

Reading Instruction for ELLs

by

Heather Wittmer

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Abstract

Teaching reading to English Language Learners (ELLs) is a difficult task. Farrell (2009) notes there are some issues with reading instruction that play a role in why these students struggle. The problem addressed in this capstone is how to meet the literacy needs of ELLs in elementary school. The research suggests that a whole language approach is the most effective way to teach ELLs how to read. In addition, it is important to also have teachers incorporate a students' L2 in their instruction as this is an example of culturally responsive teaching. I designed a professional development (PD) for elementary school teachers where they can work together to develop and incorporate research based skills and strategies for reading instruction to best serve ELLs based on their NYSESLAT level. This PD will give teachers information on teaching ELLs in addition to culturally responsive teaching. Using the information given in this PD, teachers will be able to create standard and curriculum based materials to use with ELLs in their future classroom.

Keywords: English Language Learners (ELLs), culturally responsive teaching (CRT), whole language approach, phonetic approach, progress monitoring

Chapter 1: Introduction

In elementary schools reading is one of the most important subjects taught beginning in kindergarten and continuing throughout high school. At the same time, English Language Learners (ELLs) face the challenges of trying to understand the meaning of printed words that are not in their native language. Throughout the United States there has been an increase of ELLs entering schools at all levels. According to National Center for Education Statistics (2021), 9.2% or 4.5 million ELL students attended public schools. Compared to the most recent data which is in 2019 where 10.4%, or 5.1 million ELLs attend public school. The number of students has skyrocketed in recent years; therefore, it is paramount that reading instruction for ELLs is addressed in elementary schools today. Having these students learn a new language while also developing basic reading skills such as phonemic awareness and reading comprehension is a difficult task.

A major question that comes up frequently among educators is how can teachers enhance reading instruction for English Language Learners? Another question that comes up regarding this is, should students be taught in their native language before, their English instruction begins? Therefore, this capstone will address the overarching question: How to meet the literacy needs of ELLs in elementary school? There is an abundance of research about how teaching bilingual students reading skills in their native language as well as in their new language is beneficial. "...a large portion of learners, both migrants and foreign language students, successfully achieve advanced-level proficiency in their second language" (Hyltenstam, 2016, p.1) . When discussing the topic with some teachers, they feel that it can be confusing for students to have to go back and forth between the two languages, however, prolific research proves otherwise. Using techniques like this could help improve reading instruction for ELLs.

Significance of the Problem

According to Cheung and Slavin (2012), ELLs are at higher risk of not developing early literacy skills when compared to native English speakers. The authors also note, supporters of bilingual education say once taught literacy skills in native language; students can then transfer their knowledge to the second language. In contrast, "...several recent studies have reported that phonological awareness and reading skills transfer only, or at least more easily, when L1 shares with English an alphabetic structure" (Guglielmi, 2008, p.323). Some early literacy skills include phonological awareness and basic phonetics. Therefore, exposing ELLs to the beginning stages of reading is important because research shows that oral skills continue to develop as reading skills advance. An important question is whether teaching students in their native language as well as in their second language is beneficial to progress in early literacy. This question may have multiple answers since literacy skills may transfer depending on linguistic system of the L1. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to find out what strategy works better for ELLs progress in literacy.

In my current district on the eastern end of Long Island, there are two main reading programs that are used daily, Foundations by Wilson Language Training Company and Journeys by Houghton Mifflin. In addition, this district has recently adopted the Sound Sensible/SPIRE reading program through Educator Publishing Service. While Foundations and Sound Sensible/SPIRE focus on phonics, Journeys focuses primarily on reading comprehension and grammar skills. Luckily, Journeys has accessible materials in both English and in Spanish that teachers can incorporate in reading lessons. For example, Journeys provides vocabulary, weekly stories, and the workbook pages in both languages. Unfortunately, this is not true for all curriculums. Since, not all districts have access to bilingual materials, I would like to provide

different strategies, resources, and skills teachers can use to make sure our bilingual students are getting the best instruction possible during reading.

ELLs face linguistic challenges in the classroom when compared to monolingual peers such as, content vocabulary and academic language (Wei, 2021). Teachers report that they have not received the proper training to help these students progress in reading. Many feel unprepared to help struggling ELLs in the area of reading. Even though some of these teachers have received professional developments or trainings in the past, they feel that none of the skills they have learned have been proven to work or have been supported with data and research. Therefore, the skills and strategies being taught may not even be effective (Albers & Martinez, 2015). It is crucial to figure out strategies can teachers use to help improving reading instruction for these students.

Purpose

Is there something teachers can be doing for bilingual students to help them progress in reading? During the professional development I will present information on NYSESLAT levels, and help teachers create materials and activities they can use with their future students to make sure English language learners are getting the best possible reading instruction they can get. Then during the professional development, in small groups, educators will examine at the curriculum and materials and reflect on best practices for ELLs in the area of reading. Furthermore, the groups will share findings, ideas, and reflections on how to improve instruction for ELLs. In addition, teachers will have the opportunity to provide demonstrations on how to incorporate strategies and skills that work for ELLs with the current curriculum.

