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A Qualitative Study of English Language Learners in the Portland Public Schools

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**PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MULTILINGUAL & MULTICULTURAL CENTER**

Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to identify the demographic characteristics of English Language Learner (ELL) students who successfully complete secondary education in the Portland Public Schools. The first phase of this project involves identifying ELL educators and staff to participate in interviews about this demographic and the curriculum used. This information is analyzed using Qualitative Data Analysis(QDA) to determine if there are any similar concepts or themes in the information gathered. The school and home environment and prior education experience were examined. Additionally, protective factors in the school or community were explored to see these factors made on the academic success of students. Identifying patterns of success allows us to gain some understanding of how to best accommodate the growing number of ELL students in the community.

Introduction:

The Portland Public Schools have seen a large increase in the number of English Language Learners in the past ten years. A large part of this is due to the designation of Portland as a resettlement city, one of ten in the country. Moreover, in the past two years Portland has become a city for individuals seeking political asylum. The influx of these individuals, have placed enormous challenges on the district as teachers, administrators, social workers and support staff struggle to find the best way to support this demographic of students. Looking forward to post graduation, the academic success of these students after high school has been found to be inconsistent. These students face greater barriers that impact their ability to succeed both inside and outside the classroom, yet have enormous potential and assets that have not been tapped into.

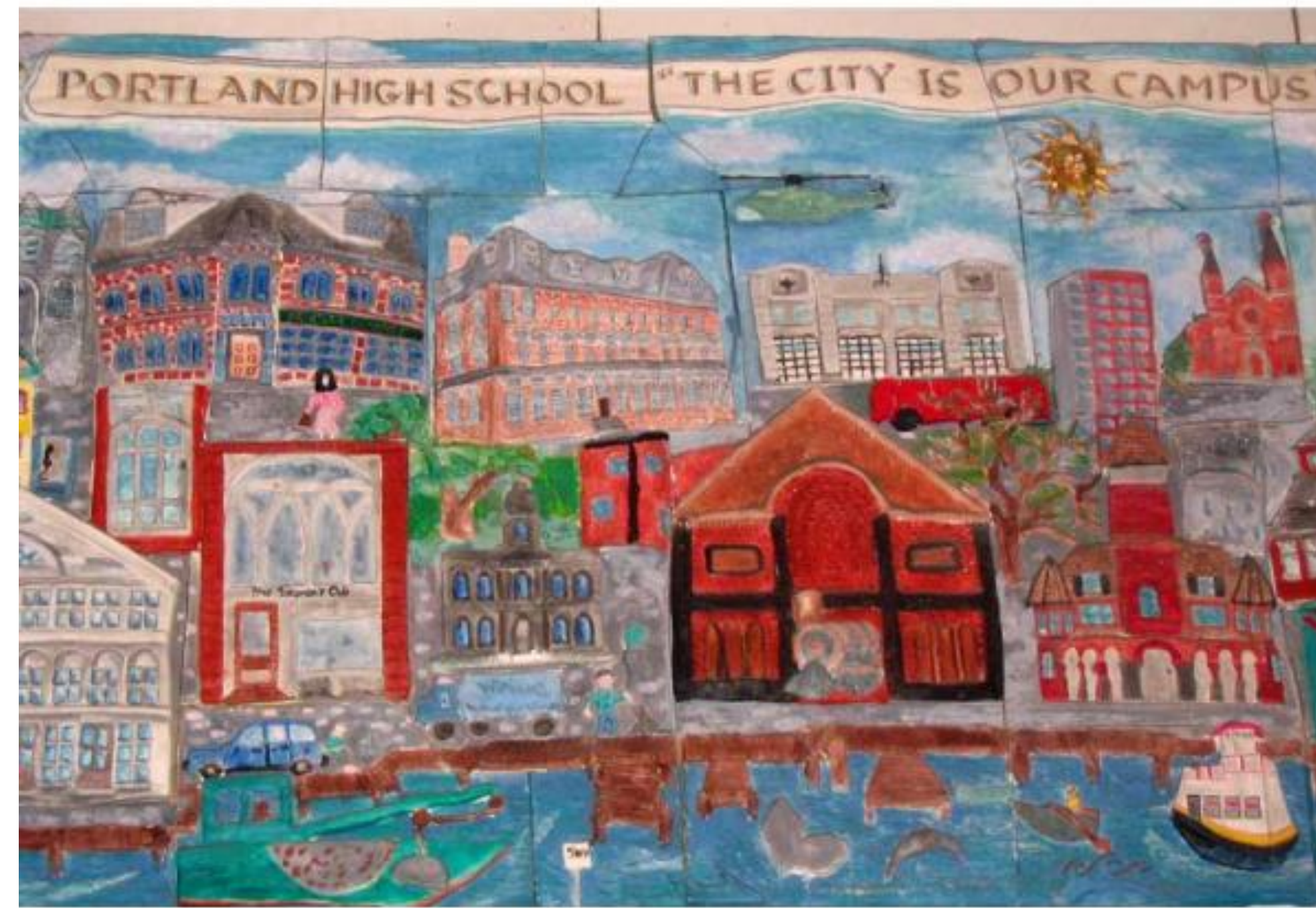
Objective:

The specific goal of this research project is to determine the demographic characteristics of graduated ELL students in the Portland Public Schools.

Methods:

- ◆ Interviews of a small, purposive sample of ELL teachers in the Portland Public Schools was conducted over a period of 16 weeks.
- ◆ Data is audio recorded and transcribed by the interviewer.
- ◆ Data has been analyzed through structured Qualitative Data Analysis(QDA)
- ◆ QDA includes
 - ◆ Coding
 - ◆ Memoing
 - ◆ Concept Mapping
 - ◆ Theme Development

“These students need time. Time to grow. Time to adjust. Time to just be teenagers.”



“Students are not a ‘they.’ They are individuals with their own stories and styles. Everyone deserves to be treated as such...”



“I wish I could take the time to ask each individual student what would help them succeed, and then do my best to meet their needs. Unfortunately, there is just no time.”

Results:

Structured Qualitative Data Analysis found three main themes in the interviews.

Time: The amount of time spend in ELL classrooms has a direct impact on the academic success of the students.

Prior Education: Students who arrive from countries with established, structured education systems are more successful academically than students who have limited content or language acquisition in their home language. Countries with strong education systems Include: Rwanda, Burundi, and Djibouti.

Family Structure: Students who are here with an intact family structure fair much better than students who are seeking asylum, or who arrive alone.

Next Steps:

- ◆ There are many similarities between my work and the published literature on ELL education. These include the amount of time spent in ELL classrooms, and impact of prior education experience.
- ◆ While there is no definitive demographic that succeeds over another, prior language and content acquisition in the students’ home language is the biggest influencer of academic success level.
- ◆ Further studies are needed to determine the improvements that are necessary to ELL education in the Portland Public Schools, as well as nationwide, to increase the academic readiness of ELL students post graduation.

Acknowledgements

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