Instruction for English Language Learners in the Social Studies Classroom: A Meta-synthesis

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Using the systematic search and coding procedures of a meta-synthesis, this paper reviews the extant literature on English language learners (ELLs) in the social studies classroom. The 15 studies making up the corpus adhere to both topical and methodological criteria. The Language-Content-Task (LCT) Framework informed the coding and analysis of the results. Discussion of the findings provides three primary implications: (1) the need for linguistically and culturally responsive instruction for ELLs in social studies classes, (2) the need for increased training for inservice and preservice social studies teachers in preparation for teaching ELLs, and (3) the need for future research among ELLs in the social studies context.

Key words: English language learners, emergent bilinguals, newcomer, social studies, history instruction, civics, culturally responsive, linguistically responsive, qualitative, meta-synthesis

Introduction

A growing number of students who speak languages other than English, often referred to as English language learners (ELLs) or emergent bilinguals (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008), are enrolling in schools across the United States (Center for Public Education, 2012; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). Policymakers have responded by including language proficiency as a subcategory in testing and accountability measures, thereby paying increased attention to how ELLs perform in school (e.g., Kena et al., 2014). Research consistently demonstrates that all too often classroom instruction does not adequately provide ELLs with access to the “language of schooling” (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. ix) through which content area knowledge is taught and learned (Aukerman, 2007; Lee, Quinn, & Valdés, 2013; Schleppegrell, 2004). Social studies content provides ELLs with particular challenges, as students must decipher such linguistic characteristics as densely packed phrases, passive verbs, and abstract nouns (e.g., Brown, 2007; de Oliveira, 2012; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008). Adding to this complexity is the presence of multiple disciplines within the social studies field (Levstik & Tyson, 2008; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).

Recent research has found that more than half of social studies teachers have ELLs in their classes (Jimenez-Silva, Hinde, & Hernandez, 2013); however, it also tells us that social studies teachers report feeling unprepared to teach ELLs (Cho & Reich, 2008; O’Brien, 2009, 2011). Recognizing this need, authors from a variety of fields have published pedagogical books (e.g., Cruz, Nutta, O’Brien, Feyten, & Govoni, 2003; Cruz & Thornton, 2009b; Short, Vogt, & Echevarría, 2011) and articles (e.g., Cruz & Thornton, 2009a; Dunne & Martell, 2013; Misco & Castañeda, 2009; Puccio, 2012) suggesting how social studies teachers may effectively teach
ELLs. The empirical research on the teaching and learning of social studies among ELLs, however, has lagged behind (Amaral & Garrison, 2007; Colombo & Fontaine, 2009; Janzen, 2008; O'Brien, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2009).

Social studies educators serve a critical role in preparing students for participation in society (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). Given the responsibilities teachers have to help linguistically and culturally diverse ELLs succeed in the classroom and beyond, the field must prepare teachers to meet their unique needs. As Joy Janzen (2008) argues, the first step is to build the empirical knowledge base on instruction for ELLs in the social studies classroom. With this goal in mind, this paper seeks to address the following research question: What insights and questions emerge from the recent qualitative research on instruction for ELLs in the social studies classroom?

Method

In their review of the qualitative research on effective teaching practices for ELLs, Kip Téllez and Hersh Waxman (2006) report that recent research investigating instruction provided for ELLs has seen an increase in qualitative designs. Given this growth and the prevalence of “naturalistic” and “quasi-naturalistic” approaches in the social studies literature (Levstik & Tyson, 2008, p.6), we chose to focus our analysis on such qualitative studies in the form of a meta-synthesis. A meta-synthesis follows the same processes as meta-analyses and other research synthesis processes, including organized searching, coding, and analysis of qualitative empirical literature (Cooper & Hedges, 2009), in order to “draw overall conclusions from many separate investigations” (Cooper, 2010, p. 4). By drawing on qualitative studies, our meta-synthesis seeks to provide descriptive, context-specific analysis that can inform our development of theory and can be discussed by teachers and researchers alike (Finfgeld, 2003; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). As below discussed in more detail, only one study (Vaughn et al., 2009) was excluded from our meta-synthesis due to quantitative methods. The following section describes the steps we took in conducting our meta-synthesis.

Our process began with searches in the educational databases hosted by EBSCO (including Education Full Text, Education research Complete, ERIC, and Academic Search Complete), PsycINFO, and the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. We systematically searched using the term social studies or a related content term (e.g., history teaching, history education, history instruction, civics, government, geography, economics) in combination with one of the terms Téllez and Waxman (2006) used (e.g., English language learners, ELLs, ESL, second language) or a related signifier (e.g., language minority, English as a second language, English learners, newcomer, immigrant). While a variety of terms are used to describe “non-native English-speaking students who intend to reside permanently in North America” (Hirvela, 2010, p. 110), we chose the term ELLs for this review given its wide acceptance in the literature (see, for example, Jimenez-Silva et al., 2013; Kibler, Valdés, & Walqui, 2014) and to reflect the emphasis primarily monolingual schools place on learning English (García, 2009).