Summary

English Language Learners have many linguistic challenges a typical native language student may not have when reading in a second language, more specifically in English. Finding ways to improve the way literacy is taught to ELLs is the goal of this capstone. Teaching literacy to ELL students presents a unique challenge because children may be coming from countries who use different grammar rules, alphabets and writing systems. Finding new ways to assist children in learning literacy competencies in English is important because learning to read in a new language helps a student's oral and written fluency skills. I want teachers to come together to design new approaches to teaching literacy to students whose native language may not be English.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the current research on literacy and English Language Learners. In chapter 3, I present the professional development grounded in research and best practices for English Language Learners. Teachers will use the current curriculum to create activities to reinforce skills, and strategies to help perform better in literacy. In chapter 4, I will present conclusion implications for student learning and make recommendations for research. Finally, the professional development materials will be included in the appendix.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The focus of this capstone is to see what skills and strategies can help improve reading instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs). I will be speaking on many different approaches from researchers in regard to teaching ELLs. I will be discussing literacy strategies that best support teaching reading to ELLs in the mainstream classroom. The way the research is grouped in this literature review includes: The Challenges of Literacy for ELLs, Challenges with Teacher Training, Challenges with Standardized Testing, Literacy instruction and ELLs, Reading instruction for ELLs, Phonics, A Foundational Literacy Skill, Challenges of Phonetic Learning, Does Phonics work for ELLs?, Is Progress Monitoring Important?, The Whole Language Approach, Is the Whole Language Approach more effective?, The Benefits of Whole Language Learning, Vocabulary, and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

The Challenges of Literacy for ELLs

All teachers at some point in their careers can anticipate having English Language Learners students as part of their classroom community. Meeting the needs of all students in any classroom is a major challenge for teachers. One way teachers can do this is by differentiation. Geelan (2015) notes that differentiation is known as modifying activities in the classroom for different types of learners. With different types of learners in one classroom, teachers are forced to differentiate. Teachers first need to understand where the learning gaps are and then develop lessons to address those gaps in a targeted approach. The challenge is that some teachers may not feel properly trained or prepared to differentiate for all the different types of learners, more specifically for English Language Learners. However, understanding ELLs and receiving training is crucial since Colombo et al. (2013) has voiced that ELLs are the fastest growing population in schools today.

ELLs reading instruction is taking major precedence among teachers in elementary schools. ELLs are a group of students who are a part of many schools throughout the United States. Snyder et al. (2017) says that in order to address all different needs of students and have ELLs be as successful as possible in the classroom, teachers need to be giving efficient reading instruction. Snyder et al. (2017) sought out ELL students who have been enrolled in school for over six years. In this study, 70% of ELL fourth graders could not read at or above a fourth grade reading level in English compared to native English speakers. When compared with English speakers, where 30% of fourth graders could read at or above a fourth grade level. This shows a significant discrepancy between native and non-native English speakers and their proficiency in literacy in the English language.

Gebhard & Harman (2010) mention that in 2002, when George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind law. All students were held to the same standard, regardless of their first language, their proficiency in English, or the quality of their previous education. "...No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have[sic] focused much needed attention on the academic achievement of low-income students and students of color, including ELLs, who have traditionally been poorly served by public schools" (Gebhard & Harman, 2010, p. 45). ELLs were required to do a lot of the same work as fellow native English speaking classmates. Gebhard and Harman (2010) note that ELLs were also being held to the same standard for state testing, with no provisions made for students who did not have the same relative competency in English literacy as their native English speaking classmates. Consequently, ELLs had the same state testing requirements as students who solely speak English.

Challenges with Teacher Training

Gebhard and Harman claim that teachers who do not have adequate experience or training in the specific education requirements of ELL students have been giving ELLs classwork that is subpar in comparison to the work given to classmates. In other words, their lack of training in the particular educational needs of ELLs creates a barrier to their ability to modify work to make reasonable accommodation for the non-native English speaker. However, when teachers attempt to modify and present culturally responsive classwork for ELLs, some of these practices can be tricky for teachers to use. This is because it is important to make sure you are being culturally sensitive while organizing thoughtful material for your students. Teaching culturally responsibly can be challenging because as the teacher it is important to make sure everyone feels comfortable, and nobody feels offended. Trying to implement new ideas while also using a culturally responsive approach is important, but also can be a sensitive situation. By contrast, teachers who are uneducated about the specific culture in which an ELL student was raised can easily cause unintentional offense to the student or their parents when they attempt to incorporate aspects of a culture with which they are unfamiliar into their modified lesson plans.

Challenges with Standardized Testing

Standardized testing under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), had students held to very high standards for a lot of states across the country. There are many tests being administered yearly that are implemented to show the growth students made from year to year. These subjects include standardized testing in mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies. However, in New York State and Virginia, adjustments were made to the state testing requirements. Under these new adjustments, ELLs were still required to take yearly standardized tests, but these students were offered the option of taking a modified English language arts

examination. These modified examinations are offered to children in lieu of the standard English language arts examination during their first year living in the United States. NCLB stated that after these students have been in the United States for one full calendar year, they must take the standardized English language arts examination. Menken (2010) notes ELLs were still required to take these tests however in these two states, instead of ELLs taking the English language arts test, they had to take an English based test specifically for ELLs. Then in 2007, in the United States, it was required that ELLs who have been the U.S. for at least one year should take the same English language arts exam as the students who have been speaking English their entire lives. A lot of teachers are of the opinion that this is not enough time to have ELLs learn enough to do well on these standardized tests. Soon after the NCLB was replaced with a new law that would help benefit those children even more.

Hines et al. (2018) says since NCLB in 2015, former president Barack Obama made the decision to sign a new law called Every Student Succeeds Act. This law was created to benefit students with a lot of needs. “ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) ending mandates under No Child Left Behind” (Hines et al. 2018, p. 2). ESSA was in support of low income students. They offered loans, grants, and supplies to districts in need to help teachers give students the best education possible. Unfortunately, years later, in 2021 ESSA was defunded (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Literacy instruction and ELLs

The question regarding teaching literacy to ELLs is whether they should be taught partially in their native language in addition to English or if they should be taught solely in English. Another question about teaching ELLs is that of which approach is better, the phonetic approach or the whole language approach. Cheung and Slavin (2012) discuss the issue of

instruction. In one hand there are those who are against bilingual education argue that ELLs should be taught fully in English, as they feel that is a more effective practice. However, the people in support of bilingual education say that teaching in the native language first is key. They argue that this is because once ELLs begin to understand literacy rules in their native language, then they can transfer them to English more easily.

