Abstract

This study describes how teachers of two urban suburban schools with large numbers of English language learners (ELLs) used Thinking Maps as a cognitive model resulting in student's improved academic language development. Teachers used Thinking Maps that included a common cognitive language that transcended grade levels and disciplines.

An antecedent condition for these results was school-wide professional development of teachers' expertise using Thinking Maps. Teachers' anecdotal reports and samples of student work gave evidence to this researcher's hypothesis: participating schools that implemented cognitive visual tools improved the academic language development of all their students.

A phenomenological methodology was used to guide a descriptive qualitative study. Interviews and a survey served as the instruments for collecting data to gain insight into the factors that support teachers' capacities to influence ELLs' development of academic language.

Findings of the study revealed a conceptual framework: a *Model for Full Access for High Achievement* in which five essential components describe the successful use of Thinking Map to teach ELLs.

The research provides recommendations for administrators and teachers regarding the application of the *Model for Full Access for High Achievement.* A whole-school approach for teachers utilizing a common, cognitive tool proved significant in supporting

ELLs, one of the most vulnerable sub-groups of students pressured to perform by the challenges of Common Core Standards.

The study concludes that additional research (e.g., longitudinal studies, mixed populations etc.) needs to be conducted on the efficacy of Thinking Maps to improve academic achievement among ELLs, as well as students with special needs and struggling learners.