

(SPECIAL PROJECT COMPONENTS)

Increasing Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners Through the
Use of Their Native Language and Shared Reading

A Special Project

Presented to

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Increasing Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners Through the
Use of Their Native Language and Shared Reading

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

With the new Common Core State Standard movement, “all” students are expected to read and write English with proficiency to prepare for college and/or a career after high school. The challenge many educators face today is that not “all” students are native English speaking, and do not live in primarily English speaking households. The teacher- researcher explored two instructional strategies, native language used in Shared Reading, which could help students “close the gap” between their current level of achievement and where they need to be in order to be successful by the new state standards. English Language Learners who participated increased their achievement scores by 7.2 points, more than double the 2.8 points the non-participants increased.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

Between 1998 and 2011, 72% of eighth grade English Language Learners (ELLs) in the nation scored below basic proficiency in reading, while an average of 24% of non-ELLs fell below basic reading proficiency according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Common Core State Standards (CCSS) aimed to prepare “all students for success in college, career, and life by the time they graduate[d] from high school” which increased pressure to improve students’ reading proficiency (Common Core State Standard Initiative, 2014). Sixty Percent of the eighth grade students enrolled in the teacher-researcher’s junior high school during the 2011-12 school year did not meet grade level standard in reading on their Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Nearly 93% were Hispanic, of which 49% were transitional bilingual students (OSPI Washington State Report Card, 2013). The vast majority of ELLs in the general education classroom were not likely to meet CCSS, let alone exceed, if nothing was done.

Traditionally, what was done for decades for ELLs was referred to as the Immersion Model. In the Immersion Model (IM), the framework for teaching ELLs was the same as for non-ELLs. Educators used English only, with little

regard for ELL students' language needs. Collier and Thomas (2004) defined a case of need for bilingual education; however, the main obstacle in providing bilingual education for ELLs was the lack of bi-literate educators in the United States. A mere 13% of the teachers, four out of 30, employed at the teacher-researcher's school earned the English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement. Meanwhile, 72% of eighth grade ELLs were not achieving the equivalent as their non-ELL peers; these ELLs were expected to learn the same academic content as their peers, while simultaneously acquiring a second language without additional support.

As recently as 2009, educators were expected to use the English-only method of instruction for all students. The Boston School District passed policy in 2002 in which schools were required to "teach [ELLs] all subjects in English" (Vaznis, 2009, p. 3). The hope was to implement "a quicker way to teach students English." However, ELLs did not "gain ground on their English speaking peers." In fact, the most devastating finding was the doubling of the high school dropout rate, from six percent to 12%, for students who were still learning to read and write in English (Vaznis, 2009).

While many students struggled to read and write in English, they struggled more to read and write in their first language. Often times ELLs entered the classroom illiterate in their first language. This fact made transfer from the student's native language (L1) to their second language (L2) nearly non-existent.

Students who lacked literacy in their L1 had a more difficult time learning an L2.

Statement of Problem

English Language Learners were expected to successfully perform at the same level as non-ELLs on state standardized assessments in reading. Likely, many ELLs were not properly provided with adequate, research-based practices required to obtain proficient levels in reading in English, since most educators lacked specialized ELL training. As previously mentioned, 13% of the teachers at the teacher-researchers' school were ELL endorsed (OSPI Washington State Report Card, 2013). School districts around the country may not have had access to the resources required to provide an equitable education for ELLs, including but not limited to: funding, bi-literate or ELL endorsed educators, and political support.

Purpose of the Project

With the implementation of Common Core State Standards, ELLs were expected to meet the same standards as their native English-speaking peers without additional scaffolding. Due to the lack of proficiency in ELL students' L1 and L2 these children entered the public school system ill-equipped to match their peers' standardized test scores through the Immersion Model. The teacher-researcher's goals included delineating best practices that appeared to assist ELL students, specifically in reading comprehension, through utilization of their L1 during Shared Reading (SR) in the general education classroom.

Delimitations

Participants for this action research project were the teacher-researcher's 7th grade Language Arts students for the duration of the 2012 – 2013 school year. Research was conducted in the same general education classroom in which students attended class. The data was collected from May 6th to May 31st, 2013. The reading program utilized throughout the school year, *Inside: language, literacy, and content* by Moore, Short, Tatum and Tinajero (2009), was the same used for this action research project. The teacher-researcher obtained administrative consent to conduct this action research project.

Assumptions

Forty-five students were included in the action research project: 43 Hispanic (Spanish and English speaking) and two Caucasian (English-only speaking). Eighty-five percent of the students learned to speak Spanish first, 2.5% learned to speak English first, and 12.5% learned both languages simultaneously. The students lived a rural, agricultural community with high poverty.

The school itself was comprised of 93% Hispanic, 6% White, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The school also had 93% Free or Reduced-Price meals, a 48% Transitional Bilingual population, and 29% were qualified as Migrant.

The teacher-researcher earned her English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement through university training in 2012. She worked for the school district for two years.

Research Question

Did the English Language Learners who utilized their native language (Spanish) during the cooperative learning strategy, referred to as Shared Reading, earn higher reading comprehension scores than students limited to using only their L2 (English) during Shared Reading?

Significance of the Project

Only 6% of the school's Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were proficient on the 8th grade Measurement of Student Progress (MSP), 17% of the 7th grade, and 31% of the 6th grade in 2012. Since nearly half of the school's population consisted of Transitional Bilingual students, this action research project had a high level of relevance. For the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, the teacher-researcher's school was labeled a Focus school as a result of the high quantity of ELLs enrolled in the school. Students were classified as ELL if they scored a Level 3 or lower on the Washington English Language Proficiency Assessment (WELPA). The WELPA was an annual English proficiency test ELL students completed until they earned a level 4, at which point they were no longer classified as ELL. Once the students earned a Level 4, they were no longer required to take the annual test. As standard practice in the school district,

students who enrolled in the district and indicated the primary language spoken at home was other than English, were identified as ELL and were required to take the WELPA. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) defined Focus schools as “among the lowest 10 percent of Title I schools in the state. They [had] the consistently lowest performing subgroups on statewide assessments in Reading and Mathematics (combined) over three years” (OSPI, n.d.). Despite the high numbers of ELLs who attended the teacher-researcher’s school, only 13% of teachers had acquired their ESL endorsement. Since most teachers did not have a high level of ESL background, they might have been limited in implementing adequate ESL instruction.

The aim of the action research was to better understand effective and easily implemented strategies for reading instructing ELLs in the general education classroom. The strategies focused on in this action research project were two strategies that could have been used in any content area that required any amount of reading text, with little to no instructor training, and with no additional school district expense.

Procedure

The teacher-researcher included two of her classes of students to participate in the classroom action research project. For each class, the students were divided randomly into one of two groups: the English-only group, or the Spanish-English group. Once placed into groups, the teacher-researcher used the

Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) data to pair up students (high with low). The school regularly administers the MAP three times a year. Students worked with the same partner for the duration of the action research project unless their partner was absent, in which case the lone student joined another pair for the daily session.