In a typical public elementary school, subjects such as math, literacy, social studies, and science are all taught daily. According to Brunner et al. (2012), literacy is presented in each of these subjects in a different way, through questions, word problems, and stories. Without literacy, teaching these other subjects would be nearly impossible. In addition, many children retain information more effectively when they have received the information through written materials rather than receiving the information through other sources, such as auditory, visual, or kinetic presentations of subject material. Reading is what is believed to be one of the most important subjects taught in school. There are many approaches to reading instruction and some of them include a whole language approach and some of them include a phonetic approach. While both approaches are designed to help students progress in reading, they are very different methods. Faust et al. (2009) believes a phonetic approach is based on letter sounds and basic phonics whereas whole language learning does not focus on decoding and letter sounds. English is a non-phonetic language. In other words, this means that it does not follow specific phonemic rules like some other languages do. Whole language learning is based on learning words and meanings rather than decoding. Whole language learning focuses on using vocabulary and word-based instruction rather than tapping out each sound in a word.

Reading Instruction for ELLs

Transitions to new schools are hard for any student. More specifically, as teachers of ELLs we already know how difficult it can be to walk into a new school building for the first time, make friends, and adapt to an entirely new environment. For ELLs who do not have any prior knowledge in a second language, the first few weeks can be extremely difficult - even if they are not physically showing it.

It is important as teachers to use the best skills and strategies available to teach reading competency to all students. More specifically for ELLs, there are many approaches you can use to teach reading competency. One of the ways teachers teach reading, according to Watkins and Lindahl (2010), is targeted instruction. Targeted instruction uses expressive - such as writing and speaking - and receptive - such as reading and listening - language skills. It provides language support for ELLs as they also are learning content knowledge within the classroom. Watkins and Lindahl talks about how it is crucial to use targeted instruction with ELLs. This is because of the diverse learning needs ELL students have. The authors note that on average, because ELLs are learning a new language in addition to typical grade level content knowledge, it takes ELLs five to ten years to gain language proficiency. It is also important for teachers to ask themselves a few questions about how to best teach reading to ELL students. Some things teachers should consider include: what background knowledge do my students have, what do my students know about reading, and how can lessons be scaffolded to best support my students in literacy.

Phonics, A Foundational Literacy Skill

When teaching English to a monolingual student, starting in kindergarten, teachers start by teaching letter recognition and letter sounds. Researchers state that phonics is the first step to any reading instruction. Warnick and Caldarella (2016) say phonics is the foundation to

successful reading instruction for grades K-3. This includes reading instruction for ELLs. It is also mentioned that because different languages have different alphabets, learning phonetics in a new language can be challenging for some children. English is a non-phonetic language that does not follow specific, consistent phonetic rules that other languages may. In agreement, Green and Langille (2021) also believe phonics instruction is the key to successful reading instruction. This includes teaching letter sounds, phonemes, graphemes, and digraphs. The authors argue that this type of instruction has a higher level of achievement than other methods of reading instruction. Some examples of the program's schools use to teach phonetics are foundations and sound sensible/SPIRE.

Challenges of Phonetic Learning

Regarding ELLs, there are some skills that are more difficult for them to comprehend than these skills are for a monolingual learner. One of the skills taught is being able to phonetically spell a word using the letter sounds that they know. There is one study by Brunner et al. (2012), where a student uses the word vote and with that, "... where /v/ is a non-Spanish phoneme, native Spanish-speaking children may represent what they hear as BOT" (p. 648). The beginning stages of reading include spelling using the sounds that students hear. This will look different for monolingual children than it does for bilingual children. Brunner et al. 2012 states there will be many recurring errors that bilingual children will present that monolingual children may not. These mistakes may be represented as a bilingual student not knowing how to transliterate the letter sounds that they hear into written words. These letter sounds are used when children are trying to spell a word. Spelling is a skill that people use every day.

Spelling is used to write emails and text which are two major forms of communication in today's world. According to Raynolds and Uhry (2009) spelling is influenced by a child's first

language. In other words, if the first language is Spanish, students will typically use the spelling rules of the Spanish language when speaking and writing. It is important for teachers to ensure that these errors are not misconstrued. Unfortunately, some teachers may see these errors as a learning disability rather than a language barrier. In addition, Lindner et al. (2020) says that in some instances, when someone sees that spelling is a struggle, it may influence thoughts on someone's intellect. Furthermore, spelling can be misconstrued by teachers as a negative reflection of the intellect or subject material comprehension among ELLs. These errors are because of the language barrier. These errors are normal and should not be used as a baseline among ELLs for teachers to determine a student's intellect or to recommend a student for evaluation for learning disabilities.

Raynolds and Uhry (2009) note how when Spanish speaking bilingual children are learning a new language, they are forced to determine what letters are not included in their L1 alphabet. Some of the letters not included in the English alphabet are ñ and ll, which are included in the Spanish alphabet. Raynolds and Uhry also discusses how when children are using sounds to spell words, the letters they choose to use to spell words represent what sounds they know. Some of the rules they have previously learned in their L1 may present additional challenges because of the rules the English language uses. Some of the new rules they learn may contradict what they have already been taught.

Does Phonics work for ELLs?

