 8). To foster the constant effort and anticipated proficiency in L2, less pressure (Noels, Clément and Pelletier, 1999) should be present during the learning process. Gardner’s, Moorcroft’s and Metforda’s (1989) study of students learning French pinpoints the
influence of attitudes and motivation in learners’ breadth with the study of a language and how such factors contribute in improvement of proficiency.

Thus, high anxiety affects the motivation of learners and their language performance. When ELLs are speaking in the new L2 context, communication apprehension sinks in as a kind of anxiety affecting second language learners’ performance and self-confidence. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) who find a close relationship between motivation and attitudes, comment that when second language learners want to communicate a message and because of the lack of language are unable to do so, frustration will follow and “can lead to apprehension about future attempts to communicate” (p 303). Anxiety as “fear of failure is more salient for most of L2 learners than fear of success” (Oxford and Shearin, 1996, p 127).

Contrarily to anxiety, creating a positive educational environment for second language learners was found to be a significant predictor to young Israeli students’ motivation who were learning Arabic as a second language (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy, 2004). Likewise, Gan, Humphreys, Hamp-Lyons (2004) found that a positive learning experience played a significant role in motivation of Chinese University students learning English as a second language. Self-confidence was prompted when praise and encouragement were present, but students who were not successful experienced anxiety, agitation, apathy, and animosity. Thus, although, it is important to develop a well-
organized curriculum for language learning, it is crucial to create a learning environment where anxiety is reduced to minimum.

**Prior Instruction**

One question that Christophersen (1967) raises is: “Can one learn to use a foreign language with the same ease and fluency as one’s first language?” (p 51). There is no easy way of answering this question. The term first language needs to be clear too. Usually L1 term is referred to cases when one has learned at mostly or all and has achieved a certain proficiency level. It is important to keep in mind that language knowledge and life knowledge of the learner go hand to hand. Someone who spends his/her entire life in one country will be supposedly more familiar with terms of the country will be supposedly more familiar with terms of the country more than an outsider. No two people are alike when it comes to language commands in their native language. Different factors like areas of interest, life experiences, education etc. effect one’s competence and proficiency level. Research (Coelho, 1994; Sears, 1998) has revealed that when ELL students have had prior schooling in their native language it makes the progression to the new educational system a less anxious experience.

McKeon (1994), Tabors and Snow (1994), Handscombe (1994), Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez (1994), and Goodz (1994) demonstrate how second language learners’ skills in their first language (L1) are transferable to the target language (L2). In Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez (1994) and McKeon’s (1994) terms ELLs represent a diversity in language,
cultural and educational upbringing. Therefore, their apprehension and ambition about the American academic context are expected to be diverse. The transferability of reading ability might work well for languages that have similarities (Alderson, 1984; Cziko, 1978; Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn 1990; Block, 1992; Koda, 2005), in linguistic structures, but languages that differ greatly from each other will make the transfer less likely to happen.

Carrying on the same point of view Alderson (1984), while reviewing different approaches that have been taken on factors which contribute to the success of reading ability in second language, points out two existing hypothesis:

1. Poor reading skills in L1 will be transferred in L2 to which is translated into that a learner who is a poor reader in his native language most likely will be a poor reader in a foreign language.

2. The lack of knowledge in the foreign language will result in poor reading in the target language.

He concludes that the learner can transfer the reading ability or strategies of L1 to L2. L1 and L2 are related regarding language competence the learner possesses in each language. The transferability of reading ability might work well for languages that have similarities in linguistic structures, but languages that differ greatly from each other will make the transfer less likely to happen. Language proficiency in L2 needs to occur prior
to transfer happens. But how much the L1 proficiency contributes to L2 knowledge is an area to be further explored.

In like manner, Carrell (1991) further explores the extent to which “reading in a second language is a function of the transfer of first language reading abilities or of language proficiency in second language” (p 159). As she investigates the role of reading ability in L1 plus L2 language proficiency which equals to L2 reading, she found out that both first language reading and second language proficiency level play a significant role in second language reading ability and these variables are relatively different in strength when it comes to the predicting role in reading ability. The findings of this study indicate that both first language reading ability and second language proficiency are important factors in second language reading, but other factors needs to be considered when it comes to the relative importance of each one individually.

Pointing out that the relationship of vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension might not be the same for L1 and L2 readers Koda (2005) comments that the performance among second language learners is related to their different backgrounds in L1, as well as how their learning experiences in L1 influence their lexical processing in the target language. Getting to know a word means that the readers need to know its form, meaning and use. New words are banked through life experiences and different contexts learning. Readers must make connection with the new information to the old one as a schema is activated.
Consistent with such affirmation, Goodz (1994) found that the influence of L1, French, in English learning in the first three years of thirteen children raised in bilingual speaking families does not influence the acquisition of L2 negatively. The data from this longitudinal study reported that bilingual children were developing the same utterances at the same rate as the monolingual children and vocabulary mixture took place when such lexical terms were not developed in L2 without affecting the linguistic awareness. The study findings suggested that children, who were transferring lexical terms from another language, occurred due to the lack of the proficiency in the L2 and not the inability to differentiate in two languages.

In addition to understanding the various variables that contribute to L2 reading comprehension, Carson et al., (1990) examine the relationship of reading and writing modalities between L1 and L2 respectively of Chinese native speakers and Japanese native speakers studying in American Universities. This relationship between these two modalities is looked closely how they influence each other and the effect of L2 proficiency on L1 literacy knowledge and L2 input. The study suggests that variety in transferring reading and writing skills depends on first language patterns as well as proficiency in the target language along with cultural differences.

In sum, so far, it has been discussed the distinction brought to attention by different researchers in second language acquisition such as acquisition versus learning, interpersonal language versus academic language. To function academically at their
grade level in standardized tests, ELLs should have acquired the knowledge that prepares them academically to face the demands of the content of such tests on grammatical, lexical levels, and know the text features (Bailey and Butler, 2007; Heritage, Silva, and Pierce, 2007; Davidson, Kim, Lee, Li, and López, 2007). Moreover, the ways how ELLs perform academically reflect their cultural and social experiences. Although such variables are examined in relation to academic performance of ELLs in standardized tests and such progress is documented statistically, more empirical evidence of qualitative nature exploring the experiences of the tests takers of this subgroup will further contribute to second language acquisition field.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Context and Participants of the Study

This study was conducted at an elementary public school within Seminole County Public Schools (SCPSs) located in a suburban area in the state of Florida. For the purposes of this study, the school was given the pseudonym “Little Gators.” Such access was obtained by the researcher being an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher at the school. Since the focus of this study was the perceptions and experiences of English Language Learners (ELLs) toward a state mandated test, in this case the FCAT for grade three students, how this test was interrelated to the daily instruction, and what it meant to the teachers and parents of these children, the researcher chose a case study approach. Concurring with Schwandt’s (2003) statement that “the qualitative inquiry movement is built on the profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying” (p 311), the researcher aimed to examine the FCAT through the more personal lens of key stakeholders connected to the exam: the ELLs, their teachers, and the ELLs’ parents.

According to Potter (1996), when gathering participants for a study, “the researcher might be guided predominantly by some formal purpose, such as representativeness, finding a critical case, finding a typical case, or looking for a set of cases that maximizes variation” (p 105). In order to provide information that needed to be gained to answer the research questions of this study, it was decided to utilize a purposive
sampling strategy. Patten’s (2005) statement that “purposive sampling is the correct term to use when the researchers seek participants who fit into some broad category” (p 143) guiding the selection process. The purposeful sampling procedure employed the following criteria: various genders, various L1 and cultural backgrounds, various levels of L2 proficiency, duration in US, and active placement in the ESOL program. Such criteria intended to provide a sample that presented a wide range of experiences of test takers, as well as those who closely worked with and were related to them during a state mandated test. To better select the participants for this case study, the names of LY (active ELL students in the ESOL program) were obtained from the school’s list of such students. Recommendations from the ESOL teacher who worked directly with third grade students were taken in consideration.

Using the above criteria, four students were selected for the ELL component of the study. Willingness of students to participate in the study was taken in consideration, and the parental permission form (see Appendix F) was submitted. While these students did not have the desired linguistic diversity—all were native speakers of Spanish—they did vary in terms of their prior exposure to English and to the target culture. Demographic information about them is provided in Chapter 4.

In order to explore the experiences of elementary second language learners, the impact on the daily classroom teaching, what such a state mandated test means to the parents, the regular classroom teachers, the ESOL teacher who works with these students,
and the ELLs’ parents, were asked if they were willing to participate in this study. In addition to the four ELLs, four teachers were selected. They provided considerable diversity in terms of the amount of teaching experience they had and their prior experience with the FCAT. Three parents of ELL participants in the study were selected primarily on the basis of their willingness to be in the study. While they shared the same native language (Spanish), they, too, provided some diversity in terms of prior experience in the target culture and their educational background. Demographic information about the teachers and parents is also provided in Chapter 4. The participation of eleven participants was on a voluntary basis, and pseudonyms were used to ensure their confidentiality. The nature of the research study was explained to the participants, and the researcher responded to questions and provided additional information as requested. No experiments were conducted with the participants in this research study, and it was granted approval by the institutions Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A).

A friendly approach and tone was obtained during the conversations with the participants of the study. A special emphasis was placed on the qualification that there were no negative consequences for any participants who chose to leave the study. The personal contact numbers and e-mail address of the researcher were provided to the participants. The participants were informed that if they had further questions or needed further clarifications, they were welcome to contact the principal investigator. Such information was provided in the recruitment letter (see Appendix C) and participant
consent form (see Appendix D). In circumstances where any participant was not willing to talk to the researcher, a professional and positive attitude was maintained.

**Data Collection**

The data for this research was gathered from multiple sources: classroom observations/field notes, individual interviews, students’ classroom work, teachers’ teaching materials (lesson plans, instructional materials, and activities), teachers’ checklists, and statistics/testing reports from school and district documents.

The timeline for data collection was from the end of January 2010 to end of May 2010. The classroom observations, interviews, collection of students’ work and teachers’ lesson plans and checklists took place during the first three months of the study, January through March. The collection of statistical data at the school and district level took place in the months that followed as such information became available. The FCAT was administered during two time frames. FCAT writing, which was administered to fourth graders only, took place in February. The remainder of the FCAT subtests (reading, math, science) for third to fifth graders took place in March. The data collected for this study was stored in a file cabinet at the researcher’s home and was monitored so that no one would have access to it but the researcher.
Interviews

Since the purpose of the study was to gain insight into experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of elementary ELLs, teachers and parents regarding the FCAT, interviews were chosen as one source of data, in that they allowed the researcher to directly hear and report the voices of the participants. Keeping in mind Patton’s (1990) advice that “interviews are always reporting perceptions-selective perceptions” (p 205), the study combined such information with other sources of data in order to present a more comprehensive examination of the FCAT.

To gain an insider account of each participant’s experiences and perceptions, one substantial interview was conducted with each participant. It was felt that one major interview was sufficient in view of the fact that the researcher also had first-hand access to the ELLs and their teachers during the classroom observations and unscheduled contact at the school. These other forms of contact allowed the researcher to gain, informally, additional information that supplemented the interviews. As will be discussed later, the interviews were semi-structured, with allowance made for open ended follow-up questions. Written permission was obtained from Independent Review Board (IRB) of The Ohio State University (see Appendix A), the participant public school district (see Appendix B), as well as the approval of the school’s administrator where the study was conducted. All the participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interviews. Pseudonyms were used to keep their identities confidential. The consent form required
parental permission for the students who participated in the study. The forms were in English, and for those participants who were not proficient in English, upon participants’ request, the forms were translated in their native language (see Appendices E, G and I).

Each interview took place either at the site where the research was conducted or in the participants’ homes. These were arranged at the convenience of the participants. The length of the interviews was thirty to forty five minutes, with the shortest spans for the students given their age. Time accommodations were given to participants depending on their language proficiency level and their personalities. Upon availability, two paraprofessional bilingual interpreters, one at a time, were used with participants whose dominant language was their L1, which in this study was Spanish. The interpreters were asked to sign a confidentiality promise letter prior to the interviews. Each interview was recorded. The interviews that were conducted in participants’ L1 were translated into English.

In regards to interviews, Moore’s (1983) advice is that they need to be scheduled carefully. Adopting Moore’s (1983) and Patten’s (2000) approach on semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, I left room for any questions that were prompted by the participants’ responses. Moore (1983) made the statement that “semi-structured interviews are used to collect discursive information-qualitative as opposed to quantitative, to use the jargon-which usually contains a high degree of opinion or expression of attitudes” (p 26) which captures the nature of the methodological approach.
adopted for this research study. Most of the questions were constructed in advance according to the group level of the participants. Questions were semi-structured for the three groups of participants: students, teachers, and parents. Each question for the interviews was constructed to serve the purpose of gaining in-depth insights from different participants on their experiences during the preparation for and taking of the FCAT as a state mandated test. Their experiences, perceptions and attitudes regarding this state mandated test were explored to construct a full picture of such experiences. On students’ level, the questions focused on what was it like for them to prepare for the FCAT and what challenges they experienced while taking it. An understanding was gained of what this test meant to these second language learners through their personal reflections and attitudes toward the FCAT.

On teachers’ level, the questions aimed to gain insights into how the FCAT and AYP were interrelated to their daily instruction and their ELL students, what challenges the mainstream and ESOL teachers faced in their daily instruction as a result of the FCAT’s importance, their perceptions and attitudes towards such state mandated test, as well as the suggestions they had for test developers and policy makers. On parents’ level, the questions aimed to gain insights into their understanding of the FCAT and its impact on their children, as well as how they dealt at home with the FCAT.
Classroom Observations and Field Notes

Classroom observations constituted another main source of data for this study. Classroom observations took place once to twice a week from January through March. The length and the days of the observations depended on the classroom schedule and instructional plans. The observations were scheduled during the Language Arts period. The interactions between the mainstream classroom teacher, the ESOL teacher, and the ELLs helped capture the preparation experiences of the ELLs and the ways in which the teachers approached both their regular (i.e., non-FCAT) and FCAT-related instructional practices. Their engagement in classroom activities, participation in learning context, events that occurred, and classroom work that was produced during the observation times was the center of the researcher’s attention. During observations, field notes were taken to record the data that emerged from the observations as well as the thoughts and feelings of the researcher at particular moments. Such data helped in later reflections and analysis of what the researcher observed during classroom visits. The field notes were typed in the researcher’s personal computer on the same day of the observations in order to ensure a detailed and accurate description of what took place.

Students' Classroom Work

Students’ classroom work varied depending on the nature of the tasks and activities that took place during the observations. It was collected upon the completion at the end of an observation, or at the end of the school day in order to avoid any disruption
of the classroom routine. Students’ classroom work consisted of oral participation during guided reading time, small group tasks and activities, worksheets filled out during mainstream and ESOL time, individual computer time on language learning programs, as well as weekly assessment papers. Such data was obtained to monitor students’ understanding of the mainstream and ESOL teachers’ L2 instruction in these contexts, and to determine if the length or amount of such input was sufficient to help them address a major academic task like the FCAT. The understanding of their behavior and way of thinking reflected in their work contributed to understanding of the experience of what it was like for such students to prepare for a state mandated test while they were still acquiring the target language. Therefore, the patterns observed in students’ performance behavior through individual classroom work, either in written form or computer language learning programs activities, weekly assessments that took place while the researcher was observing in the classrooms, were described to see how such performance varied from that on the FCAT.

Demographic Data and School and District Documents

Demographic data charts for the participants were constructed to provide an in-depth understanding of their backgrounds. As noted earlier, these appear in the appropriate places in Chapter 4. Here it is worth recalling Patten’s (2000) recommendation to take into consideration the demographic characteristics because “there will probably be some that you will want to hold constant in the study you are
planning” (p 13). Information on age, ethnicity, gender of participants, native language, duration of residence in the United States, the length of time spent in the ESOL program, educational level, and amount of teaching experience were factors considered. Data for the children was gathered from the Home Language Survey (HLS) (see Appendix J) which parents filled out on the day of the school enrollment of their child, and their individual Language Enrichment Plans (LEP). The adults’ demographic data was gathered at the time of the interviews.

The data collected from school documents and district reports provided ELLs’ individual scores on the FCAT. In addition, the CELLA testing reports provided the ELLs’ yearly progress in terms of their L2 proficiency.

Checklists

Checklists were distributed to the mainstream teachers only. Checklists were constructed to reflect the impact of the FCAT on teaching and instructional planning for such a state mandated test. On a weekly basis the teachers were asked to record how often they planned and conducted FCAT oriented activities, how many hours of planning were involved in such a process, how many extra professional meetings or consultations they had to attend professionally for the FCAT, how often they worked individually with the ELLs to help them master the skills required to take the FCAT, and what was involved in preparation for such a state mandated test.
Lesson Plans/Teaching Materials.

The collection of lesson plans, instructional manuals, and materials on classroom activities was included in the data gathering process because these materials provided a detailed picture of the nature of the classroom activities that took place and the classroom routines expected to be observed by the researcher during the classroom visits.

Data Analysis

The purpose of gathering data is to provide an in-depth understanding of what research is investigating. The qualitative approach taken in this study, as suggested by Berkowitz (1996), “is especially appropriate for exploring the viewpoints of persons and groups whose assumptions differ from those of the mainstream culture, and who, therefore, have a particular need to speak and be heard, ‘in their own voices’” (p 54). Therefore, all classroom observations/field notes, interviews, students’ classroom work, teaching materials and checklists, or statistical documents were analyzed as valuable sources of evidence aligned with what the study’s research questions were asking. Each source of data was intended to address at least one research question. Since the data varied, the methods that were employed to analyze it varied as well. The data analysis methods consisted of case analysis, content analysis, and cross-case analysis.

The first three sources, classroom observations/field notes, interviews, and students’ class work, were the primary sources of data. Hence, the point that Patton
(1990) makes that “the purpose of observational data is to *describe* the setting that was observed, the activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed” (p 202) was the criterion for analyzing and presenting the findings from the primary data; thus, observations/field notes, interviews and students’ work together in one subsection. Furthermore, Patton (1990) cautions to not mix the description of data with the interpretation of it. With such a focus in mind, a case analysis was the starting point of this analysis by providing a description of each participant as an individual case based on the data collected for this study. Since the goal was to provide a thick description of each case and the data was expected to be abundant by offering variety on an individual basis, Chapter 4, the findings chapter, presents each of the eleven cases separately, although within three categories: teachers, students, and parents.

And yet, it could not be assumed that the observations/field notes, interviews, and students’ class work alone could provide the foundation for the findings chapter. Therefore, the data obtained from the teaching materials and checklists, as well as the statistical documents, played a supporting role to discover those elements that were not captured from the primary data sources. Some of the data obtained from testing reports are presented in forms of graphic organizers (charts, tables) while describing each individual case study. Another subsection analyzed the findings from the teachers’ checklists and the remaining testing reports. A content analysis of the checklists revealed the average of the amount of time spent by teachers to prepare for the FCAT and the
extra activities planned for that purpose. The number circled for each question was added up among the three mainstream teachers’ checklists and divided to find the mean.

At length, upon such completion, a cross-case analysis followed guided by Patton’s (1990) framework that “cross-case analysis means grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on central issues” (p 376). Throughout a cross-case analysis, the study compared and contrasted eleven cases evaluating the patterns and themes that emerged from their responses. Thus, the following chapter includes such analysis where the research questions were tied to it.

And yet, the challenge ahead was how to interweave all this data together in order to paint one picture at the end: the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of elementary ELLs, teachers and parents towards the FCAT. Accordingly, an inductive analysis approach was employed to analyze data in order to help answer each research question that was posed in this study. To achieve such a goal, Patton (1990) recommends triangulating the data sources and methods to come to assemble a final picture of what the findings reveal. Such an analysis was performed by taking one research question at a time and checking back with the data for consistencies in patterns and themes that were observed throughout observations/field notes, interviews, and students’ class work to answer a particular question. Some questions required comparing and contrasting perspectives and attitudes that participants from different subgroups had in certain areas by pointing to their similarities and differences.
The interviews were transcribed \textit{verbatim} by the researcher and a copy was given to the participants to check for accuracy. This was a time-consuming process. As Hinds (2000) observes, “for every hour spent interviewing allow ten times as much time to process the data” (p 49). The researcher intended to transcribe the recordings promptly upon completion of interviewing the participants in order to use the freshness of it to assist the description of the representation to the fullest. During the process of transcribing, the recordings were listened to several times, stopped and rewound to secure accuracy in transcriptions.

The analysis process of the transcriptions of interviews, field notes from classroom observations, checklists and all data collected for the purpose of this study was guided by the four major steps that Giogi (1985) suggests. In order to analyze a text he recommends not to analyze the whole text at once, but to break it into units that the researcher can manage where \textit{meaning units} will emerge. The four major steps that he recommends on pp. 9-10 are:

1. Read the entire text to get a general idea.
2. Once a general idea is embraced reread the text looking for the \textit{meaning units}.
3. Read to examine how \textit{meaning units} are relevant to research study disregarding the ones that are irrelevant to it.
4. Synthesize “all of the transformed meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the subject’s experience” (p 10).
Drawing from a research methods classes with Dr. James-Brown, the researcher took this professor’s advice in which verbatim will be “massage the data” until themes and patterns emerge. Massaging the data meant visiting and revisiting the data by constantly asking myself which were the frequent, common patterns and themes that helped me answer the questions that the study was addressing. Being guided by the study questions, since the volume of data was abundant, I narrowed it down to patterns and themes that were relevant to the questions.

Therefore, the examination of the meaning units was conducted from different angles and synthesized in order to lead to the identification of the patterns and themes that data revealed. The coding of data was done manually by the researcher. Wilkinson (2000) states that the researcher should aim for 80% accuracy in the coding process. Peer debriefing helped to reach such a goal. Hence, aiming to establish the reliability of this study, a colleague of the researcher, who has earned her doctorate in the education field and was not involved with the research, was asked to look at the data analysis and provide feedback. Such feedback aimed to lead to discussions and elicit questions about specific parts of the coding process.

During the coding process, as themes emerged, they were grouped into three categories: teachers, students, and parents. These categories reflect their perceptions and attitudes towards the FCAT. Such a process involved reading and rereading the data several times. The identification of the patterns and themes was performed by using
different colors of highlighters while looking at sentences as a whole, paragraphs and
words separately for regularities that were observed. On large pieces of cardboard where
categories were coded, sticky notes with sentences or words were placed and moved
around until themes and patterns emerged and could be confirmed. Patterns and themes
that were scrutinized from data were the foundation to explain the grounded theory that
derived from this inductive analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

Establishing credibility and objectivity were the intentions of this research. Beside
the triangulation of data established by employing multiple sources of data and methods,
some other tools were used to reach such goal: peer debriefing, member check, prolonged
engagement, and self-reflexivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that peer debriefing is a
process where a neutral researcher is invited to analyze one’s research to further serve the
purpose of taking a deeper look at the data. Another researcher who was not engaged
with this research was invited to look at the data analysis with expectations of providing
productive feedback. Such feedback was expected to elicit questions that encouraged
approaching particular parts of the data analysis with more specific, detailed
interpretation. In addition, being a teacher of ELLs myself, another goal of these
discussions was to attempt to reduce my own bias. Thus, two elementary teachers at the
research site, who were not part of the study, were asked to read the findings and provide
feedback on the accuracy of the patterns revealed through analysis. This was important to
establish the objectivity of the study and maintain a teacher-reader friendly language throughout the research. It is important to note that I entered this study as someone who praised the FCAT and wrote the professional goals as a teacher based on such mandated test.

Another tool used to enhance trustworthiness was member check, which Newman and Benz (1998) refer to as the process of checking the accuracy of data. After the transcription of the interview tapes, the participants were asked to read the transcripts to confirm the accuracy of them. This was to ensure validity of data throughout the data analysis process. Such a tool was intended to increase the credibility of this study, as doing so would “allow for clarification, explanation, or extension of questions and ideas, just as it can offer important insights into participants’ understanding of self and context” (Talburt 2004, p 88). In addition, communication through e-mails and phone calls with the adult participants was maintained for any kind of clarifications.

In addition, the prolonged engagement was another tool that added to the trustworthiness of this study. Inspired by Denzin & Lincoln’s (2003) assertion that “qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p 13), the time that was invested in conducting this study served to show in depth the context where the study was conducted. Most importantly, a trustworthy rapport was established between the researcher and the participants. Such a
rapport was achieved through personal contacts with them, including communication via e-mails and phone calls.

Moreover, interpreting data is a major responsibility. Getting to know the data that was collected for this research study required time to stay still and just listen for the voiceless codes and interpret the story they had to tell. Self-reflexivity was crucial to engage in a dialogue with oneself to become aware of any bias and assumptions that arose in the process.