During the daily session, the class was separated into the two groups: one side of the classroom was designated for the English-only students, while the other side was for the Spanish-English students. Student pairs took turns reading the text selection out loud to their partner. After each section was read, students discussed questions corresponding to that section before they continued reading, to check for understanding. Once they finished reading the entire selection, they quizzed each other on the eight vocabulary terms that corresponded with the reading. After they read the selection twice and studied the vocabulary, students independently completed the selection quiz.

Definition of Terms

Affective filter. The affective filter is an impediment to learning or acquisition caused by negative emotional ("affective") responses to one's environment.

At-risk students. At-risk students are those who are involved in or are at risk of involvement in any of the following: drug and/or alcohol abuse, adolescent pregnancy, single parenthood, physical and/or emotional abuse, gang activity,

violence and vandalism, poverty, family unemployment, truancy, and academic performance below grade level or failing to complete high school.

Comprehensible input. Comprehensible Input is the understandable message/language as received by learner.

Comprehensible output. Comprehensible Output is the understandable message/language produces by the learner.

Immersion Model. The Immersion Model is a method of teaching a second language using the second language only as the medium for instruction.

L1. The L1 refers to the student's first language learned.

L2. The L2 refers to the student's second language learned.

Selection. The selection refers to the text the students read from their textbook.

Shared Reading. Shared Reading is the strategy of deliberately pairing students to read to each other.

Task. Task refers to the classroom activity students are engaged in.

Acronyms

CI. Comprehensible Input

CO. Comprehensible Output

CWPT. Class-Wide Peer Tutoring

ELL. English Language Learner

ESL. English as a Second Language

LEP. Limited English Proficient

MAP. Measurement of Academic Progress

MSP. Measurement of Student Progress

NAEP. National Assessment for Educational Progress

NWEA. Northwest Evaluation Association

OSPI. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

RA. Read Aloud

RIT. Rausch Unit

SEM. Standard Error of Measure

SR. Shared Reading

WELPA. Washington English Language Proficiency Assessment

Chapter 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Until recently, the use of a student's native language (L1) had been rejected as a strategy in the general education classroom (Liu, 2008). Educators employed a monolingual approach, as millions of English Language Learners went through immersion classrooms, and many considered this to be the most effective way to learn English. Once deemed imperative to avoid students' native language in the classroom, teachers ended up going to great lengths to teach without direct translation (Liu, 2008). Cummins (2000) stated "conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible" (p. 39). It was indicated that the learner's first language maintained a facilitative role in the acquisition of a second language. The findings suggested that the bilingual approach accelerated the rate of acquisition by utilizing the student's L1 as a tool for learning as well as facilitated more efficient communication (Cummins, 2000). Concurrently, policy that pushed for English-only instruction has declined (Nazary, 2008). In the more recent past, researchers discovered that immersion strategies were not best practices.

According to Turnbull and Arnett (2002), learners' L1 helped increase comprehensible input because it made the L2 significantly easier to understand. Students' L1 had potential to help make L2 easier to understand (Turnbull &

Arnett, 2002). Brooks and Donato (1994) noted that native Spanish speakers learning English who interacted in problem-solving activities used the L1 for three purposes: confirmation of task requirements, goal setting, and to discuss their use of L2 metacognition. The L1 enabled them to control dialogue during the task and to commence and maintain verbal communication (De La Colina & Garcia Mayo, 2009). Therefore, the researchers suggested that the L1 might have served as a beneficial tool to learn the L2. Their research argued that a common native language between the learners offered more academic support, which granted them greater opportunities to reach deeper thinking than if they were limited to communication using their L2 alone (De La Colina & Garcia Mayo, 2009). Likewise, researchers such as Brooks, Donato, and McGlone (1997) advocated for the necessity of a learner's L1 to maintain task engagement, to orally self-monitor, and aid learners in the expansion of cognitive understanding of their knowledge. Brooks, Donato, and McGlone deduced that students who were provided the chance to work together in their L1 were capable of performing mentally challenging tasks in their L2 (De La Colina & Garcia Mayo). Furthermore, researchers Guerrero and Villamil (2000) claimed the use of L1 in ESL environments facilitated dialogue between learners to reach the designated goals of the task. The ELLs' L1 aided in accomplishing the task and helped to connect the languages in a way that facilitated expression in their L2 (De La Colina & Garcia Mayo). In addition, "as pointed out by Schmitt (1997), intra-

lingual strategies are ‘pedagogically correct’ because they are consistent with principles of communicative language teaching or comprehensive input” (Liu, 2008, p. 65). In agreement, Liu (2008) supported the strategy of using L1 as an aid to increase L2 learners’ vocabulary comprehension.

Utilizing instead of avoiding L1 to acquire L2 became prevalent in recent research and practice. Incorporation of students’ native language into classroom instruction was encouraged because it positively influenced the dynamics of the classroom (Nazary, 2008). In 1999, Schweers conducted a study (via climate survey) with English as Foreign Language students in a Spanish context that examined their thoughts in using L1 in the L2 classroom. Schweers studied and concluded that 89% of Spanish students studying English preferred L1 used in the class because they believed it facilitated learning. Students also desired up to 39% of class time to be spent in L1 because they felt more comfortable, they had increased confidence, could check comprehension, and could help define new terms. Students in the survey stated they preferred to use their L1, Spanish, when they needed help.

Krashen’s 1988 theory of language acquisition supported these findings in that when a student’s affective filter was lowered they were more apt to learn. Krashen asserted “a number of 'affective variables' play[ed] a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety” (as cited in Schutz, 2007, p. 1). To lower students’

affective filters, which increased learning capabilities, educators encouraged students who were comfortable using L1 to use it when they needed it (Schutz, 2007).

Many researchers have stated the need for use of L1 to learn L2. For example, Atkinson's (1987) "Judicious Use Theory" (p. 21), espoused that L1 worked as a crucial resource tool for instructors and learners alike (Nazary, 2008). "Hamin and Majid (2006) investigated an L1's effectiveness in brainstorming for writing in the second language. A remarkable improvement was seen . . . from those who utilized their L1 to come up with ideas because it activated their schema" (as cited in Nazary, 2008, p. 143).

Many reasons existed to support the use of L1 in general education classrooms other than to lower students' affective filter and among such were: lowering task difficulty, clarifying directions, and making the task more interesting or meaningful. All these qualities resulted in better content retention (Brown, 2001, p.180).

Research has been conducted that supported the use of L1 to assist students in reaching higher-order thinking (Bloom, 1956). In recent research, there was a push for teachers to allow opportunities for students to use higher-order thinking in the classroom, such as synthesizing information as well as analysis and creation.

Since research had sufficiently demonstrated the value of students using their L1 while they performed academic tasks, the author of this report had a firm foundation for testing the use of students' first language in combination with the Shared Reading strategy as a means for increasing reading comprehension.

Use of Shared Reading strategies for English Language Learners to increase reading comprehension

With the increase in class sizes educators were faced with, researchers looked for ways to successfully accommodate the needs of diverse learners, including but not limited to ELLs. Importantly, some educational strategies deemed effective for ELLs were also found to benefit other groups of students. In 2003, Viadro (as cited in Cramer, 2004, p. 5) analyzed several studies pertaining to Shared Reading (SR) and other Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) and concluded that “elementary students [learned] better when they [taught] each other and that peer tutoring seem[ed] to be particularly effective in dealing with ‘urban children, low income kids, and minority kids.’”

Educators constantly sought ways to maximize learning especially when it came to reading. One method of coping with various challenges students and educators faced was utilizing the SR strategy. Even within leveled classrooms, typically there was a range of abilities. Shared Reading deliberately paired students (high-medium, or medium-low) within a classroom to read aloud together. The students themselves were, until recently, seemed to be an

underutilized resource that could have been tapped into with efficiency. Teachers who implemented cooperative learning strategies aimed to improve their instruction and reach higher order thinking through underutilized, local sources (Collier & Thomas, 2004).

Another cooperative learning strategy, Class Wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT), suggested that students who engaged in CWPT in more than one subject area, such as reading and social studies, gained skills more quickly and retained more of what they read than if they participated in independent reading (Arreaga-Mayer, Banister, Bowman-Perrott Veerkamp, Greenwood, Kamps, Tapia, & Utley, 2008). CWPT allowed general education classroom teachers to differentiate instruction, thus providing comprehensible input for the various ability levels within a classroom. The CWPT strategy had been validated for elementary and at-risk students as well as those with mild disabilities (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2008).

Most of the research on CWPT was conducted at the elementary level, despite the fact that the achievement gap widened at the secondary level (Cramer, 2004). According to The Nation's Report Card and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, n. d.), the achievement gap between fourth and eighth grade reading increased by 6.3 points in 2011. Motivation seemed to be an issue for secondary students with a history of struggling in reading, and structured reinforcement systems during peer tutoring

(PT) may have been important (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Kazdan, 1999). Utilizing researched-based strategies for ELLs that included peer tutoring was recommended. Peer tutoring, a similar strategy to SR, helped increase opportunities for language use and participation.

Cooperative learning (i.e. SR and PT) was not just found to be more effective than traditional methods of teaching, it was:

better in this case not just because it was more effective than the standard approach, but also because it fits uniquely with the Hispanic culture. Madrid states that cultural influences have direct impact on the academic performance of bilingual Hispanic children who are raised with a more cooperative social orientation than the commonly more competitive Anglo classroom. Therefore, he postulates that the learning achievement of Hispanic children will be enhanced in the more cooperative atmosphere provided by peer tutoring strategies than in the more traditional method (Cramer 2004, p. 5).

Viadro (2003) analyzed the results of studies using PALS and concluded that elementary students can learn better when they teach each other and that PT seemed to be particularly effective for at-risk students.

The CWPT strategy, used as an intervention, has been applied with success with elementary ELLs. However, the SR strategy was not proven to be more effective for students of middle or high ability levels who received a variety of engagement strategies (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2008). The data suggested that this strategy may have benefited at-risk secondary students (Fuchs, Fuchs,

Kazdan, McMaster, Otaiba, Prentice, Saenz, Svenson, Thompson, Yang, & Yen, 2001). Freeman and Freeman (2006) claimed “effective teachers . . . read aloud to their students every day . . . whether they [were] kindergarten teachers or high school teachers” (p. 132). Reading out loud to middle-level students might have seemed like an elementary-level idea; however, when they read aloud to older students, teachers modeled the process of reading for ELLs. The strategy was much the same for SR, when a high-level student read to a middle-level student, or a middle-level student to a low-level student. The students experienced a similar effect as when the teacher read aloud. In either case, the lower of the two students benefited from hearing reading modeled by someone with a greater reading ability, but still close enough to their own abilities because it may not have created stress or unfamiliar language between the pair. The higher of the two students benefitted as well because they would, in a sense, take on the teacher’s role, and a known method for learning content was to teach the content. Calderón (2007) stated that fluency and reading comprehension skills were modeled for ELLs when a secondary teacher read aloud to a class.

Teacher preparation courses prepared teachers to provide effective whole-group instruction to teach reading comprehension. However, not all ELLs were able to learn as well using just this whole-group method (Freeman & Freeman, 2006). Furthermore, being explicit in delivering reading comprehension strategies was equally important in the secondary level as it was in the elementary

grades (Calderón, 2007). When instruction occurred in a small group setting, ELLs had more opportunities to interact with both their teacher and other students in a low-anxiety environment. SR was one such reading comprehension strategy (Bolos, 2012). Previously, SR had traditionally been used with elementary students. However, SR was crucial for middle school students who found it challenging to read grade-level texts independently (Bolos, 2012). During SR, students had more opportunities to interact with each other, as well as use their first language to complete an academic task, thus leading to more learning.

The effects of tutoring were not limited solely to that of the student being tutored; the tutor had much to gain from the opportunity as well. In the case of SR, the higher of the two students was considered the tutor. The results of one such study were as follows:

A secondary level study on the effects of peer tutoring by Fisher & Douglas in 2001, but its focus was on the effect of tutoring on the tutors themselves. The study involved the use of 7th grade struggling readers replacing their time in the reading resource room with time spent acting as tutors for 1st and 2nd grade children in a cross age tutoring program. The 7th grade tutors improved their reading scores on their yearly Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test when compared with those who did not participate in the program. Scores for the tutoring students increased in vocabulary by $t=7.21$, $p<.01$ over those who did not tutor and in comprehension by $t=6.04$, $p<.01$ (Fisher & Douglas, 2001). The authors attribute this positive growth to the tutors having authentic reasons for reading, and

they received regular feedback from their tutees which, in effect, increased their desire to become more literate (Cramer, 2004, p. 6).

Cooperative learning strategies may have had the potential to behoove more students involved, not just the lower students in need of assistance.

Use of English Language Learners' native language in addition to Shared Reading strategies to increase reading comprehension

Comprehensible output was described as speaking English with native English speaking peers and was nearly as vital as comprehensible input (Haynes, 2005). The practice of SR with similarly-abled, English-speaking peers yielded higher levels of comprehensible output. Cooperative learning groups were one way for new learners of English to receive plenty of understandable input and output. A small group setting allowed for more comprehensible input because the content was modified by the partner; it was easier to check for understanding, more opportunities for oral practice were granted, and students received immediate, non-judgmental feedback and correction.

Since more attention had been placed on formative assessment as per new teacher evaluation systems, checking for understanding had never been more important. Checking for understanding was a method for teachers to verify what students learned and had not yet learned. "One of the most common ways that teachers [checked] for understanding and link the information they gather[ed] to

future instruction [was] to talk with students or listen in as students interact[ed] with one another” (Fisher & Frey 2011, p. 2). While students engaged in SR, the teacher was available to listen to students read-aloud and their subsequent dialogue; when necessary, the teacher could clarify misconceptions and engage in meaningful conversation with students.

Students required daily opportunities to engage in academic language dialogue using Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) if they were to internalize the concepts. Marzano (2004) stated that the more content related opportunities students had, the more likely it was that the students would be able to add the knowledge to their schema for later retrieval, thus building background knowledge, an essential component to retaining new content. The more chances the students had to interact with each other and use language in academic ways, the more likely it was that they would add to their fluid intelligence (Marzano).

Brosvic et al. (2002) found sound evidence that supported the theory that Immediate Feedback (IF) provided authentic engagement opportunities and assisted in the retention of academic content. During SR, students provided each other this corrective IF in a low-stress environment. Likewise, as a teacher checked for understanding, the teacher could also provide IF between the pair of students without publicizing the error in front of the whole group and thus potentially lowered the student’s AF. Not only did the student receive the corrective feedback for his/her initial inaccurate response, if the teacher was in

audible range, s/he had the opportunity to note of the error and check for understanding amongst other student pairs. If the teacher was not near the student pair at the time of the error, the student could have received the IF from their partner, and was more likely to retain the knowledge by not repeating the error. The students temporarily replaced the teachers because teachers could not be everywhere at once.

The pairings of students needed to be considered very carefully. Their reading and language development ought to have been relatable to that of their partner because students with similar abilities tended to feel comfortable participating in the ongoing exchanges, thus lowering their AF. In other words, a very “high” student should not have been paired with a very “low” student. Students needed to feel safe in order to successfully learn. The partner format for this engagement with texts permitted even very shy students to feel comfortable reading and discussing the selection. Without this one-on-one experience, many ELLs were hesitant to speak even in small-group settings; partner reading and talking was a more secure environment and afforded all students in class daily opportunities to talk about academic tasks (Ogle & Correa-Kovtun, 2010). If students were not paired with someone of slightly differing ability, they may not have been able to convey their knowledge effectively with the whole group because they might have lacked the chance to practice in a safe environment (Ogle & Correa-Kovtun).

Conclusion

Shared Reading with a partner who possessed similar language ability (i + 1) was a means to increase reading comprehension. Students who used their L1 as a form of comprehensible output could have lead to increased comprehension. If the SR strategy was combined with that of using L1 to learn L2, the result could have been gains in reading comprehension in English. For monolingual English-speaking educators incapable of using a students' L1 themselves for the aforementioned purposes, utilizing the bilingual students was a logical means for improved instruction (Collier & Thomas, 2004).

In order to ensure middle school students' active engagement, educators needed to implement classroom management techniques in order for cooperative learning to be effective (Fuchs et al., 1999). As previously mentioned, teachers sought ways to maximize learning, and with these added management components, CWPT or SR could have aided in attaining that goal of maximized learning, and ensured all students were adequately preparing for reading in college.

In addition to behavior management procedures, monolingual teachers wanted to ensure L1 student talk centered on learning. Many strategies existed to accomplish just that. Students could have been required to fill out a graphic organizer, compose a journal entry, generate a question and/or a connection, or in some other way prepared to come back to the whole group, with the expectation

that they were required to share aloud with the class. These were common strategies to ensure that student talk centered on learning.

Schools did not need to seek supplemental external resources or recruit older tutors to come in and tutor younger students when they already had a valuable resource at their disposal. Students may have thrived if provided the opportunity to share their thinking with a partner of relatable ability. Especially important for ELLs, students must have felt safe, comfortable, and able to succeed in participating and contributing to the partner dialogue (Correa-Kovtun & Olge, 2010).

Cooperative learning such as SR or CWPT provided that much-needed safety. Students may have felt more secure when they discussed academic matters within small groups or partners, thus lowering their AF that allowed for more learning to take place. Krashen (1981) noted that learners mastered a new language by exposure to content just above their current ability level (comprehensible input +1). This concept was attained when students were paired with other students whose L1 was the same (comprehensible input) and whose ability was slightly greater, such as high-medium and medium-low pairings (+1).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The teacher-researcher included students from her Language Arts classes, nearly half of whom were identified as ELLs, in her action research project of instructional strategies. Action research projects were intended to enhance both teaching and learning in schools by offering solutions to commonplace difficulties faced by both teachers and students (Airasian, Gay, & Mills, 2009). The fundamental components of action research began first with focusing on an area of study. The next step is to collect data, followed by analysis and interpretation of the data, and ending with action planning (Airasian, Gay, & Mills, 2009).

Students were randomly divided into two groups; one was designated English-only and the other Spanish-English. The English-only group used only English when discussing the assigned text selection and for vocabulary practice. The Spanish-English group used both languages for the duration of the action research. Within each group the students were paired up based on their most recent (winter 2013) Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) data; “high” scores paired with “low” scores. All students completed the same assigned reading tasks. The strategies were employed four days a week, over a four week period.

Methodology

The teacher-researcher utilized an action research design for the project. The desire of the teacher-researcher was to seek a better understanding of student learning by analyzing both students' reading assessment scores and students' beliefs/opinions about the role of their native language in reading comprehension. The teacher-researcher wondered if this process may yield a sufficient amount of data to inform logical judgments and recommendations for future practitioners. The quantitative portion of the action research included: reading comprehension/vocabulary assessments after each selected reading and a participant climate survey. The data was analyzed to determine if students saw gains in reading scores as measured by MAP, MSP, and curriculum summative assessments.

Participants

After receiving administrative approval and other informed consent to proceed with this project, the project included forty-five students. Forty-three of the students could speak Spanish and English, while two were English speaking only. Of the Spanish speaking students, 81% learned to speak Spanish before English, 5% learned English first, and 14% claimed to have learned both languages simultaneously. Sixteen out of 43 (37%) scored a WLPT (now referred to as WELPA) Level 3 in 2012, qualifying them as ELLs. None qualified for

Special Education services. All data was stored in a locked file cabinet and no personally identifiable information was kept or presented.

Instruments

The reading comprehension assessments were those included in the school adopted curriculum, *Inside: language, literacy, and content* by Moore, Short, Tatum and Tinajero (2009). After every selection, the curriculum provided a summative selection assessment comprised of eight fill-in-the-blank vocabulary items and five multiple-choice reading comprehension items. The teacher-researcher selected this curriculum for the action research project because the students were accustomed to it since they had used it all year for their regular classroom instruction, therefore learning a new format may not have interfered with the content.

Students also completed the school scheduled computer-based spring MAP tests. Students at this school (and many other schools in the State) completed the MAP assessment in reading and math three times a school year for both formative, diagnostic and progress monitoring purposes. The teacher-researcher used these reading comprehension scores to compare the students' winter to spring scores to determine if there was any overall reading growth at the conclusion of the action research.

The third instrument utilized by the teacher-researcher was a teacher-constructed assessment to inquire about the students' feelings and beliefs about the use of their native language.

Design

Using the curriculum by Moore, Short, Tatum, and Tinajero (2009), students answered 13 questions on paper. The protocol followed before the assessment consisted of three main steps: taking turns reading the selection aloud, discussing the selection with their assigned partner by answering questions provided by the curriculum, and oral vocabulary practice. There was no time limit and the quiz was taken independently; however, they were allowed to use their textbook for the reading comprehension portion of the assessment, as was the norm in the classroom, because the teacher-researcher wanted to avoid adding unnecessary variables to the action research project. The teacher-researcher thoughtfully controlled the students' learning environment by maintaining to the greatest extent possible the similarity of the environment. This was intentionally done to control potential confounding variables that might increase the students' affective filter, or stress level. The data from the English-only group was compared to the data from the Spanish-English group.

Procedure

Students and their partners were directed to go to the designated side of the classroom, depending on which group they were assigned, and students were taught to bring their textbook, spiral notebook and pencils to the learning zone.

Upon being assigned the selection, the first student, Student A, read aloud to their partner. The text was designed specifically to have natural stopping points to check for understanding. The curriculum by Moore, Short, Tatum, and Tinajero (2009) provided either two or three Before You Move On (BYMO) questions for the students to answer before they continued reading. Upon arrival at the BYMO questions, Student A read the questions aloud and both students discussed the answers together in their designated language(s). If the students could not answer the questions, they were encouraged to reread the section to find the answer in the text.

After the students were satisfied they knew the answers, Student B read the following section aloud, while Student A followed along. Student B stopped reading at the BYMO questions, and together Student A and B discussed the answers. Students continued this process until they finished reading the entire selection.

After the students finished reading the selection the first time, they studied the eight vocabulary terms together, until the conclusion of the 30 minute daily session. They took turns reading the definitions and sentences for each term. The

students' initial reading of the selection usually required a portion of the second session to successfully complete the reading because they only had 30 minutes.

The following session, students either continued where they left off the previous session, or repeated the above process. For the second reading, students switched reading parts. The Student A became Student B and vice versa, ensuring each participant had the chance to read the entire text. When students came to the BYMO questions the second time, they re-read the questions to see if their answers remained the same after they read the text a second time.

At the completion of the second reading, students assisted each other in learning the vocabulary, still using their designated language(s). Student A read aloud the definition. If Student B could not correctly identify the term, Student A described the illustration provided for the word. If Student B was still unable to answer correctly, Student A provided the first letter of the word as a hint, and continued to provide letters until Student B answered the word correctly. Students often needed use of the third session to complete the second reading of the selection.

The fourth session was used for assessment: independent, open-book, no time limit. Each of the four sessions, one a day, lasted approximately 30 minutes. The action research lasted four weeks. The first week was a trial only, to help familiarize students with the protocol.

Treatment of the Data

Students in the action research were assigned numbers to ensure confidentiality. Data was secured and stored in accordance to other assessment data at the school. Student responses to the summative assessments were scored by the teacher-researcher using the curriculum answer key, as well as the questionnaire responses. Students' MAP scores were calculated by the computer software program. The teacher-researcher utilized Microsoft Excel for statistical calculations such as measures of central tendency and percentage of growth data.

Summary

The teacher-researcher's action research project was intended to determine whether there was improvement in reading comprehension scores when students employed SR as well as L1 during partner discourse. The students were randomly divided into two groups: English-only and Spanish-English. Students in the English-only group used only English when discussing the selection, and students in the Spanish-English group used Spanish and/or English during their discourse. The teacher-researcher paired up higher achieving students with lower achieving students based on the most current reading scores, their winter MAP scores.

For approximately 30 minutes a day, four days a week, for four consecutive weeks, students followed an SR protocol, which consisted of reading aloud to a partner, answering questions and practicing vocabulary terms. Students individually completed a summative assessment following the completed

reading of each of the three selections. In addition, students also completed the computer-based MAP and MSP assessments.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

Introduction

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) stated that all students were expected to be “college and career ready in literacy” (State of Washington OSPI, n. d.). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) during the years of 1998-2011 nearly three times as many ELL students scored below basic proficiency in reading than their non-ELL peers (The Nation’s Report Card, n. d.). For the 2010-11 school year, the number of ELL students reached 10% (4.7 million).

Students identified as ELL may have required different methods of instruction to be academically successful than their non-ELL peers. According to the NAEP, since 2002, non-ELLs scored higher than ELLs in 4th and 8th grade; the NAEP (2013) called this reality the achievement gap. The area of interest for the teacher-researcher was to see if the SR strategy, used by students who used L1 when desired, would yield higher reading comprehension assessment scores.

Description of the Environment

Forty-three of the 45 participating students were the teacher-researcher’s own students. Seventeen qualified as ELL. The teacher-researcher randomly divided the students into two groups: English-only and Spanish-English.

The English-only group consisted of 11 ELLs and 12 non-ELLs. They were designated to use only English when discussing the text. The Spanish-English group was comprised of six ELLs and 14 non-ELLs. This group was designated both languages. Due to the random assignment into groups, the ELLs were not evenly distributed between the English-only group and the Spanish-English group. The English-only group was made up of 48% ELLs, and the Spanish-English group was 30% ELL. This fact may have accounted for the higher scores yielded by the English-only group, as this group was comprised of more ELLs than the latter, and the strategies focused on for this action research were targeted for ELLs. While non-ELLs saw gains in their reading comprehension scores, ELLs saw a greater improvement overall.

The data followed students' progress over a four week period, which consisted of 30 minutes a day, four days a week. Students followed a protocol using SR for the assigned text from their curriculum. After taking turns reading the selection twice and studying the eight vocabulary terms with their partner, the students completed the open-book selection assessment. The assessment consisted of eight fill-in-the-blank vocabulary items and five multiple-choice reading comprehension items.

Results of Action Research

The teacher-researcher used three reading assessments to analyze data for this project. One assessment, the MSP, showed that the participating students

earned an average of 401 (range of 376 - 426) on the 2013 Reading MSP, the standardized assessment for Washington state. Students who were designated to use only English passed the 2013 Reading MSP with an average of 402 (range of 381 – 431). A score of 400 on this assessment was considered proficient.

A second assessment used by the teacher-researcher was the curriculum summative assessment. The data appeared in *Figure 1*. *Figure 1* compared the Spanish-English students' individual average curriculum summative assessment scores during Regular Classroom Instruction (RCI), prior to the action research, and scores during the action research. The mean summative assessment scores increased from 86% to 95%. The range remained at 15% for both sets of scores; however, with the minimum scores increased from 78% during RCI to 85% and a maximum during RCI of 93% to 100%.

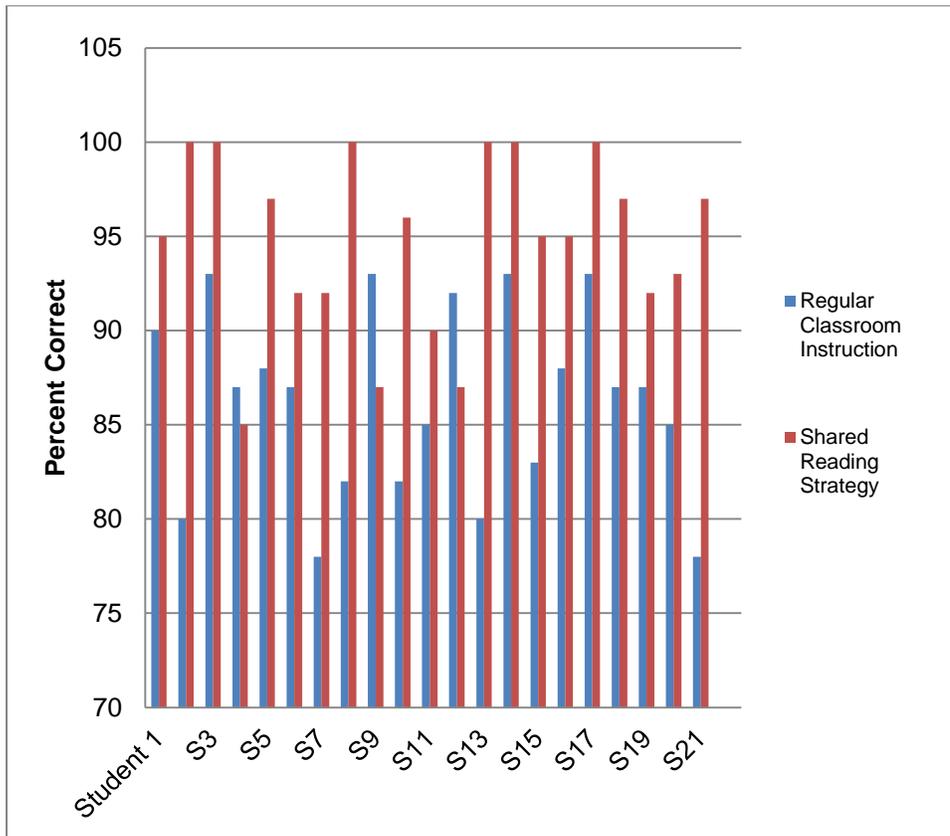


Figure 1. Average reading selection scores for students who utilized English and Spanish. This figure illustrates the effectiveness of the Shared Reading strategy when student used both languages.

All students whose scores decreased reported on their climate survey they were often off-task due to distractions or boredom which suggests an issue of motivation as opposed to cognition.

Figure 2 compares English-only students' individual average scores during RCI and scores for SR. These students saw an 11% increase in their average scores. The mean for this group of students increased from 84% during

RCI to 94% using SR. During RCI the range of average scores was 20 with the minimum score of 73% and a maximum score of 93% average. During SR, the range remained the same, 20, but the minimum score increased to 80% and the maximum score at 100%.

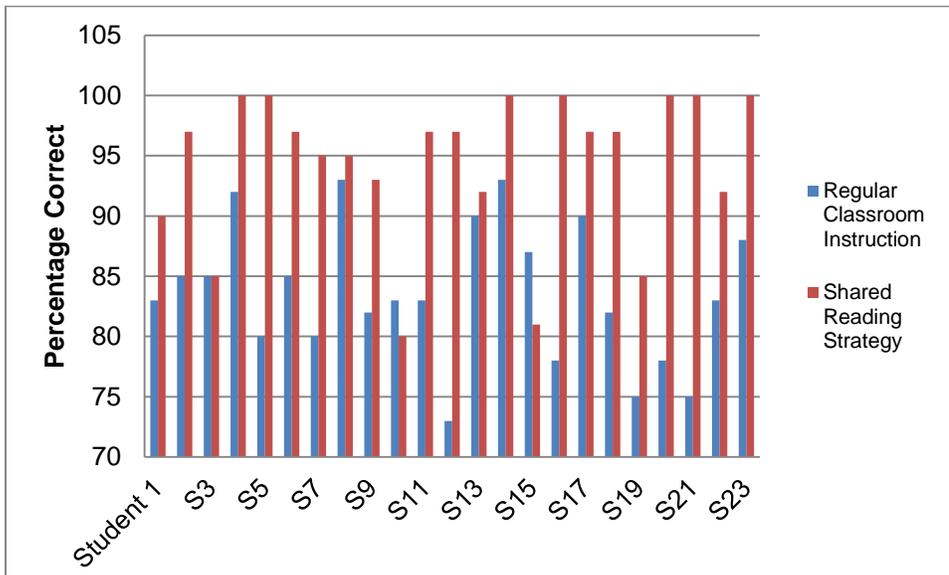


Figure 2. Average reading selection scores for students who utilized English only. This figure illustrates the effectiveness of the Shared Reading strategy when students used only English.

As depicted in *Figure 2*, two students’ scores decreased in average: one student dropped two percent and the other dropped six percent. These two students reported being “bored” and often “off topic” on the climate survey, again, perhaps suggesting issues with motivation rather than ability.

The results of the third reading assessment, MAP, showed that ELLs improved an average of 7.3 RIT points from winter to spring, while non-ELLs

improved 4 RIT points on average. Scores are shown in *Figure 3*. Students in the Spanish-English group saw a 9.1 RIT score average increase in their reading selection assessment scores; the standard deviation for this test was 4.72 (NWEA, 2011). The expected growth for students at this level was 2 RIT points from winter to spring and 3.5 from fall to spring. The typical standard error of measure (SEM) ranges from 2.5 to 3.5 (NWEA, 2011). RIT scores were used as a means for calculating student achievement on the MAP test.

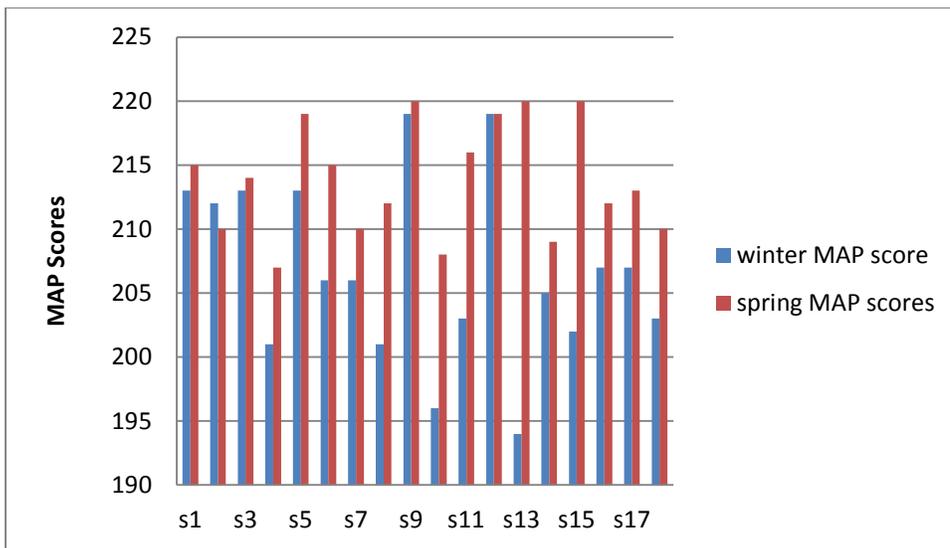


Figure 3. This figure shows the increase in MAP scores from the winter to spring for ELLs.

Twenty-one percent of the total number of students did not earn a higher RIT score in the spring. Of those nine students whose scores decreased, one was identified as an ELL, but all nine reported speaking primarily Spanish at home on the climate survey.