A recent study by Snyder et al. (2017) was done where students in grades kindergarten through second grade were observed while using reading intervention. Some of the skills and strategies used during the intervention included letter sounds, phonetics, and sounding out words by each letter. The study was done to see if intervention using phonetics helped reading

instruction for ELLs. Although intervention is not specific goal of this study, seeing what literacy strategies work for intervention will help conduct this study. The study shows that although phonics instruction is extremely important to a successful reading instruction, there are other, better skills to focus on when teaching reading competency. Some of the skills this research says to focus on are vocabulary, and basic and listening comprehension strategies. In fact, this research suggests that more than one skill should be taught at a time. For example, if the goal is to be teaching vocabulary, this should of course be practiced, however, the teacher should also choose another skill that can be worked on alongside teaching vocabulary. According to Snyder et al. (2017) notes that when teaching reading comprehension, better results are shown when comprehension is that simultaneously with another reading skill for ELLs. Since it is recommended that more than one skill is taught at a time, it is important for teachers to keep track of those skills learned for each individual student.

Is Progress Monitoring Important?

Progress monitoring is one-way teachers can track what progress students have made over a certain period. Ardoin and Christ, (2009) note that a few of the programs used are DIBELS and AIMSWEB, which both provide weekly assessments for progress monitoring and benchmark assessments to give to all students. Teachers begin tracking the progress of their students in kindergarten and continue throughout their schooling or until a teacher deems it necessary to stop the monitoring. Some of the skills teachers can track the progress of are letter recognition, letter sounds, sight words, and fluency. With these assessments, native English speakers' scores should not be compared to ELLs scores. However, Snyder et al. (2017) states ELLs scores can sometimes be compared to other ELL's scores to measure progress and growth. By extension, letter recognition and sounds are two major components to foundational reading

growth, but they may not be a pertinent skill to track when teaching ELLs. Although there are many studies that show that teaching these letter sounds in an ELL's L2 is beneficial, there is another approach which is the whole language approach

The Whole Language Approach

The whole language approach according to Onukaogu (1997) is "...an approach to literacy empowerment in which language instruction is not segmented but is unified and integrated" (p.191). It is an approach that does not want teachers focusing on breaking apart sounds, teaching vocabulary or teaching grammar. This reading approach want students to learn in a more natural way. Shang (2017) discusses that there is not a specific order in which students learn different literacy skills. Students decide when they read or comprehend verbal/ written language. It is therefore important to integrate all aspects of language literacy - reading, writing, speaking, and listening - when teaching children, a new language.

In a professional development teachers will plan whole language lessons based on specific strategies such as brainstorming and predicting, while also having students connect the literacy they are learning to personal experiences outside of the classroom. This skill is essential because of the importance of culturally responsive teaching which includes students being able to relate academics back to their own experiences and/or bringing their own personal touches and cultures into the classroom.

Is the Whole Language Approach more effective?

The issue of using phonetics or a phonetic approach for teaching ELLs the beginning stages of reading has been an argument among educators for years according to studies. Although there are many studies that show that teaching these letter sounds in an ELL's L2 is beneficial, there is another approach that some researchers feel is more valuable, which is the

whole language approach. Vellutino (1991) argues that a whole language approach is the more efficient way to teach ELLs how to read. He says that you should not be teaching ELLs to break up words into letter sounds, instead, you should be using a more natural approach. He emphasizes that the word 'natural' is a key component to success in teaching reading to ELLs. In other words, breaking up the words into separate components rather than using a more natural way of teaching reading can be confusing for some students. He argues the natural way of teaching flows better for ELLs.

Nakata and Webb (2016) talk about a study conducted by Stahl and Miller where it was concluded a whole language approach is more effective and their reasoning for reaching this conclusion. There are a few reasons why the results of this study sum up that a whole language approach is more effective. An example of whole language learning is when teaching it, it is crucial to teach skills altogether and repeat those skills multiple times throughout that time period. Whereas Nakata and Webb (2016) note that the opposite part-learning technique is when you use smaller sections of time and teach separate activities in those time frames. An example of this that Nakata and Webb touch upon is if a teacher is teaching poetry, whether it is more beneficial for the teacher to read the entire poem a few times, or is it better to break up the poem into sections and read each section a few times. As a result, is part learning or whole learning is best for ELL students?

The Benefits of Whole Language Learning

One of the aspects of whole language learning that has been seen to be more effective is learning vocabulary. Nakata and Webb (2016) wanted to see if the whole language approach would help teach vocabulary more easily to ELLs. Nakata and Webb speak about a study using twenty words that were repeated multiple times in one group of all twenty items and encountered

four times throughout the study. Whereas the same twenty items were reintroduced four times in in four different sessions including five items, which was performed using part language learning. According to Nakata and Webb, the results of this study showed that students did not perform better using one approach or the other. The teachers did not see a difference in vocabulary comprehension between the whole language learning versus the part language learning. The results could have been different had they used a different group of students or if the students' L2 was different; there were a lot of variables to this experiment that could have changed the results. What the researchers concluded was overall whole language learning is a better and more effective way of motivating students to read.

Dahl and Freppon (1995), say that students in a whole language classroom environment showed major interest in becoming better readers. One of the whole language skills that was beneficial in the success of ELLs and literacy was book talks where students talk about what they read. In a study by Fu, et al. (2007) an ELL student who did not like to read or write, by the end of the study was participating in class and doing book talks with fellow classmates. This was done using readers and writers' workshops which were adopted to see if Fu, et al. would see any improvement in literacy using these programs. According to Fu et al. creating interest in reading is an important aspect of improving language literacy. Furthermore, Springer et al. (2017) notes that children will be more inclined to put effort into learning reading comprehension if they are more interested and motivated to read the presented materials, and if the reading materials reflect their own interests. Springer et al. (2017) says that interest plays a big role in the effectiveness of reading. When creating different strategies and materials to support reading there are many strategies like peer interest conferences, hands on reading activities and curiosity catchers that

can help teachers get a better idea of what students are interested in and will help motivate them to be better readers.