Prior to the data analysis chapter, an important reminder is that through this research, the researcher does not intend to generalize the findings as a whole truth. The findings are used to provide some understanding of the experiences of ELLs as test takers of a state mandated test, the FCAT, and how such a test was interrelated to the daily instruction and home, thereby involving teachers and parents as well. Such findings are not generalized for all the ELLs who reside in the state of Florida or any other states of the United States. The patterns found might be transferable to other studies in L2 field. In that case, transferability will add to the validity of this study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will focus on addressing the perceptions and attitudes of the elementary second language learners (ELLs), teachers and parents towards the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The setting was what I have called the *Little Gators school. The chapter will describe eleven case studies representing the eleven participants of the study. The purpose of the chapter is to explore the FCAT from the perspectives and experiences of these different stakeholders in both the examination process and the exam’s outcomes. By examining the FCAT through the various lenses represented by these different stakeholders, the chapter triangulates various data sources as it attempts to construct a larger picture of the FCAT’s impact on those whose lives it touches in one way or another.

To fully capture the perspectives represented, the eleven participants will be described as individual case studies in this chapter, addressed by using pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality that was promised to them at the time of the signing of the consent forms. Cross-case analysis running across the cases appears in Chapter Five. The cases were created to represent the different stakeholders within a heterogeneous population not only in their cultural and educational backgrounds, but also in the subgroup to which they belonged. The idea was to provide representative voices from each subgroup with respect to how they were affected by the state achievement test, the FCAT. The breakdown is as follows: four teachers, four students, and three parents.
Along with the descriptive information for each case study participant, the chapter also features direct quotes from the participants and paraphrases of their comments. Field notes from observations are also interspersed throughout the chapter, along with other sources of data relevant to different stakeholders (e.g., English proficiency test scores for the students). Tables containing relevant personal information will be provided prior to each of the three case categories to provide context for the cases which follow.

Two key terms that will be often used in this chapter are modifications and accommodations, as these are central to life surrounding the FCAT. Indeed, this was one of the findings of the study, particularly with respect to the teachers and students: modifications of classroom practice and accommodations related to the FCAT administration play an important role in how these stakeholders experience the FCAT. This is particularly true in the case of modifications. As August and Shanahan (2008) have noted, research shows that adjusting instruction to meet the ELLs is essential. What is less clear, they add, is which modifications are most effective: “The research has provided a sketchy picture of what some of these adjustments might be” (p. 10). Hence, in this study an important objective was to identify the kinds of modifications being made by the teachers.

Daily modifications are provided for the ELLs by the ESOL and the mainstream teachers. The modifications constitute differentiated instruction pegged to ELLs’ pace of learning, and are support mechanisms designed to help ELLs reach their academic
potential. What this means is that in a classroom consisting of mainstream (i.e., native English speaking) and ELL students, the ELLs will receive some instruction tailored to their specific needs. The teachers’ selection of these instructional modifications is based on well established ESOL strategies. An analogy that can be used about the modified support that ELLs receive by the ESOL and mainstream teachers is that such support can be compared to the mother bird feeding her little babies; she chews the food before she gives it to them. It is the same food, but the consistency changes. In the same manner, the modifications for ELLs consist of differentiation of the curriculum adjusted to fit their English proficiency levels and their pace of learning. What this means, essentially, is that the language used is simplified, not the content itself. ELLs, because of the language barrier they often face, especially in the earlier grades, need the language of the academic content modified in order to master the skills that are required by the grade level curriculum.

An understanding of these modifications is important because, on the day of the FCAT administration, ELLs are expected to perform without this support they receive in the classroom. When facing the FCAT, the support that ELLs are accustomed to on a daily basis is limited to what is called accommodations. Accommodations can be defined as alterations in the FCAT administration aimed at accounting for the challenges ELLs face given the fact that they are often in the early stages of learning English. Under such circumstances, they cannot be expected to respond to the FCAT in the ways that their native English speaking classmates do. Such accommodations include such features as
being allowing additional time to complete the examination, flexibility in the scheduling of the exam, and the use of dictionaries. Another accommodation is referred to as the heritage language adjustment, one in which students can receive guidance in their native language. This heritage language accommodation is defined as:

The ESOL or heritage language teacher may answer student questions about the general test directions ONLY. Questions must be answered in a way that the student would not be led to infer the correct answer to any of the items. The teacher is prohibited from reading words to the student from the passages, test items, and performance tasks, and from answering student questions about the passages, test items, and performance tasks. (FCAT Test Administration Manual 2010, p 294)

Another accommodation is what is called flexible setting. Flexible setting means that ELLs have the choice to take the test in another classroom (not in their mainstream classroom) with the ESOL teacher present. The additional time accommodation allows ELLs to take all day (school day) to work on the section being tested that day on the exam. Flexible scheduling gives the ELLs the opportunity to take the test session “during several brief periods within one school day: however, a session of the test must be completed within one school day.” (FCAT Administration Manual 2010, p 294)

Given their importance in the FCAT ecology, modifications and accommodations serve as a key analytical lens through which some of the data in this chapter reported. Table 1 below presents a summary of what the study found in these areas as well as main features of the classroom settings. These findings will be discussed as they appear within
the individual teacher case studies. In general, what the table shows is that modifications certainly played a role in the instruction the ELLs received.

Table 2: Classroom Features and Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Established Daily Routine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bilingual/Peer Help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stress Free Working Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Methods/Modifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual representations (pictures, realia, graphic organizers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Speech; pauses, emphasis, intonation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repetitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several exposures to the text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistent reviews of previous concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarified directions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individual support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Immediate feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explanation of unknown terms in definitions that were comprehensible to ELLs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of gestures, TPR,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 2 continued

- Reduced number of weekly spelling words
- Assignments broken into steps
- Modification of content; curriculum and assessment
- Alternative assessment (aural)
- Culturally relevant teaching

Accommodations

- Flexible setting
- Small group
- Additional time
- Access to bilingual dictionary

FINDINGS

The findings section is organized around the three categories of participants, beginning with the teachers.

Section 1: Teachers

The findings section begins with an examination of the first category: the four teachers. Each teacher is presented in a separate case study. This section focuses in particular on such variables as the teachers’ regular teaching practices, their practices with the ELLs, modifications they made in their ELL instruction to help them prepare for the FCAT, and the accommodations provided for ELLs when the FCAT is administered.
In this way this section of the chapter attempts to capture the FCAT experience as it unfolds for the teachers. Table 3 presents key demographic information about them.

Table 3: Demographic Information: Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study #</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Degree/Major</th>
<th>NES/NNES</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years in 3rd grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>ESOL/Endorsement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mrs. Thomas</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>BS in Elementary Education</td>
<td>NES</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mrs. Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>BA in Elementary Education</td>
<td>NES</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mrs. London</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>BA MA</td>
<td>NES</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ms Blake</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>BA in English &amp; Literature</td>
<td>NNES</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Endorsement means that teachers hold a second teaching license in ESOL.
As shown in Table 3, the teacher participants represented a wide range of educators who had an ELL (English Language Learners) population in their classrooms. They were similar in the sense that all were female, all were qualified to teach at the elementary level, and held an ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) endorsement. In these regards they were like nearly all teachers who work with ELLs at the elementary school level. On the other hand, there was some diversity with respect to native language, with three NS (Native Speakers) and one NNES (Non-Native Speaker) of English, and there was considerable variability in terms of the amount of teaching experience they had, including years having taught third grade, the grade that serves as the focal point of this study (the first year in which students are required to take the FCAT). There was also considerable variation with respect to age. As such, they viewed the FCAT from a variety of perspectives and experiences and thus added to the study’s depth.

Mrs. Thomas

Mrs. Thomas held a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in elementary education and began her teaching career in 1996 working for the public schools. Over the years she had taught third, fourth and fifth grade level, all of which are grades in which students have to take the FCAT. Her teaching style was modeled after the constructivist theory of instruction. Her belief was that becoming a parent of two, a girl eight years old and a boy three years old, had helped her become a better teacher. Because of her relationship with
her family, she believed that she had developed a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the perspective of the parent in a parent-teacher relationship as well as that of a teacher. Of particular importance in Mrs. Thomas’ case was the fact that she had had direct experience with the FCAT throughout her 14 years of teaching and thus was in an especially informed position when it came to looking at its plusses and minuses.

Mrs. Thomas had a challenging class during this study; she taught a highly mixed group of students. Most were native speakers of English who might be called mainstream elementary school students, while four out of eighteen were Special Learning Disability (SLD) students, and she had one ELL student, Sarah, who entered her class as a non-English speaker, that is, a true beginner with respect to learning the language. Thus, she had to account for the varying exceptionalities of a diverse group of students. For this reason, I nicknamed this teacher “The Queen of Differentiations.” Every time I went to observe in her class or walked by her classroom, her students were swarming around her like bees around honey. Her lesson plans were written and developed to reach each student’s educational and psychological needs. Working in small groups or one on one was a well-established differentiation system in her class. She believed that such differentiation was a necessity in order to assist the students who needed special attention. She felt that “anybody can teach teachable people,” but we no longer live among a homogeneous population where everyone comes from the same background and is equally teachable. Thus, her differentiated approach was deemed necessary, and so, in a heterogeneously grouped population of students, her solution was to avoid instructional
practices limited to the middle population; instead, she taught the same skills to all the
students, but within a scaffolding sequence which was understandable to them and
accounted for their individual needs and readiness to learn.

Visuals were an important and continual feature of Mrs. Thomas’ class in an
effort to help the students with special needs (Classroom Observations, 2/11/10). Her
daily routine was written in different colors on the board, which made it easy for students
to follow. With respect to Language Arts, the weekly vocabulary words were modified to
provide “student friendly” definitions and displayed on a bulletin board. Reading time
was another major feature of her classroom, and after reviewing the instructions for
reading time with the whole class, Mrs. Thomas made sure that she answered any
individual questions before she turned to her small group intervention. She focused either
on the story of the week, vocabulary to be learned, or a specific skill that needed to be
taught. For instance, in one particular class session that will be discussed in more detail
below, while the rest of the class started working quietly, she pulled a group of six aside
and moved them to the back of the classroom (Classroom Observations, 2/11/10).

The ELL student, Sarah (a native speaker of Spanish), was part of the small group
of six. As they worked on a cloze sentence exercise targeting the intended vocabulary
items for the day (Classroom Observations, 2/11/10), Mrs. Thomas read the sentence
aloud slowly. There were six choices to select from. Mrs. Thomas read the vocabulary
word choices and acted out the words through Total Physical Response (TPR), a popular
ESOL teaching method. She narrowed the list down to three choices and asked Sarah to read the sentence as she guided her through the vocabulary unfamiliar to Sarah. As Mrs. Thomas narrowed down to two choices, an “Aha” moment occurred for Sarah. She selected the correct word to complete the sentence. Mrs. Thomas clarified the explanation regarding the meaning of the vocabulary word again by associating it with the motion it signifies. She made sure that Sarah solidified the correct pronunciation of the word after she (Mrs. Thomas) repeated it slowly. Mrs. Thomas often translated a few words in Spanish for her. Repetitions and TPR were helpful strategies for Sarah and the other students during this small group intervention to understand the concepts at their level with fluency in the pace of learning. Apparently, Mrs. Thomas’ awareness of necessity of ESOL strategies application in her teaching practices derived from her deep knowledge of what tools were effective to meet her students’ academic needs. Thus, she made sure that Sarah had several exposures to the weekly reading passages. As she explained:

Well the first day of the week, on Monday, we listen to the story on a tape and she (Sarah) puts a (intelligible) with that. Second time, we do a buddy read and a small group read or solo, and it is differentiated based on students’ needs or my choice. If I don’t have to choose, they can pick from other options. And the third time is for homework that night (before the test). They reread with their family member and answer the questions that go with it, the questions that we have already been discussing either Monday or Tuesday. So, they have had access to the story three times at least and during the class time if they finish the work early they can take the book out again and listen to the book on tape. So, by the test time on Thursday they have been exposed to the story of a minimum three times, or more we have reviewed it. I want them not so much to remember the story, but to comprehend it, so eventually you come to a point you cross the point of the main idea and understand the skill, to show me that you get how to read it, not to just remember the story. (Interview 3/17/10)
This interview segment reveals a significant difference between what ELLs experience on a regular basis, which is several exposures to the reading passages, as opposed to the FCAT, which involves one round of exposure to the text. In this regard there is possible tension between the modifications present in Mrs. Thomas’ differentiated instruction and the way in which the FCAT operates.

Culturally relevant teaching was another technique I observed in Mrs. Thomas’ instruction. This was demonstrated in a class session involving the folktale, The Crowded House (Jacob, 2001), (Classroom Observations, 2/11/10). An expression Mrs. Thomas was using, “so long,” seemed to be a challenge for Sarah. Mrs. Thomas explained that it is an expression that Americans like to use for “goodbye”, i.e., the same as the word “farewell,” which was the word choice necessary to complete a cloze sentence exercise they were working on. Thus, she used the reading time to incorporate a cultural component in her instruction. Also, in the Social Studies portion of the third grade curriculum, World History was the focus of a particular instructional episode. Mrs. Thomas shared with me (Interview 3/17/10), when the class discussed the President, the House of Representative, and other features of the government of the United States, she made sure that Sarah shared, with the help of one of her bilingual classmates, the features of the government of her native country, Cuba. As they compared and contrasted the two systems, the class learned about the differences that existed between these two governing systems, and Sarah was able to make connections between the two cultures.
With respect to the FCAT, while the pressure to prepare students for the FCAT, as Mrs. Thomas describes it, was enormous, her philosophy of teaching was to teach in order to fortify her students’ needs and avoid teaching to the test, as the examples above illustrate. In her words:

Professionally I still administer it (FCAT) of course. It’s part of my job and I will prepare students for it, but I don’t teach my students to this test. What I teach is the skills that are required to pass the test, and the students who are coming with cultural differences compared to the test not necessarily to the students in the classroom environment, teaching them what they need, and how they need to get it and when they are getting to take the test, they are tested in a different way. So, I don’t want to set them up for failure. That’s what the sample practice is a sample so they get not only what they need to move to the next grade level, but also what they need to play the game to get through the system and move on. (Interview 3/17/10)

Mrs. Thomas appears to be suggesting that there is a fundamental mismatch between what transpires in the classroom and what transpires on the FCAT, and there may be cultural differences in how some ELLs approach learning and how FCAT constructs learning. Mrs. Thomas attempted to minimize the impact of FCAT rather than allowing it to dominate the instructional ecology of her classroom. In an effort to probe into this pedagogical framing, I asked her what she would say to the policy makers who dictated how ELLs were to be assessed (and, in essence, how they would be taught):

Pretty much the same thing, I would say it needs to be something and I understand deals are struck with different publishing companies when they make these up. But someone asks an educator just one time: “What do we need to do?” because we don’t have a problem with accountability, we don’t have a problem with testing these kids and looking for a change over time. It needs to be done in a way that is fair and they are setting them up
Thus, Mrs. Thomas believed that the FCAT was not a valid instrument for ELLs, in that, as she saw it, the test “setting them up for failure” instead of striving to gain a meaningful and helpful measure of what and how they were learning. As she revealed in the interview segment, she preferred measures which are “looking for change over time.” Thus, she had a developmental view of learning that was incompatible with the way FCAT operates. It was significant here that she acknowledged the value of accountability and testing, so that the issue was this particular test and what it was intended to do, not the overall notion of assessing the ELLs. In her opinion, they should be tested with a test that is custom made so as to meet their needs as language learners, and reflects what students know, not what they do not know. The following comments are noteworthy as she reveals another drawback of FCAT for ELLs: the way the test itself is written, which in her opinion did not do justice to ELLs. She elaborated:

It’s a standardized test and that’s get a lot of wiggle worm right there and that’s has been debated for years way before FCAT because standardized testing is an easier form to prepare. We are looking at thousands and thousands of copies of something that have to be published. So what they do is sort of the old traditional style of instruction that you go straight down the center and the population is primarily white and that’s what they are going to make the test for and any students who isn’t and doesn’t have that cultural background, they are going to miss out on several questions opportunities and getting those answers correct because of the way it is written. It’s very hard to prepare a test that is for the whole population with that all these differences and make one test for everybody that is valid. (Interview 3/17/10)
To support such an argument, she provided a specific example of her going to another country where she did not speak the language and would be forced to take a similar kind of test. Would it prove her intelligence, the ability to read, or just create frustration for her?

Building on her earlier comments about the FCAT, I asked Mrs. Thomas what the FCAT meant to her. She replied:

I think of it as accountability. I think it’s important for any career, in particularly in education because what we do affects a lot of people. My theory is that what is going on with FCAT got way out of hand. It doesn’t really show the students’ ability or disability and it does not really care for their backgrounds if it is cultural, if it is a student with needs or disabilities. And it bothers me that they are testing them at the point of the year they do. There is no pretest/posttest where we can see the learning gains. I have no problem with accountability. I would love if they do a pretest at the beginning of the year and one at the end. I can show you a year’s of growth in any child, but give me one in the middle of the year when we have not covered all the skills in a way that is beneficial to the kids! I don’t think it is fair, I don’t think it is fair especially to the ESOL students and students with learning disabilities. (Interview 3/17/10)

Mrs. Thomas’ comments illustrate not only her respect for accountability, but also the unique meaning that it takes in education, a realm that builds the foundation in people’s lives. What is striking is her preference for a pre-and post-test arrangement aimed at measuring growth of knowledge and ability over time, as opposed to a measurement that takes place at just one point in time, and before the students have finished their learning for the entire academic year. As she notes, it makes little sense to measure their ability well before the school year ends. That an experienced teacher like her would support
some form of testing that was developmentally oriented is noteworthy, as it might be expected that experiences with the FCAT would have driven her to oppose any form of testing for ELLs as early as the third grade.

As a teacher who had dealt with the FCAT since it started, thirteen years ago, the next interview segment reveals how her thoughts about it changed over the years. She had administered it to 3rd and 5th graders during her career and thus was extremely knowledgeable about it.

I have been doing FCAT since they started thirteen years ago. I always have taught 3rd and 5th grade. And when it came as a pilot test, the original test was given to the teachers and basically told to give it to your kids, don’t worry about it. It is something we are looking at. We want to see how they are doing. We need something, sort of benchmark level and we can compare from there. Ok, no problem. Totally no stress. As the years progresses and things get more important and you start tacking money onto it and of course all the political things that have happened it’s got to be more and more of a problem. I don’t have a personal feeling either way prior to the test, during or after it because of given enough times, so I am not nervous, I don’t have any animosity about it, so I do what I am supposed to do to get the kids prepared. Following the test, afterwards I would say that there is some relief because my students feel better and I feel what they are feeling. When you have these kids in a classroom setting in an elementary school setting, they are with me seven hours a day, they become mine. So I get used to their emotions, changes, the way how they feel and it was like a whole ball was lifted off the classroom when this was finished. Timely, I don’t have to think of this till May so that’s what their feelings were. I feel what they feel. (Interview 3/17/10)

These comments from a teacher who had experienced the FCAT since its inception capture the frustration accompanying the changing purpose and administration of the FCAT, from its early days in which it gave teachers and students valuable, stress-free feedback regarding students’ performance relative to benchmarks of proficiency to its
current incarnation as an examination carrying great impact. Mrs. Thomas’ comments about the relief experienced after the testing period is over, and her fears for her students, offer a compelling view of the exam from the grassroots level of someone who is directly affected by it.

**Summary**

Mrs. Thomas honored accountability in her profession and believed in trying to comply with the testing guidelines while also placing a premium on her students’ learning as opposed to mechanically teaching to the test. In that vein, she placed considerable emphasis on modifications in her classroom. An especially striking comment of hers is “what is going on with FCAT got way out of hand.” While very closely tied to her students emotionally, she did not oppose the assessment of ELLs or even the earlier implementation of the FCAT. Seeing what the FCAT had become, and how it adversely affected her students, had changed her views of it. At a time when the kind of testing represented by the FCAT is increasingly common in the United States, these perspectives from a teacher who had witnessed the development and changing use of such an instrument are noteworthy.

*Mrs. Brown*

Mrs. Brown graduated from one of the highly regarded universities in the state of Florida in 2003. She successfully completed a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Elementary Education. She was hired at Little Gators during the summer of 2003 and had
taught 2nd grade for six years prior to the study. This was her first year teaching 3rd grade; therefore, it was her first experience with the FCAT. Thus, unlike Mrs. Thomas, who had extensive experience with the FCAT, Mrs. Brown brought a novice’s perspective to it. Two of the student participants, Nathan and Brian, were students in Mrs. Brown’s class. Another new ELL student, a non-English speaking one, enrolled in February as a new addition to the class. One important feature that Mrs. Brown shared with Mrs. Thomas was that she was teaching a class comprised of both native English-speaking students and ELLs, thus compounding the normal challenges associated with 3rd grade instruction.

Upon an introduction to Mrs. Brown, it is impossible not to smile. Her infectious smile was contagious. Her love, respect and care for students were demonstrated continually as a result of her words and actions. Furthermore, Mrs. Brown was a highly organized teacher; this was evident from the well-established routine which characterized her classroom. The daily schedule, along with the assignment for each subject, was clearly written on the white board. The bulletin boards were colorful and the room was inviting. With respect to pedagogy, Mrs. Brown believed that working in small groups and the application of modifications were key components to help the ELL students reach their optimal potential. Instructional planning, compiling materials and modifying the load of work for this subgroup of students demanded a great deal of time. In addition to her regular course planning, she had designated one to two hours a week for FCAT preparation.
The emphasis she placed on making modifications for the ELLs was an interesting feature of her instructional practice. This involved the use of something called istation, which is a computerized, reading comprehension program which adjusts academic content and skills required to work with it to ELLs’ L2 academic proficiency level. I asked her to discuss istation and her approach to modification after she mentioned istation one day. I was especially interested in why, after using the istation, the students had not performed well on the FCAT sample test. According to Mrs. Brown:

Because it wasn’t at their level. Because they are not proficient. I am modifying for them, because that is what they need in order for them to learn the English language. If we throw things at them that are too hard, these kids are going to shut down and they won’t want to continue to learn. So, when we throw these stressful FCAT test to them, which is not their level, these poor kids get so stressed and they break down, so here is a test, a practice test. They did not do as well as much as they do try. They are great kids and they do try, but when you have no idea what the word is, how can (you) possibly figure out what the question is they are asking for? (Interview 3/16/10)

Mrs. Brown’s comments illustrate not only her commitment to her class, but also the challenges she faced as well as the complexities relevant to the FCAT. During the reading time in her class, the ELL students were working with stories from the intervention kit designed for their utilization. This involved the same emphasis on comprehension building, vocabulary items and skills that the mainstream or regular students engaged on a weekly basis (Field Notes, 1/27/10). The difference was the intervention stories were stratified below grade level, i.e., not aimed at 3rd grade readers.
Although the same core curriculum skills were introduced to all students, the language used to teach such skills to ELLs was modified. In other words, the focus was on the same concepts they need to know in third grade, but material was modified to a level that ELLs were able to understand. The following segment reveals that Mrs. Brown had to account for the diversity that existed in her ELLs’ language proficiency levels in order to make the content of the curriculum, as well as the weekly assessment, to be comprehensible to them. In her words:

During class task I have these students in interventions kits for reading. These reading kits are below level stories that use the same vocabulary words and skills for the week, the same story that other kids would be using, however the content of the stories is more to their level. I also have them use below level science book and test which are intervention books which focus on same key concepts they need to know, but it puts them on the level of knowledge they are able to understand it. They have more time, are allowed more time, they are in small groups for math or reading. I also repeat directions to them. The assessments are below level reading comprehension and in science test. Again it is basically what the other kids are doing, but more to their level, fewer questions will be on the test. I read the directions as well. (Interview 3/16/10)

An important question that arises is whether these modifications, well intended to help ELLs achieve their academic potential as they go through the stages of second language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), adequately prepare ELLs to take the same test as the native speaking students where such modifications are not provided. As another example of this process, for the ELLs the weekly spelling list was half of what the regular students received. In addition, the reading passages were shorter and featured modified language that ensured a comprehension level appropriate for the ELLs (Classroom
Observation and Field Notes 1/27/10, 2/2/10). Thus, what the ELLs did was adjusted to make learning for them manageable and reduce the stress they otherwise would have felt had they completed the same materials (types and amounts) as the other students. However, in these circumstances teachers like Mrs. Brown are caught in a complicated dilemma: to continue modifying for her ELLs that made learning more manageable for them, but it also limited the extent to which they could grow academically and left them underprepared for the material included on the FCAT. The FCAT was the cause of this dilemma, for which there was no escape for Mrs. Brown. Whatever choice she made—to modify or not modify—had negative consequences for her students. It also meant that her instructional practices were shaped to some extent by the FCAT, instead of by her own desires as a teacher. For a caring, compassionate teacher like her, this had to be a painful experience.