Overall, students scored higher on the spring MAP assessment than in the winter. The average number of RIT points the students increased was 5.3, whereas according to NWEA (2011) the expected growth was 2 points. These students who participated in the SR strategy more than doubled the expected growth from winter to spring. The teacher-researcher's students who did not participate in the action research increased on their spring MAP by 2.8 points, using RCI. The students who did not participate in the intervention were non-ELL students enrolled in grade-level content only, not in the teacher-researcher's reading intervention class. The average growth for students scoring between 215 and 258, as the non-participants, was 2.5 (NWEA, 2011). Therefore, students who participated in the action research project increased their MAP score almost twice that of the students who did not participate.

The mean MAP score for students in the winter was 211 and increased to 217 in the spring after the conclusion of this action research, when the mean growth from winter to spring is 2 points, and for a school year is 3.4 points (NWEA, 2011). The range of scores decreased 34% from 32 in the winter to 21 in the spring: 194-226 and 207-228 respectively. .

As a whole, students increased their MAP score from winter to spring, as depicted in *Figure 3*; separating the ELLs from the non-ELLs showed the greater improvement that ELLs experienced over non-ELLs. The mean improvement was 7.2 and 4 respectively. According to the NWEA, average growth for seventh

grade students scoring between 192 and 236, is 3.5 points from fall to spring. The ELLs more than doubled the average RIT score expected growth, while non-ELLs did show more growth than what was expected, albeit not as much as their ELL peers. ELLs also showed more growth in overall RIT score. The most the non-ELLs improved was 19 points, where the maximum improvement for ELLs was 26 points, 27% more than non-ELLs.

The students who scored a Level One on the MAP (significantly below grade level) advanced out of Level One. Thirty-eight percent of these students scored high enough to place them at a Level Three (grade level), and the other 68% improved enough to get them to a Level Two (slightly below grade level).

In the spring, no students remained a Level One (significantly below grade level) in MAP after the conclusion of the action research. Most students advanced a level, and in some cases, two levels. Nearly half of the students scored at Level 3 in the spring, where as in the winter approximately one third scored at or above grade level (Level 3).

Observations

During the project, the students in the Spanish-English group earned an average of seven percent more on the three reading selection assessments using SR, than on the previous three assessments during the teacher-researcher's Regular Classroom Instruction (RCI) prior to the action research (from 86% to 93% average). The English-only students saw a nine percent average increase on

the three reading selection summative assessments during the action research as compared to the three assessments during RCI, prior to the start of the project (from 86% to 95%).

The teacher-researcher's data suggested that while 79% of students saw improvement in reading scores, ELLs saw larger gains in scores than non-ELLs. The students in the English-only group saw greater gains, 11% on their selection assessments, than the students designated to Spanish or English, who gained seven percent on their selection assessments. As noted before in the limitations, this discrepancy may have been a function of the unequal distribution of ELLs caused by the random division of students.

Since ELLs saw greater improvement, and most of the ELLs were in the English-only group, consequently the English-only group saw greater gains, which did not support the teacher-researcher's question. ELLs in the English-only group saw an average increase in MAP scores of 7.5 points, while ELLs in the Spanish-English group saw gains of 6.6 points on average. The teacher-researcher expected the ELLs in the Spanish-English group to show greater growth in RIT scores. NWEA did not provide separate expected growth statistics for ELLs; all students were expected to increase their RIT score at a specific rate regardless of current level of language proficiency. While the data does not support the teacher-researcher's initial thoughts that students in the Spanish-English group would score higher than those in the English-Only group, the data

set was so small that even one data point can heavily influence the teacher-researcher's data. Thus, due to the small sample size (n), this data should not be generalized to any other setting.

Discussion

During SR, the English-only group as a whole, reverted to the use of Spanish (their L1) when they were designated to use only English (L2), which may have accounted for the English-only group's higher scores (they had more ELLs and did not appear to use English solely). This phenomenon is consistent with Brooks et al. (1997) assertions that L1 was needed for task sustainment and for metacognition (pgs. 524-541). As observed by the teacher-researcher, the English-only group rarely engaged in text analysis or discussion during the first few daily sessions, other than reading the text aloud. According to the student responses on their climate survey, they were afraid of "messing up" by utilizing Spanish instead of only English. In order to ensure more text discussion occurred during the reading sessions, the teacher-researcher encouraged the students to use more dialogue during the sessions, and the groups' oral dialogue increased, but included a large amount of Spanish; this was consistent with Guerrero and Villamil's (2000) claim that L1 use in an ESL classroom managed conversation. Schutz (2007) recommended educators encourage L1 use for students who are comfortable using it as it can help with motivation. As noted earlier, motivation

appeared to be an issue for more than one participant limited to using only English during this project.

Anderson et al. (1998) suggested that students who participated in the SR strategy may have benefitted from more language-use opportunities; the participating students' scores reflected the aforementioned researchers' assertion. The data are also aligned with Arreaga-Mayer et al. (2008) in that at-risk secondary students may have benefited more from the cooperative learning SR strategy than middle or high achieving students. Cramer (2004) stated that strategies such as SR behooved students of the Hispanic culture since they tended to be raised more cooperatively, and therefore their learning achievement was heightened with the use of a more two-way environment, which again, was achieved through the SR strategy.

Summary

With the new CCSS "all students", regardless of language abilities, are expected to meet the same academic expectations "for success in college, career, and life by the time they graduate[d] from high school" which increased pressure to improve students' reading proficiency (Common Core State Standard Initiative, 2014). The CCSS encouraged educators to seek ways to effectively present content to increase student achievement for the ever increasing number of ELLs entering United States classrooms. The teacher-researcher of this project explored a combination of two ELL, research-based strategies: use of students' L1

and the cooperative learning strategy SR. The teacher-researcher wondered if ELLs who utilized their native language (Spanish) during SR would earn higher reading scores than those students who were limited to using only English.

The teacher-researcher randomly divided her 43 participating Spanish-speaking students into two groups: English-Only and Spanish-English. Of the 43 Spanish-speaking students in the action research project, 17 qualified for ELL services. Students in the English-only group, six ELLs and 14 non-ELLs, were limited to using English (their L2) throughout the duration of the project, during allotted session times. The 11 ELLs and 12 non-ELLs in the Spanish-English group were not limited and could use either language during the project.

Students used the same district approved reading curriculum to alternate reading aloud and studying vocabulary. As previously discussed, students read the text twice and then took a summative assessment of the selection that was provided by the curriculum. At the conclusion of the four-weeks, students also completed the spring MAP to compare data to their winter MAP scores. The teacher-researcher compared MAP and MSP results from students who participated in the SR strategy with non-participating students taught using RCI.

The MAP data collected from the action research in the classroom suggested that the small group of students who participated in the SR strategy exceeded the expected growth. The results also suggested that ELLs improved more than non-ELLs. The NWEA statistic for expected growth was 3.5 RIT

points; ELLs' average improvement was more than double the expectation at 7.2 RIT points, and 4 RIT points for non-ELLs, which was slightly above the expected growth for seventh grade.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this action research project was to seek to understand the effect of students' native language (L1) during Shared Reading (SR) on seventh grade reading comprehension. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) increased grade level content expectations in Language Arts for all students, regardless of English language proficiency. Researchers Collier and Thomas (1989), cited by Bolos (2012), suggested that ELLs have the tendency to find academic vocabulary difficult. Bolos (2012) cited Collier and Thomas' 1989 research on cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) that suggested that acquiring CALP may take as much as five years to 10 years. The ELLs who entered U.S. classrooms may not have had the minimum suggested time to acquire English proficiency, and may have lacked the CALP suggested for academic success. Educators, over time, have struggled to find effective, high-yielding instructional strategies for these ELLs, and thus many teachers seem to have been encouraged to provide students with engaging and differentiated instructional strategies. The teacher-researcher has thought about this question for some time, and this action research project sought to better understand how a teacher – especially a teacher with a large class – could provide effective support in reading.

Summary

Until recently, ELLs were often enrolled in schools in which they were likely to be taught using the Immersion Model of instruction in United States classrooms. The Immersion Model of instruction was a strategy in which educators used English for communication and presentation of content. ELLs may not have been provided additional tools for learning, given the unique challenges of being an ELL. ELLs have scored much lower than their native English-speaking peers on state standardized assessments. On the 2012-13 reading Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) only 15% of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students met state standards in Washington State, whereas 72% of their non-ELL counterparts met state standards (OSPI Washington State Report Card, 2013).

The teacher-researcher researched two strategies that may be useful in the general education classroom containing ELLs, and sought to discover their potential benefits. De La Colina and Garcia Mayo (2009) suggested the strategy of encouraging the use of learners' L1 – or native language – as a cognitive tool. Using their native language served several purposes, including but not limited to task clarification (Brooks & Donato, 1994), higher order thinking (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000), lowering stress levels (Krashen, 1981), and reinforcing students' individuality when teachers valued L1 by encouraging its use to assist in learning English (Bolos, 2012).

The second strategy of the teacher-researcher's project was Shared Reading (SR). SR was a partnered read aloud, in which the students were deliberately paired with a peer of a higher reading ability. Having students read aloud to each other provided the students with ample opportunities to hear someone of a higher reading ability model the process of reading, and appeared to create a safer, lower-stress environment for the lower students to practice reading without fear of peer ridicule from other students. The teacher-researcher attempted to provide such an educational environment consistent with Krashen's (1981) theory. According to Krashen (as cited by Schutz, 2007) students who had personal inspiration, high self-esteem, and little trepidation were more likely to acquire a second language successfully.

During the school year, the teacher-researcher grouped students to use best practices. This entailed randomly dividing the students into two groups: one group was limited to only using English and the other group was encouraged to use their L1 (Spanish) if they needed it. The English-only group was comprised of six ELLs and 14 non-ELLs, where as the Spanish-English group was made up of 11 ELLs and 12 non-ELLs. As stated earlier, this random assignment of students to each group may have accounted for the unequal number of ELLs in each group. This was a limitation of the work, and as such does not allow any generalizations to a larger population whatsoever. This was acceptable, as the teacher-researcher in the action research paradigm was more interested in better

understanding how ELL students may be assisted in reading fluency in the transition from L1 to L2.

It is important to note that all students, regardless of which group they were assigned, completed the same protocol and reading selections. Students used the existing and district approved curriculum – *Inside: language, literacy, and content* by Moore, Short, Tatum, and Tinajero (2009). All students alternated reading aloud to each other and assisted each other in learning the corresponding vocabulary terms. After three days of reading the selection and vocabulary study, students completed the reading selection summative assessment individually on the fourth day of the week. The assessment was made up of eight fill-in-the-blank vocabulary items and five reading comprehension items. Each session was approximately 30 minutes, and the activities lasted approximately four weeks.

At the completion of the four-week action research project, students completed the MAP assessment for reading and the teacher-researcher analyzed overall student growth as measured by Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP). This assessment is a long-standing practice in the school district and in the school, and was not used just for this action research project. Students' growth, on average, suggested a Rausch Unit (RIT) score increase of 5.3 points; this was almost double the 2.8 RIT score increase over time that the non-participants' data suggested. On the other hand, students identified as ELL scored a 7.2 RIT average increase while non-ELLs averaged an increase of

approximately four RIT points; all of these data are still greater gains than the students in the teacher-researcher's class who did not participate in the action research project.

Conclusions

The teacher-researcher concluded that the SR strategy, when utilized by ELL students, appeared to indicate that higher reading comprehension scores were attainable. However, one ought to be cautious with this data. As noted, it is a very small sample and likely does not generalize whatsoever to any other setting.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

Cooperative learning strategies such as SR may not be as beneficial for students who already achieve average or above average reading scores. Rather, the teacher-researcher observed that students whose scores were below grade level, like the students in the teacher-researcher's intervention reading class, may have benefitted more from SR than the students achieving at or above grade level. The teacher-researcher's data suggests that educators who have students who speak the same L1 and struggle in reading may benefit from cooperative learning techniques such as SR.

SR combined with L1 use may be an efficient way for educators to increase the number of students reading aloud and listening, which may increase reading abilities. Students could be more actively engaged in the reading process,

providing more opportunities for the teacher to circulate in the classroom, gather formative assessments, and observe individual student reading skills in a time efficient manner.

Most students who participated in the action research claimed to understand the reading selection better when listening to their partner read. This may be due to the fact that they learned their L1 and L2 orally. According to Brown University (2014), “ELLs learn English primarily by listening to language in use around them, while using context to figure out what the spoken words mean. This language serves as the input or data that learners internalize and use to express their own meanings in their interactions with others” (“Teaching Diverse Learners,” 2014, para. 1). Therefore, teachers could utilize a peer-teaching model to provide more comprehensible input (CI) by strategically pairing lower achieving students with higher achieving students for more reciprocal learning.

An implication from this very small action research project may be to more formally study and statistically analyze the outcomes over a longer period of time. One of the limitations from this project is the relative short period of time the students were involved in the process. Quite possibly, that much of the observed gains were largely within the standard error of the instruments.

Limitations

The teacher-researcher’s action research was limited in several important ways. First, the sample size was restricted to a few students in the teacher-

researcher's classroom, as well as the fact that the ELLs were unevenly distributed into the two test groups due to the random distribution. This was a convenience sample and while very reasonable given the methodological choice, there are numerous limitations when using small and conveniently available sample sizes. For example, any outliers are likely to skew the data.

Second, the action research was conducted for only a few weeks, therefore there were few data points, and the small data set and the influence of outliers could have affected the outcomes.

Third, the teacher-researcher could not control whether or not the students only used their L2 when they were supposed to use their L2 per the design. Often students reverted to L1 out of habit. Thus, some students who were categorized as using English only may not, in fact, have only used English. In an effort to control the method, the teacher-researcher promptly reminded students when she heard student groups using the non-standardized use of L1 being spoken for the activity.

Finally, the teacher-researcher had little control over whether or not the students took the assessments seriously, however the assumption that the students did their best is a reasonable assumption for the purpose of this project. There were likely students who may not have attempted to answer questions correctly.

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