Vocabulary

Teachers argue that vocabulary is the most important area of literacy to focus on while teaching ELL students. In contrast to the whole language approach, some teachers and researchers believe beginning teaching ELLs with vocabulary is essential to success in literacy. Wei (2021) notes that there are many different types of vocabulary that can be taught to all students. Wei discusses vocabulary such as general academic language, content vocabulary, word parts, Tier 1 words, Tier 2 words, and Tier 3 words. Academic vocabulary is a crucial component to success in any academic setting. Students use academic vocabulary when they are reading, writing and speaking with peers throughout the day. According to Wei (2021) students with a larger vocabulary tend to achieve better in school. This is related to all subjects, even math, which Wei says even though it is universal across most countries, students still struggle with the academic vocabulary. Improving the academic vocabulary of a student will increase their comprehension of the subject matter, because they can more easily understand the terminologies and concepts presented in the subject matter if they have a pre-existing understanding of what the individual words mean.

As teachers of ELLs, you are still required to give ELLs a content based, grade level curriculum even if these students are not yet proficient in English. This can be difficult for teachers if the ELL students in their class have limited vocabulary in their L2. Gebhard and Harman (2010) note that academic language is claimed to be the most essential type of vocabulary for ELLs to learn. The researchers recommend that teachers spend time learning how

academic language is incorporated when asking students to read and write. Using academic language can help support social emotional and academics for ELLs in the classroom.

There were many different techniques teachers used to teach students vocabulary. One of the techniques involves the teacher writing vocabulary and its definition on the board and students would write it down until eventually it was memorized. Wei argues that there is no evidence to prove how effective this strategy really is. One method of instruction Wei claims is effective is explicit instruction. Explicit instruction is known as teachers assisting learners in processing new vocabulary using phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. In addition to explicit instruction, another means of teaching academic vocabulary, according to Wei, is systematic vocabulary instruction. This is one of the many difficult types of vocabulary for ELLs because it is vocabulary identified with subject areas. Wei gives an example that math and science vocabulary have many words that you can relate to everyday life, however when learning them in a different context, ELLs may have a hard time understanding them Wei notes that when teaching vocabulary to entering ELLs explicit instruction is more effective.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

One of the most crucial aspects to teaching any subject in an elementary school is making sure teaching is culturally responsive. Toppel (2015) speaks about themes for culturally responsive teaching. There are three themes to culturally responsive teaching applied to reading instruction. The first theme is using books in the classroom that are culturally appropriate. This is important because incorporating culture into the classroom can let children feel more welcome and included. As a teacher, making sure each student feels comfortable in your classroom community is crucial to your students' success socially, emotionally, and academically. The second theme Toppel speaks about is letting every student have a voice. Letting every student

have a voice includes having students participate in discussion and use their native languages in the classroom even if that language may not be everyone else's first language. The last theme Toppel discusses goes hand in hand with the second theme. The last theme talks about student knowledge. This is possible during class discussions like morning meetings. Having students talk about what they know lets them feel like they are an important part of the class.

Another important aspect of culturally responsive teaching is building relationships with students, especially for ELLs. When an ELL comes into a new school for the first time, it can be intimidating, and scary. When an ELL student walks into a classroom for the first time at a new school a lot of emotions can go through their head. One of the relationship-building techniques discussed by Arroyo and Vaughns (2015) is starting by building relationships with not only the students, but also with the students' families. There were specific teaching strategies that were used in correlation with relationship building. Some of these literacy skills were storytelling, reading projects, and story dictation. Arroyo and Vaughns speak about how these techniques were used with not only the students in their everyday classroom environment, but with the students' families as well. Including family into the classroom is an essential part of building relationships with students' and their families.

Conclusion

The issue still lies on how to improve reading instruction for ELLs. With both the phonetic approach and the whole language approach showing research which holds them both to be effective in different ways, it is hard to know if these approaches are something that teachers should be implementing in their daily reading instruction. With vocabulary being the most critical component to literacy instruction for ELLs, the whole language approach suggests to be more effective when teaching literacy. While learning letter sounds and phonological awareness

is still important to reading instruction in general, regarding ELLs, the literacy skill that goes hand in hand with the whole language approach is teaching vocabulary. Research suggests that vocabulary should be taught at the same time as another literacy skill like comprehension. This is so students can use the vocabulary and relate it back to the story they are answering comprehension questions on. With this being said, having students learn naturally seems to be the most successful, but what can teachers do to promote this in their classroom?

Therefore, creating a professional development to help teachers create skills and strategies to promote this research is beneficial for ELLs success with literacy in the elementary classroom. The research shows the importance of teaching using a whole language approach. Using research from Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I will present the professional development which will allow teachers to create together and incorporate different skills and strategies that can be used in their classrooms to help ELLs gain success in literacy using the current curriculum. The curriculum that will be used during the professional development is foundations and Sound Sensible/SPIRE. This professional development will allow teachers to work together to create materials for ELLs that will help teachers teach specific reading skills.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

During a three-day professional development, teachers will get together to discover new skills and strategies that can be used in the classroom to help ELLs achieve success in reading. The first two sessions of the professional development will be 2.5 hours each and the last one will be 4.5 hours or a half day. All materials for this PD are labeled as a figure and can be found in the Appendix of this Capstone. Participants will be split into small groups where they will work together to use culturally responsive classroom methods and become familiar with different cultural and language backgrounds. Abacioglu et al. 2020 states, “Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been associated with increased student engagement and achievement” (p. 736). All these factors play a huge role in the learning of ELLs. In addition, teachers participating will investigate different approaches using two different reading/phonics curricula: Sound Sensible/SPIRE and foundations. However, teachers can use other literacy methods successfully in this PD. These two curricula are used in this school district, therefore they play an important part in a PD on reading with CRT in mind. Before the first day of the PD participants will be given the option to bring in and use their own literacy/phonics curriculum to use during Session 2. Groups will create activities for different proficiency levels. ELLs are assigned a level through testing by an ESOL teacher. These levels include entering, emerging, transitioning, and expanding. This professional development will not include the commanding level.