To illustrate this dilemma a little further, as a result of her sensitivity to linguistic differences, Mrs. Brown placed an emphasis on culturally relevant teaching. To accomplish this, every Monday all the students in Mrs. Brown’s class wrote in their journal about personal experiences and stories connected with families. Throughout the year, the students and Mrs. Brown provided pictures of different countries they had lived in or visited, along with different currencies and artifacts (Field Notes 3/2/10). Here Mrs. Brown was able to make use of her own instincts and desires as a teacher and exercise control over her instructional practices.
The purpose of these paragraphs describing Mrs. Brown’s teaching is to draw a contrast with her teaching related to the FCAT and to reveal the complexity at the heart of her instructional ecology, which juxtaposed her own inclinations as a teacher with the demands associated with the FCAT. Preparation for the FCAT in Mrs. Brown’s class started from the very beginning of the instruction to the school year (Interview, 3/16/10) and was intended to cover as many skills as they could prior to the FCAT administration, which was in the second week of March. Although Mrs. Brown thought that no one should teach to the test, the pressure to cover the materials and skills the students are expected to master at the third grade level, took its toll. The following segment draws attention to the dilemma and pressure that teachers like Mrs. Brown face while preparing for FCAT:

I agree with the (teaching to the test) statement. However, we shouldn’t teach to the test. As much I as try not to teach to the test there are some skills and strategies I would not get in time before the test. It is not fair to test the students 2/3 into the school year. And expect the teachers to have everything covered by then. How can I possibly cover all the Sunshine State Standards in that amount time? I have to use certain workbooks to make sure that all skills are covered. But you are in so much pressure and stress to get everything done and with all these books to cover these skills I am not sure if I’ll get to them on time by the 2/3 to get through. So these kids should not be tested. These kids should not be tested until the end of the year when all skills have been taught. This way you are “not teaching to the test.” You have time to teach, master these skills, but you are tested in to 2/3 of the year. You should have a book that covers and introduces the skills they will see in the test, so the kids do not go “Oh my, I’ve never been taught that or I’ve never heard that before. I know teachers don’t like to teach to the test by any means. But when you are telling us that we
One word that Mrs. Brown used to describe the FCAT was “stressful” for all the parties involved: students, teachers, and parents. In addition, there were mixed feelings such as overwhelmed, upset, annoyed, and pressured that this teacher felt during the year as she encountered the FCAT for the first time. She dealt with this situation in one of our interview segments, where she was asked about her feelings before, during, and after the FCAT administration and why she had those feelings. She replied:

Overwhelmed because it is my first year. I did not know what the expectations were going to be going into it. I had no idea of this testing. I know how to prepare kids for testing, but I guess I just did not know. It was the unknown. I had never seen the test, I had never proctor the test, never done those things before. So it was overwhelming. Here they are giving you all the materials: These kids need to learn this, the kids need to learn this and there is a time frame the kids need to go through this. Yes! There 180 days of school, but we are going to test these kids into 2/3 of the school. So, you need to have all these skills learned and is not even the end of the school year yet. So, that is really stressful going. How come I need to have this test done 2/3 into of the school year when there is still 50 plus days remaining of the school year now left? And these kids are supposed to know all the skills before March. That’s why I said it is stress, annoyed and upset. Upset because of the kids. I hate putting them through this. They get so upset and stressed and at eight years old you should not be that way. (Interview 3/16/10)

These comments are compelling testimonial to the power of the FCAT, to see how a relatively experienced teacher like Mrs. Brown was torn emotionally as she helped her students prepare for a test that she knew was devastating for them intellectually and psychologically. She puts into greater perspective the classroom environment that
accompanies such an examination and the pressures faced by teachers like Mrs. Brown who must adjust to the demands generated by the test.

An interesting point that emerged while talking to Mrs. Brown was that ELLs did not necessarily take advantage of the accommodations available to them, especially the opportunity to use a dictionary. As I was interested to know why the ELLs were not taking advantage of the bilingual dictionaries to somehow help reduce the stress level of FCAT, I asked her to discuss her response to such behavior. Mrs. Brown replied:

The dictionaries are offered and placed on the desk. But the students do not use them. I don’t see them taking advantage of them. I think not only they might not be proficient enough in their native language, but I think it is overwhelming for these kids to go back and look every word up. So, by the time they get the test they are frustrated and overwhelmed, so going back and looking up the words in the dictionary might be overwhelming for them. It might be they might know how to use a dictionary. Those are skills that once you kind of get proficient with the language you kind of go back and look through the words. (Interview 3/16/10)

What is notable in her comments is the distinction she makes that having an accommodation in place like the use of a bilingual dictionary does not necessarily translates to an advantage to ELLs during the FCAT, thus problematizing the whole notion of accommodations.

Also complicating the picture with respect to state mandated tests like the FCAT is the way in which students’ performance on such tests is used to measure teachers’ success, including affecting the size of their pay increases or even, potentially, their job security, as the following interview segment reveals:
I do not think it is fair to judge a teacher based on their students' scores. Every school has a different economy status and with this type of pay they are going to push good teachers at low economical schools out of those schools because they'll be looked upon what those students do. There are so many factors that have to be looked at when judging a teacher. It is not as easy as looking at one standardized test. As a teacher, I am always working overtime to ensure that my students have a successful year. I know they are (policy makers) are trying to base the scores to what pay we should get, and my personal opinion is that you should not. These students come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The teacher has the kids eight hours a day. What goes on at home and what's continued at home, the teacher can't enforce that. So, I can do as much as I can do with these kids, but outside the school I can't make sure the parents are doing the homework with them. I can't make sure the parents are reading twenty minutes a night, or making sure the parents make them use the internet, or go to the FCAT explorer. So, I feel doing that to the teachers they (policy makers) are going to push the teachers, the good teachers out of the schools. In my opinion, is not fair. I don't know how they can possibly do that. (Interview 3/16/10)

These comments are a further illustration of the pressures associated with the FCAT and of the ways in which such an examination might affect teachers' performance and attitudes. For one thing, there is even greater pressure or motivation to “teach to the test” at the expense of providing other instruction so as to try to ensure higher test scores. Furthermore, if a state mandated test like the FCAT becomes a measuring stick for how teachers should be paid, it might cause them to not want ELLs in their classrooms. As Mrs. Brown stated:

I enjoy having ESOL students in my class. They are great students. I like to see the gains they make throughout the year. However, if our pay was to be based off of my students' scores, my opinion might be different if they base my pay on students' scores here at school at Little Gators. (Interview 3/16/10)
As for an alternative approach to assessing ELLs’ academic progress, Mrs. Brown offered the following thoughts:

It’s hard to think what to do instead, but I would probably do each ESOL student, look at as an individual with their own specific goals. Their test will then reflect the expectations that are required of that student. So if that student just came speaking no English, then I think the goal for that child should be different from FCAT: “Here read these passages where you have no idea what they are reading or maybe the goal would be to name the letters and sounds or form these sentences to use these words, or something that reflects that student’s needs and goals for that, that particular student...Yeah! Like a portfolio, or it has to be individual, because there are ESOL students who do better on some test that the other students. It is such an individual based program and I think maybe a portfolio on what they can or are capable of doing and test them on those skills. (Interview 3/16/10)

These comments are especially interesting when seen in the light of the fact that Mrs. Brown was having her first experience with the FCAT. After just one experience, she was already exasperated. Also interesting is her preference not to test ELLs with an exam in English if they are not proficient yet and to have in place an assessment tool that better aligns with the classroom practices, such as portfolio, which portrays students’ learning over time.

Summary

Having the same regard to accountability as Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Brown also believed that assessment should be in place for ELLs; however, she, too, confronted issues of fairness and complexities involved in helping a subgroup of students prepare for the test. As a teacher dealing with the FCAT for the first time, Mrs. Brown could relate to
her students at the emotional level. For her and the students, the fear of the “unknown” was present from the beginning of the school year to the examination period, and the demands of the FCAT on a daily basis created an overwhelmingly difficult experience for her as a teacher. Committed to best meet her students’ academic needs, she felt pressured by the complexity and challenges that she faced as a teacher to prepare her ELL students for the FCAT. In addition, the fact of having the FCAT administered 2/3 into the school year added to the pressure of teaching the skills the students needed to perform well on this test, along with teaching how to take a test of this nature for the first time in their lives.

Mrs. London

Mrs. London began her journey at Little Gators in 1981 as a media specialist, work she did for sixteen years before she went to the classroom. Like Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Brown, she brought a NS perspective to this study. During her teaching career, she had taught grades three through five to whom the FCAT is administered. Thus, she added depth to the study, particularly with her extensive experience with the FCAT. She held a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Education, Master of Arts (MA) in Educational Media, along with teaching certificates in five areas: Latin (grades K-12), Media (grades K-12), Science (grades 5-8), Elementary Education (grades K-6), and ESOL endorsement. There was one ELL student in her class who decided not to participate in this study.
The most interesting feature that caught my attention while observing Mrs. London was the rich realia (Observation Notes, 2/1/10) she used for different lessons. In addition to what she had collected over her years of teaching, she asked her students to share items they had through family roots in different cultures, or from travels to different locales. This realia was tied to the stories during the Language Arts lessons, or to explore themes during the Social Studies lessons. In this way, she attempted to apply her pedagogical belief in providing hands on learning experience, as she acknowledged the significance of students literally seeing and touching what they were learning about on a particular subject rather than just looking at the pictures in a book, on a computer screen, or in a video. In this way, each student, whether an ELL or native speaker of English, had opportunities to share a perspective that was not familiar to their classmates. This allowed comparisons and contrasts across cultures, and it allowed each student to feel like an equal participant in the class.

Clear directions written on the classroom white board in different colors made it easy for students to follow their daily class routine. Another noticeable feature of her teaching was the way in which she tried to make connections. For example, one day as the story for the guided reading lesson, *Lon Po Po: A Red Riding Hood Story from China* (TROPHIES, 2001, Trans. by E. Young) was introduced (Observation Notes, 2/1/10), Mrs. London asked her students if they ever had read the story about a girl named Red Riding Hood. In this way, the students could draw on and benefit from their existing schema, and empowered to make meaningful “text to text” connections with
similar versions of such stories from their native literature and culture. This demonstrates her sensitivity to the needs of ELLs as well as the domestic students.

Another example of this was seen in her use of pictures depicting unfamiliar words or concepts, picture she herself drew. For instance, while reading the *The Crowded House* (Jacob, 2001) play (Observation Notes, 2/8/10), students had to have an understanding of what a stage was. Mrs. London’s detailed drawing of a stage along with her explanations of important terms such as center stage, back stage, front stage and so on provided great visual support, especially for the ELL and struggling students who did not seem to be familiar with the concept of a stage or play. Mrs. London’s awareness of different levels of comprehension skills and language proficiency not only illustrates her commitment to her students, but also her wisdom in knowing how to reach them at their present learning level in order to take them where they needed to be academically. The following interview segments illustrate her instructional approach to her ELLs (present and past):

For ESOL students and other students who have a need, if they need help with the reading to read questions, asking me what does this word mean, it may be a vocabulary words that everyone knows because they have grown up with the language and maybe an idiom or just another form of what they have seen, but they do not know the word, but they can just raise their hands and have that answered. With the ESOL teacher in the inclusion, she can answer to those questions more rapidly that I can go around from student to student. (Interview 3/19/10)

Then she elaborated on the support provided to ELL during the weekly assessments:
Once again, when we have a test a spelling, science, or reading test if they need the questions read to them I will read the questions out loud. They have to read the actual part of the reading test. If it is the science test or social studies test and there are questions or actual answers, words they need to know I will read them out loud. They are expected to know what they mean if it’s a test because we’ve gone over the materials but I’ll read out loud to them but other students in the class on grade level they are supposed to take those tests on their own. (Interview 3/19/10)

While these modification efforts may have enriched their learning, they did not necessarily prepare the ELLs to meet the demands of the FCAT. This was a dilemma she faced as a teacher who had to account for the FCAT because of the grade level she was teaching as well as the everyday needs of her ELLs.

Due to her extensive experience with the FCAT, Mrs. London, unlike Mrs. Brown, was aware of the need to understand and use figurative language as an expected third grade skill and as a component of the FCAT. Thus, Mrs. London carefully monitored her use and explanations of this challenging part of the English language, where the meanings might not be immediately apparent to nonnative speakers of the language, such as idioms and slang. In fact, she acknowledged that those were even difficult for students who had resided in the United States their entire life; as a result, she could not even imagine what a challenge they were for ELLs and how this potential barrier might impact on their FCAT performance.

What is striking in her comment “we do have to be more aware that anything you say may not be understood” is the awareness and sensitivity that this experienced teacher
had to ELLs’ actual language intake, a consideration that is not a focus of the FCAT.

Once again, though, an important question that arises as whether ELLs can achieve such “Aha” moments of understanding during the FCAT while trying to determine the meaning of figurative language without the support provided by a teacher like by Mrs. London. To illustrate the complexity of such a situation, during an interview she highlighted the differences in the processing length between ELLs and native speakers of English when they face an academic challenge like the FCAT. She was asked to discuss the disadvantages she felt the ESOL students had versus their native English speaking peers while taking the FCAT as well as the main struggles she observed among the ESOL students. As she explained: “Vocabulary and understanding phrases, some of the test taking, words when they say describe in your own words, or what’s mostly about. Some of these phrases they really have to think about what’s being asked here. That’s very difficult for them” (Interview 3/19/10). She went on to say:

With many of the ESOL students I’ve had in the past and some of the students I have right now are bilingual that many times they are translating as they are working in their head. I can tell they know the information. If I talk to them, they know the concept, but when they are reading it on the page then they take longer to process that, pick their answer and then go on to the next item because they are not just thinking and reading in English and English answer. They are doing English-native language, native language –English, find the answer, bubble it. (Interview 3/19/10)

She was then asked to discuss the accommodations available to the ESOL students during the FCAT and whether they were sufficient for such students. She replied: “For those students who have had at least one year of ESOL program, yes, but those students who do
not know English very well I don’t think we have any accommodations available to put on an even footing with native students” (Interview 3/19/10).

A few points stand out from these interview comments. One pertains to the cultural dimension of the FCAT (the first of Mrs. London’s answers above) in terms of language used. ELLs are expected to have a culturally-based knowledge of words in the early grades in school, and after relatively little exposure to English. Another is Mrs. London’s belief that many of the ELLs are bilingual and know more they can show because they are not yet equipped to do so. This, like the earlier comment, raises a question about the administering the FCAT to students in the earlier grades, when they are still in an optimal language learning phase as opposed to a language display phase. In these circumstances, not only are they unable to fully show what they know, but the exam is also unlikely to provide an accurate picture of what they know. Also striking is Mrs. London’s distinction (in her final set of comments) between newer ELLs and those who are more established and how those who are established should be able to work with the FCAT accommodations. These remarks put the accommodations issue in an interesting light.

Considering her extensive experience in teaching, I was interested in Mrs. London’s stance on what could be a fair alternative assessment for ELLs instead of the FCAT. In her opinion:

I don’t know as I feel that especially, as far as the reading part in FCAT, I don’t think it is appropriate for a student who didn’t have one year of English because they can’t evaluate how well this child reads when they
are reading something they don’t understand. They don’t understand and trying to give a similar test in the child’s language, well, even in our school you need to have the test at least in ten different languages just to accommodate that. When you look at the county you need to have dozens of different languages to accommodate child’s native language at their grade level, so I don’t think it’s even appropriate for the reading part to be given to the ESOL students who haven’t had at least one year of English in ESOL program. As far as math, once again if they came from a country where they are using similar math system, then having a teacher read the questions to them or help them in their own language understand the questions that can be appropriate. But once again, you end up having ten translators in order to help them do that. And of course with a student who comes from an area who uses a different alphabet than we do, different American symbols, then it’s totally inappropriate. (Interview 3/19/10)

What is of special interest here is not only the distinction between the differences in lengths of exposure to the English language the ELLs might have prior to the FCAT, but also Mrs. London’s comment on another factor that might contribute to the language barrier: the differences that might exist between ELLs’ L1 alphabet system and American English symbols. In fairness to the FCAT, she brings up an interesting point: that trying to accommodate to all the students’ native languages would be an unrealistic expectation considering the variety and the number of languages the ELLs represent. In fact, in this school district alone there are 48 languages spoken by ELLs subgroup (Student Administrative Student Information, 2010).

Another point that emerged during this case study was the fact that the FCAT preparation became a significant aspect of the daily instructional process from the very beginning of the school year. She attached considerable importance to this, especially in
terms of pressure this places on teachers and students, as well as parents, given the gate
keeping dimension of the exam. In her words:

From the very beginning of the year, the students know, especially
students in third grade they know. If they don’t get a good score on the
FCAT, they are going to be in third grade again and that is very stressful
on them. They know here three days in March, they have to perform and
it’s like the Olympics. You got this one chance and if you don’t it then you
have blown it and you are going to be back in third grade again. It’s very,
very stressful. The school we try not to put a lot of stress on it but we have
to because they have to realize they cannot just slack off on those days
because they have to be prepared so they can perform. So it’s really
coming from the parents, it’s coming from the school, it’s coming from
the district, and it’s coming from the state. So, it’s a tumbledown thing.
The state says you have to do this, so the school board and comes down.
(Interview 3/19/10)

The demands created by this situation, in Mrs. London’s point of view, produced both
positive and negative effects. On the positive side, it provided students and the school
with a goal to strive for. It motivated them to meet this level of excellence as defined by
the exam. Thus, it added structure and direction to the instructional ecology. On the
downside, with the FCAT being administered in March, well before the school year is
over, there is pressure put on students and teachers to accelerate the learning process so
as to be prepared for the exam. For some teachers and students, this accelerated pace
might not be workable. It could also have the effect of making the instruction and
learning after the exam appear less important, which could impact on the amount and
quality of students’ learning, since the motivation to learn might be reduced. Thus, the
FCAT took on an added aura of significance, especially with its power to hold students in
the same grade level. This made it difficult for the teachers to direct the attention of the students to the rest of the skills that need to be mastered to go on to 4th grade.

This situation illustrates the dominating impact of FCAT on the classroom climate when there are still skills to be facilitated. In Mrs. London’s opinion, completing a 180 days curriculum in 110 days was impossible, as the 70 additional days of instruction were there for a reason. However, with those 70 days occurring after the administration of the FCAT, the part of the school year that ‘counted’ most was what took place before the FCAT. Hence, the heavier teaching load prior to the FCAT created a “stressful” daily race to ensure adequate preparation for the exam. The following interview segment reveals Mrs. London’s concern about the FCAT demands negatively influencing the daily instructional practices and thus affecting the depth of the competencies and skills covered in class and how much the students actually learn. She made these comments while answering questions about the alignment between the curriculum and the FCAT.

According to her, “I think all of the things that are in the FCAT are in the curriculum somewhere. The thing is you cannot teach 180 days of curriculum in 110 days. The other seventy days of teaching are there for a reason. There is too much to teach before the FCAT test” (Interview 3/19/10). When asked about her feelings before, during and after the FCAT administration, she replied:

Before FCAT is how much can I squeeze in, can I get this done um, I love to do this activity but it will take an hour. During that hour I really I could be teaching this skill and that skill and another and another skill instead of in depth of teaching this one skill so how can I use the time the skill that
FCAT is demanding on me. During FCAT its test stress you have to have all these security things. You have to focus on being a supervisor really being a jailor. You have to, the kids can’t get up, you can’t do this and you can’t do this, they can’t talk, they can’t drop their pencil. Um you really have a completely different role during the FCAT test and during that week and after the FCAT as a teacher I feel Ok, finally now if I want to do that big unit that encompasses art and social studies and science and math and reading, all those things in one big unit I can spend that whole week that unit I can do that because I don’t have this FCAT book to finish up and this skill that has to be introduced to them. Either that can be mastered or not they have to have it this week and tomorrow is this skill. I can feel the freedom to teach the way I feel the students they are going to learn the best. (Interview 3/19/10)

A few striking points stand out from these comments. One provides a comparison of a common situation that many teachers experience because of the pressure of the FCAT: a race to cover as many skills as they can to prepare students for this test. Another is the compelling dilemma that teachers like Mrs. London face when they administer FCAT: it strips them of their daily compassion toward their students and forces them to become heartless administrators of objects rather than of human beings. Mrs. London’s comments illustrate how the demanding imposed by the FCAT shifted her role as a teacher to “being a supervisor, really being a jailor” when no one could get up, talk, or even drop the pencil. Coming from someone with extensive experience with the FCAT like she had, these words resonated strongly. Also striking is Mrs. London’s (in her final comments) expression of freedom she feels to teach in depth the units she wants, in a stress free learning environment, after the FCAT is over, a freedom that was taken from her by the priority the FCAT assumes on daily basis. This is also reflected in the following detailed description of the FCAT day, which provides a fuller picture of what it was like to be in a
third grade teacher’s shoes on that day, not to mention what the students experience. This occurred when she was asked whether she had any additional comments to make about the FCAT: “Yes. The FCAT stress on the teacher. During the FCAT week, the teacher has to pick up the books in the morning, students’ booklets, take them to her room, cannot have them out of the sight until the end of testing sessions is over and some other person, authorized person has to come and pick up those books” (Interview 3/19/10). She then elaborated:

When the students are in the classroom, you cannot leave the classroom, not even go to the bathroom or anything. When the students are in the classroom, so from time to time you pick up those books to the time they are gathered back by the administrator, you need to have them by your sight. Um, that can be three to three and a half hours of course which is a long time. If you need a bathroom break, you need to have somebody who would be able to come to your room, sign in, take over the testing while you go to the bathroom and then you sign back in. It’s not practical when you figure out how many teachers are trying to give the test. It’s a long period of time especially on the days you have double sessions. It’s a long day for the students, very long for the teachers. The students get a break after one hour, but they can’t leave the classroom and the tests are still in the teacher’s possession, so that meant the teacher although they had one hour of testing, ten to fifteen minutes break then one hour of testing, the teacher is in the testing mode all, entire time. So it’s very tiring physically on the teacher and during that time the students are not allowed to have water or anything on their desks. During their break they can (the test is collected), but during the test they cannot and therefore the teacher cannot be walking with water bottle because they don’t water on the test. It wouldn’t be appropriate for the teacher to be drinking water when students cannot and if the teacher decides to have some water while the children are having a break too, then you still have one and a half hour before someone picks up the tests. It’s not practical. It’s very stressful on the teachers, on their physical body. (Interview 3/19/10)
The pressure that is put on teachers and students to perform well academically for the FCAT during the school year, as Mrs. London illustrated in her previous comments, seems to further stretch on the FCAT administration day. A striking point in her last comment is Mrs. London’s plea for awareness to the physical endurance and high level of stress the teachers have to endure on administration days of the FCAT.

**Summary**

Mrs. London regarded accountability with the same respect as Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Brown; however, the issue that she wanted to address was not to avoid accountability, but to be aware of the cultural factors that she felt should be accounted for in constructing such tests. While she appreciated the accommodations offered to ELLs during the FCAT, she did not think that there were “accommodations available to put on an even footing with native students.” Thus, her belief about the FCAT not being a valid instrument to provide a full academic report of what the ELLs truly know in L2 brings forth an interesting point that deserves further attention. Another compelling point to take from Mrs. London is her concerns about how the FCAT shifts her role as a teacher to “being a supervisor, really being a jailer.” At a time when state mandated tests, like the FCAT, are given a special priority in measuring the standards of excellence in our educational system, these perspectives from an experienced teacher like Mrs. London are valuable.
Ms Blake

Originally from an Asian country, Ms. Blake was a second language learner herself. Thus, unlike the three other teacher participants, Ms. Blake could more directly relate to the experiences of the ELLs. She began her teaching career later in life and had taught for six and half years at the time of the study. She held a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English language/literature and had taught ESOL at Little Gators for over four years. As an ESOL ‘inclusion’ teacher, Ms. Blake differed from the other three teacher participants in the study. Whereas they were ‘regular’ or mainstream teachers who had their own third grade classes, Ms. Blake’s job was solely for the purpose of assisting the ELLs. Thus, she brought a different set of teacher perspectives to the study and thus enriched its breadth. A compassionate and a hard working teacher, her mission was to reach “one student at a time.” Exposing her second language students to various texts was her classroom focus in order to ensure that these students would obtain familiarity with the varying genres used in school, including: fiction, nonfiction, scientific fiction and poetry. She spent extra time researching activities that would create a pleasurable learning environment for her students. Searching for FCAT related activities added another thirty minutes to many of her school days.

The inclusion of the ESOL model at the school provided her the opportunity to enter classrooms and be a valuable resource not only to ELLs, but also to the classroom teachers with whom these students were mainstreamed. In the afternoon Ms. Blake pulled them out of the mainstream classroom and worked with them in her own classroom for
thirty minutes of what is called the focus group time. Focus time meant that the students, grades kindergarten through third grade at Little Gators, were grouped based on their individual needs and worked with a teacher or paraprofessional for thirty minutes a day for two to three weeks before they moved on to another skill for another period of three weeks, and so on. In early February, as the FCAT approached, Ms. Blake’s afternoon time with the third grade ELL students increased to one hour and involved a more complex approach focusing on skills and test taking strategies for this test.

