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USING LITERACY STRATEGIES WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL ELL STUDENTS TO IMPROVE THEIR LITERACY SKILLS

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Abstract English Language Learners (ELLs) often struggle with literacy due to discrepancies in their social and academic language skills. Explicit instruction of research-based literacy strategies is often suggested to strengthen their literacy skills. The researchers in this study investigated the effectiveness of using research-based explicit literacy strategies during small group instruction to improve the vocabulary and comprehension skills of middle school ELLs. A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data, including a range of assessments and interviews (participant, parent and teachers). Findings showed that participants were successful when engaged in daily instruction, but that information did not always transfer to their broader assessments.

Keywords: teacher action research, diversity, differentiated instruction, literacy, English as a second language, English language arts

Introduction

Literacy can be defined as one's ability to read (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension), understand (vocabulary and comprehension) and use/communicate (listen, speak and write) among various texts (print and non-print text,

spoken word, etc.) to connect and interact with others (Keefe & Copeland, 2011; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) often struggle with literacy even if they are not first generation. The impact of the home language environment can affect academic achievement, particularly in comprehension, decoding and encoding (Uccelli & Phillips Galloway, 2016). To address this continuing problem, research-based explicit vocabulary and comprehension strategies are often suggested for remediation and achievement of student growth to strengthen the skills necessary to be successful on grade level and English as a Second Language (ESL) assessments (Uccelli & Phillips Galloway, 2016).

Using a case study approach with students, teachers and parents, this investigation viewed the effectiveness of using research-based explicit literacy strategies during small group instruction to improve middle school ELLs' reading comprehension. The research question that propelled the study was "What is the effect of middle school ELLs' comprehension development when small groups are used to deliver research-based explicit literacy instruction?" Through a combined cognitive and sociocultural approach to literacy, teachers trained in the research model sought to engage students in reading skills enhancement that was developmentally appropriate while also engaging them in a safe social space that allowed their academic needs to be met (Britto & Brooks-Gunn 2001; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Davidson, 2010).

Literature Review

The 2015 report from the Institute of Education Sciences found 31% of fourth grade students and 24% of eighth grade students were reading below basic levels while 33% of fourth graders and 42 % of eighth graders were reading at a basic level (IES, 2015). Twenty-seven percent of fourth graders were reading at the proficient level, and 9% were at the advanced level; 31% of eighth graders were reading at the proficient level, and 3% were at the advanced level (IES, 2015). According to Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) and Krashen (2004), the number of struggling readers in today's classrooms has held steady with little improvement, and upwards of 70% of children considered to be low income have basic or below basic reading levels. Lanning (2009) and Tatum (2008) add that many eighth through twelfth grade students read below the proficient level which impacts matriculation through school because many who struggle academically drop out of high school and have difficulty participating as literate citizens in the workplace and communities. In middle and high school, non-proficient readers continue to struggle because reading, interacting with and comprehending content specific text increases (Harvey & Zemelman, 2004). Sizer and Meier (2006) believe it is imperative to create a supportive learning environment so that all students, especially those in middle school, can achieve their academic potential. An essential component to any supportive learning environment is building relationships with students and knowing the students one teaches personally and educationally (Sizer & Meier, 2006).

ELLs Literacy Challenges. ELLs come from many diverse backgrounds, and programming to support their learning must be as broad as the students and their individual learning needs

(Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2011). It is important to utilize small group instruction for students who struggle academically, including those who are learning English. Small group instruction allows teachers to target a specific area of need with explicit instruction and monitor the students' progress regularly while also giving students the opportunity to actively participate in the educational environment with like peers (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2017; IES, 2007).