Session 1

The learning target for this session is for the participants to get familiarized with the current curricula. As a whole group, there will be a discussion on what specific literacy skills the participants would like to focus on. For each of these skills, the participants will come up with strategies for incorporating these skills using the current curriculum. Participants will also

discuss with colleagues what the most important gaps are to focus on for the five New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) levels.

Agenda

The professional development will start by handing out an agenda of activities we will work on throughout the next three days (see Figure 1). I will go over the agenda and save time for questions and comments.

Opening Activity

To begin the professional development, teachers will write down the number one gap they see with ELLs and literacy instruction. Teachers will have two minutes to do a quick write of their number one gap, including an explanation, on a provided note-catcher (see Figure 2) to be shared with the group. Participants will then spend about five minutes sharing their thoughts with their peers at the table. After sharing with their peers, they will then share with the rest of the group what they thought was most important to focus on. This activity will get participants thinking about the gaps they feel need to be filled when it comes to literacy instruction for ELLs.

Activity 1

Participants will be given a note catcher with room to take notes on the NYSESLAT levels during the presentation (see Figure 3). There will be a ten minute presentation. Where teachers take notes on the characteristics of ELLs using the NYSESLAT levels.

Activity 2

Using the quick write and note catcher from the presentation, participants will sort the what they see as gaps in the literacy skills of their student into the NYSESLAT levels (see Figure. 4). After, each table group will share their reasoning as to why they organized the gaps

into those levels. Alternatively, this could be an activity where the teachers do a gallery walk and write their classifications and explanations on posters placed around the room. Once they are placed under the hypothesized level, it will be time to begin the lecture and discussion on culturally responsive teaching and literacy instruction for ELLs using foundations and Sound Sensible/SPIRE.

Activity 3- Curricula

Teachers will bring their own materials from the Sound Sensible/SPIRE and foundations programs to complete Activity 3. The presentation will first briefly describe both Sound/Sensible and foundations curricula, its purpose, and how they work. Then, teachers will spend about ten minutes with their table taking a look at the materials from the Sound Sensible/SPIRE and foundations curricula. This is an opportunity to ask questions and engage in a thoughtful conversation with fellow colleagues.

Activity 4

Teachers will examine Module 1 of foundations and answer the following questions based on students and their NYSESLAT levels:

What NYSESLAT level would benefit from using this module?

Select 2 activities that would benefit this level?

What success criteria would you select to be able to move onto the next module?

Closing Activity- Exit Ticket

The closing activity of session one will have participants fill out an exit ticket (see Figure 5), where teachers will use the sorting handout and the information on the two curricula to help them pick a module from either curriculum to create an activity.

Synthesis

Teachers are doing the activities in Session 1 to understand the importance of the NYSESLAT levels and how they will be able to choose appropriate activities for specific NYSESLAT levels. The activities in this session were created to give background information on the current curricula, and what skills participants think are most important when teaching ELLs. According to Brunner et al. (2012), teachers need to recognize that literacy is presented in different ways. The goal of this session is for teachers to be able to recognize what literacy skills go along with what NYSESLAT level. In addition, in Chapter 2, the research from Gebhard and Harman (2010) claims that if teachers are not trained properly in teaching ELL students, the work that is given to them is not up to the standards of the classwork given to other students in their classes.

Session 2

The learning target for Session 2 is for participants to be able to create a literacy activity for ELLs at a specific level with their table group using the current curricula. The goal of this session is for participants to use what they know about teaching ELLs and the NYSESLAT levels and create materials an activity to best help ELLs succeed in literacy. Participants are able to choose what activity they want to do and get it approved by the presenter.

Agenda

I will begin by handing out the agenda for day 2 (see Figure 6). I will read the agenda aloud to participants and leave time for questions and comments.

Opening Activity- Different Types of Learners

Session 2 will begin by having participants write down one word that describes what type of learner they are on a post it note. I will then select multiple participants to share what they wrote. This is important because it reminds them that everyone is a different type of learner and when creating activities and lessons for ELLs, it is crucial to keep that into consideration. Zoghi (2017) notes that there are many factors that play a role in learning a new language like their culture, personal interests, backgrounds and individual educational history. It is crucial for teachers to consider all learning styles when creating lessons for ELLs. Everyone learns in a different way, but when learning a new language, it is important to see what type of learning style will promote success for these students.

Activity 1- Video on CRT and Discussion

In small groups teachers will watch a video called “ELL & ESL Teaching Strategies”. This brief video will discuss what to keep into consideration when teaching ELLs. It will give participants some ideas to think about when creating literacy activities for ELLs. After watching the video, participants will engage in a whole group discussion on what was talked about during the video. I will let participants ask questions and speak about their thoughts on the video.

Activity 2- Criteria for the Assignment

The criteria for the assignment will be given in the form of a handout (see Figure 7) Teachers will aim to create a lesson with a run time of approximately 20-30 minutes. Teachers will have access to materials which include crayons, paper, glue, etc. to create a literacy activity that goes with the distinct curriculum like Sound Sensible/SPIRE, foundations, and grade levels. On the handout (see figure 7), there will be a spot for groups to write down what skill they are focusing on, whether it's a phonics skill, vocabulary, etc. Then the presenter will let groups go

off and begin creating. I will be circling the room, sitting with each group and having a discussion about what they are creating. Participants will have the entire session 2 to create these activities with their group.