The third grade ELL group that she assisted had six students, including the participants of this study: Nathan, Sarah, Kevin and Brian. In the morning, Ms. Blake matriculated into the mainstream classrooms for thirty minutes and worked with the ESOL students on the weekly comprehension stories and skills. Her approach was to gather them all together as a small group. Modifications during classroom tasks were provided to accommodate the variety of ELLs who represented different cultural backgrounds, different knowledge and skills, and varying degrees of proficiency levels in English. Materials below grade level were utilized during the reading comprehension time. While native speakers who were on grade level worked on the regular reading curriculum, which involved Harcourt stories, Ms Blake worked with ELLs with the stories from the intervention curriculum that was aimed below grade level. Such modifications were useful during the ESOL time in terms of helping the students to understand the skills and language of the FCAT explicitly taught at their proficiency level.
Acknowledging the various levels in L2 proficiency, Ms. Blake provided as many repetitions as needed throughout her instructional practices. She ensured slow enunciation and clear fluency to enhance comprehension. It is significant here that, empowered with ESOL teaching strategies, Ms. Blake made sure that helpful measures to aid her students’ learning, such as visuals, were present all the time (Observation Notes, 2/4/10). The reading strategies written on colored construction paper strips were displayed on the board. Another example of such sensitivity to her students’ needs was observed in Ms. Blake’s approach to teaching them what to do when encountering unknown words. She reinforced the importance of creating mental images in cognition (Observation Notes 2/18/10). When possible, pictures were drawn on the classroom board or displayed to ELLs prior to the weekly reading materials. In addition to the visuals, repetition, slow and clear speech, as well as TPR, Ms Blake was able to make good use of what she had learned as a nonnative speaker of English. She could see the ELLs’ needs through their eyes via her own learning (as well as teaching) experiences. This is reflected in the way she handled their weekly assessments:

Ok, extra help is provided sometimes. I have to read all the questions to them and then especially to non-English speakers. They have to have to answer me orally instead of in writing. Then also from the story we read instead of taking the comprehension test that is provided by the Harcourt, I make up my own assessment which is like summary of the story where they have to fill in the blank to fill out the summary. (Interview 3/19/10)

A notable point in her comment is that Ms. Blake made sure that the weekly assessments were matched with the ELLs’ proficiency levels, which is not how the FCAT operates.
With respect to the FCAT, Ms. Blake commented that this test was “extra stress and extra work” for her as a teacher. When asked how she felt before, during and after the FCAT, her response revealed more than just a set of mixed of emotions that come with the experience of preparing students for a test of this nature. She stated:

Lot, again, there is a lot of stress going on before FCAT, trying to get them ready for this big test. During the test some frustration because one side I feel their frustration, I know the pain they are going through and that again sometimes I see the lack of effort among the kids. So that’s where the frustration comes from during the test, and relieved, and after anticipated to see the result. (Interview 3/19/10)

Besides the testimony of another experienced teacher as to nature of the FCAT’s demands on educators on a daily basis, what it is noteworthy in this comment is her belief that ELLs are not trying as hard as she expects them to. Elaborating further on this point, Ms. Blake reveals another challenging part of her job in preparing her students for the FCAT is the lack of the support from their parents. She added:

My biggest challenge and frustration comes from truly lack of support from home. I have just have noticed actually one of the fifth grade student today who was, just because she does not speak English she thought that she does not have to do class work. Really concerns me she did not have that interest to learn the language. As a second language learner myself I remember when I was in middle school and started learning English. I just could not have more. I wanted more, but seeing that there is a lack of interest in kids to learn, the lack of support, the lack of communication from home that is actually the biggest challenge I have with my ESOL students in the classroom. (Interview 3/19/10)

These comments are interesting in the way they add another dimension to the FCAT story. That is, the story extends beyond the demands of the test and possible unfairness to
the ELLs, despite the accommodations available to them. An additional issue, as Ms. Blake points out, is that at least some of the students lack vital educational support at home. Without that support, their chances of succeeding on the FCAT likely diminish even further. This also puts criticisms of the FCAT’s possible unfairness in a different light. That is, the issue is not just the possible mismatch between the test and what the students are capable of, but also the impact of students’ family background, a factor which the FCAT presumably cannot be expected to account for. What is also interesting is the reference Ms. Blake makes to the time when she started to learn English as second language learner herself. Her pinpointing of the differences she sees in her willingness to learn the language then and the lack of it in her ELLs today highlights the need to better understand all of the circumstances surrounding debate over whether the FCAT is an appropriate test for the ELLs.

Regarding the issue of whether the accommodations available for the exam are sufficient to help ELLs during the exam, she answered that “if they fully take advantage of it, if they really use them, these accommodations I think should be enough to help.” She then elaborated on this:

Yes. I still think somewhat can help. There are two, three pages long passages and some of the beginning learners it can take forever for them to go through the dictionaries word by word. So they end up not even doing it. So they are overwhelmed but if, with this flexible time, flexible setting, if one is determined I think they could help. (Interview 3/19/10)
Interested in knowing whether she, as an NNES teacher, thought the FCAT was a fair assessment for ELLs, I asked her to say more about her perceptions of the exam. The interview comments that follow represent a contrast with her positive view regarding the usefulness of the exam’s accommodations:

“I do not believe FCAT is a fair assessment for ESOL students because although there are some accommodations available for them, you cannot compare their reading and math level to those of students who have been exposed to the language ever since their birth, so I don’t think it is a fair assessment. (Interview 3/19/10)

Her striking distinction between ELLs and native speakers of English who have been exposed to the language since they were born is significant, as it illustrates the disadvantage ELLs have compared to their native English speaking peers when taking the FCAT. That disadvantage is heightened in importance in her next set of comments, where she discusses the importance of the FCAT:

“There is a Florida law saying that 3rd graders need to pass FCAT in order for them to move on to fourth grade and that of course includes the ESOL students who have been in the program more than two years and I don’t want this language barrier to come in the way. So I think it is very important mentally they are prepared for this big test, probably the biggest test in the 3rd year. (Interview 3/19/10)

Another interesting point is the common behavior Ms. Blake observed on FCAT administration day. She noted how many of her students, even those who performed well in the daily classroom sessions, did not thoroughly read the passages in the test. In her words: “What they did, they just guessed the answers and I have noticed that some
students did not even bother to read the questions thoroughly and just picked the answers” (Interview 3/19/10). Then she elaborated on this behavior:

I could see they were overwhelmed. Some of the students who do regular class work and do well and when it comes to the FCAT test especially I noticed it this year there were FCAT passages that were long passages and by just looking at it might be they were overwhelmed. (Interview 3/19/10)

These comments create a sense of hopelessness about the exam from the perspective of the ELLs and draw attention to the affective domain of the exam in terms of the emotional trauma that could be created when students are faced with passages far too long to process on an examination that determines whether they move to the next grade level.

Summary

As an NNES herself, she could relate to the ELLs’ experience with a state mandated test on a personal level. What is striking is Ms Blake acknowledgement of the unfairness in administering the same state mandated test to ELLs compared to the native speakers of English who have been exposed to the English language since birth. Remaining supportive of the value of accountability for ELLs, she would rather see an appropriate assessment that measures what they really know. An especially interesting point made by Ms. Blake is that in addition to the challenges the teachers face to prepare ELLs academically, the lack of additional support and communication from home adds on to the stress level. At a time when the demographics are constantly changing, such perspectives from a teacher who is a second language learner herself are significant.
Section 2: Students

This section explores the perceptions and experiences of another group of stakeholders affected directly as a result of the FCAT: students, that is, those who had to prepare for and take the exam. The analysis focuses on the students’ classroom experiences, especially as related to modifications intended to assist their learning, and their responses to the FCAT. We have already looked at the instructional practices of several teachers responding to the FCAT; students represent the other side of that pedagogical coin, since they also participated in the instructional ecology surrounding the FCAT. It is especially interesting to examine their responses to the FCAT juxtaposed against those who instructed them. The student participants were mainstreamed in accordance with the inclusion model; i.e., ELLs are placed in the regular classrooms with native speakers, and the teacher is endorsed with the ESOL certification. For them, the Language Arts and content areas are enhanced by “using ESOL strategies and assessment modifications. The classroom teacher is responsible for planning, teaching and assessing all students” (Seminole County Public Schools-ESOL procedural Handbook District ELL Plan 2008-2011, p 11). Table 4 provides demographic information representative of this group.
Table 4 shows both the kinds of similarities and differences common among ELLs in many parts of the United States. On one hand, they shared the same native language, Spanish, a situation common in some parts of the United States. On the other hand, there was considerable variation in terms of how much time they had spent in the United States and therefore how much exposure they had had to the English language as well as the American education culture. In this regard they represented one of the major challenges faced by many ESOL teachers: trying to account for students with considerable diversity in terms of what they know and do not know.
To provide more framing for this section, it is also interesting to look at how the four student participants approached the reading section of the FCAT, since that section figures heavily in the data presented in this chapter. Table 5 provides this information.

Table 5: The Time that Student Participants Spent on FCAT Reading Sections*.

March 9th-10th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Day 1 Reading Start Time</th>
<th>Finish Time</th>
<th>FCAT Scheduled Time</th>
<th>Dictionary Use</th>
<th>Day 2 Reading Start Time</th>
<th>Finish Time</th>
<th>FCAT Scheduled Time</th>
<th>Dictionary Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>11:15 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9:10 AM</td>
<td>10:45 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
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<td>11:35 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9:10 AM</td>
<td>10:40 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11:25 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9:10 AM</td>
<td>10:50 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
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<td>10:40 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>9:50 AM</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The official amount of time allowed for this part of the exam is 60 minutes.

The table shows that three of the four participants took full advantage of the accommodation allowing more time to complete the test, with Sarah averaging an extra 30 minutes, Brian averaging about 41 additional minutes, and Nathan averaging approximately 42 more minutes. By contrast, Kevin, at 50 minutes, averaged less time than officially allowed for the test. It is also interesting to note that three of the participants did not take advantage of the accommodation allowing use of a dictionary during the first administration of the test, while two did not on the second day.
Collectively, these results paint a mixed picture with respect to the students’ approach to accommodations, an important point to bear in mind while reading the individual cases.

Sarah

Sarah, a nine year old female student, was in Mrs. Thomas’s class. She moved with her family from Cuba to the United States on January 27, 2009. Before they moved to Orlando they lived in Miami for three months, and then Georgia for two months. The dominant language in her home was Spanish, and the interview with Sarah required an interpreter. The interview took place at her house on April 14, 2010. The need of clarification for a few questions required a second, brief interview which took place at school on April 26, 2010. A language proficiency test administered in the Miami public school in July 31st 2009 categorized Sarah as a non-English speaker, that is, a true beginner with the language. Based upon her age and years of schooling in her native country, she was placed in the fourth grade. Upon her transfer to Little Gators in December 10th 2009, a new LEP (Limited English Proficient) student plan was developed for her.

When a student transfers from another country, state, or county in the state of Florida, the entry language tests are administered (except the cases when the student transfers from a Florida public school and the entry tests are already administered to them) and scores are recorded in the student data system. The Home Language Survey which is required upon student’s enrollment at Little Gators was completed in Spanish for Sarah’s enrollment. Upon her mother’s request, in order to give her daughter more
time to adjust to her L2 and considering her medical needs, Sarah was moved into the third grade when she began at the Little Gators’ school. Because she was in her first year in the United States, Sarah did not have a CELLA (Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment) testing record. She took this exam shortly after the study ended.

To accommodate Sarah’s situation as a fairly recently arrived student and new learner of English, Mrs. Thomas had placed Sarah next to a bilingual student who was able to translate for her when necessary. In addition, being a diabetic, Sarah required special attention to ensure that her sugar level did not drop. Mrs. Thomas always checked her and at 9:30, which was her usual snack time, and again at 11:30 for the daily trip to the clinic to check her sugar level.

Sarah responded well to the morning routine; she apparently enjoyed having everything written on the board by her teacher (Observation Notes, 2/11/10). The instructional motions associated with TPR, repetitions of the directions, modification of the language of the assignments, partial translations, and a lighter work load compared to the regular students seemed to assist Sarah’s progress with the English language. This was revealed during the regular class sessions and ESOL classroom observations, review of the completed class work, and the istation program (a special language learning program) observations.

Both in the mainstream and ESOL classrooms, Sarah had small group (up to six students), or one-on-one instruction time. These modifications were extended through
istration, which the county had purchased for work with ELLs. Students are tested for their reading skills by the program; they build their skills one at a time based on the program’s measurement of where they are when they start. A progress monitoring chart provides data for reading growth, and the teacher can identify the areas in which a student needs help. Ability is represented by what are called Tiers, e.g., Tier 1: the student is working on grade level, Tier 2: the student’s performance is moderately below grade level and intervention is needed, and Tier 3: the student is seriously performing below grade level and needs intensive intervention. Sarah’s chart (see Appendix K) on March 25th, 2010 demonstrated growth in her reading since December 2009, but she was still seriously below grade level (Tier 3) and needed a lot of intervention, especially with respect to performance on the FCAT. As a student still well below the grade level, Sarah faced a daunting challenge with the FCAT which was confirmed by her performance on the test of a not passing score of 1 (Reading School Report of Students Grade 3, Florida Department of Education, FCAT Spring 2010). From the point of view of this study, Sarah thus represented one kind of student who must engage the FCAT: the kind who is very early in the process of learning the target language as well as target culture but who must experience a state-mandated proficiency test despite not yet being ready for the test. As such, her perspectives on the FCAT are valuable.

To acquire a clear understanding of Sarah’s experience with the FCAT, it is necessary to evaluate what she experienced during reading lessons in her class and then how she performed on the FCAT. A fundamental mismatch between classroom practice
and what the FCAT requires of students, including ELLs, was readily observed. One especially notable point with Sarah was the frustration she expressed in her class when she did not know a word or the answer to a question or task. She displayed this frustration through gestures such as rolling her eyes, putting her head down on her desk, looking up at the ceiling, or holding out her hands (Observation Notes, 2/10/10). Such behaviors concerned the classroom teacher, Mrs. Thomas, as they could be interpreted as hostile actions towards her classmates, particularly since Sarah often believed her friends and classmates were talking about her and possibly making fun of her. These reactions were a critical kind of foregrounding to her experiences with the FCAT testing, as they portray a student struggling outside the FCAT context and thus likely to feel even greater pressure during the FCAT.

Her average grades on modified assessments, performed with the assistance of the teachers (mainstream and ESOL), were based on her efforts, a rule that applies to all ELLs who have been in the ESOL program less than two years. Under these conditions, she obtained a C average for reading comprehension despite her status as a true beginner in English. To put this in context, her performance on the non-modified worksheets or assignment (the ones that native English speaking students engage) denote the struggles she experienced with the target language (and therefore with reading it). To illustrate, in order to familiarize students with FCAT reading passages, teachers use the *FCAT Reading Released Test Book* by the Florida Department of Education (DOE) that is published on line. For example, after reading the story *Slip, Slop, Slap* (Nelson, 2006)
about a family of four preparing for a trip to the beach, all that Sarah was able to do
correctly was to draw a picture of the four characters in the story. She understood that the
characters were taking a trip to the beach (clues that she probably got from the visuals
provided along with the story), but she struggled to answer the questions that required
higher critical analysis skills (Observation Notes, 2/18/10).

Such patterns were observed with the Sample FCAT Practice (Student Sample,
2/10/10) that all students had to complete prior to the FCAT. Sarah answered only six
questions correctly out of twenty two (Field Notes, 2/11/10). Though she had the
advantage of such test accommodations as having additional time to complete the test,
taking the test within a small group with the ESOL teacher (Ms. Blake), having access to
the use of a bilingual dictionary, and having general directions translated into Spanish,
she still struggled with the test. As was shown earlier, she had averaged an additional 35
minutes of time on the two days of the FCAT reading test and had used a dictionary on
both days. In other words, Sarah took advantage of the accommodations available to her
and still struggled. What was also important here was that these kinds of accommodations
were present during regular classroom assessment in addition to the modifications, so that
the FCAT experience was not aligned with her classroom assessment experiences. Thus,
there was a fundamental mismatch between assessment practices in the classroom for
ELLs and what the FCAT has in place for these students.

Moving now to Sarah’s perception of the FCAT experience, her comments during
an interview on 4/15/10 show a complex set of reactions. When asked what the FCAT
meant to her, she indicated that it represented “something important to learn more.” In other words, she saw it as a learning opportunity on the one hand. On the other hand, she stated that prior to taking the FCAT, “I knew I was going to fail because I knew it is not my language.” When asked whether the passages (and therefore the reading experience) would have been easier had it been in her native language, she replied: “Yes, because I understand my language, in Spanish, and English is so hard.” As Sarah further shared with me, the first thought that came to her mind when she saw a reading passage was that she had to do something with it, but she did not understand it; thus, she was helpless. Not surprisingly, she experienced a feeling of relief when the test days were over.

What we see here is that her mind was already set in a “negative” mode: Sarah fully believed that she would not be able to pass the test. Sarah felt that she could not yet connect with the FCAT because she had not accepted English as her language and was still so new to it, as opposed to her sense of ownership with Spanish, her native language. It is interesting to note that Sarah did not have an opinion regarding the requirement that ELLs take the FCAT. However, when asked if she would rather take the FCAT in her native language, she replied: “In English and Spanish, a bilingual.” Once again, Sarah reveals that the sense of ownership toward her native language, Spanish, was important to her. At the same time, interestingly, she did not embrace the idea of taking the exam only in Spanish. She wanted a presence for English as well, perhaps because of her earlier comment about the exam representing “something important to learn more.” That she still
wanted a place for English in spite of her difficulties with reading the language is noteworthy.

Summary

Sarah had spent less time in the American school system than the other student participants. Thus, she brought the perspective of a true novice to the study. Not surprisingly, for her the FCAT experience was a daunting one, as she knew heading into the exam that she had no chance of succeeding. At such a young and impressionable age, this had to be an extremely painful experience for her, despite the fact that she took advantage of the accommodations available during the exam (the only one of the participants to do so). And yet, for all of the pain the exam may have caused her, she still wanted to have a role for English in the FCAT even if she was not required to.

What was striking in her case was the dichotomy between her positive recognition of the FCAT’s potential as a learning opportunity and her sense of hopelessness about the exam, as well as the way she highlighted the language ownership issue. She was not only aware of the fact that Spanish was her native language; she seemed to experience a strong identity with the language as well as a lack of any identity with English. Not surprisingly, she felt lost as she took the FCAT; this resulted in her writing random answers to the questions so that she would at least have answers. Also interesting in Sarah’s case was the fact that the modifications she had experienced in her class had little or no effect on her FCAT experience.
Brian

Unlike Sarah, Brian, a nine years old male student, was born in the United States. He was Mrs. River’s son, one of the parental participants. His parents immigrated to the United States from Ecuador in 1997 with two other children. Brian began kindergarten in 2006 in a public school within Seminole county (the same county as Little Gators) and transferred to Little Gators in August 2009. He was in Mrs. Brown’s class. He was outspoken and had to be actively involved at all times.

The primary language in Brian’s family was Spanish. The language proficiency test, IPT, administered to him as he entered kindergarten in 2006 categorized him as a limited English speaker with a raw score of 9 out of 83 possible correct answers. The following table of CELLA, which tests students on four domains of the language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) reveals the gradual growth of Brian’s English language proficiency, with him qualifying at the beginning level on four domains at kindergarten and progressing to the proficient level in three domains (listening, speaking and reading), and to the high intermediate level in one domain, writing, at the end of second grade. The higher scores in CELLA can be attributed, at least in part, to Brian’s increased length of exposure to the English language and English academic context, a factor that Sarah did not have as a component prior to taking the FCAT.
Table 6: Brian’s CELLA Testing Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>09/05/2006 Grade: Kg Level</th>
<th>04/23/2007 Grade: Kg Level</th>
<th>04/22/2008 Grade: 1 Level</th>
<th>4/14/09 Grade 2 Level</th>
<th>Proficient Level Score Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>621/Beginning</td>
<td>637/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>653 High Intermediate</td>
<td>681 Proficient</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>621 Beginning</td>
<td>637/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>653 High Intermediate</td>
<td>681 Proficient</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>345 Beginning</td>
<td>518 Beginning</td>
<td>640 High Intermediate</td>
<td>696 Proficient</td>
<td>690-800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>565 Beginning</td>
<td>629 Beginning</td>
<td>657/Beginning Low Intermediate</td>
<td>686 High Intermediate</td>
<td>690-775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With respect to Brian’s classroom experiences, on a particular school day when an observation was being conducted (Observation Notes, 1/27/10), Brian seemed familiar with the morning routine, which consisted of copying the assignment in his planner and
heading to the computer for the istation program. On this occasion, Brian’s time on istation consisted of 30 minutes focusing on comprehension, text fluency, vocabulary and spelling skills. This routine appeared to be a common one for him. Observing Brian work on stories with the istation program revealed that he relied on the repetitions of the directions of different tasks as well as visual clues to understand and comprehend the vocabulary words that went along with the reading passages.

With respect to the FCAT, the anxiety about this test began at the beginning of the school year and it seemed to prevail until the moment of the administration of the test. When asked when he first heard about FCAT, Brian responded: “The first day of school.” (Interview 3/17/10). As for his perceptions concerning the FCAT, when asked what the exam meant to him, he replied that it was “something to learn and you have to like be in fourth grade.” He described himself as “nervous” about it and, when asked to explain why he felt that way, said “Maybe because it is a little hard and we do not know a lot of questions.” He added: “Because you don’t know if you going to pass or not, a lot of questions and maybe you have to read some of the questions you don’t know. That’s pretty much I know.” (Interview, 3/17/10).

Unlike Sarah, Brian’s mode entering FCAT was not as “negative” as Sarah’s which might be attributed to the higher level of ownership he had of the English language as opposed to his sense ownership with Spanish. When asked whether the FCAT would be easier for him if it was in Spanish language, he preferred English. Therefore, the interesting aspect of the next comments during the interview (3/17/10) reveals that,
unlike Sarah, not surprisingly, Brian did not think the FCAT should have a translation into the Spanish language because “I don’t know any much of Spanish.” He did not relate to Spanish at the same level of ownership as Sarah because “I just know a little bit. Easier for me is English.” As he elaborated further, in his opinion, his dominant language was English “Yeah! I speak it with my brother and sister.” These results are especially interesting when considering that Brian, at an average of 41 minutes, took even more additional time to complete the reading portion of the exam than Sarah. It might be expected that he would have taken less time given his much greater exposure to and confidence in English. On the other hand, he chose not to use a dictionary during both administrations of the test, while Sarah used one each time.

Even though these comments highlight Brian’s sense of confidence with his L2, the striking point in the above interview segment is that Brian, just like Sarah, had anxiety of not passing the FCAT. Commenting further on the FCAT experience itself, Brian spoke of the difficulty of the stories, not the question about them. In fact, though he acknowledged that some questions were difficult (seen in the interview segment above), the questions may have helped him, as he explained in an interview on 3/17/10: “You have to read slowly to understand it. Sometimes the questions, tell what happened, what is happening, main idea, what do this person and this person.” As for vocabulary aspect of the test, when asked how he dealt with the words he did not understand, he explained that “I just read the beginning letter like if I don’t know to read this name like Mr.C.”
Some deeper insight into Brian’s attitude toward the FCAT emerged when he was asked what kind of examination he would prefer to take instead of the FCAT. He identified a test called PMA (Progress Monitoring Assessment), which is a form of assessment used regularly throughout the school year. When asked to explain it, he said that it was “Like a test with 40 questions, maybe like FCAT but it is not the real FCAT.” When asked to elaborate, he said of the PMA: “first, you know how many questions are going to be, how is going to look like and how many stories will be there.” By contrast, he said of the FCAT that “sometimes” he was not as aware of the test format. These comments are in line with a point often made in the L2 assessment literature: that learners are entitled to know about a test’s format prior to taking it, and that this knowledge has a positive effect on the test’s ability to produce the information about learning and proficiency that it is intended to provide.

What it is noteworthy about Brian’s comments is the reference to the FCAT’s format as unknown. As mentioned in the teachers’ section, one piece of curriculum was the FCAT practice book, or the FCAT passages published on line. Also, an FCAT sample test was administered prior to the FCAT. In addition, Ms. Blake, six weeks prior to the FCAT, pulled ESOL students out of their classrooms for thirty minutes of what it is called focus group time and targeted FCAT skills (comprehension strategies and test taking skills). Despite all of this information and exposure, Brian was still unaware of the FCAT format. An explanation of Brian’s comment for the PMA is that it was perceived
as a friendly assessment to him as opposed to the imposing and gate keeping FCAT, which generated anxiety.

Summary

Brian was the most advanced student participant in this study in terms of English language proficiency. In this regard he represents another important type of ELL represented in this study: someone who has developed a certain level of confidence with the target language and the academic culture accompanying it. Brian’s long exposure to his L2 and the academic language environment were likely key factors on his “grade level performance” (Reading School Report of Students Grade 3, Florida Department of Education, FCAT Spring 2010) on the reading section of FCAT. For him, unlike Sarah, the FCAT was manageable, though it did create anxiety for him. In some regards, then, Brian’s perspectives put the FCAT in a different light than seen in Sarah’s case. These perspectives offer valuable contributions to the study’s depth.