When engaging in literacy-related activities, ELLs often find content specific texts difficult to understand; not because they cannot read, but because they are not familiar with the specific content related terminology and writing format. Being literate in a content area requires learning vocabulary and knowing the meaning of words in the context of the subject and language structure. Content literacy also requires students to link what they read with key concepts to comprehend text (Gibbons, 2009). Often ELLs are not well prepared for the demands of middle and high school education because they lack necessary experience, background and vocabulary from native language speakers (Freeman & Freeman, 2009). Teachers must advocate for ELLs learning and acknowledge the difference between ELLs' everyday social language and their use of academic language (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010; Optiz & Guccione, 2009). Robb (2008, 2010) emphasizes that vocabulary and background knowledge connects to reading comprehension, and these skills should be developed daily in all classrooms.

When identifying students who struggle and are not meeting grade-level expectations, it is imperative to provide instructional modifications to accelerate academic growth (Johnston, 2010). Lanning (2009) asserts that content teachers cannot assume that ELLs, or any students for that matter, can read and comprehend at grade level. Broad literacy must be addressed alongside content in course instruction (Lanning, 2009). Research demonstrates that teachers need to provide as many opportunities as possible for children to read (Allington, 2012). Students should have the opportunity to choose level appropriate independent reading to develop reading stamina and interest while improving accuracy and fluency (NMSA, 2010; Robb, 2008). Students should be engaged in independent reading, and access to high-interest materials is necessary for this to occur (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Gallagher, 2003).

Comprehension and Close Reading. The goal of reading is to comprehend what is being read, and teachers are key to comprehension development for students (Beers, 2003). Teachers must use a variety of explicit literacy strategies to assist their students to understand text (Beers, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2012). A purpose must be given to students in order to determine what is an important focus when reading any text (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Tovani, 2000). Through research-based strategy instruction such as "comparing and contrasting, connecting to prior experiences, inferencing, predicting, questioning to the text, recognizing the author's purpose…, and summarizing" a purpose for reading can be set which leads to improved comprehension (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Beers, 2003, p. 40-41; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Tovani, 2000; Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003).

Reading is an active process that requires students use metacognitive skills and be reflective about their own thinking while reading (Beers, 2003; Brown, 1987). By engaging in texts and actively constructing meaning while reading, students are able to pull from prior knowledge, reflect while reading, utilize text features and monitor their comprehension (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Brown, 1987; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2012). Addressing students' ability to think metacognitively about what they read and then apply various literacy strategies across content areas allows them to see the text/content relationships to transfer those concepts to various subject areas which in turn improves their overall academic ability (Gritter, 2010; NMSA, 2010). However, most students cannot learn this process automatically; teachers must model how to think and activate what is known to then process new information (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Harvey & Daniels, 2009; NMSA, 2010). It is important for readers to activate schema and make connections within the text as well as identify major elements of the text (Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher, 2004). Additionally, students must also have fix-up strategies to assist in scaffolding support to comprehend difficult content that they struggle with (NMSA, 2010; Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003). Zimmerman and Hutchins (2003) state that students must know how to slow down, ask questions and re-read to problem solve and comprehend text.

To build students' abilities to comprehend the texts they read and engage with that text, they must learn to close read (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2012). Close reading is defined as reading that causes students to engage purposefully with a text through multiple readings while focusing on specific aspects of the text including vocabulary, text structure, main ideas and supporting details to support comprehension (Boyles, 2013). Extended practice with close reading allows one to build positive reading habits and the stamina to utilize these reading habits independently (Fisher & Frey, 2012). These habits require that explicit instruction and practice be provided consistently for students to fully engage in pre-reading, multiple readings of a text, annotating text, using graphic organizers and summarizing what they read (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Baker and McEnery (2017) and Fisher and Frey (2012) add that it is imperative that students not be told to just do these things, but teachers must model the expectation, facilitate discussion and encourage questions.

Theoretical Framework

A combined cognitive and sociocultural approach to literacy is the foundation of this research as literacy skills can be developed systematically using the social and cultural constructs students interact with daily (Davidson, 2010). Cognitivists agree that literacy skills are developed through specific stages, which include decoding (6-7 years old), fluency (7-8 years old), reading to learn (8-14 years old), etc. However, if educators teach literacy skills only in the stages above, students, often from diverse backgrounds, who struggle to read and do not master each stage in succession are often seen to lack the skills necessary to move on academically (Davidson, 2010). Many times, students from diverse backgrounds do not move through school (elementary, middle, or high school) with developmentally appropriate literacy skills. By understanding the needs of students and the knowledge they do bring with them to the classroom, teachers can provide direct instruction while engaging students with print to

develop literacy skills while improving confidence and motivation to read (Britto & Brooks-Gunn 2001; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Davidson, 2010).