Baur and Manyak (2008) note that it is important to create instruction for ELLs that is language-rich. They also state that teachers who create this type of material for their ELL students help speed up their oral language and academic vocabulary. Creating materials for ELLs is different from creating materials for a mainstream monolingual student since they have unique linguistic needs. Some of the strategies given by Snyder et al. (2017) include incorporating writing activities daily and making time for small group instruction for different literacy skills while also incorporating content-area information. Participants will use what they know about creating activities and materials for their classroom and come up with appropriate lessons to share with their ELLs that will promote success for them in reading.

Activity 3 - Creating a Literacy Activity

To begin the third activity for session 2 participants will sit in small groups. The groups will be decided by the presenter. To follow, the presenter will sit with each table group for about five minutes and ask to approve the skill they want to create an activity for. During the time with each table, the presenter will ask them what NYSESLAT level and curriculum they chose to use for their activity. After each group is the skill, each group wants to do is approved the presenter will then go over the criteria for the activity.

Closing Activity- Exit Ticket

Participants will take what they created and put the materials in a folder where, during Session 3, they will present what they came up with. Participants will then get an exit ticket (see Figure 8) where they will write down the skill they created an activity for and write a comment

about it. What did they think about creating an activity for that skill using the curriculum of their choice? Was it difficult? Did they need more time? I would like to hear their thoughts.

Synthesis

Teachers are doing the activities in Session 2 to get information on culturally responsive teaching. According to Hu et al. (2021) ELLs bring a lot of culture into the United States, however some teachers still have limited knowledge when it comes to being a culturally responsive teacher. Being a culturally diverse teacher is something that is noted in education preparation programs, but Hu et al. say that programs should be incorporating different ways to train teachers in multi-faced CRT. The purpose of Activity 2 is for teachers to work together to create materials to use with future students when teaching literacy to ELLs.

Session 3

For the final Session of the three-day professional development, teachers will share the activities they created for the literacy skill and ELL level they chose. Sharing these activities will help teachers and give them ideas on how to teach literacy to ELLs and gain understanding about activities would be beneficial for them.

Agenda

I will begin by handing out the agenda for Session 3 (see Figure 9). I will read the agenda aloud to participants and leave time for questions and comments.

Opening Activity

In the last session, participants will begin by gathering their materials from the day before and discussing with their group how they want to present it to the whole group. They will choose

someone to “teach” the lesson to the class, and someone to hand out the materials needed for the lesson.

Activity 1- Presenting the activities

Participants will take turns to teach the activity they created to the class. While one group is teaching the rest of the participants will guess what grade level and level this activity could be used for. Participants not presenting will do the activities as they are the students. Although some of the participants may be monolingual, it is important for them to put themselves in the shoes of an ELL to see if they think the activities being presented would work for ELLs. As each group presents, the participants will fill out a feedback handout (see Figure 10) where they will rate what they think about the activity, how they can implement the activity in a lesson, what will work in their grade level (etc.) on scale and write comments if they deem necessary. They will not write their names on it as I will hand out the comment and rating sheet for creators to see feedback. Participants will be able to take notes on the activities given by each table group on a note taking chart (see Figure 11), so they can go back and use the activities in their future teaching.

Closing Activity- Distributing Materials

We will end this professional development by making copies of the materials created and sharing them with the group. Each person will leave with a folder of ideas and activities created throughout the professional development. I will then hand out an exit ticket where I would like participants to leave feedback on what they thought the last three days and write down questions, thoughts, and suggestions they may have about teaching ELLs literacy instruction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this PD is to give teachers the opportunity to work together to create materials and strategies to help teach ELLs literacy within the mainstream classroom (Colombo, et al., 2013; Cheung & Slavin, 2012). In the PD the goal is for teachers to come up with activities and ideas using an existing curricula to alleviate the literacy challenges ELLs face (Snyder et al., 2017). Some of the idea's teachers could create activities for are vocabulary, grammar informed by CRT to provide the best skills and strategies to teach reading competency to students (Watkins & Lindahl, 2010). Session three will end the course of the PD. Chapter 4 will talk about the takeaways I have about reading instruction for ELLs, recommendations, and final thoughts on the capstone.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Throughout this capstone, it has discussed different methods teachers can use to help teach English language learners how to read in the most efficient way possible. This project has also explored what skills and strategies are best used to help ELLs in the classroom during literacy. The main research question that lies is: How to improve reading instruction for ELLs in elementary school? There are many things you need to consider when working with ELL's like culturally responsive teaching, and what approach will best serve these students. Some of the questions that came up during this research were:

Does a phonetic approach or a whole language approach work better for teaching English language learners to read? When teaching literacy to ELLs where should you begin your literacy instruction? What are some helpful skills strategies and activities teachers can use to help teach English language learners how to read in the best way possible?

Conclusions

In this chapter, I will touch on the literature review that was discussed in chapter 2. Then, I will discuss the results that I saw during my research and finally I will end this capstone with a discussion on future research and recommendations.

A few conclusions have been made during this research. One of the conclusions that was made during the course of this research is that the whole language approach was seen to be the most effective approach to teach ELLs literacy. Moghadam and Adel (2011) note that when teaching a language to an ELL communication skills and linguistics need to work together. Having these two skills work together will help students be more successful in speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is also stated that using the whole language approach helps

promote learning a language and that the skill that is being taught should not be separated from learning the language.