Nathan

Nathan, a male student, was the son of Mrs. Samora, who was another of the parental participants in the study, and a student in Mrs. Brown’s third grade class at the time of the study. He resided with his mother and brother, who was also a Little Gators student. The dominant language spoken at home was Spanish. Nathan was born in Florida. When he was four, Nathan returned to Ecuador and lived there with his paternal
grandmother for three years. He returned to the United States in December 27th, 2008 where he was placed in the second grade. A commonality Nathan shared with Sarah (who had moved from Cuba to Miami, to Georgia, then Orlando) was the mobility, in this case, back and forth between two countries. In this regard, the interruption of the English language learning process represented another challenge faced by many teachers who instruct ELLs, as well as the students themselves. However, unlike Sarah, he was not a true beginner with respect to English. This is where Nathan was an important contributor to the study: he brought the experiences and perspectives of someone sharing dual linguistic and cultural backgrounds and perhaps identities. To better understand the effects of a state mandated examination like the FCAT, it was necessary to have a participant like Nathan, who represented an important student constituency.

Nathan moved to Little Gators on January 12, 2009, and upon his enrollment there, he scored 10 out of 83 points in the IPT oral test, which categorized him as a non-English speaker. The following table of his CELLA results reveals that he was indeed at the beginning stage of English language proficiency in two out of four domains, listening and speaking, a high intermediate level in one domain, reading, and low intermediate in writing at the end of second grade.
Table 7: Nathan’s CELLA Testing Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>04/14/2009 Grade: 2 Level</th>
<th>Proficient Level Score Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>617/ Beginning</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>617 Beginning</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>630/High Intermediate</td>
<td>690-800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>657/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>690-775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ms. Brown commented that she enjoyed him in her third grade class and drew particular attention to his politeness. (Field Notes, 2/2/10) It was not difficult to grow fond of this happy, bright boy with a kind, nurturing heart. While he enjoyed math, science and school in general, interestingly, in a writing assignment (Field Notes, 3/25/10) Nathan revealed that he was afraid of spiders, worms and being lost. He did not
easily approach strangers, avoided eye contact, and had a very strong need for routine.
The fact that he had previously observed me around the school was a significant factor in
my building a relationship with him.

It is important to note that Nathan was diagnosed with Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in September, 2009. Being concerned about the certain
behaviors related to this condition, the school staff sought further information to
determine how best to meet his academic and socio-emotional needs. During the data
collection period, Nathan’s mother, Ms. Samora, the mainstream classroom teacher, Mrs.
Brown, and the ESOL teacher Ms. Blake, completed a psycho educational autism
evaluation. Afterwards, an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) meeting held on May
17, 2010 classified Nathan as autistic, and in the coming school year, 2010-2011, he
would attend a school where his needs could be met. This is another way in which
Nathan’s case contributes to the study: an ELL facing a learning-related disability.
Because the diagnosis of autism did not occur until after the FCAT administration, he and
his teachers proceeded toward the FCAT without this very important knowledge.

To accommodate Nathan’s English language learning needs, the instructional
ESOL strategies utilized by Ms. Blake and Mrs. Brown would be the crutches that
Nathan seemed to rely on to develop his language proficiency and be successful
academically. Instructional strategies such as visual clues, daily repetitions, and motion
(TPR) seemed to trigger Nathan’s memory with respect to learning vocabulary terms.
Other modifications included teachers using a slow rate of speed, clarifying the directions for completion of assignments, using simplified language in classroom tasks and weekly assessments, and assigning a lighter load of class work than his native English speaking peers. These strategies were employed during the reading sessions, and between these and his use of the istation program, the overall reading report showed gradual progress throughout the year.

To illustrate how Nathan depended on modifications, we can look at a specific observation related to the istation (Observation Notes, 2/26/10). Prior to reading a story called *Bert and Gert*, (Kim, 2010) I asked him which of the vocabulary words he already knew from the following words: “bangs”, “skill”, “cling”, “rink”, “twirl”, “flaps” and “brave”, (vocabulary section, para 1). He knew the four words “bangs”, “twirl”, “flaps”, and “brave” (vocabulary section, para 1). It took the use of pictures, narrator assisted definitions, several repetitions, seeing the words used in different contexts, guided reading, and silent reading, for Nathan to recognize the words at the end of the story. These details help illustrate the kind of situation he would face taking the FCAT, when such modifications would not be available to him. Given these circumstances, it was perhaps not surprising that he averaged the greatest amount of additional FCAT exam time among the participants, 42 minutes. This might also explain why he chose not to use a dictionary, even though that would be presumably having helped him: doing so would have required even more time and effort.
Nathan was on Tier 2 (the student’s performance is moderately below grade level and intervention is needed), for most of the school year (see Appendix M). As a result of this, istation did not move to another skill until Nathan once again demonstrated mastery of the one previously addressed.

Regarding Nathan’s perception of the FCAT, he framed it in serious, gate keeping terms when asked what the FCAT represented to him: “To pass 3rd grade.” Whereas Sarah and Brian had identified a learning-related opportunity with the FCAT in addition to their difficulties with it, Nathan saw it only as a major stepping stone (or perhaps barrier) to moving on to the 4th grade. As for the exam experience itself, he indicated that he had struggled “because there are a lot of questions that are hard.” In addition, he identified “some words I don’t know” as a cause of difficulty. He had also pinpointed “the story” as causing him problems (Interview 3/10/10). Though he had worked extensively with stories and vocabulary during his reading sessions in both Mrs. Brown’s and Ms. Blake’s class, these were obstacles to him during the FCAT. These obstacles were evident in his weak performance on the exam on which he earned a non-passing score of 1.

Summary

Nathan, unlike Sarah and Brian, aside from the challenges involved in acquiring a second language, faced a special condition, autism, which was not diagnosed until the conclusion of the school year. It was evident throughout the school year that Nathan
relied on accommodations to experience progress; without them, he likely would have struggled significantly, as his FCAT performance suggested. The anxiety of the FCAT added to the fear he already had, which was remembering information contained in passages and stories he read. With the pressure of having to pass the FCAT to move on to 4th grade added to what he already felt about the difficulties of reading and vocabulary, Nathan was in an especially daunting position with respect to the FCAT.

**Kevin**

Kevin, a 10 year old male student, was originally from the Dominican Republic. He had two younger siblings at home, with Spanish as the dominant language. He enrolled at Little Gators in February 13th, 2006 where he began kindergarten. His IPT entry test, where he scored 0 out of 83 questions, categorized him as a non-English speaker. Due to the hard time Kevin was having after just arriving in the United States and the fact that he had not previously been to school, his father requested that Kevin be held back in order to give him more time to adjust. The following table for CELLA, administered to him upon his first year to kindergarten, reports a beginning level, with a minimum score, at all four domains, listening, speaking, reading, and writing (see Table 8). Over the years, although growth in all domains had occurred, his progress was slow. This was especially true in comparison to Brian, who had spent the same number of years in the ESOL program.
Table 8: Kevin’s CELLA Testing Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>08/28/2006 Level</th>
<th>05/25/2007 Level</th>
<th>04/22/2008 Level</th>
<th>04/14/2009 Level</th>
<th>Proficient Level Score Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>495/Beg</td>
<td>653/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>687/Proficient</td>
<td>681/Proficient</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>495/Beg</td>
<td>653/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>687/Proficient</td>
<td>681/Proficient</td>
<td>673-755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>345/Beg</td>
<td>518/Beg</td>
<td>589/Low Intermediate</td>
<td>640/High Intermediate</td>
<td>690-800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>515/Beg</td>
<td>515/Beg</td>
<td>619/Beg/Intermediate</td>
<td>672/High Intermediate</td>
<td>690-775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unlike the other three student participants, Kevin had already qualified for the Special Learning Disability (SLD) program and Language program in October 6th 2008, when he was in second grade. Therefore, he was served by the language therapist teacher, SLD teacher, and by Ms. Blake in the ESOL program. This background, along with the amount of time he had spent in the ESOL program, made him another valuable
participant in the study. However, the participation in three different programs made the observation a challenging task. A tendency to rush through assignments was obvious in the observations. (Observation Notes, 2/18/10, 2/23/10) Although he indicated that his favorite activity was to play with his friends, Kevin had a difficult time relating with his peers and did not like to take responsibility for any inappropriate behavior on his part. His desk was located far from his peers, next to the classroom teacher’s desk. His tendency to argue with his teacher reduced valuable learning time. A behavioral plan was initiated in September 2009, and upon further evaluation, Kevin was placed in the Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) class in March, 2010. This information about Kevin’s background helps in interpreting his FCAT non-passing score of 1 (Reading School Report of Students Grade 3, Florida Department of Education, FCAT Spring 2010). Here it is worth remembering that Kevin was the only one of the four participants who chose not to take advantage of a key accommodation available to him: using additional time on the reading test. Not only did he not use this accommodation; at an average of 50 minutes, he actually spent less time on the reading test than was officially allowed, though he did utilize the dictionary accommodation during the second day of the test.

In terms of his learning opportunities, his weekly reading comprehension sessions, using stories, with Ms. Blake in the ESOL class provided the small group support that Kevin required. Guided reading on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, in addition to the daily required reading at home, was a major part of his weekly learning
routine. During the reading comprehension sessions, he was exposed to modifications intended to enhance his learning. As with other student participants, these modifications, which were tied to weekly assessments, were at odds with the FCAT context, as the students already knew the text used in the weekly assessments, whereas they saw the texts for the first time during the FCAT. Thus, while the modifications enriched their learning and assisted them in the weekly assessments, the students were at a disadvantage when they had to take the FCAT and could not operate as they had during the class sessions.

Moving to the FCAT, a particular struggle for Kevin involved question stems such as “Most Likely”, or “Mostly” in the FCAT Reading Sample Test (Student Sample, 2/10/10). Kevin had the same problem during the interview, when he often required clarifications on the questions asked. He either would ask what the question meant, or would provide an answer based on what he thought or guessed the question was. For example, when asked what changes he would make to the FCAT if he had the power to do so, Kevin said he would prefer to make corrections. In his mind the word “correct” triggered the idea of having to correct the sentence or word that answered the questions derived from the reading passage. It required repetition and clarification of my question and rewording for him to understand what I was asking. Given these circumstances, Kevin was clearly in a difficult spot with respect to the FCAT. If he was unable to decode the questions, he was certainly unable to answer them correctly. Despite his work during the reading lessons, he had been unable to overcome his inability to understand questions.
Unlike the other student participants, who were familiarized with the FCAT at the beginning of third grade, Kevin heard about FCAT in earlier grades. Thus, for him it seemed something he had had some time to anticipate, and in his mind this was apparently an advantage. Perhaps it was this prior knowledge of the exam, as well as his upbeat, positive attitude prior to and during the FCAT that convinced him that he was going to receive a high score on the exam. His comments conveyed his positive demeanor, and he looked forward to taking the FCAT, where an “A” grade was expected, as he saw it. As he stated during the interview, “I feel great because sometimes I get A, but you don’t have to worry about the FCAT because that is the most important thing, that is FCAT.” (Interview 4/20/10). This is another example of his inability to understand certain concepts, in this case, that FCAT does not assign grades, but a passing score, even though such clarifications was done by the classroom and ESOL teachers. What is also interesting here is his reference to “sometimes I get A,” which appears to mean that he had done well during the classroom assessments, which were enhanced by modifications. In his case, these modifications, which may have enriched his learning, had the unintended effect of creating a false sense of confidence in Kevin. Based on those very different experiences, he expected to do well on the FCAT. This perspective adds complexity to the issue of whether modifications are ultimately beneficial for ELLs.

Regarding his perceptions of the FCAT, when asked what the FCAT represented to him, Kevin replied that “it means that you have to read the questions correctly. I don’t know you have to read all that and pay attention to the story.” (Interview 4/20/10). Not
surprisingly, here Kevin returned to his ongoing concern about not understanding questions. He saw the questions as just as important as the content of the exam, if not more so. However, other comments he made offered some different perspectives. For instance, when asked about what he considered the hardest part of the exam, he replied “The hardest part is when you have to count all the numbers.” That is, he had found the math component of the exam the most difficult to deal with. As for the reading section, he stated that “The hardest thing is when you have to read all the story. Was too hard because the letters like letters.” When asked to elaborate, he said “Like sentences, there were hard sentences. There were hard sentences. Because sometimes you can’t, sometimes I can’t read them. Because the reading, because sometimes there is a long word, a big long word. I can’t read them.” (Interview 4/20/10).

In these later comments, then, Kevin moved away from problems with the questions to struggles with the content of the exam. The picture that emerges is one of him struggling with the exam in all regards, which is perhaps not surprising giving the learning disability he had been diagnosed as having. Confronted by problems with the questions as well the vocabulary and sentence length in the reading material, Kevin, despite his optimistic expectations, was seemingly doomed to perform poorly on the exam.

**Summary**

Kevin brought an especially interesting perspective to the study: the challenges
that an ELL faces when other special needs are involved. Although he had participated in an ESOL program for a prolonged period of time, Kevin’s progress with academic language developed at a slower rate. He relied heavily on the modifications that were provided in his small group ESOL setting, which enabled him to achieve some success on the weekly assessments and led to his expectation of a strong performance on the FCAT. What makes Kevin’s case particularly interesting and notable, then, is the question of which setting provided the best indicator of his progress as an ELL: the classroom-based weekly assessments aided by various instructional modifications, or the FCAT? One domain suggested progress, albeit it via modifications; the other did not. This is a long-standing issue in the field of assessment: whether to value formative assessment (the weekly classroom assessments) or summative assessment (the FCAT). Kevin’s case highlights the complexity of that issue.

Section 3: Parents

This section looks at another important set of stakeholders relative to the FCAT: the parents of ELLs who were taking the examination. While the teachers and students, located inside the school setting, were directly impacted by the FCAT and thus offered important insights concerning the exam, the parents’ perspectives also contribute to developing a deeper understanding of the ecology surrounding the FCAT. As the parents of children taking the exam, the parents straddled the fence between the school on one side and life outside the school on the other. Parents are also an important set of
stakeholders because, as research has shown (August & Shanahan, 2008), parental involvement plays a role in ELLs’ performance in school. Thus, it was important to look at how the parents of ELLs viewed the FCAT experience, particularly since they themselves were learners of English as a second language and thus would have their own ideas about learning the language and its related culture. Table 9 provides valuable demographic information about them.

Table 9: Parents’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study #</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Parent of L1</th>
<th>L2 Self-Evaluation Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years In US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mrs. Spencer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>3 year degree from a business, technical school</td>
<td>Home stay mom</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1 year &amp; 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mrs. Rivers</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Low Intermediate</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Home stay mom</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Since 1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 9 shows that the three parents represented some important commonalities as well as differences. One commonality they shared was that their L1 was the same, Spanish, a language commonly spoken in the state of Florida and thus one they could likely use frequently outside the home as well as inside it. This could have important consequences for their children in terms of English language learning. They also shared a reasonable degree of similarity in terms of their English language proficiency, ranging from beginner in one case to intermediate in two cases. On the other hand, there were significant differences with respect to their educational background. This was also the case in terms of age and, more importantly, time spent in the U.S., ranging from a little over one year to 10 years to 13 years. In the latter regard, this, together with their limited English proficiency, could have important implications for the nature of the home environment in which the students lived and what they learned within that environment. This could also impact on a very important variable and challenge in teachers’ work with ELLs: the kind of interaction they have with parents. Given the parents’ restricted...
English language proficiency, effective communication between the parents and teachers would be difficult to achieve. On the other hand, the fact that two of the parents had spent at least a decade in the U.S. could mean considerable familiarity with the American educational system as well as an understanding of what their children would need to learn in order to succeed in the U.S. This could also impact on their responses to the FCAT. This section present cases for three parents of participants in the study.

*Mrs. Spencer*

Mrs. Spencer, a 31-year-old female, arrived with her family in the United States from Cuba in January 27, 2009. Before they moved to Orlando, her family spent time in Miami for three months, then Georgia for two months. Unlike Mrs. Rivers and Mrs. Samora, Mrs. Spencer was exposed to the English language and educational system for a very short time, and thus brought some valuable perspectives to the study, as her situation is a common one in the ELL context. She did not know any English when she arrived in the United States. A stay-at home mother, she was trying to learn English by attending English classes at a community college. Spanish was the dominant language in the household; therefore, the interview, which took place in her home, was conducted in Spanish.

Mrs. Spencer held a three year accountant degree from a technical business school in Cuba, where she worked as a bank teller. She had two children, Sarah, one of the student participants, and a two year old son. Mrs. Spencer rated herself as a beginner in
the English language. The help she provided her daughter at home when they completed schoolwork was through a bilingual dictionary. Thus, Sarah had some exposure to English at home in addition to her native Spanish. In this way, Mrs. Spencer attempted to minimize the stress for her daughter in terms of completing her school assignments. Sarah could learn via the comfort provided by her native language and yet be exposed to English at the same time. However, Mrs. Spencer, with her beginner’s level of English, faced a significant challenge when it came to helping her daughter read texts in English and improve her reading comprehension. There was very little she could do for her daughter, which added pressure to Sarah’s learning in school, as that was, realistically speaking, the only place where she could strengthen her reading comprehension. This situation brings into play a comment made by Ms. Blake, who raised a concern about the extent to which ELLs are prepared for their work at school if the educational assistance they receive at home is limited. In the interview (4/15/10), Mrs. Spencer noted that “reading and comprehension” were the greatest challenges she faced in trying to help Sarah with her homework, adding that “There is too long and English is not perfect, not my native language.”

Regarding the FCAT, Mrs. Spencer said, in response to a question about her knowledge concerning the FCAT, “I understand it as they see how much they progress in English.” As for what the exam represented to her, she explained that “It is good to see how kids progress. That way they find how the kids can progress better.” (Interview 4/15/10). It appears, then, that Mrs. Spencer had a somewhat positive view of the FCAT,
with her emphasis on measuring progress rather than the stresses or burdens it could create. She seemed to feel that the exam could play a helpful diagnostic role that might lead to further instruction relative to what children had (and had not) learned. That is, she seemed to assume a positive intention underlying the FCAT.

Her next few comments on the FCAT continue to show a very interesting set of perspectives on the exam as a recently arrived immigrant parent of a young child who had to take the exam. For instance, when asked whether she felt it was fair to test her daughter according to the same standard of ability applied to native speakers of English, she stated: “Yes, because everybody has the right to learn.” Thus, she once again seemed to assume a fundamentally positive purpose underlying the FCAT as well as the learning conditions surrounding it: everybody has equal opportunity to learn and thus perform well. On the other hand, she acknowledged a sense of unfairness when pushed further about her daughter taking the same exam as the native speakers when she commented that “No, it is not.” She added: “Because she does not have the same learning skills the other kids have now.” (Interview 4/15/10). Here her comments seem contradictory, perhaps reflecting some lack of clarity in her mind concerning the exam. At first she sees no unfairness for her daughter, and later she does. Perhaps such contrasting views are a natural outcome for a relative newcomer like Mrs. Spencer, who was still learning about education in the United States. How well she really knew the FCAT and was prepared to offer truly informed comments about it is difficult to determine, but here she may reflect
a kind of confusion that might be common among the parents of ELLs in her circumstances.

Continuing on with her thoughts about the FCAT, she said, in response to a question about what she would like to see as a replacement for the FCAT for her daughter, “It could be a test at her level.” As for her feelings about the accommodations available to ELLs and possible changes she would like to see made in the exam administration, she appeared to have mixed feelings. She wanted to see “The level of the test to be her level because it can be extra time, but that’s what should be done, give her the test at the level of her language.” (Interview 4/15/10). In other words, while she supported accommodations, she appeared to place greater emphasis on providing a test at a level appropriate to students’ proficiency, in which case there would be less need for accommodations. This could suggest that she felt accommodations might distort performance on the test, as it would be difficult to know if a good performance was the result of accommodations or the actual ability of the child. Her preferred approach of pegging the test to the level of a student’s ability would apparently offer a true indication of what the student knows.

Summary

Mrs. Spencer brought the important perspectives of a fairly recently arrived immigrant to the FCAT. Even though she was a beginning learner herself in English, she tried her best to assist Sarah with school work but was keenly aware of her limitations in
that regard. What was most striking about her was her wide ranging views of the FCAT. She saw both good intentions and unfairness in it at the same time and appeared to be only lukewarm towards the accommodations aspect of the exam. Her insistence on an exam tied to her daughter’s level of proficiency seemed to be consistent with her view of the FCAT as serving a fundamentally diagnostic function. That is, an exam pegged above her daughter’s level would essentially reveal what her daughter does not know (i.e., a deficit model of assessment), without providing any real indication of how well she knows what she has learned. She wanted an exam that would provide a more realistic appraisal of her daughter’s progress so as to better inform the instruction that would follow.

Mrs. Rivers

Mrs. Rivers immigrated to the United States from Ecuador in 1997 with her husband and two children. Her youngest son, Brian, was one of the student participants in the study. They had resided in Central Florida ever since their arrival in the U.S. She finished high school in her home country, Ecuador, and was a stay-at-home mother. Spanish was the dominant language used at home among family members. Her English, at a low intermediate proficiency level, was learned by ear. Thus, she had no formal knowledge of or instruction in the language. This background with English, together with her 13 years of residence in the United States, made her a valuable participant in the study because she brought those lenses, which are not uncommon in the ELL world, to
the FCAT situation. We began our interview in English, but it was rescheduled since it was necessary to use a translator.

The adjustment to a new country presented critical challenges. The ones that Mrs. Rivers and her family faced are an illustration of the common experiences that ELLs and their families might go through upon the arrival in the United States. One of those challenges was the decision to place her oldest son one grade below where he should have been due to his English language situation. Another challenge was that because of her own limited understanding in English, Mrs. Rivers often had to ask her oldest son to help Brian with his school assignments. This situation, too, is common in the ELL world, where children often become what are called “language brokers” for the parents (that is, translating for them when dealing with schools, government departments, banks, etc.) and perhaps have to help siblings with school work on behalf of the parents. At the same time, as a long-time resident of the U.S. and possessing some knowledge of English, Mrs. Rivers (and parents like her) had acquired some knowledge of the target culture and of the educational system. This made her perceptions of the FCAT especially useful for the purposes of this study.

Regarding the FCAT, she presented a very different view of the exam than Mrs. Spencer. For instance, when asked what she knew about the FCAT, Mrs. Rivers replied: “From what I understand, it is a test that the government mandates, and that it is a very difficult test that a student has to take and I know it is very important.” (Interview
This is a quite contrast to Mrs. Spencer’s view, with its emphasis on the exam being aimed at measuring students’ progress and playing a diagnostic role in their learning and instruction, especially in light of what Mrs. Rivers added when asked what the exam represented to her as a parent: “A very important exam, one that evaluates my son to continue in school and pass the grade.” Mrs. Rivers saw an extremely important gate-keeping function for the exam and focused on its impact on her son’s future in school, a point never raised by Mrs. Spencer. This very different view of the FCAT may well have been a result of Mrs. Rivers’ much longer period of residence in the U.S., as evidenced by her awareness of the exam as a “government mandated” test. This suggests an understanding of the larger context surrounding the exam than Mrs. Spencer, with just over a year of residence, appeared to possess. Another comment of hers from the interview reinforces this possibility. When asked whether the FCAT was appropriate for ELLs or whether there should be another exam, she stated:

I think it is a little too tough for second language learners because just listening to the word FCAT it gives a child up and arms nervous. Because my older son demonstrates fear towards it. Because the minute the season starts for FCAT he will start telling me “Oh mom, oh my! FCAT is coming.” Speaking with other families who have other kids at school you could hear the fear in their voice and see they are very scared of FCAT. Of course I have never taken it so I really don’t know, but from what I hear it is a very tough test. Maybe someway somehow to ease down a little bit, take the fear away from it, make kids comfortable about it, and don’t make it like life and death depends on it. (Interview 4/28/10)

Here she shows considerable, albeit anecdotal, awareness of the FCAT via her older son’s experiences with it and discussions with other families. It is difficult to determine
whether she wanted to see another exam, as comments like the FCAT “is a little tough for second language learners” and “maybe someway somehow to ease down a little bit” could mean she would like to see another exam or would prefer seeing some adjustments in the FCAT. What is clear is that she was keenly aware of the affective aspects of the exam in her comments about the fear the exam generates. Some additional comments from her reinforce her emphasis on the fear factor associated with the exam. When asked to elaborate on the causes of this fear factor, she said:

The two things that I have noticed that FCAT is one of those tests that determines if the child passes the grade level so that obviously that grows fear in people. Second, by anything you hear that the state or government issued, of course scares them greatly. Between being called state or government test and on the top could make or break the likely hood of the child going to the next level. Those two combination factors scare people. (Interview 4/28/10)

Mrs. Rivers, then, did not focus on the academic or learning aspects of the FCAT. Her responses centered on its government-sponsored origins and its gate-keeping function, along with the fear such circumstances would, in her view, naturally create.

Summary

Mrs. Rivers brought the perspective of a long-time immigrant parent with a double experience of the FCAT. She had seen one son already experience it and was now watching her second son, Brian, confront the exam. She had also heard comments about the exam from other families. That she focused only on the stress related to the exam, in sharp contrast to Mrs. Spenser’s more learning oriented perspective, is quite interesting. Perhaps this difference is caused mainly by Mrs. Spencer’s lack of experience with the
exam as a recently arrived immigrant mother. She had presumably not experienced the same opportunities to hear others discuss the exam. Also interesting to note is the difference in educational backgrounds and the effect this might have had on their perceptions. Mrs. Spencer had three years of college level study in Cuba, while Mrs. Rivers was a high school graduate with no college experience. This may have caused them to look at the FCAT through different eyes. Between these two parents operating in different circumstances we see widely differing perspectives on the FCAT.