We developed two sets of criteria for evaluating studies. The first criteria served as topical parameters. To be included, each study needed to: (a) report on classroom-based instruction, (b) document qualitative research with ELLs, and (c) focus on the teaching and learning of social studies content. The second set of criteria articulated the requirements for methodological rigor in qualitative research, and paralleled the inclusion criteria Téllez and Waxman (2006) and Lawrence Locke and colleagues (2010) outline for quality in qualitative research. These quality indicators stipulated that each study include detailed accounts of the
following: (a) the selection of participants and setting; (b) the data collection process, including qualitative research designs (e.g., observation, interview); (c) the data analysis and interpretation processes; and (d) the comprehensive analysis of the data. These markers provided guidance on the validity and value of potential studies.

The search process yielded 35 articles, which we winnowed to 15 studies for inclusion in the final corpus. The majority of the articles eliminated during this phase were either pedagogical essays written for teachers (e.g., de Oliveira, 2012; Herczog, 2012; Russell, 2007), policy or demographic reports (e.g., O’Conner, Abedi, & Tung, 2012; Stepanek, Raphael, Autio, Deussen, & Thompson, 2010), studies about ELLs that did not include classroom instruction (e.g., Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteiza, 2007; Choi, Lim, & An, 2011; Colombo & Fontaine, 2009), or articles that reported on research without articulating data collection or analysis procedures (e.g., Gilder, 2009; Salinas, Franquiz, & Guberman, 2006; Salinas, Franquiz, & Reidel, 2008). Two additional reports were eliminated because one did not have a qualitative design (Vaughn et al., 2009) and the other duplicated a study already included in the corpus (Franquiz & Salinas, 2011a).

![Diagram](image-url)


**Coding Procedures**

The first step in the coding process focused on the bibliographic data for each study, including author name(s), date of publication, and type of publication. For participant demographics, categorical codes denoted the content area of the observed class(es) and student
grade level(s). We used a binary dummy variable to indicate whether students were grouped homogenously or heterogeneously according to ability or language proficiency. We also used binary codes to denote whether the majority of the ELLs were native speakers of Spanish, as well as whether students’ language proficiency and the dominant language used in the household were reported. These measures were included as a way of assessing if the research recognized diversity among ELLs, given their varied educational experiences (Aud et al., 2012). We then coded for methodological practices, including total hours in the field, and the presence or lack of qualitative field notes, interviews, transcriptions of recordings, and document analysis.

During this initial coding stage, we encountered the Language-Content-Task (LCT) Framework in one of the corpus articles (see Figure 1). Heeding Harris Cooper and Larry Hedges’ (2009) call for the integration of a theoretical framework in the review of qualitative research, we chose to use the “three areas of academic literacy” (Short, 2002, p. 18) the LCT Framework presents as a guide in the coding of the instructional practices described in each article. The choice to utilize the LCT Framework, which separates content and language, is not meant to indicate that we understand content knowledge to be void of linguistic characteristics, but rather that instructional practices often foreground either content or language. The Venn diagram in Figure 1 demonstrates how the LCT Framework provides a format for capturing this distinction while recognizing the significant overlap in the two.