Another conclusion that was made during this research is that breaking up words into different sounds is not an effective way to teach ELLs. Although phonics is a great approach to teaching students in general how to read, it is not the best way to teach ELLs how to read. In Chapter 2 a study by Snyder et al. (2017) was discussed. It was concluded that there were better aspects of literacy to focus on that would promote successful for ELLs during literacy instruction and that teaching two skills together rather than separate is more effective for these students.

Professional Development

In Chapter 3, I created a PD for teachers to come together and create activities and materials that they can use in their future classrooms to help teach ELL's literacy skills. The goal of the professional development was for teachers to be able to work together, use what they know about teaching ELL's, and use what they know about important topics and reading and present the materials to each other for future use.

Before teachers were able to begin creating with their fellow colleagues, a discussion and information was given to them about being culturally sensitive, informing them on different NYSESLAT levels and giving them time to use what they know about teaching ELL's and transfer that knowledge into the activities during the PD. During the PD teachers were able to use curriculum given to them by the presenter to do the activities, however the hope is that some of the materials and activities created during the PD can be modified to work for different curriculums that they may be using in their own school. There was a lot of things teachers needed to consider when creating their activities like being a culturally responsive teacher, keeping their NYSESLAT level in mind, and making it interesting and fun for students.

Implications for Student Learning

Students begin learning to read starting in kindergarten and use the skills throughout high school and into college if they choose to go. It is important for students to be able to read confidently, answer questions, etc. In some cases, ELLs have more of a challenge in doing this than a typical monolingual student. Learning a second language while also learning to read and learning content from different subjects is a difficult task. I feel that students will benefit from some of the ideas discussed during this Capstone like the whole language approach for reasons. The top reason I feel that students will benefit from using a whole language approach is because like Onukaogu (1997) mentions, it is a more natural way of learning. Instead of breaking up skills, teaching more than one skill together, Shang (2017) notes it lets students learn the way they want to learn. In my personal experience letting students learn in a more natural way seems to be more effective, especially when teaching ELLs.

Implications for Teaching

Throughout the research given in the capstone, there are many things that I think will be beneficial for teachers when teaching ELL's how to read. More specifically, I believe according to this research that teaching using a whole language approach will be more effective for students when teaching them how to read and will let teachers cover more material using a more natural approach. One idea Onukaogu (1997) notes is you should teach more than one skill at a time. For example, instead of teaching a separate lesson for vocabulary and comprehension, teaching them together has teacher cover more skills all at once. It is also important for teachers to remember that incorporating a student's native language is crucial in the success for literacy instruction. Guglielmi (2008) notes using both a student's native language and second language will help them progress at a better rate for learning literacy skills and reading.

Something else to mention about implications for teachers is that if teachers understand a student's proficiency level according to the NYSELAT. All these levels were discussed during chapter 3, session 1. Teachers were able to take notes on these levels to use in the future when creating materials and developing strategies for students will become easier and students and teachers will become more successful.

It is important for schools to make sure teachers have time to attend professional developments for many reasons. One of the reasons is that unfortunately some teachers do not have a lot of exposure to working with ELLs, so when an ELL is placed in their classroom, they do not know how to accommodate them in the proper way.

Recommendations

The question revealing this capstone is: How can we improve reading instruction for ELLs? With teaching ELLs the part that needs improvement is getting more teachers trained to work with ELLs. Offering PDs for teachers for teachers to improve their teaching methods on how to teach ELLs how to read using different literacy strategies would be extremely beneficial. Using the whole language approach and teaching more than one content at a time according to this research are great strategies to use when working on literacy with ELLs.

Final Thoughts

Teaching ELLs is a challenge and preparing classwork for them can be even more challenging for teachers. Unfortunately, some teachers do not have the resources or time to time research how to better their lessons, ideas and activities to best meet the needs in literacy for these students. My hope would be that through the research done in Chapter 2 and the PD presented in Chapter 3, teachers will have a better idea on how to create instruction in reading that will help ELLs be as successful as possible in the classroom.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Session 1 Agenda

SESSION 1 AGENDA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick write• Note Catcher NYSESLAT• Sorting activity• Taking a look at curriculum• Q & A• Exit Ticket

Figure 3

NYSESLAT Notes

NYSESLAT LEVEL NOTES

Entering	Emerging	Transitioning

Expanding	Commanding

Figure 4

Sorting activity

Entering	Emerging	Transitioning

Expanding	Commanding

Figure 5

Exit ticket Session 1

Name _____

EXIT TICKET SESSION 1



What are the top three literacy skills for ELLs you would like to work on to create materials for?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Figure 6*Session 2 Agenda*

SESSION 2 AGENDA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Do Now- What type of learner are you?● Discussion● Review Culturally Responsive Teaching● Criteria for Assignment● Create activity with group● Exit Ticket

Figure 7

Assignment Criteria



ASSIGNMENT CRITERIA

Please work with your table group to come up with an activity to teach the following skill:

What ELL level is this for? _____

Can this be taught on multiple levels? If so please explain...

What materials will you use to help create your activity? _____

Please explain in a few sentences what your plan is for the activity you are creating

Figure 8

Exit Ticket 2

Name _____

EXIT TICKET SESSION 2



1. What skill are you making an activity for?
2. What NYSESLAT level could it be for?

Notes on skill:

Figure 9*Session 3 Agenda*

SESSION 3 AGENDA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather materials• Presentations, rating activity and Note-taking for each presentation• Distribute materials

Figure 11

Note catcher on presentation

NOTE CATCHER- PRESENTATIONS



Name of Activity _____

Notes:

Name of Activity _____

Notes:

Name of Activity _____

Notes:
