I.	Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe what is occurring in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the context of middle schools that have been distinguished as successful middle school campuses by the Texas Middle School Association. According to the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (2010), "the middle grades are a pivotal point in students' lives," (p. 4) and it is necessary that the appropriate resources and supports be provided to help close the achievement gap and to promote social equity in middle grades education. This study sought to answer the following question:

	1.)	What approaches are *Texas Schools to Watch* middle schools using to meet the needs of their specific English Learner (EL) populations?

II.	Significance of the Study to the Field of Middle Level Education

The *Texas STW* (2011) framework is composed of four criteria, including academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational support and processes. These four criteria were identified as being essential aspects of successful middle school education. While these four criteria do no specifically address literacy or language learning, both of these issues are embedded among the themes. Adolescent literacy is embedded in academic excellence, second language acquisition is embedded in social equity, and middle-level education encompasses developmental responsiveness and organizational support and processes. While these criteria are valuable for all adolescent learners, they are especially meaningful in the context of educating adolescent ELs. Haneda (2008) referred to the different dimensions of instruction for middle-level ELs as planes of instruction, illuminating the complex, multidimensional, and interwoven nature of instruction similar to that put forth in the STW Framework.

According to Peercy (2011), successful ESL educators hold a holistic view of the students and instruction. The first step toward this vision includes a focus on academic excellence, in which all students are prepared using grade-appropriate, cognitively demanding resources (Cummins, 1981; Haneda, 2008; Peercy, 2011). The Association for Middle Level Education - AMLE (2010) went on to say that, appropriate middle-level curriculum is not only challenging, but also exploratory, integrative, and relevant to respond to the developmental diversity among adolescents.

Developmental appropriateness is an interesting dimension to consider in relationship to adolescent ELs, because in addition to the physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, and socio-emotional development typical in adolescence, the instructor must consider a sixth dimension of linguistic development (AMLE, 2010; Cummins, 1981; Faltis, & Hudelson, 1994). The learning strategies that are frequently cited as appropriate for the high-quality instruction of adolescents is surprisingly similar to those ESL strategies recommended through approaches such as sheltered instruction (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Friend, Most, & McCrary, 2009; Pascopella, 2008). Again, it becomes difficult to disentangle high-quality instruction for adolescents from high-quality instruction for adolescent ELs (Haneda, 2008; Peercy, 2011).

While many of the instructional strategies may overlap, one item that is frequently cited as of high-importance when serving adolescent ELs is that of culturally responsive environments. The definition of culturally responsive instruction is in frequent flux as educators and researchers

attempt to meet the needs of the groups we are serving. However, for the purpose of this paper, culturally responsive instruction will be defined as socioculturally conscious, affirming, empowering context in which students and teachers are comfortable to construct their own knowledge and stretch beyond the familiar (Au, 1980; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). STW addresses this need through a requirement of social equity in which all marginalized groups are to be engaged in the school through a responsive, welcoming environment (AMLE, 2010; NFAMGR, 2010). The STW framework seeks socially equitable environments through indicators such as all students having access to mainstream curriculum, being well known and engaged in the community, opportunities for on-going cultural learning and appreciation, parental and family involvement, and discipline structures that are socially and culturally conscious.

As a part of creating a culturally responsive environment and curriculum appropriate for adolescent ELs, it is important that strong, focused organizational structures and processes be in place. According to Madhlangobe & Gordon (2012), culturally responsive campus environments are created through socio-constructivist leading and teaching strategies in which relationships are built and fostered among all stakeholders involved in the school. The STW framework indicates a belief that the community, families, students, and school staff hold themselves accountable for student success and work collaboratively to maintain an atmosphere that fosters creative problem solving to meet the needs of students. Indeed, it is critical for the success of ELs that school leaders take an active role in developing and maintaining programs that serve ELs and students of other marginalized groups, including providing the appropriate professional development, resources, and supports for instructors (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

While the framework was originally designed to help schools evaluate the quality of a specific middle school, it also provides a window into what is occurring in a specific educational context. For the purpose of this paper, the holistic approach to high quality education that the STW framework and AMLE (2010) champions is a perfect fit for an approach to middle-level ESL programs that are also viewed as complex, multidimensional, and campus-wide programs (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Haneda, 2008; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Peercy, 2011).

III.   Research Design

This qualitative multiple-case study sought to describe the approaches that high-quality middle schools in Texas are using to meet the unique needs of their specific English Learner (EL) population. The study analyzed the narrative applications of all campuses recognized as *Texas Schools to Watch.* A total of 44 narrative applications were analyzed. Next, 4 campuses were selected for site visits. The participants were selected based on their designation as a Texas STW campus and successful English as a Second Language (ESL) program performance based on state data. The study was conducted over a six month period spanning from September 2016 - February 2017. Each campus was visited once for the total of one instructional school day.