We then recoded the corpus studies based on the three components of the LCT Framework. In order to unpack “language practices” or “a combination of communicative acts (e.g., saying, writing, doing, and being) used in the transmission of ideas, concepts, and information in a socially mediated context” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012, p. 2), we coded for student language performance as a function of the teacher’s instruction in the following language modalities: (1) speaking, (2) writing, (3) reading, (4) listening, or (5) multiple modalities. We then coded for the disciplinary practices in each study through identifying whether students accessed content information through (1) primary sources, (2) comparison between sources, (3) primarily textbooks or (4) multiple approaches. Finally, we coded for the task or instructional format teachers used according to the following values: (1) group work, (2) oral presentations, (3) class discussion, or (4) a combination of these. For each of these categories a value of (9) denoted an unknown value with only one study (Myers & Zaman, 2009) failing to provide data for any of these areas of analysis. We now turn to the findings, first describing their bibliographic characteristics before analyzing them according to the LCT Framework.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Focal Students</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Discussion &amp; Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amato</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Four ELLs from varied backgrounds</td>
<td>High school U.S. History class</td>
<td>Teachers incorporate knowledge of students to add multiple cultural perspectives to instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunch</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>“Transitional” LEP (p. 287) with fluent peers</td>
<td>7th grade history class</td>
<td>Students used both “conversational” and “academic” (p. 298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Activities/Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bunch</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>“Transitional LEP” (p.84) students in mainstream classes</td>
<td>7th grade social studies class</td>
<td>Students planned and presented in groups, which necessitated language production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciechanowski</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mixed ability Latino students</td>
<td>3rd grade bilingual social studies class with “side-by-side translation”</td>
<td>Teacher identified importance of “thinking in social studies mode” (p. 314) and students identified misconceptions through comparing textbook and Disney’s <em>Pocahontas</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deltrac</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>ELLs in classes across four counties</td>
<td>High school sheltered instruction/social studies classes</td>
<td>Teachers provide civic education in culturally responsive ways through various instructional techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franquiz &amp; Salinas</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Late-arrival ELLs</td>
<td>High school sheltered instruction social studies class</td>
<td>Teachers encouraged first language (L1) use and explicitly added Latinas/os into the curriculum to support historical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fritzen</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>ELLs in classes at three schools</td>
<td>3 high school Sheltered Instruction history classes</td>
<td>Teachers provided varied levels of rigor based on simplification of concepts versus language supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klingner, Vaughn, &amp; Schumm</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Heterogeneous mix (about half ESL) receiving reading strategy</td>
<td>Five 4th grade social studies classes</td>
<td>In quasi-experimental design of reading strategies, high achieving students in both control and intervention scored best on content measure, yet all abilities were able to participate in cooperative learning groups with text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myers &amp; Zaman</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Immigrant and dominant-culture students</td>
<td>Five-week international studies summer program for high school students</td>
<td>Civic education needs to be broadened to include more voices and civic affiliations; a theme-base approach is suggested.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Findings

Many of the corpus studies report cases of exemplar students and teachers or document the instruction of researcher educators. Of the 15 studies, 10 were published since Janzen’s review of the literature in 2008. Four studies were classified as either a doctoral dissertation (Amato, 2012; Deltac, 2012; Taylor, 2013) or a Master’s thesis (Nazare, 2009) while the remaining studies were published in research journals. The content area of the instruction investigated in each study yielded greater variety. One study took place in a civics setting (Myers & Zaman, 2009) and one study reported on multiple classrooms of different disciplines (Deltac, 2012). Six others took place in history classes, and the broader label of *social studies* was used for the seven remaining studies. Two studies were conducted with students in grades three to five (Ciechanowski, 2012; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998), six of the studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Group Description</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nazare et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>ELLs of Asian decent</td>
<td>Transitional high school U.S. History class</td>
<td>Role play contributed to language production and activation of content knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schleppegrell, Achugar, &amp; Oteiza</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>ELLs in mainstream class</td>
<td>8th grade history class</td>
<td>Analysis of students using the textbook highlighted the importance of scaffolding as simplifying the text removes meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short et al.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Mostly ELLs who had been in U.S. for 3 years or less</td>
<td>Four middle school sheltered social studies classrooms</td>
<td>Teachers dominated discourse too frequently with suggestions for increasing student language production and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor et al.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Latino/a newcomer students</td>
<td>Four high school history classes in NYC newcomer schools</td>
<td>Teachers made citizenship education meaningful through pedagogies of community, success, cross-cultural connections, language, and participatory citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twyman, Ketterlin-Geller, McCoy, &amp; Tindal</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Single ELL as exemplar</td>
<td>7th grade social studies</td>
<td>The exemplar student scored higher on an essay after instruction including graphic organizers and categorized cloze activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoder et al.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>ELLs in sheltered instruction class</td>
<td>7th grade U.S. History</td>
<td>Scaffolding language production supports both written and oral use of academic language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
occurred in middle schools, and seven studied high school students. See Table 1 for a basic description of each corpus study.

In a majority of the studies (n = 10) researchers used the term Latinos to identify the majority of their participant ELLs, whereas three studies indicated Latinos made up less than half of the participant ELLs (Amato, 2012; Myers & Zaman, 2011; Nazare, 2009) and two did not report students’ ethnic backgrounds (Fritzen, 2011; Twyman, Ketterlin-Geller, McCoy, & Tindal, 2003). Eleven studies included the home language of the participant students, with the level of specificity ranging from Kathryn Ciechanowski’s (2012) breakdown based on individual students in an appendix to George Bunch’s (2009) note that 95% of the students in the study spoke Spanish. A majority of the studies (n = 9) also reported the language proficiency of the ELL participants, with categories ranging from standardized test scores to informal descriptors. Examples include: Paul Yoder’s (2013) listing of individual students’ WIDA ACCESS scores and Saundra Deltac’s (2012) conclusion that the English proficiency of the ELLs in her study “must be limited” (p. 26) based on their placement in a sheltered instruction class. Finally, in the last of the participant demographic markers, eight of the studies reported on classrooms in which students were heterogeneously grouped according to language proficiency or academic ability, whereas students were grouped homogenously according to language proficiency (e.g., sheltered instruction classes) or reading ability in the other seven studies.

The research methods of the 15 studies represent the range of qualitative design. Ten of the studies employed field notes based on observations. Nine utilized interviews with teachers, students, or both. Eleven studies recorded and transcribed data from observations or interviews. Ten described document analysis, usually focusing on lesson plans, student work, or primary sources. Only three studies reported data collection using all four methods. Two of the studies (Myers & Zaman, 2011; Nazare, 2009) explicitly used a mixed methods design, with others using quantifiable student assessment data. These studies were included in the corpus because their designs included qualitative methods. In total, the 15 studies account for over 487 hours of data collection, which does not include unreported data for five studies (Bunch, 2009; Franquiz & Salinas, 2011b; Schleppegrell et al., 2004; Twyman et al., 2003; Yoder, 2013). In the following sections, we present the findings according to our coding and the LCT Framework.

**LCT Framework**

We adopted the three components of Short’s (2002) LCT Framework (see Figure 1) to code and organize the instructional practices found in each study. The language component in the LCT Framework highlights the role of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the learning process. The content component refers to “the concepts and topics of the course that teachers present to students” (Short, 2002, p. 19). The task component denotes the activities and strategies teachers use to facilitate student learning. We present our analysis of the corpus studies based on these three components in the following sections.

**Language**

Our analysis of instructional practices reported in each study began with the component of language (Short, 2002). Fourteen of the studies report on student performance in multiple language modalities. In one particular study, John Myers and Husam Zaman (2011) noted that the diverse group of high school students in the summer program they studied engaged in research and writing, which culminated in a “discussion and debate on immigration and citizenship during one class” (p. 2600). In an example from a fourth grade social studies class, Janette Klingner and colleagues (1998) described how students took turns in a read-aloud
activity that activated multiple modalities. In the other study in an elementary setting, Ciechanowski (2012) reported on students drawing a mural of Powhatan in response to a reading, with the pictures serving as catalysts for further language production. In a middle school example, Bunch (2009) described student presentations in a seventh-grade social studies class for which students prepared oral remarks and a visual representation of the content.

One study did not expressly include multiple language modalities but focused on the features of history textbooks in a mainstream eighth-grade history classroom (Schleppegrell et al., 2004). This focus on text corresponded to a language practices code for the single modality of reading. There were additional examples of language taking a primary role in a few of the corpus studies. In examining students’ written texts, Wendy Amato (2012) and Yoder (2013) provided analysis of student work based on linguistic features, such as grammar and syntax. Based on student growth through scaffolded instruction, they concluded targeted instruction based on knowledge of student language proficiency led to student production of academic language, including increased complex sentence structure and content-specific vocabulary. In a separate account, Deltac (2012) found high school social studies teachers in her study focused on reading when addressing language skills, concluding that “a good number of the teachers taught how to read text, decode, make sense of boldface text, utilize the glossary, etc.” (p. 63). In their study of late-arrival immigrant Latinas/os, Maria Franquiz and Cinthia Salinas (2011) highlighted the role of bilingual written language production as a means of developing “historical thinking” skills. They concluded that when students were supported in writing in both English and Spanish, their content learning increased. Building on this content focus, we turn now from our focus on language to findings based on the content in the corpus studies.

Content

In the following section we present the findings on the LCT Framework component of content based on the sources of content knowledge utilized during instruction in each of the corpus studies. The two Bunch (2006, 2009) studies among seventh-grade students report on the use of primary sources, as do Anny Fritzen (2011) and Franquiz and Salinas (2011b) in their studies involving ELLs in high school. These four studies demonstrate a variety of pedagogical approaches to using primary sources, including through bilingual writing assignments (Franquiz & Salinas, 2011b), oral presentations (Bunch, 2006, 2009), or scaffolding with graphic organizers (Fritzen, 2011).