Methodology

The question researchers sought to answer in this study was: What is the effect of middle school ELLs' comprehension development when small groups are used to deliver research-based explicit literacy instruction? A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data that was collected over the course of 15 weeks in one academic year. Participants' pre- and post- assessment data were collected from Common Formative Assessments (CFA), benchmark assessments, literacy strategy assessments and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). Additionally, the participants' sixth and seventh grade End of Grade (EOG) data and WIDA ACCESS Test (World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment) data were used. Data analysis of participant, parent and general education teacher interviews allowed the researchers to gauge the participants' feelings, behaviors and progress in reading development. These interviews occurred prior to beginning strategies instruction. Researchers collected the aforementioned data to examine the effect small group and literacy strategy instruction had on the participants. The methodology explored the effectiveness of strategies implemented to improve participants' comprehension.

CFAs and district benchmark assessments were used to review all students' attainment of learning goals district wide. The CFAs followed intermittent instruction of common core standards and occurred every three weeks; the benchmarks occurred after each nine-week grading period and covered all grade level language arts standards. The district mandated SRI was used to measure the students' Lexile levels; a Lexile score of 870-1010 was on grade level for seventh grade. EOG data were collected, and a score of 3 or higher is required to pass this assessment. The WIDA ACCESS Test data was also collected; data from this assessment is collected yearly by the ESL teacher to determine if students could be exited from the ESL program. To exit the ESL program in the state in which this study took place, students had to score at least a level 4 in reading and writing and a level 6 in listening and speaking.

This study took place in a middle school in a small city school district in the Southeastern United States. The middle school had 550 students comprised of 27.8% African Americans, 30.2% Hispanics, 27.8% Caucasians and .9% Asians; at this school, 4.5% of the students were in the ESL program and 10.9% received EC (Exceptional Children) services. The average class size in the general education classes was 20-24 students.

Two ELL students participated in this study, and both were in the same general education language arts classroom. Student A was a seventh grade, 12-year-old boy, and Student B was a seventh grade, 12-year-old girl. Both were first generation Americans whose parents were from Mexico; the participants were born in the same community in which the school is located. Both

participants struggled with word recognition and comprehension. This study took place in a co-teaching environment through a push-in model. The ESL teacher was available daily for 75 minutes in the participants' language arts class to facilitate small group instruction, and the student participants received ESL services via a pull-out model every other day (A/B day) for 75 minutes. The classroom was equipped with an active board, ActivExpressions, computers and a large library of books, magazines and dictionaries.

Literacy Interventions. Over the course of 15 weeks, multiple research-based literacy strategies were utilized repeatedly to support the participants' reading comprehension development. Strategy instruction was aligned to the specific Southeastern state's seventh grade Common Core Standards and WIDA Standards language objectives. The comprehension related strategies focused on pre-reading, multiple readings of a text with a specific purpose, annotating the text, using graphic organizers and summarizing what they had read.

During the pre-reading process, pre-reading activities were used to introduce a topic and address possible vocabulary and comprehension issues via frontloading. The participants watched video segments to enhance their background knowledge of the pending text's content. Multiple readings of individual texts were required as participants engaged in the 15-week intervention. Participants read each text at least twice, and during these multiple readings, the participants would interact with the text via a lens that directed by their teacher. The participants would annotate the text during these readings by highlighting important information or drawing and writing in the margins to identify concrete information and inferences they had drawn. Multiple readings also allowed the teacher to demonstrate reading fluency and proper enunciation via read-alouds of the text while modeling how to think about the text as one reads, asking questions and making connections to the text to determine the main idea and supporting details. The teacher also modeled how to annotate the text to highlight the passage's important information, avoiding the urge to over annotate.