Method	Data Source	Details
Classroom Observations	Site Visits	- Content-area and elective courses were observed for approximately 15 minutes each - Total of approximately
Student Semi-Structured Panel Interviews	Site Visits	- 1-5 students - 15-30 minutes per interview
Campus Leadership Semi-Structured Panel Interviews	Site Visits	- 1-4 campus leaders - 30-45 minutes per interview
Teacher Semi-Structured Panel Interviews	Site Visits	- 1-4 teachers - Approximately 30 minutes per interview
Artifacts	Site Visits; Application Data Set; TAPR Reports	- Publicly displayed instructional tools and student work (word walls, anchor charts, learning targets, etc.) - 44 Texas STW Applications - 4 TAPR Reports

The applications were coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to determine the patterns of practice among high-quality middle schools. The initial coding utilized open coding. These codes were then sorted into the domains of academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, organizational processes and structures, language, and literacy. Within each domain, the open codes were collapsed by looking for patterns of similarity.

The site visit data was analyzed using open coding. Through recursive analysis between the two data sets, I interpreted the themes of the study. Because the data sets were analyzed separately and then cross-analyzed for themes, the findings are presented by discussing the information from the application data set, followed by findings from each case, and concluding with the themes determined across the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

IV.   Findings

Institutional affinity refers to the way in which the campus constructed its identity. For this theme, the campuses who held asset-based perspectives of their EL population had common affinities to these populations. Asset-based perspectives were determined by examining the language the school used around their EL population. Examples of this included valuing out-of-school knowledge, cultures, and languages, as well as the influence of the community on learning outcomes. One of the most striking findings was that the ways in which the schools and the students defined the identities of linguistically diverse students were not aligned. The schools defined the students as English learners (ELs), whereas the students defined themselves as what we would refer in research to as emergent bilinguals (García, 2009).

In the second theme, distributed leadership refers to the way in which campus stakeholders were empowered and positioned as leaders. The campuses who held asset-based perspectives of their EL population made efforts to empower the campus stakeholders and positioned their staff, students, and community members as leaders. Examples of distributed leadership includes

empowering campus stakeholders to make a difference, being transparent and communicative about decision-making, and creating opportunities to utilize students, families, and community members as resources for the school. Distributed leadership was an important finding in the study, because students, teachers, and families felt empowered to make a difference in the school. The relationship where the teacher is the expert did not exist at these schools, rather a true partnership had been built. Schools successfully built these relationships by listening to the needs in the school and creating multiple opportunities for teachers, students, families, and community members to engage in leadership opportunities that allowed their strengths to be valued. Furthermore, the schools that practiced distributed leadership focused on creating a symbiotic relationship with the community. The school did not send a message that they expected the community to do all of the work, nor did they send the message that the school was solely in charge. Rather, the message communicated was that the school and community expected to serve each other in a mutually beneficial manner, starting with developing trusting relationships.

The third theme in the study is responsive instruction, which includes responsivity to academic, social, cultural, linguistic, and emotional needs of students. Responsive instruction includes the instructional strategies that were common among the campuses that demonstrated high-quality instruction for early adolescent ELs. The major components of this theme included a focus on language and literacy development, on-going progress monitoring, and instructional opportunities and programs that were responsive to the needs of students. The schools that utilized responsive instructional techniques were focused on the current needs of their students. They did not practice a one-size-fits-all approach, but allowed students multiple ways in which to engage with the learning. The teachers were flexible in their instruction, tasks, and assessments. This allowed students to ability to work at an appropriate level of challenge, while still mastering the necessary standards and having the opportunity to experience success in the classroom.

It is important to point out that while these recommendations have been separated into three components, they are not intended to suggest that selecting one over the others will lead to campus success. Rather, the recommendations here are interrelated practices that complement one another. The recommendations being made is that schools must take a comprehensive approach to creating atmospheres conducive to the success of early adolescent ELs and that the major components of that approach include addressing campus identity, community engagement, and instructional strategies.

V.   Conclusions

This study has provided compelling evidence that a comprehensive approach to middle-level education, adolescent literacy, and second language acquisition will provide early adolescent ELs with a path to academic success. Due to the findings of this study, I assert that the following components are essential to a comprehensive program for early adolescent ELs: (a) positioning ELs as multilingual, bilingual or emergent bilingual (García, 2009); (b) empowering all students, staff, families, and community members to be engaged instructional leaders; and (c) implementing responsive instructional strategies for individual students based on collaborative on-going progress monitoring.

VI.   References

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