Mrs. Samora

Originally from Ecuador, a small country in size, yet substantial in heart as she reiterated in her words, Mrs. Samora moved to the United States in April 2000. Perceiving life with love and hope, she considered herself lucky to have a lot of friends from different countries and cultures. Most of all, she was thankful to have a family that she hoped to raise in a healthy environment. Working as a teacher’s aide at a preschool, her dream was to become an elementary teacher one day where she would be able to touch the lives of little ones with the best care, patience, love and dedication. Mrs. Samora held a business administration degree from a well known university in her native country. Eager to learn English, she had put herself through a community college and finished the ESOL classes while she was trying to raise two boys pretty much on her own. Nathan, one of the student participants was her son. With her educational background and length of residence in the U.S., she represented another valuable contributor to the study.
In terms of her perception of the FCAT, she recalled that she completed a test of this nature prior to her admittance to the university. When asked in the interview (3/10/10) what she knew about the FCAT, she offered a succinct reply: “I know it is mandatory.” That this piece of information about the exam was what stood out for her was interesting. In this regard she was similar to Mrs. Rivers, who focused on the government mandated aspect of the exam, and unlike Mrs. Spencer with her concentration on the measuring progress aspect of the exam. Perhaps this similarity with Mrs. Rivers was caused by the fact that she, too, had resided in the U.S. for some time and had thus gained a very different kind of exposure to the exam than Mrs. Spencer, the relative newcomer.

When asked to explain her thoughts about what the FCAT represented to her, she once again offered a succinct reply: “Nothing.” When asked to elaborate, she said:

Personally, I think for kids of this age I don’t think that FCAT is not necessary because it is too much stress and it is a lot of pressure for them. They should wait till kids grow up and go to high school and middle school. That’s my personal opinion. (Interview 3/10/10)

Here, too, she resembles Mrs. Rivers in her emphasis on the stress caused by the exam and lack of attention to the academic aspects of the exam.

The emphasis on the stress-related aspects of the FCAT was revealed again in an interesting incident that occurred one day. When Mrs. Samora walked into my classroom for the interview, I asked her two boys to play learning games on the computer while I
conducted the interview. She turned to Nathan and kept saying to him “FCAT, FCAT.” Intensity was present in her voice and demeanor. All she wanted for Nathan to do was to prepare for the FCAT on the website designed for the 3rd graders to practice test skills at home utilizing a password assigned specifically to them by the mainstream teacher. Later, during the interview, I asked her about the intensity she had displayed, and she explained:

Because when you come from another country, for us to repeat the grade it is tough. If they don’t pass the FCAT, they don’t pass the grade even I know that Nathan is very intelligent and even he needs help with language does not mean he needs to fail. (Interview 3/10/10)

Here is another instance in which Mrs. Samora’s views resembled Mrs. Rivers’, in that she, too, saw the FCAT in a gate-keeping role. However, she added an important cultural framing for this response, one that sheds light on the pressures faced by ELLs when confronted by a challenge like the FCAT. She revealed that the source of stress was not just taking a test in a language they were not yet proficient in, but it is culturally related as well. She explained that it was a source of considerable embarrassment in their own community if the test was not passed. Knowing of this could certainly add to the stress experienced by the students themselves, and could cause parents to place additional pressure on their children, which could in turn affect their performance on the exam. In Mrs. Samora’s opinion, living in a new country was a challenge for anyone, no matter how well they might know the language. Unlike native speakers, the ELLs have to adapt to a new community, school, educational system, and of course language and having to
face a test like the FCAT is bound to be stressful. When the cultural factors just described are added to the mix, the stress could reach extreme proportions.

Although her perception was not a positive one regarding the FCAT, as a parent she acknowledged the value of accountability and her son’s academic success. Therefore, she tried her best to help him at home with school assignment, using the language learning programs on the computer, and taking him to the library to check out books even if it was a major challenge to her due to her limited proficiency in the English language.

With respect to how she wanted to see the FCAT administered, she expanded on her belief in adding a bilingual component to the exam and commented on the accommodations issue. First, she said, “I recommend that the ESOL teacher speak their language, sit next to them, read the questions, explain the questions and also use the dictionary.” When I pointed out that they can use a dictionary, she added, “Yes. But it would be better if the ESOL teacher explains the questions to make sure they understand them” and thus enrich their dictionary use and overall experience of the exam. In addition to wanting to see this kind of accommodation, she explained that “First, the children should have three years of English prior to taking the test. Second, the ESOL teacher should sit next to them to help with any question and concern. Third, in my opinion it (FCAT) should not be administered at elementary level.” (Interview 3/10/10)

These comments suggest a well developed view of the exam that extended far beyond her earlier remarks concerning the FCAT’s stress-related aspects. It was interesting to see
how far she had gone in developing her alternative view of how the exam should be
administered, including her belief that the exam should not be part of elementary school.

Summary

Mrs. Samora, a long-time immigrant with a college education in her own country,
contributed valuable perspectives to the study not only with her comments about what
she felt would be a better approach to the exam. Her feeling that ELLs were not ready for
the exam while in elementary school was especially interesting, as was her belief in a
bilingual approach to the exam. While there was some overlap between her views and
those of Mrs. Rivers, she added new perspectives that put the FCAT in a somewhat
different light.

So, what does all this data mean in terms of the study’s research questions and
intentions? The purpose of Chapter Four was to describe the study’s findings and offer
some analysis of them. Chapter Five offers additional analysis, especially across the
cases, while addressing the study’s research questions and looking at what the study has
contributed to understanding on this topic.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study intended to capture the perceptions and attitudes of three different sets of stakeholders (teachers, ELLs, and parents) within an elementary school context towards a state mandated proficiency test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). With respect to the teachers, it also explored their instructional practices as related to the FCAT. The purpose behind examining the FCAT through the lenses of three different sets of stakeholders was to achieve a triangulation of data and thus offer a more definite view of the FCAT as experienced and perceived by these groups of people who were all significantly impacted by it. This emphasis on stakeholders’ responses to the exam was expected to provide a different kind of look at a large scale proficiency test. That is, instead of analyzing the test itself, the study sought to add a human face to the exam by examining those most affected by it. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of an examination that affects the lives of thousands of people across an entire state each year. The data was analyzed qualitatively to provide a representation in depth of the stakeholders’ experiences and perceptions. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do elementary ELL students, teachers, and parents perceive FCAT?
2. How does the magnitude of the FCAT impact the classroom climate on a daily basis?
3. To what extent are ELLs prepared to take a state-mandated test like the FCAT?
4. Can a state mandated test, given in one standard language, be a fair measure of ELLs’ academic knowledge?

The chapter begins with an illustration which attempts to summarize key information and perceptions gleaned from the study. This illustration provides a backdrop to a discussion of the study’s research questions that follows. The chapter then summarizes conclusions derived from its findings and addresses implications arising from the study, followed by the recommendations for future research.

Summary of Key Findings

Figure 1 provides a pictorial view, or map, of the study’s findings. The map is modeled after an approach called the multi-flow map found in *Thinking maps: A language for learning*, by D. Hyerle and C. Yeager, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by the Thinking Maps, Inc. The purpose of this mapping approach is to portray key relationships in an educational setting or context so as to generate a portrait of the reality of that context.
Figure 1: The Reality of FCAT

**Areas of Concern**

- It is not constructed and modified based on ESOL strategies.
- The wording of the questions is a challenge.
- ELLs’ L2 proficiency level does not match with the academic language of the test.
- It is not a culturally relevant test.
- It is demanding on teachers.
- It does not distinguish those ELLs who are in need and/or in the process of further academic evaluation.
- It does not exempt any ELL, no matter how long they have been in the ESOL program.
- It is a one time shot performance.
- Teachers teach to the test.
- It is administered 2/3 of the way into the school year.

**Outcome**

- There is a mismatch between classroom practices and accommodations offered during the FCAT.
- It caters to a certain student population.
- It causes an inordinate amount of stress on teachers, students, and parents.
- It limits teachers as to what to teach.
- In attempt to cover everything, there is no time to go in depth.
- Students learn to be just test takers, not readers.
- It gives students the false impression that the school year is over.
- There are still skills to be learned after FCAT.
- Students might not necessarily perform well on those test days.
- There are other factors (i.e. special learning needs) that hinder ELLs’ academic performance.

**The Reality of FCAT**

So What?
As a general summary, what this map shows is that the reality of FCAT is not an equitable one. It shows that ELLs are quite at a few disadvantages entering the FCAT. The issues observed in the areas of concern, voiced by all the three stakeholders (teachers, students and parents), result in an outcome that contradicts in many ways with what an assessment should aim to assess, that is, a reflection of skills and knowledge students have attained. Based on such an outcome, meaningful instruction should be redesigned to further meet the needs of the students. To the contrary, the FCAT does not serve such a purpose.

Discussion of Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do elementary ELL students, teachers, and parents perceive the FCAT?

At a time when the research literature focuses on explorations of test themselves, especially their reliability and validity, this study looked instead at how those whose personal or professional lives are shaped by tests respond to them. Thus, a key question addressed in this study was what the various stakeholders felt about the FCAT.

With respect to the FCAT, one finding that stood out was that accountability was valued highly by teachers. While they expressed reservations about the FCAT, they generally saw value in assessing the learning and ability of ELLs. The fact that they agreed with the idea of assessing the ELLs adds validity to their concerns about the
FCAT, in that they saw problems with the test itself, not with the testing of ELLs per se. Directly impacted by the FCAT, the teachers made regular attempts to comply with its guidelines and sought to prepare students to take it and to succeed on it. However, they all described considerable frustration with that process. Along these lines, the word ‘stress’ occurred a number of times in the teacher interviews—stress in terms of trying to help their ELLs prepare for the FCAT and in terms of seeing their students suffer emotionally as they confronted the FCAT. Returning to their frustration, also notable was their belief that the FCAT was unfair toward ELLs, at least at the 3rd grade level, because they simply were not ready for that kind of test, even with the accommodations it permitted them. In their view, the test could not measure what the students really knew. They felt that accountability should be meaningful and lead to positive outcomes, such as providing insight into how to better serve the academic needs of students. However, their experiences had shown them that the FCAT was not a test that could fairly reflect a year’s academic growth of the ELLs given that they are still early in the language learning process. Providing more time for ELLs to first become proficient in the L2 seemed a more reasonable approach to them. In their view, based on the fact that the ELLs are taking a state mandated test when they are still in a language learning phase versus the language display phase the examination emphasizes, the teachers findings reveal a mismatch between what the ELLs are capable of showing what they know academically, and the FCAT’s ability to provide an accurate report of such knowledge.
The three teachers with FCAT experience and the one teacher who was experiencing it for the first time agreed on these points.

Being the other subgroup that was directly impacted by the FCAT, the students, to some extent, also provided a mixed view. On the one hand, to them this exam represented an opportunity to learn more. On the other hand, in most cases they felt a sense of hopelessness about passing it and found it stressful because it stood as a barrier to their passage to the 4th grade. A notable finding in this study is that the relationship between the FCAT and the ELLs was influenced by how they identified themselves with the English language in terms of a sense of ownership toward the language. For most of the students, their sense of ownership remained with their native language, Spanish, and they expressed a desire to use that language while taking the test. They wanted a genuine opportunity to display their real academic knowledge and not have the test only examine their knowledge of English, which it in effect did, since the language of the test items was English. Like the teachers, then, the students accepted the idea of being tested; they just wanted a fair opportunity.

Being on the other side of the fence, and yet also affected by the FCAT’s outcome and its emotional impact on their children, the parents brought an interesting set of perspectives to what the FCAT meant to them. They saw it as a tool to evaluate their child’s progress in the L2 and wanted that knowledge, on one hand, but were unhappy about its gate-keeping function on the other. Like the teachers, they saw a fundamental unfairness in having their children tested by the same standards applied to native English
speaking children. They objected to the unfair position their children were placed in. Another interesting finding in their case was social pressure associated with the FCAT, in that in their Spanish speaking community, failure to pass the exam and thus to move on to the 4th grade represented a kind of stigma and thus added pressure to both parents and the students. This pressure magnified another finding of the study: the parents’ desire to help their children do well in school and succeed on the FCAT, but their inability to do so due to limitations in their English proficiency.

Looking across the results related to this research question, what stood out were a) the juxtaposition between an overall agreement with the need for accountability and assessment and the unsuitability of the FCAT in these regards; and b) the way in which stress was experienced by members of all three stakeholder groups. The results showed an atmosphere of fear surrounding the FCAT. That this fear was felt at the 3rd grade level, among children still trying to learn a foreign language and culture while taking an examination which assumed they already knew both, highlighted the need to re-examine issues surrounding mandatory administration of an examination that brought unhappiness and frustration to the teachers, children, and parents directly affected by it in one way or another.

Research Question 2: *How does the magnitude of the FCAT impact the classroom climate on daily basis?*

This was an important question to ask because of one of the most frequently heard and loudest complaints made in the United States in the era of the No Child Left Behind
(NCLB) legislation and the state-mandated testing related to it: that teachers are forced to “teach to the test” instead of engaging in classroom instructional practices aimed at enhancing student learning.

As was discussed earlier, the results showed that the teachers unanimously acknowledged the FCAT as a significant source of stress that came from the demands that such an exam placed on their daily teaching practices to prepare students for the exam. Whether a fairly new or a long time experienced teacher, NES or NNES, they were all aware of the devastation, intellectually and psychologically, that FCAT preparation created in the classroom environment. One of the reasons for this was the fact of the FCAT being administered in March, well before the school year was over. With instruction beginning in September, there was relatively little time to get students ready for the test. This necessitated what they saw as an unnecessarily rapid pace of learning. It also meant shortchanging other kinds of knowledge and skills they wished to teach their students, as FCAT preparation played a dominant role in their course planning and classroom and classroom activity from the moment the school year started. The fast pace of learning the skills prior to the exam created the effect of crunching everything prior to the exam. Essentially, it meant completing a 180 day school curriculum in 110 days to meet the March exam administration date. In the teachers’ view, this was not a reasonable demand. Trying to teach the third grade curriculum and adding on the load of the FCAT preparation prior to its administration created a “stressful” daily race to ensure the coverage of skills that prepared students adequately for this exam. “Teaching to the test”
became what they saw as an inevitable outcome of such a set of circumstances. This presented them with an ongoing and stressful dilemma: teaching to the test versus teaching the knowledge and skills that are needed to lay the foundation for the fourth grade, not to mention later grades.

Another concern raised by the teachers had to do with the remaining 70 days of curriculum that take place after the FCAT is over in March. On the one hand, to compensate for what they were not able to teach prior to the FCAT in order to prepare the students for the FCAT, the teachers now had to make up for the lost time in the remaining months of the school year. Thus, the pace of teaching and learning was still unduly affected by the exam. In addition, the false belief created in students that the learning was over once they had completed the FCAT, diminished the importance of subsequent teaching and learning and made it difficult for teachers to keep them motivated after the FCAT was administered. The FCAT had loomed so large in the students’ minds for the previous months that it was difficult for them to fully value the instruction that followed the exam. Thus, what seemed more logical to the teachers was having a pretest at the beginning of the school year and a posttest at the end of the school year. This approach would give students more time to be introduced in depth to all the knowledge and skills that were required to be taught in third grade and thus prevent the reductions caused by the FCAT administration. Here the teachers were reflecting Met’s (1994), Genesse and Hamayan’s (1994), and Coelho’s (1994) suggestions for having assessments that are
classroom based and which reflect classroom instructional content. Replacing the FCAT with this pre-and post-testing system would fulfill this purpose.

As an additional illustration of the FCAT’s impact on the teachers’ instructional practice, Table 10 displays the results of a checklist procedure in which the teachers were asked to list various activities related to the FCAT.

Table 10: Checklist Distributed to Teachers

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<td>How many extra activities did you plan this week for the purpose of FCAT?</td>
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<td>How many hours of extra planning does it take each week for FCAT preparation?</td>
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<td>How often did you practice for FCAT this week?</td>
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<td>How many professional meetings did you attend this week?</td>
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<td>How often did you visit an educational website in search for FCAT oriented</td>
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<td>How often did you have your students read passages from FCAT practice books?</td>
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<td>How often did you introduce a new FCAT taking strategy skill this week?</td>
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<td>How often did you review the FCAT test taking strategies skills this week?</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>How often did you work individually with your ESOL student(s) this week?</td>
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<td>How often did you consult a colleague about a concern or issue regarding FCAT preparation this week?</td>
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Note: T: Mrs. Thomas, Br: Mrs. Brown, L: Mrs. London

As observed in the table, these teachers planned an average of eleven activities targeting FCAT skills on a weekly basis. In addition to the regular instructional planning,
one to two extra hours went to the identification and preparation of the extra activities. These results provide a telling illustration of the extent to which the FCAT shaped their instructional activities. This is also shown in the large drop-off between the average number of activities during the weeks (January 1/25 - March 3/1) targeting FCAT skills, which are the weeks prior to test administration days, and the week (3/8-3/12) when the test is administered. The average went down from 11 to 1.3 activities.

A very different situation, one described in Chapter 4, pertains to the efforts the teachers made to enrich the ELLs’ learning. This was in the important domain of modifications. Differentiating the instruction and learning materials to account for the ELLs’ English learning proficiency levels was a necessity that the teachers in this study saw in order to help the ELLs progress academically. However, pursuing these modifications did not necessarily mean that the ELLs were academically prepared to meet the demands of the FCAT, since the modifications were tailored to the 3rd grade curriculum. Whether to teach to FCAT demands or the ELLs’ real academic needs as reflected in the curriculum was a daily dilemma that these teachers faced. Thus, the modifications issue, in tandem with the demands of the FCAT and the strong likelihood that the ELLs would not be prepared for it in light of their ELL status, added more to the teachers’ stress level. To further illustrate the stressful impact imposed on teachers by the demands of the FCAT, Chapter 4 described the role of the teacher as a compassionate facilitator during the school year and then shifting to that of a supervisor, compared to a “jailor” by one of the teachers, during the FCAT administration day. The exam “forces”
teachers to disconnect the nurturing role from students. While this could be said to apply to their relationship with the other students as well, the situation is magnified in the case of ELLs, who tend to rely more heavily on their teachers as ‘allies’ due to their linguistic and cultural limitations. The ELLs feel a particularly strong need for that kind of support, so that suddenly seeing these teachers in a very different role during the FCAT can be a jarring and disturbing change for the ELLs.

On the students’ part, they entered third grade already knowing that if they did not pass the FCAT, they would be retained in that grade. This is an enormous source of pressure with which to start the academic year while still learning the language used on the examination (in contrast to the native English speaking students). As was shown in Chapter 4, to a large extent the students were not strong with respect to their English language proficiency. In addition, the fear of the unknown that came from taking a test of the magnitude of the FCAT for the first time in their lives created a stressful learning environment. This situation is especially telling when seen in the light of the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), which states that in order for a second language to be learned successfully, such learning should take place within a low anxiety environment, i.e., the affective filter is low and learners are thus more receptive to what they are being taught. The higher that the filter is raised, the more difficult it is for learning to occur. In such a context, where positive attitudes toward second language acquisition are encouraged, a lower affective filter will play a major role in providing more comprehensible input that stimulates additional language acquisition. Thus,
although different ELLs might receive the same input, the outcome will vary if the affective filter varies. In other words, the learners in a positive learning environment will acquire and benefit from more input. Contrarily, the findings of this study reveal that the magnitude of the FCAT is not conductive to providing a helpful filter in the learning environment through the whole academic school year for the ELLs. As suggested by the results in Chapter 4, these ELLs were likely to have been dealing with a high affective filter, which in turn made it even less likely that they would be equipped to succeed on the FCAT.

With respect to the second research question, then, what stands out is that the teachers and students faced a teaching and learning environment that was unduly influenced by the FCAT and that added unnecessary pressure for both groups of stakeholders. The teachers were placed in what amounted to a ‘no-win’ situation: provide support aimed at helping ELLs acquire the 3rd grade knowledge and skills at their own pace but likely to not prepare them for the FCAT, or sacrifice those modifications in order to focus solely on what was required for the FCAT. Whatever the decision the teachers made, the students were likely to lose something valuable. Meanwhile, the students were forced to learn in an atmosphere which ran counter to the tenets of second language acquisition, which argue for a low anxiety learning environment that enhances the value of the input the students receive.
Research Question 3: *To what extent are ELLs prepared to take a state-mandated test like the FCAT?*

Extending from the first two research questions, the study also sought to look at the extent to which ELLs were ready for a test like the FCAT, bearing in mind the kinds of instructional support available in their classrooms, the exam accommodations available to them, and the nature of the FCAT itself.

Within a small group of ELLs, four participants in this study, the data points out differences in their L2 proficiency levels, years in the American educational system, cultural differences, socioeconomic backgrounds, learning styles, and two of them have special learning needs. And yet, they took the same state mandated test, the FCAT, like the rest of the student population at Little Gators, and everybody else in the state of Florida, for that matter.

Since language proficiency seems to be a key factor in ELLs’ academic performance, it is worth recapturing the L2 proficiency levels of this study’s participants. Looking at CELLA’s 2009 individual students’ reports, Brian (Table 6) was proficient in three domains, listening, speaking, reading and high intermediate in writing. Sarah’s entry language test in July 2009, qualified her as a non-English speaker. Nathan’s CELLA’s 2009 report (Table 7) qualified him as a beginner in listening/speaking, high intermediate in reading, and low intermediate in writing. Kevin’s CELLA’s 2009 report (Table 8) revealed that he was proficient in two domains, listening/speaking, and high intermediate in reading and writing. In addition, the length of time each of them spent in
L2 academic context was as follows: Sarah one year, Brian four years, Nathan two years, Kevin four years. Their L1, Spanish, was the dominant language spoken in their households. The question that arises here is: Had they had enough time and practice with the English language to own the L2 academically and thus be prepared to face a test like the FCAT, which assumes a certain level of English proficiency? Another question is: what support and modifications did they receive, and how helpful were they?

As shown earlier, the findings revealed that the teachers used various differentiated instructional techniques and strategies to make the 3rd grade curricular content comprehensible to the ELLs. The key principle observed in the classroom practices was the amount of support provided to ELLs. In other words, the teachers were using instructional principles and teaching strategies that were aimed at the ELLs’ language proficiency levels and readiness. They differentiated the content, process, and product. Content was differentiated as teachers used a curriculum that was simplified, (i.e., intervention materials) but aligned with the same learning standards, and were teaching the same skills as those aimed at native speakers of English. An analogy that can be used here is that the mother bird chews the food before she feeds it to her babies. It is the same food, but the consistency changes.

In terms of the process, instructional strategies such as scaffolding, careful review, building background knowledge and teaching strategies such as well-defined monitoring, appropriate pacing, immediate corrections and positive feedback were
present in the daily lessons and instruction. The application of scaffolding principle in teachers’ teaching practices was a necessity because:

just as scaffolding is used in construction to provide support for the builders as they put up walls or add the finishing touches, students need support to help them learn until they are able to use the knowledge and skills on their own. (Beech 2003, p 16)

Therefore, instructions were repeated slowly, realia was present, pronunciation of words was clear, and friendly definitions of unknown words were given. Also observed were instructional motions associated with TPR, use of graphic organizers, visuals, partial translations, a lighter work load compared to native speakers, small group or individual support, flexible setting with the ESOL teacher, and additional time was provided to complete assignments. During the classroom assessments, the format was simplified (intervention assessments) and readjusted according to the product (oral assessment for Sarah, the non-English speaking participant). Contrarily, when the FCAT is administered, such support is completely removed. ELLs have to elicit the information on their own, without the contextual support that was just described. Thus, there is a mismatch between what occurs in the classrooms and how a state mandated test, like the FCAT, assesses what they know and can do.

Although FCAT offers some of the same accommodations that are practiced by the teachers in this study in the form of modifications, such as flexible setting (ELLs can be tested in a separate room with the ESOL teacher), flexible scheduling (ELLs can take part of the test over several brief periods within one school day), flexible timing
(additional time to work on test sessions), and access to a bilingual dictionary, it is what is not allowed that is causing another mismatch between the classroom practices and the FCAT. Some of the accommodations that ELLs are used to having in the classroom are not allowed in the FCAT. For example, the reduction of the test questions or of the passages’ length, having the teacher read aloud the reading passages and, using graphic organizers. Nevertheless, to illustrate the mismatch between the accommodations offered in the classrooms and in the FCAT administration day, the following quote states:

The ESOL or heritage language teacher may answer student questions about the general test directions ONLY. Questions must be answered in a way that the student would not be led to infer the correct answer to any of the items. The teacher is prohibited from reading words to the student from the passages, test items, and performance tasks, and from answering student questions about the passages, test items, and performance tasks. (FCAT Test Administration Manual 20110, p 294)

When you look at the IRE in the classrooms where ELLs were mainstreamed, interactions between the students and the teachers contextually involved linguistic terms as well as social actions. In many situations, language proficiency caused the patterns to be slightly different for the ELLs from their native English speaking peers. Offering several repetitions was one of them. When the students’ responses were repeated, correct pronunciations and linguistic forms were modeled to strengthen the reinforcement of new knowledge. Keeping in mind that “task repetitions can have an impact on the processing and not just on the product” (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p 45), the findings reveal that not being able to hear the new words, or not having the passages read to them, might be an obstacle in ELLs’ processing of the FCAT’s content. This takes us to another mismatch
that this study’s findings reveal: a mismatch between the ELLs’ existing L2 proficiency levels and the academic proficiency required to face a state mandated test like the FCAT. The findings reveal that the ELLs were not proficient yet in their L2, English. Since they did not have ownership of the English language, academically, or in terms of general usage, they learned how to navigate through the test within a survival mode instead of trying to show what they really knew. In the end, for the ELLs the FCAT is not about assessing the academic skills they have acquired, but most likely showing what they do not know. In their case, that means the English language itself, not core math or reading skills. While the FCAT is not designed to operate as a test of language proficiency, for the ELLs this is its de facto function.

To further illustrate the dilemma faced by ELLs, during their classroom reading lessons there is exposure to the same text at least four to five times prior to the weekly assessment. Such exposure gave them time to become familiar with the content and vocabulary of the stories. Istation, as well, provided several exposures to the stories and vocabulary until the ELLs mastered the skills and showed comprehension of the content. In contrast, the ELLs have one chance to see the stories in the FCAT and answer the questions about them. The students not only have to encounter more challenging vocabulary words, but also are expected to follow several processing steps in order to come to a correct answer on their own. Thus, there is a high contextual support versus a low contextual support issue. To face the exam tasks, the L2 academic proficiency is a
must so the FCAT does not become an obstacle course to overcome, but rather a course to measure academic progress.

These circumstances bring to mind The Natural Order Hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), which posits a particular order in which components of a target language are acquired. To measure students’ language acquisition effectively and fairly, that order needs to be kept in mind so that the learners are not being tested for knowledge and ability that they would not yet have acquired. An examination like the FCAT can pose a serious challenge to this view of learning. To illustrate such challenges, the findings of this study revealed the significance of the cultural dimension of the FCAT, in terms of the language used in the exam. Figurative language, a major part of the 3rd grade curriculum, is an example of how a culturally-based knowledge of words can affect the product when the test takers are ELLs who have had little or no exposure to the English language. This is a kind of language use they are not ready for in the acquisition process, and yet they are expected to know it for the FCAT. Thus, a mismatch between the diverse cultural knowledge of learners and FCAT catering to a certain group of students creates another obstacle for ELLs.

Such findings are in alignment with Meier’s (2000) and Swope’s (2000) suggestion that tests are culturally biased and do not reflect the needs of different ethnic and social class groups. Furthermore, other support can be found in Sears (1998) and Snow et al., (1991) who argue that standardized tests present a challenge for ELLs by
offering two explanations. First, the tests contain passages where circumstances reflect experiences of native English speakers, and not of ELLs, such as holidays, customs and norms that take place in Anglophone culture. Second, ELLs are required to respond questions in short paragraphs which lack the contextual hints to help them figure out the answers. These points echo Brady’s (1997) comment that standardized tests invariably reflect the interest of one group and do not recognize the interest of another, a problem compounded when students live in a multicultural society.

Last but not least, the findings reveal that besides the second language learning needs, there are learning issues that need to be addressed. For example, within the time frame of data collection, Nathan was diagnosed with autism, a diagnosis that did not occur until after the FCAT administration. Therefore, the FCAT was administered to him without this very important information being available. Kevin, who was in the SLD program and given special education accommodations during the FCAT, also qualified for the Emotional Behavior Disability (EBD), which was not noted in the 2010 FCAT demographic data. In other words, readers of that data would not be aware of this causal factor. Also, although it was not a learning issue, Sarah’s physical problem of diabetes affected her concentration ability. Her learning was interrupted by several check-ups during the day to make sure that her blood sugar level was stable. In addition, she moved three times within a year in the United States. At the end of the school year, she moved again to another state. None of these casual factors would be accounted for in her FCAT scores.
To answer the third research question directly, then, the findings suggest that the ELLs were not prepared to take the FCAT, despite the efforts made by their teachers to build their skills and knowledge. They may have learned a great deal in the 3rd grade through the modifications made by their teachers, but that learning could not be calibrated with the ways in which the FCAT operates.

Research Question 4: *Can a state mandated test, given in one standard language, be a fair measure of ELLs’ academic knowledge?*

Based on the findings of this study, the answer to this question is “No!” The way the FCAT is constructed reflects a traditional approach to testing: straight down to the center of the population, that is, aimed at the native English speaking population. By doing so, it assumes that ELLs have been in the American cultural and instructional environment for a long time, an assumption that Genesee and Hamayan (1994) and Coelho (1994) question as they demonstrate what they see as the effectiveness of classroom-based assessment versus standardized tests. However, from the perspective of feasibility, an important component in assessment, the approach featured in the FCAT is the most workable. From the perspective of ELLs, though, the FCAT has significant limitations, as the results of this study show. A key factor, as noted earlier in this chapter, is that the FCAT operates on the assumption that the test takers already know the language of the test and thus examines other skills, not language proficiency itself. This includes both general language proficiency and academic proficiency. ELLs, particularly at the 3rd grade level that was the focus of this study, are very unlikely to have acquired
such proficiency and thus start the test at a significant disadvantage. The lack of academic English proficiency is especially problematic for them. This situation is reflected in data provided by the Seminole County Public Schools and shown in Table 11. These data show the performance of different “accountability groups” on the reading portion of the FCAT.
Table 11: FCAT Reading Historical Trend for Accountability Groups 2003-2009.

Source: Table presented at the ESOL Teacher In-Service of Seminole County Public Schools by the ESOL Department Coordinator M. Cardona on August 17, 2009.
The table shows that the ELLs lag well behind the other groups represented, though the achievement gap appears to be diminishing. Research (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Hill & Flynn, 2006; Haynes, 2007) has shown that a period of five to seven years is needed for ELLs to acquire a workable command of academic English proficiency and thus approach the performance of native English speakers. To expect that at the 3rd grade level, when students are first required to take the FCAT, seems highly unreasonable relative to what research has shown. Cummins (1979) offered an oft-cited explanation as to why this is the case. He distinguished between what is called BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) and showed how ELLs must acquire a command of each set of skills as they move through school in an English dominant environment. He also showed a relationship between the two sets of skills. These terms help explain the scores that were achieved by each participant on the FCAT 2010 (Sarah 1, Brian 3, Nathan 1, Kevin 1). Although the data shows progress in ELLs’ social language skills (BICS), none of the participants had reached the appropriate proficiency level in terms of academic language (CALP). CALP will come later, as BICS provides a language foundation to work from. Thus, their academic proficiency was not sufficient to assist them meaningfully on the same state assessment task used by native speakers. Therefore, such findings agree with prior claims (Cummins, 1979; Cummins, 2000; Herrera et al., 2007; Bailey, 2007) that ELLs, besides becoming proficient in social language, must also be proficient academically in the L2.
These comments relate to Zamel’s (2001) assertions about the impact of context-reduced tasks; state mandated tests, like the FCAT, represent a challenge for ELLs because of the mismatch in their language and academic proficiencies, which leaves them un-or-under prepared for the context-bound tasks on the FCAT. Language is processing, and not just memorizing a certain number of rules or amount of vocabulary words. Therefore, the findings of the present study suggest that language cannot be served ‘cold’; it takes time to be ‘marinated’ in one’s mind in order to reach the ‘baked’ point. In other words, ELLs need a longer time of exposure to the target language in order to display their academic knowledge.

With respect to the fourth question, then, it seems clear that these 3rd grade ELLs were not offered a fair measure of their academic knowledge and skills when they took the FCAT. Still in the process of acquiring both BICS and CALP, they faced a test that offered them little or no chance of success.

Conclusions

While this study focused on one statewide examination, the FCAT, it actually addresses a much larger issue: the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that carries significant weight in pre-college education in the United States. This is because examinations like the FCAT function in a vein similar to NCLB. NCLB foregrounds the notion of accountability in education through its mandate that schools must ensure that all students perform academically in core subject areas at specified
levels of achievement. It is within this environment of accountability that an examination like the FCAT operates.

As was seen in this study, three out of four ELLs who participated in the study performed poorly on the FCAT. Their performance echoes a theme playing out across the United States: ELLs not achieving at grade level in state mandated tests. This is an ongoing problem in our educational system. The root of such a problem is administering the same mandated test to ELLs as native speakers of English on the assumption that they own their L2 at the same level as their native English speaking peers. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 added more strains to such a problem when promoting standards and assessments that serve nationally as the guidelines to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This had a powerful effect because “a school’s ability to show AYP significantly impacts on the grading of the school, which in turn affects funding and management issues in schools and school districts.” (Ryll, 2004). In other words, schools and teachers are held accountable for their students’ performance. The following figure illustrates the pressure of No Child Left Behind tumbling down on those who are directly affected, in one way or another, by state mandated tests such as the FCAT:
The figure captures the relationships and positioning of the stakeholders researched in this study. Teachers are subject to dictates coming from above, and must then perform accordingly with respect to the next group on the chain: students. They in turn, impact on those at the end of the chain: the parents. The students’ need to perform
well trickles down to parents in the sense of the parents needing to help their children succeed and responding to the pressures felt by the children.

A conclusion arising from this study is that those at the bottom of the chain—teachers, students, and parents—are at a disadvantage in such a climate of accountability. While they were comfortable with the notion of accountability, there was no way the students could succeed, at least in the 3rd grade context. As shown earlier, the teachers were in the unenviable position of either stressing differentiation and accommodations that helped students learn the 3rd grade curriculum but failed to prepare them for the FCAT, or focus on the FCAT preparation and neglect the support the students needed to acquire the skills and knowledge within the 3rd grade curriculum. The students were left to take a test they had little or no chance of passing, and the parents were generally powerless to help their children prepare for the FCAT or cope with the pressures surrounding the FCAT. Teachers are not able to teach as they wish, students cannot learn in the way that best suits them or display what they actually know via the test, and the parents are inadequately positioned to make a difference. The voices of these stakeholders need to be heard, and listened to, if an examination like the FCAT is going to have positive outcomes instead of inducing fear and causing failure.

Another conclusion arising from the study is that teacher modifications are a mixed blessing. While students do appear to benefit from them, and teachers gain satisfaction from employing them and seeing ELLs learn, they create shortcomings in an
era of accountability, since they do not appear to help ELLs succeed on the FCAT. A different approach to assessment is necessary if what students have learned through such classroom practices is to be measured effectively and valued by teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in education, including school districts and boards of education.

A further conclusion is that accommodations offered by the FCAT are also a mixed blessing. On the plus side, they offer ELLs a chance at success if fully utilized, and in that sense can move toward leveling the playing field with the native English speaking children. On the other hand, we saw that the participants did not take full advantage of them, despite the fears that the three of them had entering the exam. Furthermore, they did not appear to help much. This leads to the conclusion that more work must be done to examine the accommodations issue and arrive at better answers in terms of how they can be a genuine asset to ELLs.

An additional conclusion is that the No Child Left Behind legislation needs to be reexamined within the framework of what is going on in the classrooms and what is known about second language acquisition. Accountability that does not account for the ways in which and pace at which some test takers learn does not serve a useful or valid purpose, even when test accommodations are permitted. It may be that ELLs need an alternative version of an exam like the FCAT or a completely different assessment
system if the goal truly is to determine whether they are performing at specified levels of achievement.

Moreover, using state mandated test scores, in this case those from the FCAT, to determine if a school made the AYP or not, how to distribute the federal funding, or awarding teachers’ performance pay, does not necessary translate into an incentive. To the contrary, those scores can become a pretext to punish those who fail. I cannot agree more with the International Reading Association (1999) statement that in the process of acknowledging the efforts of those who are tied to high stakes tests, it turns into a set of “disincentives” for some of the stakeholders. Unintentionally, the emphasis on these test scores singles out and punishes those teachers who work directly with ELLs. Furthermore, the ELLs are seen as the ones who are hindering a school’s progress or lowering its statewide effectiveness rating. The net result is that the ELLs become scapegoats and acquire a stigma. A target is put on the backs of the ELLs and on those who teach them as they become victims of the ‘blame game’. This can have different effects, all negative. On is that the ELLs and their teachers must endure criticism and scorn that can be debilitating emotionally. Also, in an effort to lift a school’s academic rating, teachers will face additional pressure to “teach to the test” and thus be forced to neglect other material and accommodations that would enhance ELLs learning. Third, the ELLs will face even greater pressure and experience even more stress the next time they are required to take a state wide test. Accountability in the form of state mandated tests should complement classroom instruction, not the opposite. A cultural transformation in
the way we think of education is needed. This involves embracing the saying that “one size does not fit all.”

An important question that arises from this study is “Does the FCAT data lead to better instruction to genuinely meet ELLs’ academic needs, or does it increase the pressure to ensure that they pass the following year’s FCAT, at whatever cost?” The perceptions and attitudes of the participants in this study suggest that there is room for accountability, but that the assessment has to match with ELLs’ academic L2 proficiency in order to be a reliable source of data.

On personal level, prior to this study I was someone who idolized the FCAT. As a teacher of ELLs, I wrote the professional goals at the beginning of the school year aiming for my students to score on grade level on FCAT no matter what stage of their second language acquisition they were on. Surprisingly, at the end of this study I realized that I was another educator that the FCAT had been demanding on me, and unknowingly I had taught to the test. Sitting on the observer’s seat, it made me realize how much this state mandated test had driven my instruction.

Although, it might seem as a study of convenience given my connection to the research site and my involvement as a teacher of ELLs, in my opinion, there is not such a thing as “convenient data.” The only conveniences in this case were less gas and mileage in my car. Prior to the study, I thought I had a lot of knowledge about the FCAT, but the findings provoked my mind- set picture of “the same test is fair to all”.

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Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications can be identified. First, selecting the appropriate tool(s) to assess the academic knowledge of ELLs is essential not only for assessment purposes but to ensure effective instruction. The assessment approach has to match instruction that is available to these students throughout the school year. In particular, the use of pre-and post testing tied to the grade level curriculum should be considered, as opposed to a one-shot state mandated test, as this would allow for a more accurate portrait of what the ELLs have and have not learned. In addition, differentiating to meet ELLs’ needs should not only be the foundation of the daily instruction, but also a guideline to regulating the assessments. This way the information obtained will crystallize the planning of the future instruction.

Second, there needs to be more accounting for the time that ELLs need to reach grade level performance. This already occurs in the support teachers create to enhance ELLs’ learning. Now this must also be reflected in the assessment practices adopted.

Third, the policy makers have to seek and take into consideration the voices of ELLs, teachers, and parents and reconstruct a state mandated test that is responsive to the views of these stakeholders.

Fourth, the state mandated tests, if in place, should be administered at the end of the school year so as to allow time for the grade level curriculum to be covered fully.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

What prompted this study was the existing gap in the assessment literature with respect to the perception and attitudes of ELLs, teachers, and parents towards state mandated tests. Even though it cannot be completely assumed that more research of such a nature has not been conducted, it is clear there is not enough to provide a coherent picture of voices of those who are directly impacted by such tests. Future studies of this kind could extend the time of data gathering from the beginning of the school year to the time the state mandated tests are administered to create more of a longitudinal effect. Furthermore, expanding the scope of the study to other grade levels, from elementary to high school, will provide more information on this topic.

In addition, another significant area for further research could be an analysis of the language of the state mandated tests, meaning the ways in which the questions are worded. The length of the texts itself is an area to be addressed as well. Such studies will be a great contribution to constructing an appropriate state mandated assessment for ELLs.

Also, future research addressing the long term effects that a test of such magnitude might have on children of this young age is needed, including how this stress may impact the second language academic performance on a daily basis.

Moreover, the demanding nature of state mandated tests and the resulting impact on both the daily instruction and teachers’ performance merits for further research. This study offered some insights into the stresses and frustrations experienced by teachers. It
would be helpful to spend more time in their classrooms and look more intently at their responses to the instructional conditions they face. Such data will offer valuable insight into how the state mandated test impact the daily instruction as well as the lives of those who are part of them.

Finally, as this study showed, differentiation and accommodations are an important and complex part of teachers’ lives while working with ELLs. However, there is still relatively little understanding of this support system and its impact on students’ learning. A study focused specifically on such support to ELLs would shed important light on this complicated arena of ELL instruction. In a similar vein, future research could focus on the state mandated test accommodations issue. As discussed earlier, one of the interesting findings of this study was that the ELLs’ use of accommodations during the FCAT was not as extensive or as effective as could have been the case. While three of them did use additional time during the reading test, they could have used even more time than they did. Furthermore, there was inconsistency in their use of what would seemingly be a valuable resource during a reading test: a bilingual dictionary. One of the questions that arise from this study is: why didn’t they make greater use of the test accommodations available to them, particularly since three of them feared the exam? Future research could look at whether other ELLs are similarly inconsistent in their use of accommodations, and if so, why? It could also look at successful use of accommodations and what was behind that.
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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL
December 17, 2009

Protocol Number: 2009E-0968

Protocol Title: PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF ELLS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS TOWARDS FCAT (FLORIDA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TEST): A CASE STUDY OF THE EARLY ELEMENTARY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE WITH A STATE MANDATED TEST; Almas Hirvela, Xholjeta Gjini, Teaching & Learning

Type of Review: Request for Exempt Determination

ORRP Staff Contact: Cheri M. Penney
Phone: 614-688-0389
Email: penney.3@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Hirvela,

The Office of Responsible Research Practices has determined the above referenced protocol exempt from IRB review.

Date of Exempt Determination: December 17, 2009
Qualifying Exemption Category: 1

Please note the following:

- Only OSU employees and students who have completed CITI training and are named on the signature page of the application are approved as OSU investigators in conducting this study.
- No procedural changes may be made in exempt research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, instruments, enrollment numbers, etc.)
- Per university requirements, all research-related records (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the Investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under The Ohio State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00000378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the ORRP staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Senior Protocol Analyst—Exempt Research
APPENDIX B: SEMINOLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS APPROVAL
January 7, 2010

Ms. Xhuljeta Gjini
83 Chaney Drive
Casselberry, FL 32707

Dear Ms. Gjini,

I am in receipt of the proposal and supplemental information that you submitted for permission to conduct research in the Seminole County Public Schools. After review of these documents, it has been determined that you are granted permission to conduct the study described in these documents under the conditions described herein. However, it must be understood that your research project must not take away from the instruction time of students.

Principal [insert name] is the authority to decide if she wishes to participate in your study or if it is appropriate to release any requested information. Therefore, your first order of business is to contact her to explain your project and seek permission to conduct the research. You are expected to make appointments in advance to accommodate the administration and/or staff for research time. Please do not use SCPS email or courier mail to disseminate your research information.

Please forward a summary of your project to my office upon completion. Good Luck!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ronald L. Pinnell, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Secondary Education

Visit Our Web Site
www.scps.k12.fl.us
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT LETTER
To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Xhuljeta Gjini and I am one of the ESOL teachers at In fulfillment of my doctoral degree from The Ohio State University, it is required to conduct a research study for my dissertation. I am looking for participants who will volunteer for my study. I am looking for parents, students and teachers to participate. I am attaching The Ohio Consent Form which explains the nature of the study and might answer some of the questions you might have in regards to the procedure of the study. If you are willing to be one of the participants, please sign the attached form and return it to me as soon as possible. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (407) 699-5839, or by e-mail at domatjad@gmail.com. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Xhuljeta Gjini
Estimados Padres:

Mi nombre es Xhuljeta Gjini y soy una de las profesoras de ESOL en la Escuela. Para poder cumplir con los requisitos para obtener mi grado Doctoral de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio, se me requiere que conduzca un trabajo de investigación para mi disertación. Para este trabajo de investigación necesito la participación voluntaria de padres, estudiantes, y profesores.

Adjunto le incluyo el Formulario de Consentimiento de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio donde se explica la naturaleza de la investigación, y puede que le aclare o conteste algunas de las preguntas que usted pueda tener en relación al procedimiento de este estudio. Si usted está dispuesto a ser uno de los participantes, por favor firme y devuélvame el formulario lo más pronto posible. Si usted tiene preguntas adicionales referentes a mi estudio, favor de comunicarse conmigo mediante correo electrónico al domatjadri@hotmail.com o me puede llamar al (407) 899-5839. Agradezco por adelantado su deseo de participar en mi estudio.

Sinceramente,

Xhuljeta Gjini
APPENDIX D: ENGLISH CONSENT FORM
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title:
Perceptions and attitudes
of ELLs, teachers and
parents towards FCAT:
(Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): A case study of elementary second
language learners' experience with a state mandated test.

Researcher:
Xhaljeta Gjini

Sponsor: N/A

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about
this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your
decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign
this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of elementary second language students
with FCAT, their perceptions and attitudes as well as of the their teachers' and parents'
towards such state mandated test.

Procedures/Tasks: The researcher, Ms. Gjini, will visit the classroom for observations, take
notes, collect students' classwork, collect teachers' materials, checklists for teachers, collect
data from school, district and state documents. There will be one individual interview with
each participant. The task of the adult participants is to answer questions in relation to the
FCAT experience, their perceptions and attitudes towards it. The interview will be conducted
after the administration of FCAT. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes long.

Duration:
January 2010-March 2010 will be the classroom observations, field notes, individual interviews, collection of samples of students' classwork, collection of teachers' materials, and checklists for teachers. April 2010 through mid summer will be collection of data from documents at school, district and state level.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:
It will benefit the field of educational studies of how such tests impact the daily classroom instruction. It will reinforce the importance of culturally relevant teaching and the need of assessment that will match such teaching.
It may benefit the policy makers to take a look at the content of state mandated test to better reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ELL students. It will reinforce the home and school connection.

Confidentiality:
Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:
A gift certificate of the amount $20.00 for the adult participants.

Participant Rights:
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.
If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Ms. Gjini (407)699-5839, domatjadri@hotmail.com.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Ms. Gjini (407)699-5839, domatjadri@hotmail.com.
**CONSENT**
Behavioral/Social Science

**IRB Protocol Number:**

**IRB Approval date:**

**Version:**

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**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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Form date: 12/15/05
Formulario de Consentimiento a Participar en un Trabajo de
Investigación de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio

Título del Estudio:

Percepciones y actitudes de ELLs (aprendices del idioma inglés), maestros y padres hacia la Prueba

FCAT(Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): Un estudio de caso de las experiencias de los aprendices del idioma inglés en la escuela primaria con una prueba requerida por el estado.

Investigadora:
Xholjeta Gjini

Patrocinador: N/A

Esta es un formulario de consentimiento para la participación en un trabajo de investigación. El mismo contiene información importante sobre este estudio y que usted puede esperar si decide a participar.

Su participación es voluntaria.

Favor de leer esta información cuidadosamente. Siéntase en libertad de hacer preguntas antes de tomar la decisión de participar o no. Si se decide a participar, a usted se le pedirá que firme este formulario y usted recibirá copia del mismo.

Propósito:

El propósito de este estudio es de explorar la experiencia con la prueba FCAT de aquellos estudiantes de escuelas primarias que están aprendiendo un segundo idioma; al igual que las percepciones y actitudes de estos estudiantes, sus maestros y los padres hacia esta prueba que es requerida por el estado.

Procedimientos/Tareas: Observaciones en los salones de clases, notas obtenidas, entrevistas individuales, colección de trabajos realizados en clases por los estudiantes, colección de los materiales usados por los maestros, lista de cotejos de los maestros, la data de la escuela, los documentos del distrito y del estado.
CONSENT
Behavioral/Social Science

IRB Protocol Number:
IRB Approval date:
Version:

Duración:
De enero 2010 a marzo 2010 se llevará a cabo las observaciones en el salón de clases, las notas tomadas, las entrevistas individuales, colección de trabajos realizados en clases por los estudiantes, colección de los materiales usados por los maestros y las listas de cotejos de los maestros. Comenzando en abril de 2010 hasta el mediados del verano se recopilará la data de los documentos en la escuela, distrito y a nivel del estado.

Usted puede optar por no continuar en el estudio en cualquier momento. Si decide no continuar en el estudio, no habrá ninguna penalidad y no perderá ningún beneficio al que usted tiene derecho a recibir. Su decisión no afectará ninguna relación futura que usted pudiera tener o establecer con la Universidad del Estado de Ohio.

Riesgos y Beneficios:
Este estudio beneficia a la educación ya que indicará como estos exámenes impacta la instrucción diaria en el salón. También servirá para reforzar la importancia de la enseñanza de la cultura y la necesidad de evaluaciones que vayan a la par con dicha enseñanza.

Puede beneficiar también a que los legisladores le den una mirada al contenido de los exámenes requeridos por el estado para que estos reflejen el trasfondo cultural y lingüístico de los aprendices del idioma inglés (ELLS).

Confidencialidad:
Se hará todo esfuerzo por mantener la confidencialidad en la información recopilada en este estudio. Sin embargo, pueden surgir circunstancias en que esta información sea divulgada. Por ejemplo, información personal en relación a su participación en este estudio puede ser divulgada si la ley del estado así lo requiere. También, sus expedientes pueden ser revisados por ciertos grupos de personas (como sea aplicable en el estudio):
- La Oficina de Protección a los Estudios Humanos u otras agencias federales del estado o agencias que regulan estos procesos.
- La Junta de Revisión de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio o la Oficina de Practicas Responsables en Trabajos de Investigación.
- El patrocinador, si alguno, u otra agencia (incluyendo la Administración de Alimentos y Drogas-FDA-que regula las investigaciones) que patrocine el estudio.

Incentivos:
Se le regalará a cada adulto participante un certificado de regalo por la cantidad de $15.00.

Derecho de los Participantes:
CONSENT
Behavioral/Social Science

Usted puede rehusarse a participar en este estudio sin ninguna penalidad o pérdida de beneficios a los que usted tiene derecho a recibir. Si usted es un estudiante o padre en el estado de Ohio, su decisión no afectará las notas académicas o su empleo.

Si usted opta por participar en este estudio, usted podrá descontinuar su participación en cualquier momento sin penalidades o pérdida de beneficios. Al firmar este formulario, usted no está renunciando a ninguno de los derechos legales que usted pueda tener como participante de este estudio.

La Junta Institucional de Revisión responsable por las investigaciones a los sujetos humanos en la Universidad del Estado de Ohio revisó este proyecto y lo encontró aceptable de acuerdo a las regulaciones estatales y federales, y la política de la Universidad diseñada para proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes en los trabajos de investigación.

Contactos y Preguntas:

Para preguntas, inquietudes o quejas sobre el estudio favor de contactar a

Para preguntas sobre sus derechos como participantes en este estudio o para discutir otras inquietudes o quejas relacionadas con el estudio con alguien que no esté relacionada con el equipo de investigación, usted puede contactar a la Sra. Sandra Meadows en la Oficina de Practicas Responsables de Investigación al 1-800-678-6251.

Si usted es lesionado como resultado de su participación en este estudio o para preguntas sobre una lesión relacionada con un trabajo de investigación, usted puede comunicarse con

__________________________________________
Firmando la formulario de consentimiento

He leído (o alguien me ha leído) este formulario y estoy consciente que se me ha pedido en participar en un trabajo de investigación. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y se han contestados a mi satisfacción. Yo voluntariamente he consentido en participar.

Firmando este documento, no estoy cediendo o renunciando a ninguno de mis derechos legales. Se me proveerá una copia de este formulario.

Nombre impreso del participante
Firma del participante
Fecha y hora

Nombre impreso de la persona autorizada a dar el consentimiento por el participante (si aplica)
Firma de la persona autorizada a dar el consentimiento por el participante (si aplica)
Fecha y hora

Parentesco con el participante

Investigador/Personal de Investigación

Yo le explicado el trabajo de investigación al participante o su representante antes de requerirle la(s) firma(s) en esta planilla. No hay espacios en blancos en este documento. Al participante o su representante se le ha entregado una copia del documento.

Nombre impreso de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento
Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento
Fecha y hora
The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child's Participation in Research

Study Title:
Perceptions and attitudes of ELLs, teachers and parents towards FCAT: A (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): A case study of elementary second language learners' experience with a state mandated test.

Researcher:
Xhuljeta Gjini

Sponsor: N/A

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child's participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of the elementary second language learners with FCAT, their perceptions and attitudes as well as of their teachers' and parents' towards such state mandated test.

Procedures/Tasks: The researcher, Ms. Gjini, will visit the classroom for observations, take notes, collect samples of students' classwork, collect teachers' materials, checklists for teachers, collect data from school, district and state documents. There will be one individual interview with each participant. The task of the students participants is to actively participate in the regular classroom activities and answer questions during an individual interview in
relation to the FCAT experience, their perceptions and attitudes towards it. The interview
will be approximately 30-45 minutes long.

Duration: January 2010-March 2010 will be the classroom observations, field notes,
individual interviews, collection of students’ classwork, collection of teachers’ materials, and
checklists for teachers. April 2010 through mid summer will be collection of data from
documents at school, district and state level. One individual interview will take place after the
administration of FCAT. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes long.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation
in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to
which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with
The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:
It will benefit the field of educational studies of how such tests impact the daily classroom
instruction. It will reinforce the importance of culturally relevant teaching and the need of
assessment that will match such teaching.

It may benefit the policy makers to take a look at the content of state mandated test to better
reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ELL students. It will reinforce the home and
school connection.

Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However,
there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal
information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by
state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable
to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international
  regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible
  Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-
  regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:
A gift certificate of the amount $ 10.00.
Participant Rights:

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact _Ms.Gjini (407)699-5839, domatjad@hotmail.com_

For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact _Ms.Gjini (407)699-5839 domatjad@hotmail.com_.

Page 3 of 4  Form date: 12/19/05
PARENTAL PERMISSION
Behavioral/Social Science

IRB Protocol Number:
IRB Approval date:
Version:

Signing the parental permission form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to
provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity
to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit
my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Signature of person authorized to provide permission for subject

Relationship to the subject

Date and time

AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the
signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given
to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date and time

AM/PM
APPENDIX G: SPANISH PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM
Permiso de los Padres para la Participación del Estudiante en el Trabajo de Investigación de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio

Titulo del Estudio:
Percepciones y actitudes de ELLs (aprendices del idioma inglés), maestros y padres hacia la Prueba

FCAT(Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): Un estudio de caso de las experiencias de los aprendices del idioma inglés en la escuela primaria con una prueba requerida por el estado.

Investigadora:
Xhujeta Gjini

Patrocinador: N/A

Esto es un formulario de consentimiento de los padres para la participación en un trabajo de investigación. El mismo contiene información importante sobre el estudio y lo que usted debe saber si decide que su hijo/a participe.

La participación de su hijo/a es voluntaria.

Favor de leer esta información cuidadosamente. Siéntase en libertad de discutir el estudio con sus amigos o familiares y hacer preguntas antes de tomar la decisión de permitir que su hijo/a participe o no. Si decide que su hijo/a participe en el estudio, a usted se le pedirá que firme este formulario y se le entregará una copia del mismo.

Propósito:
El propósito de este estudio es de explorar la experiencia con la prueba FCAT de aquellos estudiantes de escuelas primarias que están aprendiendo un segundo idioma; al igual que las percepciones y actitudes de estos estudiantes, sus maestros y los padres hacia esta prueba que es requerida por el estado.
Procedimientos/Tareas: La investigadora, Ms. Gjini, estará visitando los salones para observar a los niños, tomará notas, recopilará los trabajos realizados en clases por los estudiantes, los materiales usados por los maestros, las listas de cotejos de los maestros, la data de la escuela, los documentos del distrito y del estado. Conducirá una entrevista individual con cada participante. La tarea de cada estudiante que participe es de participar activamente en las clases regulares y que conteste preguntas durante la entrevista individual en relación con su experiencia con la prueba FCAT, sus percepciones y actitudes hacia la prueba. La entrevista tendrá una duración aproximadamente de 30 a 45 minutos.

Duración:
De enero 2010 a marzo 2010 se llevarán a cabo las observaciones en el salón de clases, se tomarán notas, se conducirán las entrevistas individuales, se recopilarán los trabajos realizados en clases por los estudiantes, los materiales usados por los maestros y las listas de cotejos de los maestros. Comenzando en abril de 2010 hasta el mediado del verano se recopilará la data de los documentos a nivel de escuela, de distrito y del estado.

Su hijo/a puede optar por no continuar participando en el estudio en cualquier momento. Si su hijo/a decide no continuar en el estudio, no habrá ninguna penalidad y ni usted ni su hijo/a perderán ningún beneficio al que ustedes tienen derecho a recibir. Su decisión no afectará ninguna relación futura que usted pudiera tener con la Universidad del Estado de Ohio.

Riesgos y Beneficios:
Este estudio beneficia a la educación ya que indicará como estos exámenes impacta la instrucción diaria en el salón. También servirá para reforzar la importancia de la enseñanza de la cultura y la necesidad de evaluaciones que vayan a la par con dicha enseñanza.

Puede beneficiar también a que los legisladores le den una mirada al contenido de los exámenes requeridos por el estado para que estos reflejen el trasfondo cultural y lingüístico de los aprendices del idioma inglés (ELLs).

Confidencialidad:
Se hará todo esfuerzo por mantener la confidencialidad en la información recopilada de su hijo/a en este estudio. Sin embargo, pueden surgir circunstancias en que esta información sea divulgada. Por ejemplo, información personal de su hijo/a en relación a su participación en este estudio puede ser divulgada si la ley del estado así lo requiere. También, los expedientes de su hijo/a pueden ser revisados por ciertos grupos de personas (como sea aplicable en el estudio):
- La Oficina de Protección a los Estudios Humanos u otras agencias federales, del estado o agencias que regulan estos procesos.

Page 2 of 5 Form date: 12/15/05
- La Junta de Revisión de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio o la Oficina de Prácticas Responsables en Trabajos de Investigación;
- El patrocinador, si alguno, de otra agencia (incluyendo la Administración de Alimentos y Drogas-FDA que regula las investigaciones) que patrocine el estudio.

Incentivos:
Se le dará a cada niño(a) participante un certificado de regalo por la cantidad de $10.00.

Derecho de los Participantes:
Usted y su hijo/a pueden rehusar a participar en este estudio sin ninguna penalidad o pérdida de beneficios a los que ustedes tienen derecho a recibir. Si usted o su hijo/a es estudiante o empleado en el estado de Ohio, su decisión no afectará las notas académicas o el estatus de empleado.

Si usted y su hijo/a optan por participar en este estudio, usted podrá descontinuar su participación en cualquier momento sin penalidades o pérdidas de beneficios. Al firmar este formulario, usted no está cediendo o renunciando a ninguno de los derechos legales que su hijo/a pueda tener como participante de este estudio.

La Junta Institucional de Revisión responsable por las investigaciones a los sujetos humanos en la Universidad del Estado de Ohio revisó este proyecto y lo encontró aceptable de acuerdo a las regulaciones estatales y federales, y la política de la Universidad diseñada a proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes en los trabajos de investigación.

Contactos y Preguntas:
Para preguntas, inquietudes o quejas sobre el estudio favor de contactar a .

Para preguntas sobre los derechos de su hijo/a como participante en este estudio o para discutir otras inquietudes o quejas relacionadas con el estudio con alguien que no esté relacionado con el equipo de investigación, usted puede contactar a la Sra. Sandra Meadows en la Oficina de Prácticas Responsables de Investigación al 1-800-678-6251.

Si su hijo/a es lesionado(a) como resultado de la participación en este estudio o para preguntas sobre una lesión relacionada con un trabajo de investigación, usted puede comunicarse con .
Firmando el formulario de consentimiento

He leído (o alguien me ha leído) este formulario y estoy consciente que se me ha pedido en que provea permiso para que mi hijo/a participe en un trabajo de investigación. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y se han contestado a mi satisfacción. Yo voluntariamente consentir que mi hijo/a participe en este estudio.

Firmando este documento, no estoy cediendo o renunciando a ninguno de mis derechos legales. Se me proveerá una copia de este formulario.

---

Firma del participante

Firma de la persona autorizada a dar el consentimiento por el participante (si aplica)

Fecha y hora

AM/PM

---

Investigador/Personal de Investigación

Yo le he explicado el trabajo de investigación al participante o su representante antes de requerirle la(s) firma(s) en este formulario. No hay espacios en blancos en este documento. Al participante o su representante se le ha entregado una copia del documento.

Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento

Fecha y hora

AM/PM
APPENDIX H: ENGLISH ASSENT FORM
The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title:
Perceptions and attitudes of ELLs, teachers and parents towards FCAT: A (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): A case study of elementary second language learners’ experience with a state mandated test.

Researcher:
Xhuljeta Gjini

Sponsor: N/A

1. What is this study about?
The experience of elementary second language students during preparation for FCAT and taking FCAT, their perceptions and attitudes of these students and their teachers and parents towards such state mandated test.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?

Page 1 of 4 Form date: 12/15/05
I will visit your classroom to observe during language arts time. You are expected to participate actively in your regular classroom activities and routine. Samples of your classwork worksheet and activities related to FCAT preparation will be collected. An individual interview to answer questions in relation to the FCAT experience, your perceptions and attitudes towards it.

3. How long will I be in the study?
   Approximately three months; January through March 2010.
   An interview will be conducted after you take FCAT. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

4. Can I stop being in the study?
   You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?
   None

6. What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?
   You will reflect on your experience as a second language learner preparing for a state mandated test, challenges you face taking such test, your perceptions and attitudes towards such test. Your contribution will be valuable to make people aware of the real challenges that second language learners face with state mandated test while they are still learning the target language.

7. Will I be given anything for being in this study?
   A gift certificate in the amount of $10.00.

8. Who can I talk about the study? Ms. Gjini
For questions about the study you may contact Ms. Gjini (407)999-5839, domajadr@hotmail.com.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

Signature or printed name of subject                                Date and time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining assent                           Signature of person obtaining assent
                                                               Date and time

This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.
APPENDIX I: SPANISH ASSENT FORM
Formulario de Asentimiento para Participar en un Trabajo de Investigación de la Universidad del Estado de Ohio

Título del Estudio:
Percepciones y actitudes de ELLs (aprendices del idioma inglés), maestros y padres hacia la Prueba FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test): Un estudio de caso de las experiencias de los aprendices del idioma inglés en la escuela primaria con una prueba requerida por el estado.

Investigadora:
Xhuljeta Gjini

Patrocinador: N/A

- A usted se le ha pedido participar en un trabajo de investigación. Estos estudios son llevados a cabo para encontrar diversas maneras de ayudar a las personas o para poder entender mejor las cosas que le ocurren a las personas.
- Este formulario le proveerá información sobre el estudio para ayudarle a decidir si desea participar o no.
- Usted puede hacer preguntas sobre el estudio antes de tomar la decisión de participar. También antes de tomar la decisión usted puede pensararlo, y puede discutirlo con otros miembros de la familia o amigos.
- Usted puede optar por decir que “No” si no desea participar en el estudio. Si usted contesta que “Sí” y después cambia de idea, y no quiere seguir en el estudio, usted puede rehusar continuar sin ninguna consecuencia para usted.
- Si usted desea participar en el estudio, un adulto (usualmente el padre/madre) necesitará conceder el permiso para su participación en el estudio.

1. ¿De qué se trata el estudio?
El estudio se trata de las experiencias de los estudiantes de escuela primaria que están aprendiendo un segundo idioma durante la preparación y la administración de la Prueba FCAT; y las percepciones y actitudes de estos estudiantes, de sus maestros y padres hacia la prueba requerida por el estado.

2. ¿Qué necesito hacer si participo de este estudio?

Se requiere del alumno la participación activa en las actividades y rutinas regulares del salón de clases. Además de participar en una entrevista individual para contestar preguntas en relación a las experiencias con la Prueba FCAT, sus percepciones y actitudes hacia la prueba.

3. ¿Cuánto tiempo dura el estudio?

Aproximadamente tres meses, enero a marzo de 2010. Se conducirá una entrevista después de la administración de la prueba FCAT.

La entrevista tomará aproximadamente de 30 a 45 minutos.

4. ¿Puedo desistir de continuar participando?

Usted puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento.

5. ¿Qué adversidad negativa puede ocurrirme si yo participo en el estudio?

Ninguna

6. ¿Qué cosas buenas pueden ocurrirme si yo participo en el estudio?

Usted reflexionará sobre su experiencia como aprendiz de un segundo idioma preparándose para una prueba requerida por el estado, los retos que usted enfrenta, sus percepciones y actitudes hacia esta prueba. Su contribución será muy valiosa ya que creará conciencia de los verdaderos retos que enfrentan los aprendices de un segundo idioma con la prueba requerida por el estado mientras están aprendiendo el idioma inglés.

7. ¿Se me recompensará por mi participación en este estudio?

Recibirá un certificado por la cantidad de $10.00.

8. ¿Con quién puedo hablar sobre el estudio? Ms. Gjini
Para preguntas sobre el estudio, puede comunicarse con Ms. Giini (407) 699-5839
domajadr@hotmail.com.

Para discutir otras preguntas relacionadas con el estudio con alguien que no forma parte
de equipo de investigación, puede comunicarse con el Sra. Ms. Sandra Meadows en la
Oficina de Prácticas Responsables en los Estudios de Casos al 1-800-678-6251.
Firmando el Consentimiento de Participación

Yo he leído (o alguien me ha leído) este formulario. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas antes de tomar la decisión y deseo participar en el estudio.

Firma o nombre impreso del participante

Fecha y tiempo

Investigador/Personal de Investigación

Yo le he explicado este estudio al participante antes de requerirle la firma. No hay espacios en blancos en este documento. Una copia de este documento ha sido entregada al participante o a su representante.

Nombre impreso de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento

Firma de la Persona que obtiene el consentimiento

Fecha y hora

Este documento debe ser acompañado por un formulario aprobado por IRB de consentimiento firmado por el padre/tutor.

Page 4 of 4  Form date: 12/15/05
APPENDIX J: HOME LANGUAGE SURVEY
## SEMINOLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FLORIDA
### STUDENT ENTRY FORM

Students are expected to be enrolled at their previous school before enrolling at a BOCES school.

**STUDENT LEGAL NAME:**

**DATE OF BIRTH:**

**GENDER:**

**GRADE AT ENTRY:**

**SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:**

**HOME PHONE:**

**CELL PHONE:**

**BIRTHDATE (MM/Day/YY):**

**RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:**

**Street Number and Name and City:**

**MAKING ADDRESS:**

**Street Number and Name and City:**

**RACE/EThNOCULTURAL CATEGORY:**

**OTHER:**

**COUNTRY OF PREVIOUS SCHOOL IF NOT USA:**

**STUDENT LIVES WITH:**

- [ ] Both Parents
- [ ] Mother Only
- [ ] Father Only
- [ ] Other

**RELATIONSHIP:**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN'S NAME:**

**PHONE 1:**

**PHONE 2:**

**EMPLOYER:**

**SCHOOL:**

**EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION (IDE) INFORMATION:**

- [ ] Has student ever received special education services?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] Is placements current?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] Student has a language other than English?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] Language other than English?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] Student's Native Language
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] Language spoken in home by Parent
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**SPECIAL SERVICES INFORMATION:**

- [ ] If yes, please include a language other than English?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

- [ ] If yes, please provide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Learning Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Language Impaired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Mental Health Impaired</td>
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<tr>
<td>[ ] Physical Impaired</td>
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<tr>
<td>[ ] Speech Impaired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[ ] Other Impaired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER INFORMATION:**

- [ ] Is the student enrolled in an ESL program at another school?
  - [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**IS THE STUDENT'S PARENTS/GUARDIAN'S LANGUAGE THE SAME AS THE TITLED LANGUAGE?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE AN IEP OR IFSP?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE A 504 PLAN?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE A PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE A VISION IMPAIRMENT?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE AN AUDITORY IMPAIRMENT?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DOES STUDENT HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY?**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**DATE ENRICHED IN U.S. (Include Post Office Box):**

**AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE:**

- [ ] Yes
  - [ ] No

**PARENT/GUARDIAN'S SIGNATURE:**

**SCHOOL:**

**BOCES #**

**PLANNED ENRICHMENT:**

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL:**

**DATE:**

253
APPENDIX K: SARAH’S I STATION REPORTS
Student Summary Report

Student Summary Report for

Classroom: 3rd Grade
School Year: 2009 - 2010

as of Thu Mar 25 13:34:10 EDT 2010

Grade Level: 3rd Grade
Last Data Used: Wed Mar 24 00:01:37 CDT 2010
Lexile Levels: < 150

Current Reading Program Cycle: 4
Program Usage: 16.1 hours

istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP™) Results

An objective of ISIP is to identify students potentially at risk of reading failure. Subtest ability scores are used to establish an Overall Reading ability score, which can be used to show reading growth. Tier levels are established to show scores relative to a nationally normed sample.

- ISIP Overall Reading Ability Score: 197
  ISIP Overall Reading Tier: 3 (Performing seriously below grade level and in need of intensive intervention)

- ISIP Text Fluency Score: 0
  ISIP Text Fluency Tier: 3 (Performing seriously below grade level and in need of intensive intervention)

The following abilities are included in Overall Reading:

- Letter Knowledge
- Phonemic Awareness
- Alphabetic Decoding

Skill Growth Report

ISIP™ Skill Growth Report by Student

Classroom
School Year: 2009 - 2010
as of Tue May 18 14:17:29 EDT 2010

The ISIP, istation’s Indicators of Progress, Skill Growth Report by student shows each student’s assessment and the progress made through the current month as measured against performance goals. Skill goals and criteria become progressively more difficult with each assessment period.

- Assessment Information
- Instructional Tier Goals

Related Reports:
- ISIP Summary for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Tier Movement for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth by Tier Level for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP History

Overall Reading

![Graph showing reading ability score trends over time]

Student is assigned an overall reading ability score based on scores from subtests using an advanced algorithm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Reading Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Skill Growth Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>4/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>5/6/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Student Summary Report

Student Summary Report for

Classroom: [Name]
School Year: 2009 - 2010

as of Thu Mar 25 13:33:50 EDT 2010

Grade Level: 3rd Grade
Current Reading Program Cycle: 11
Last Date Used: Tue Mar 23 08:19:57 CDT 2010
Program Usage: 29.7 hours
Lexile Levels: 260 - 690

Istation’s Indicators of Progress (ISIP™) Results

An objective of ISIP is to identify students potentially at risk of reading failure. Subtest ability scores are used to establish an Overall Reading ability score, which can be used to show reading growth. Tier levels are established to show scores relative to a nationally normed sample.

- ISIP Overall Reading Ability Score: 251
  ISIP Overall Reading Tier: 1 (Performing at grade level)

- ISIP Text Fluency Score: 32
  ISIP Text Fluency Tier: 1 (Performing at grade level)

The following abilities are included in Overall Reading:

- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Spelling

The graphs above show each skill assessed and the progress made through the current month. Skill goals and criteria become progressively more difficult with each assessment period.

Skill Growth Report

ISIP™ Skill Growth Report by Student

Classroom -
School Year: 2009 - 2010
as of Tue May 18 14:17:03 EDT 2010

The ISIP, istation’s Indicators of Progress, Skill Growth Report by student shows each skill assessed and the progress made through the current month as measured against performance goals. Skill goals and criteria become progressively more difficult with each assessment period.

- Assessment Information
- Instructional Tier Goals

Related Reports:
- ISIP Summary for Classroom - Y Lao
- ISIP Tier Movement for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth by Tier Level for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP History

Overall Reading

![Graph showing overall reading ability score](image)

Student is assigned an overall reading ability score based on scores from subtests using an advanced algorithm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Reading Assessments</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Tier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>ISIP Assessment Type</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>10/23/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>11/4/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>12/1/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1/5/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www2.istration.com/en/admin/reports/reading/v1/isipSkill.asp?year=2009&breakou...

5/18/2010
## Skill Growth Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3/2/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>4/12/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Student Summary Report

Classroom School Year: 2009 - 2010

Grade Level: 3rd Grade
Last Date Used: Thu Mar 25 09:55:52 CDT 2010
Lexile Levels: 580 - 740

Current Reading Program Cycle: 12
Program Usage: 37.5 hours

Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP™) Results

An objective of ISIP™ is to identify students potentially at risk of reading failure. Subtest ability scores are used to establish an Overall Reading ability score, which can be used to show reading growth. Tier levels are established to show scores relative to a nationally normed sample.

- ISIP Overall Reading Ability Score: 251
  ISIP Overall Reading Tier: 1 (Performing at grade level)

- ISIP Text Fluency Score: 65
  ISIP Text Fluency Tier: 1 (Performing at grade level)

The following abilities are included in Overall Reading:

The graphs above show each skill assessed and the progress made through the current month. Skill goals and criteria become progressively more difficult with each assessment period.


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Skill Growth Report

ISIP™ Skill Growth Report by Student

Classroom - School Year: 2009 - 2010
as of Tue May 18 14:17:50 EDT 2010

The ISIP, isStation's Indicators of Progress, Skill Growth Report by student shows each skill assessed and the progress made through the current month as measured against performance goals. Skill goals and criteria become progressively more difficult with each assessment period.

- Assessment Information
- Instructional Tier Goals

**Related Reports:**
- ISIP Summary for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Tier Movement for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP Skill Growth by Tier Level for Classroom - Y Lee
- ISIP History

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**Overall Reading**

Student is assigned an overall reading ability score based on scores from subtests using an advanced algorithm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Month</th>
<th>Ability Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>225</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>235</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overall Reading Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>ISIP Assessment Type</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Tier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>10/22/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>11/2/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>12/1/2009</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>234</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1/5/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>243</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

## Skill Growth Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>4/1/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>5/3/2010</td>
<td>Scheduled Monthly</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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March 30, 2010

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Casselberry, FL 32707

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Judy Kent
Product Information Consultant
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Doctoral Candidate
The Ohio State University
College of Teaching and Learning

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Kevin E Kalinowski, PhD
Director of Research
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Mobile: (214) 563-9934
Kkalinowski@istance.com