When annotating the text, explicit instruction was provided that supported the participants as they learned to highlight vocabulary, main ideas and supporting details, positive and negative aspects of their reading and point of view. The participants also utilized highlighters to notate where they felt confident in their knowledge and understanding of what they were reading and where they still had questions. Additionally, when annotating the text, the participants were taught interventions related to test-taking strategies where they were encouraged to read the questions prior to reading the passage and notate in a passage when it connected to the questions being asked.

The participants also engaged in explicit instruction related to the use of graphic organizers. Throughout the course of the 15-week intervention, the student participants learned to use a variety of graphic organizers based on their purpose. They were instructed on how to use and

develop graphic organizers that addressed the following: compare and contrast, timeline, cause and effect, sequencing and problem/solution.

Finally, several interventions addressed summarizing text. These interventions included explicit instruction and guided and independent practice using language supports such as sentence stems, chunking (key words, main idea and paraphrase) and outlines to familiarize the participants with proper syntax and discourse of the content. As students participated in these literacy strategy interventions, participants consistently engaged in conversation surrounding their reading and practice annotating, using graphic organizers and summarizing the text citing specific information from the text to support their answers.

Results

Throughout the course of the 15-week literacy intervention, there was evidence that both participants demonstrated some level of success with a majority of the literacy strategies which must be considered in addition to their performance on the CFAs, benchmarks and SRI assessments. The participants also demonstrated that they were able to annotate text, utilize graphic organizers and summarize what they read on new information, areas which they struggled with prior to the small group instruction. As mentioned in the participant profile, Student A took an extended amount of time to complete assessments. By working in small groups, Student A was able to demonstrate his progress in smaller assessments related to individual reading concepts. Additionally, the small group instruction allowed the ESL teacher to recognize Student B's need for glasses, when this had gone unnoticed in a large group setting.

Overview/Participant Profile. Student A: During formal and informal assessments, Student A needed an hour or more over the allotted time to complete the assignment. During the sixth grade year, he scored a level 2 on the reading EOG and did not pass. He also took but did not pass the WIDA ACCES Test for ESL students; he scored 3.8 in reading and writing and scored a 6 on the speaking and listening sections of test (See Table 4). Students must pass all portions of the test during a single administration.

During an interview with Student A, he stated that he liked to read, especially "if it is new and interesting." He stated that good readers should make inferences while reading, and "look for context clues and write good summaries." He felt it was important to know how to read because he needs to understand the book to be successful in school and for the future. He expressed that he needed to work on writing better summaries, looking over the questions and chunking the words to understand them. He mentioned that he did not have a special place to read at home and read only when he felt like it. Finally, he stated if the book is interesting enough, he makes an effort to read.

Student B*:* Student B makes many spelling errors as she does not apply the rules of spelling. She did not pass the reading EOG in sixth grade year, scoring a level 2. She also took the WIDA ACCES Test where she scored 3.5 in reading, 3.9 in writing, and a 6 in speaking and listening; overall, she did not pass this test (See Table 4). During an interview, Student B stated that she sometimes likes to read because she is always bored. She felt "good readers underline keywords and talk to the text." She believed that reading was important because it teaches her lessons about life and practicing reading will help her become a better reader and pass her tests. She acknowledged that both reading and writing are important skills to have, and she needs to work on revising and looking back over her work.

In the parent interviews for Student A and Student B, they shared similar thoughts. Both parents thought their children did not like to read; Student A's father shared that he did not think his child was a strong reader or comprehended what he read. Both parents stated their children read three to four times a week for half an hour and expressed that they would like to know how to help their children read better at home. In her interview, the language arts teacher shared that both participants were reading below grade level. At the time of the interview, their classes were working on summarizing paragraphs and identifying elements of plot. Both student participants were also enrolled in an elective class called "Big Future" that provided them with additional support related to literacy instruction. The teacher expressed that she did not think either participant read very much at home. She would like for Student A to be able to figure out words, talk to the text and understand the questions; she believed Student B needed assistance revising her written responses.