Only Ciechanowski (2012) explicitly identifies the comparing of sources for historical accuracy as students in a third grade class studied Pocahontas via textbook and teacher-led discussion before watching Disney’s Pocahontas (Pentecost, Gabriel, & Goldberg, 1995). In this example, however, Ciechanowski concluded that the teacher could have facilitated the comparison process more rigorously, describing the viewing of the movie as a less than academic setting and more of a reward. Four of the studies (Klingner et al., 1998; Nazare, 2009; Schleppegrell et al., 2004; Twyman et al., 2003) reported primarily textbook-based instruction, which both maps onto the traditional patterns of social studies instruction (Grant, 2003; Levstik, 2008), and raises concerns about the accessibility of instruction to ELLs (Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Schleppegrell et al., 2008; Short, 2002). In Myers and Zaman’s (2009) and Yoder’s (2013) studies, the content sources were not clear. Finally, Deborah Short (2002) and the dissertations (Amato, 2012; Deltac, 2012; Taylor, 2013) reported a variety of practices including analysis of primary sources, use of the textbook, and comparing multiple texts. In total, the social studies disciplinary practices reported in the corpus studies run the gamut.
Further examination of the content areas provided an additional insight into the context of the studies. Investigations of social studies constituted the single largest block of studies with seven. However, this term often served as an umbrella label researchers used even when classes were specific to a particular discipline (e.g., Taylor, 2013). The most often cited of the disciplines was history, with six studies being located within history classrooms. Again, this can be deceptive, as Deltac (2012) and others recruited participants from history classrooms in order to study citizenship and other broader concepts. We shift our attention now to the tasks documented in each study.

**Task**

Diversity was a commonality among the primary instructional formats reported in the corpus studies. These practices most closely map onto the task component of the LCT Framework (Short, 2002). The majority of the studies (n = 9) were coded as using multiple instructional formats. Among those reporting a singular approach, Bunch (2009) describes the use of group work in preparation for student oral presentations as the driving force in the classroom during the study. Ciechanowski’s (2012) participants used primarily class discussion, while those in Klingner and colleagues’ (1998) study built instruction around group work. Three of the articles did not state this data directly (Myers & Zaman, 2009; Schleppegrell et al., 2004; Yoder, 2013).

Individual studies provide examples of a variety of tasks being used in social studies classrooms with ELLs. In research among seventh grade students, Bunch (2006, 2009) reported that working in groups and preparing formal presentations provided students with opportunities to practice both social and content-based language. Similarly, Yoder (2013) concluded that providing structure for language production, including sentence frames and accountability for listening to peers, led to both increased oral and written language production among ELLs in a middle school U.S. history classroom. The importance of supporting language production, was noted by Todd Twyman and colleagues (2003) concluding that graphic organizers and cloze writing activities successfully scaffolded the essay writing of the exemplar ELL in their study.

Comparisons across the corpus studies identify the difficult decisions teachers must make when teaching ELLs. In a study of four middle school sheltered instruction social studies classrooms, Short (2002) concluded teachers interjected during class discussions so often that they disrupted student language production. By contrast, Nicole Nazare’s (2009) study among high school ELLs of mostly Asian descent offers role-play as a possible instructional strategy that could provide clearly defined roles and potentially discourage teachers from dominating the discourse. The studies, however, highlight the features of language (e.g., register, vocabulary) students may produce during a role-play would vary from more formal settings (e.g., presentations; Bunch, 2009; Yoder, 2013). Similarly, Ciechanowski (2012) and Mary Schleppegrell and colleagues (2004) expressed concern with teachers modifying instruction in ways that removed content meaning. In the case of showing Disney’s *Pocahontas* (Pentecost, Gabriel, & Goldberg, 1995) in a third-grade bilingual social studies class, Ciechanowski suggested that the goal of providing accessible language through the film is laudable, but states that the environment detracted from the secondary objective of identifying misconceptions in the film’s historical narrative (see also Carnes, 1996; Toplin, 2010). Schleppegrell and colleagues (2004) focused on the teacher’s adaptation of an eighth grade history textbook in their study, cautioning against changing the task of reading in the textbook. This was based on an understanding that if textbooks are “translated into more concrete language to make them easier,
they can become reduced to insignificant facts or content that does not encompass the complexity of grade-level subject matter” (p. 89). Together, these findings provide a number of implications for the teaching of ELLs in the social studies classroom. In the following section we discuss these implications.

**Implications**

This meta-synthesis reviews the extant literature on ELLs in the social studies classroom, yielding three key implications for the field. First, teachers need to provide linguistically and culturally responsive instruction for ELLs in social studies classes. Second, social studies teachers need additional training in order to reach this goal. Third, social studies researchers need to conduct future research based on questions that arise from the corpus studies. Finally, the limitations of the paper are addressed.

**Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Instruction**

In order to capitalize on the context-specific nature of the qualitative studies constituting our corpus, we first present two implications specific to the classroom. Building on Stephen Thornton’s (1991) concept of the social studies teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper, we suggest each educator has the ability and duty to meet the needs of the ELLs in their classroom. Specifically, we identify the twin goals of linguistically and culturally responsive instruction.

**Linguistically responsive instruction.** In order to identify implications based on the LCT Framework and the findings reported above, we draw on the concept of instruction that is “linguistically responsive” (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 311). Whether through the writing of separate language objectives (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Short, Vogt, & Echevarría, 2011) or through providing support for “protracted language events” (Téllez & Waxman, 2006, p. 245), multiple corpus studies document ways in which social studies teachers can provide linguistically responsive instruction through accounting for the linguistic needs of ELLs (e.g., Short, 2002; Taylor, 2013; Yoder, 2013). As a whole, the corpus studies report on students engaging in a variety of language practices across a range of social studies classrooms.

Tamara Lucas and colleagues identify a series of steps teachers should take in meeting the needs of ELLs, including learning about ELLs, articulating the (otherwise implicit) steps needed to carry out classroom tasks, and scaffolding instruction for ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2010; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Elaborating on these notions of linguistically responsive instruction, we identify three primary ways in which the corpus studies demonstrate the potential for increased student learning when teachers identify goals for and support language learning with ELLs in the midst of social studies instruction. These three components are each discussed in turn below: (1) learning and applying concepts from second language acquisition (SLA) and functional linguistics literature, (2) building on the backgrounds and proficiencies of ELLs, and (3) scaffolding instruction to foster student learning.

Individual corpus studies provide limited evidence of teachers and researchers operationalizing concepts that align with Lucas and colleagues’ (2008) “essential understandings of second language learning” (p. 363). Two researchers did cite James Cummins (1999) notions of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). In one example, Amato (2012) references Cummins’ framework in discussing the “cognitive academic language” (p. 53) students use. By contrast, Bunch (2006) problematizes Cummins’ dichotomy of BICS and CALP (see also Aukerman, 2007) in highlighting the role social interaction played as seventh grade ELLs demonstrated a combination of language registers in the process of preparing for a class presentation. Among
the teachers in the corpus studies, attention to the literacy needs of ELLs was a common theme (e.g., Taylor, 2013; Twyman et al., 2003), while the unique linguistic attributes of social studies content was an area in need of further analysis. Implementation of routine, as documented by Sharon Vaughn and colleagues. (2009) and Yoder (2013), was another key in supporting student learning through providing predictable and reliable patterns of instruction. ELLs particularly benefit from such clear directions (Cruz & Thornton, 2009b). Future research could investigate other factors that contribute to “safe, welcoming” classroom environments that limit student anxiety (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 363), particularly given the content presented in social studies classrooms.

The second element of linguistically responsive instruction—learning about students’ prior knowledge and strengths—took a variety of forms in the corpus studies. Bilingual instruction was identified as a particularly powerful approach (Franquiz & Salinas, 2011b; Taylor, 2013). In Taylor’s dissertation study, two teachers regularly switched between English and Spanish during oral presentation, while Franquiz and Salinas (2011b) identified the inclusion of Spanish-language sources and support of student writing in English and Spanish as particularly powerful. In their study, Franquiz and Salinas (2011b) also highlighted the inclusion of historical inquiry, which the C3 Framework (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) emphasizes in describing social studies instruction. Multiple corpus studies documented the use of inquiry-based instruction with ELLs based on primary source analysis. Students engaged with these resources in various ways, including in planning oral presentations (Bunch, 2006, 2009), through written analysis (Franquiz & Salinas, 2011b), or describing the sources on graphic organizers (Fritzen, 2011; Yoder, 2013). Such approaches provide an alternative to the traditional dominance of lecture and the textbook in social studies classrooms (Grant, 2003; Levstik, 2008; Thieman, O’Brien, Preston-Grimes, Broome, & Barker, 2013) in order to address concerns of accessibility of instruction for ELLs (Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Schleppegrell et al., 2008; Short, 2002). The incorporation of primary sources also places the content at the forefront in ways that invite learners to examine the authentic language through which it is presented.

The many approaches noted above lead into the third component of linguistically responsive instruction. This is particularly critical as many of the corpus researchers stressed the need for scaffolding rather than simplifying content for ELLs (e.g., Fritzen, 2011; Schleppegrell et al., 2004; Short, 2002; Twyman et al., 2003; Yoder, 2013). For example, Deltac (2012) recounted how teachers taught ELLs how to “read text, decode, make sense of boldface text, utilize the glossary, etc.” (p. 63). Highlighting the task component in the LCT Framework, Short (2002) described the role teachers play in clearly articulating and defining expectations for language-rich tasks as a form of scaffolding student participation; the teacher’s creation and dissemination of a rubric for student presentations is one such example (Bunch, 2009). Across the board, the corpus studies demonstrate the potential of employing a variety of instruction approaches in order to meet the needs of ELLs (Deltac, 2012; Fritzen, 2011; Taylor, 2013). Research suggests engaging students in instructional activities that allow ELLs to actively access and use content knowledge (e.g., Colombo & Fontaine, 2009; DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2009). In the corpus studies these principles were exemplified in such collaborative classroom practices as guided reading in cooperative learning groups and preparing group presentations (e.g., Bunch, 2006, 2009; Klingner et al., 1998; Nazare, 2009). The following section builds further on the unique cultural perspectives of ELLs.
Culturally responsive instruction. In their meta-synthesis of effective teaching practices for ELLs, Téllez and Waxman (2006) identify “building on prior knowledge” whereby “teachers work to connect students’ lives to school themes” as an effective “instructional orientation” (p. 245). Likewise, Janzen (2008) concludes her review of the literature on teaching ELLs by stating: “there is a consensus that who students are must be acknowledged and valued in effective teaching practice” (pp. 1030-1031). Such understandings map onto S. G. Grant’s (2003) notions of ambitious teaching and learning in social studies classrooms, as well as literature from the field of multicultural education (e.g., Banks & Nguyen, 2008; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2013). In sum, culturally responsive instruction provides an important approach through which to make connections for ELLs given the “differences in students’ linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds” (Lee, 2010, p. 453).

Many of the corpus studies indicate that within the social studies context, connecting content to students’ lives means incorporating aspects of cultural responsiveness into instruction (Amato, 2012; Deltac, 2012; Franquiz & Salinas, 2011b; Myers & Zaman, 2009; Taylor, 2013). This inclusion of multiple Latinas/os within the history curriculum to reflect the backgrounds of the students in the classroom, is discussed by Franquiz and Salinas (2011b) as they detail the inclusion of finding that such an approach helped students “learn about pluralism within and not just between groups” (p. 72). Others (e.g., Deltac, 2012; Myers & Zaman, 2009) also argued for the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the social studies classroom, concluding that the definitions of citizenship communicated by immigrant students in their respective studies broadened and deepened the class discussion. These examples map onto the goals of developing a culturally relevant curriculum and culturally diverse knowledge base that Paul Fitchett and Tina Heafner (2012) identify in their review of culturally responsive social studies teaching.

In their review of the literature on teaching academic language to ELLs, Patricia DiCerbo and colleagues (2014) recommend teachers identify the knowledge and skills students need, such as the “language to analyze events and make arguments in social studies” (p. 28), and then bridge the gap from students’ prior knowledge to the desired outcome. The teachers in Amato’s (2012) study provided an example of how to identify the culture-specific prior knowledge of ELLs. While discussing a political cartoon, Ms. West, for example, asked her students foundational questions, such as who lives in the White House, in order to determine what background knowledge students had and then subsequently to provide the context needed to understand the cartoon. Across the literature and corpus studies, the overall implication is that the presence of ELLs in the social studies classroom should impact what is being taught, in addition to how it is being taught.

Teacher Training

Few of the corpus studies directly address the need to train social studies teachers on the needs of ELLs. The implications outlined above would certainly require additional preparation among preservice and inservice social studies teachers, given that most social studies teachers receive little training on teaching ELLs and consequently report feeling unprepared (Cho & Reich, 2008; Jimenez-Silva et al., 2013; O’Brien, 2009, 2011). DiCerbo and colleagues (2014) identified the first step as an attitudinal one, stressing that “language development is a responsibility not only of ELL teachers but of general education teachers as well” (p. 29; see also Lucas & Villegas, 2010). In his discussion of how to prepare content teachers to work with ELLs, Bunch (2013) focused on the concept of “pedagogical language knowledge” as a means of helping content teachers “purposefully enact opportunities for the development of language and
Literacy in and through teaching the core curricular content, understandings, and activities that teachers are responsible for...teaching in the first place” (p. 298). Bunch (2010, 2013) concluded there is limited research on how best to train teachers. As such, the scope of our present paper allows simply for the identification of a need for more training among both inservice and preservice social studies as they prepare to meet the needs of ELLs.

**Future Research**

The results of this meta-synthesis highlight the need for additional empirical and theoretical scholarship bridging the gap between the fields of social studies and second language acquisition. In many ways, the most prescient finding of this meta-synthesis is that instruction for ELLs in the social studies is only beginning to be empirically studied. In this regard, a takeaway may be the presence of recent research as the majority of the meta-synthesis corpus has been published since Janzen (2008) published her review. The emergence of only 15 studies, however, seems to confirm the call of many scholars for more empirical analysis on diverse groups of ELLs within social studies and the content areas more broadly (e.g., Amaral & Garrison, 2007; Barton & Avery, in press; Graham & Perin, 2007; Janzen, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2009). The limited scope of these studies must also be acknowledged. In particular, many of the corpus studies do not directly address the disciplinary nature of social studies (e.g., National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). As such, future research should include a variety of empirical methodologies, social studies content areas, and diverse ELL populations.

In short, additional empirical research is clearly needed on the teaching and learning of social studies for ELLs. Investigation into the three components of the LCT Framework (Short, 2002) provides one path forward, though we suggest that given the sociocultural nature of the social studies (Levstik & Tyson, 2008; Nieto, 2013), the cultural perspectives of ELLs must also be considered (Cook-Sather, 2002; Yoder, Kibler, & van Hover, 2014). Analysis on the role of language is often underdeveloped in many studies. A functional linguistics perspective provides one possible lens for further analysis in this area (see de Oliveira, 2011; Schleppegrell, 2004). The descriptive approaches common in qualitative research would be beneficial in considering how vocabulary interventions, such as the ones Vaughn and colleagues studied in seventh grade history classes, “provide a context for promoting students’ using language and understanding the content” (p. 316). Research into effective training practices for preservice social studies teachers vis-à-vis working with diverse student populations and meeting the language acquisition needs of ELLs is also warranted.

**Limitations**

The present meta-synthesis shares the same challenges of maintaining replicable, criterion-based procedures as other research syntheses (Cooper & Hedges, 2009), while mining the literature of the qualitative-rich fields of social studies and second language acquisition (Levstik & Tyson, 2008; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). While our review of the literature is bolstered by the quality indicators we applied to each of the corpus studies (journal articles, dissertations, and Master’s theses alike), our findings are limited by the small number of studies that met our inclusion criteria. Specific shortcomings of the corpus studies include imprecise definitions for which students should be identified as ELLs (e.g., Deltac, 2012), few hours spent in classrooms conducting fieldwork (e.g., Fritzen, 2011; Klingner et al., 1998), and limited description of instructional practices as defined by the LCT Framework (e.g., Myers & Zaman, 2009; Yoder, 2013). The primary limitation of the excluded studies is the focus on theoretical rather than empirical literature.
As Téllez and Waxman (2006) suggested, we employed a theoretical framework in the reporting and analysis of the results, but also came to share their conclusion that such an approach presents challenges when attempting to introduce new understandings. While Short’s (2002) LCT Framework provides a coherent heuristic through which to describe the convergence of the social studies and language acquisition fields, our study provided only limited analysis based on the three major tenets of language, content and task. A particular limitation is found in the dichotomous coding of these components during this meta-synthesis, because such separation depicts the language needs of ELLs as separate from the instructional practices of social studies teachers. As Short (2002) and others have concluded, this is a common limitation of the existing literature, and the coding technique we used might have exacerbated this problem. Further inquiry into the intersections of these components is needed, both in the studies incorporated in this review and in future research. These intersections represent what is perhaps the most useful way to conceptualize effective content instruction for ELLs, recognizing the inextricability of content-area practices and the language through which they are taught (van Lier & Walqui, 2012) as well as the synergy that comes from integrating language and social studies practices in classroom instruction.

**Conclusion**

This meta-synthesis reveals that a small corpus of recent studies has emerged at the intersection between the fields of social studies instruction and second language acquisition. The 15 studies constituting our corpus provide examples of linguistically and culturally responsive instruction for ELLs in social studies classes. While these findings add to the extant literature, many new questions arise, including how to best prepare social studies teachers to meet the needs of ELLs. For this reason, we argue additional inquiry and synthesis is needed in order to build and disseminate the empirical knowledge on teaching social studies to ELLs. This work will only grow in importance as the increasing number of ELLs (Center for Public Education, 2012; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011) leads to a diverse “new mainstream” (Enright, 2011, p. 804) for which growing numbers of social studies teachers must be prepared (Jimenez-Silva et al., 2013). If we are to fulfill our stated goal of preparing all students for “college, career, and civic life” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 6), the social studies field must adopt instructional approaches that are linguistically and culturally responsive. This process will require training teachers with the skills to meet the needs of ELLs and conducting further research into the teaching and learning of social studies among ELLs.
Studies included in the meta-synthesis corpus are marked with an asterisk (*).

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