CFA, Benchmarks and SRI Assessments. The participants were assessed on their attainment of learning goals through their CFA and benchmarks. The CFA is an assessment that follows intermittent instruction of common core standards and occurs every three weeks. The district benchmark tests occur after each nine-week grading period. SRI data was used to measure the participants' Lexile levels (See Tables 1 and 2). The data assisted in determining specific literacy strategies to be implemented during instruction.

Table 1: CFA Data

	Pre-Assessment CFA 7ELA CA-RE-1Q (270934)	**Formative Assessment 1**	**Formative Assessment 2**	**Post-Assessment CFA 7ELA CA-RE-1Q (270934)**
Student A	4 Correct 8 Incorrect	Identify main idea 10/10	Elements of plot 8/10	9 Correct 3 Incorrect
Student B	5 Correct	Identify main idea	Elements of plot 9/10	11 Correct

	7 Incorrect	10/10		1 Incorrect

Table 2: Benchmark and SRI Data

	Fall Benchmark	Spring Benchmark	SRI Fall	SRI Winter	SRI Spring
Student A	50.0%: 24/48	41.7%: 20/48	534 points	736 points	833 points
Student B	35.4%: 17/48	35.4%: 17/48	437 points	387 points	429 points

Students A and B were pre-assessed via CFAs before beginning the strategy instruction in their language arts class. The test contained three reading passages with 12 multiple choice questions. The participants were tested on their use and knowledge of context clues, central idea, details, plot, conflict and author's point of view. Student A obtained four correct answers out of 12, while Student B obtained five correct answers out of 12 on the pre-test. During the first semester CFAs, Student A received 10/10 in main idea and 8/10 on elements of plot; Student B had the same score for main idea, but she scored 9/10 on elements of plot. On the post test, the participants were given the same passages and questions from the pre-test. Student A got 9 of 12 correct, and Student B got 11 of 12 correct.

The benchmark tests from the fall and spring were compared. Student A performed better in the fall with 50%. He had 24 correct answers out of 48. During in the spring, Student A scored 41.7%. He had 20 correct out of 48 questions. Student B scored the same on the fall and spring benchmark with 35.4% correct. The researchers compared the participants' SRI data from the fall, winter and spring. Student A obtained 534 points in the fall, and he increased his SRI score to 736 by the winter. In the spring he again improved with a score of 833. Student B scored 437 in the fall and 387 points in the winter. In the spring her score increased from the winter to 429 points. During the study, the teacher determined Student B had difficulty seeing; upon this finding, she was referred to a doctor and received glasses after the study was completed. It is possible that this was a factor in her reading ability and subsequent scores.

Literacy Interventions Assessment. Throughout the course of this study, a variety of research-based close reading strategies were used and constantly revisited to address the participants' reading comprehension. As was stated in the Literacy Interventions section of the

Methodology, participants engaged in interventions that allowed them to complete multiple readings of a text with purpose, practice annotating the text, using graphic organizers and summarizing what they had read.

Assessment results of the 15-week literacy strategies instruction were determined on a Met/Not Met basis, which Met with Some Difficulty also being used. Student A received a Met on 10/15 (67%) of the assessments. He received a Met with Some Difficulty on 3/15 (20%) and Not Met on 2/15 (13%). Student B received a Met on 10/15 (67%) of the assessments and Not Met on 5/15 (33%) (See Table 3).

Table 3: Literacy Intervention Focus and Data

Week	Common Core Standard	Strategy Focus	Student A	Student B
1	**RL. 7.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.	Annotating Text, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea/Supporting Details	Met	Met
2	**RI. 7.1:** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Annotating Text, Vocabulary Development, Use of Graphic Organizers	Met	Met
3	**RL. 7.3**: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).	Vocabulary Development, Elements of Fiction/Nonfiction	Met	Met
4	**RI. 7.6:** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her	Annotating Text, Vocabulary Development, Author's Purpose, Use of Graphic Organizers	Met with some difficulty	Met

	position from that of others.			
5	**RI. 7.1**	Questioning the Text, Vocabulary Development, Author's Purpose	Met	Not Met
6	**RI. 7.1**	Annotating Text, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea	Not Met	Met
7	**RL. 7.2**	Summarizing, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea, Use of Graphic Organizers	Met	Met
8	**RL.7.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connective and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone. **RL. 7.2**	Summarizing, Chunking, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea, Author's Purpose	Met with some difficulty	Not Met
9	**RI. 7.1**	Inferences, Chunking, Vocabulary Development, Test Taking Strategies, Use of Graphic Organizers	Met	Not Met
10	**RI. 7.6**	Annotating Text, Summarizing, Chunking, Author's Purpose, Vocabulary Development, Use of	Met	Met

		Graphic Organizers		
11	**RL.7.4** **RL. 7.1**	Citing Evidence, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea, Author's Purpose	Not Met	Met
12	**RL.7.4**	Using Context Clues, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea, Author's Purpose	Met	Not Met
13	**RI.7.2** **RI. 7.1**	Summarizing Text, Vocabulary Development, Main Idea, Author's Purpose	Met	Met
14	**RL.7.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.	Using Context Clues, Graphic Organizers, Vocabulary Development	Met with some difficulty	Not Met
15	**RI.7.5:** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.	Vocabulary Development, Main Idea and Purpose, Use of Graphic Organizers	Met	Met

WIDA ACCES Test and EOG Assessments. Both participants took the WIDA ACCES Test in seventh grade, and upon completion of the study, they took the seventh grade EOG tests. Student A did not pass the EOG reading test; he scored a level 1. He also took the WIDA ACCES Test where he scored 6 in reading, 3.7 in writing, 6 in speaking and 4.7 in listening. Student B did not pass the EOG reading test and scored a level 1. She also took but did not pass the WIDA

ACCES Test where she scored 2.9 in reading, 3.5 in writing, 2.9 in speaking and 4.3 in listening (See Table 4).

Table 4: EOG and WIDA ACCESS Assessment Data

	6th Grade EOG Scores	6th Grade WIDA ACCESS Scores	7th Grade EOG Scores	7th Grade WIDA ACCESS Scores
Student A	Reading: 2	Reading: 3.8 Writing: 3.8 Speaking: 6 Listening: 6	Reading: 1	Reading: 6 Writing 3.7 Speaking: 6 Listening 4.7
Student B	Reading: 2	Reading: 3.5 Writing: 3.9 Speaking: 6 Listening: 6	Reading: 1	Reading: 2.9 Writing: 3.5 Speaking: 2.9 Listening: 4.3

Discussion

When considering the research question for this study, it was determined that the answer was two-fold. As is referenced in the findings above, the participants were successful on the literacy strategies instruction assessments (See Table 3); both participants achieved the Met status at a rate of 67% (10/15). Students A and B showed growth in their pre and post CFAs. During the fall and spring benchmark assessments, Student A scored lower in the spring than in the fall, and Student B's scores remained the same. Student A's SRI data from the fall, winter and spring showed growth while Student B's SRI data declined from the fall to winter and increased between the winter and spring. Both participants scored lower on their seventh grade EOG than the sixth grade EOG. On the WIDA ACCES Test, Student A saw growth in his reading scores and a decline in his writing and listening scores. It is important to note that he scored a 6 on the reading portion of the WIDA ACCES Test, which is the highest possible score. Additionally, although both participants had lower scores in seventh grade on the listening portion of the WIDA ACCES Test than in sixth grade, both participants still passed this portion of the test. Student B declined in all areas on the WIDA ACCES Test. This information allowed the researchers to draw the conclusion that when presenting information in daily instruction, the participants were successful, but that success did not necessarily transfer to their broader assessments. After observing Student B in class and reviewing her work, the teacher realized that she had difficulties seeing the board and the texts from which she was reading. The parents were informed of this issue and it was suggested the parents to take her for an eye exam. After a visit to the doctor, it was confirmed that Student B had vision trouble and needed glasses.

The participants felt supported in the learning environment developed in this case study (Sizer & Meier, 2006). The individualized instruction and interactions with the participants allowed

the teacher to truly build relationships with them, plan personalized instruction to meet their needs, and in the case of Student B, realize her need for vision care (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2011; Sizer & Meier, 2006). This study aligned with Harvey and Daniels (2009), as new strategies were introduced through small group instruction, which helped the participants better comprehend the text being studied. The results of the post-assessments were similar in both cases. The researchers noticed that both participants missed similar questions on the language arts assessments and indicated that the participants needed continued instruction in the areas of vocabulary development, finding the main idea and identifying the purpose. Through continued teacher support and modeling of close reading strategies such as reading text multiple times and annotating text with a specific purpose, participants can continue to practice these skills and utilize these strategies as they read independently (Brown, 1987; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2012).

In this study, a variety of close reading strategies related to annotating text, using graphic organizers and summarizing were explicitly taught to the participants, and the participants demonstrated success on 10 of the 15 assessments related to this instruction. Gibbons (2009) suggested that addressing subject specific literacy needs should be explicitly taught across content areas to support ELLs as they develop their literacy skills. As evidenced in Table 3, the participants struggled with several areas including citing textual evidence, determining point of view, vocabulary, drawing inferences and using context clues. In his interview, Student A indicated that good readers made inferences, used context clues and summarized what they read. Student B stated that good readers could locate key words and interact with the text. Although this study showed that the participants were still learning how to proficiently make inferences, use context clues, etc., they were aware that these were strategies they needed to utilize to be good readers. Beers (2003) acknowledged these issues and supports the need for teachers to utilize a variety of literacy strategies including clarifying, comparing and contrasting, connecting prior knowledge, inference, predicting, questioning, recognizing the author's purpose, seeing casual relationships, summarizing and visualizing in order to help students understand texts.

In this study, research-based literacy strategies were modeled to the participants multiple times, and they were provided many opportunities to read and use the strategies to support literacy growth (Harvey & Zemelman, 2004; NMSA, 2010). Allington (2012) and Krashen (2004) emphasized the need to support older struggling readers by increasing students' access to informational texts and interaction with the text. The participants also need a toolbox of comprehension strategies to use when reading informational texts and opportunities to use informational texts for authentic purposes. Although the focus of the interventions in this study focused on comprehension, consistent emphasis was placed on the participants' vocabulary development as Optiz and Guccione (2008) suggest that ELLs struggle with the shift between social and academic language. Lanning (2009) and Gibbons (2009) supported this sentiment as ELL students often speak English with their peers, and teachers assume that they use English academically as well which often is not the case.

Conclusion

This study sought to demonstrate how two participants benefitted from explicit research-based literacy strategies instruction in addition to regular classroom instruction. The participants' results on their CFAs, benchmarks and SRI assessments indicated that both participants' CFA scores increased; however, Student A had a slight decrease in the spring benchmark, and Student B had a slight decrease on the spring SRI assessment. Moving forward, researchers will continue to examine how small group, explicit strategy instruction with ELLs impacts their overall literacy growth. Future research should extend to include the comparative results of the other students in the general education language arts course to determine if the strategies instruction were the main source of the participants' development. Additionally, the researchers will expand this study to incorporate multiple subject areas such as science, social studies and math teachers to continue the literacy development of students across content areas.

This study focused specifically on the reading aspect of literacy as defined in the literature review; however, additional data was provided in this section in the areas of writing, speaking and listening as proficiency is needed in all areas for students to be exited from the ESL program in this particular state. Future research is needed in the acquisition of reading as well as writing, speaking and listening to gain a complete understanding of literacy, not only for ELLs, but for all students. Additionally, continued support for parents is needed. Interviews with the participants' parents showed that the parents did not believe their children were strong readers, and both wanted to learn how to assist their children with reading while at home. Future research should consider ways to engage and support the parents of adolescent students, both ELL and English speaking students.

About the Authors

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