

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES TO IMPROVE READING IN ESL STUDENTS

By

SARA BONANNO

B.Ed. Queen's University, 2008

H.B.A. University of Toronto, 2007

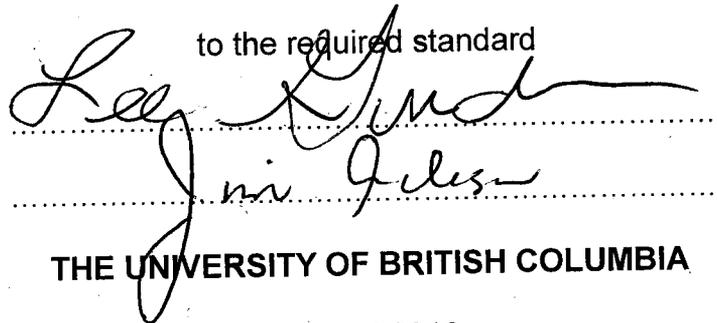
**A GRADUATING PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

in

**THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of Language and Literacy Education**

We accept this major paper as conforming

to the required standard



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2010

© Sara Bonanno, 2010

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: Introduction	3
Importance of English Literacy and Reading Comprehension for ESL Learners.....	3
Purpose and Research Question.....	6
CHAPTER 2: Methods and Conceptual Background	8
Data Collection & Evaluation	8
Conceptual Background	9
CHAPTER 3: Results	12
Phonemic Instruction.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fluency	15
Vocabulary Acquisition	16
Comprehension Strategies	19
Oral Language Development.....	23
CHAPTER 4: Discussion	25
Implications for Future Research.....	26
Implications for Teachers.....	26
Implications for Future Research	28
REFERENCES	30

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Canadian Society is shaped by a multitude of factors including its geography, laws, as well as its history; however in large part, it is also shaped by its people. Particularly, it is a society which encompasses much cultural and linguistic diversity as is evident through the variety of languages and traditions that those who settle here bring with them and pass on to subsequent generations of Canadians. Despite this, one of the challenges faced by those whose first language is not English, including many newcomers to Canada as well as those who are born here (e.g. Aboriginal children or people born in primarily immigrant communities), is becoming proficient in the English language. Specifically, English literacy and reading comprehension, that is, the ability to understand the meaning behind written words, is a valuable life skill that every person should possess and in today's society, needs in order to function and meaningfully contribute to life in Canada.

Importance of English Literacy and Reading Comprehension for ESL Learners

With regards to elementary school aged children, the educational system in Canada assumes the responsibility of teaching English literacy and reading comprehension. The complexity of this endeavour is further highlighted as the cultural diversity within Canadian society is also reflected in classrooms across this country, especially those located in large urban and multi-cultural centers such as Vancouver and Toronto. According to recent estimates in the Vancouver School Board, approximately 25% of students are designated as English as a Second Language (ESL)

learners and 60% speak a language other than English at home (Vancouver School Board, 2010). Similarly, the Toronto District School Board states that over 50% of its students speak a language other than English at home (Toronto District School Board, 2010). These statistics are significant in light of research which suggests decreased academic achievement in ESL students compared to their native speaking counterparts. Specifically, there is considerable evidence which shows that ESL learners consistently underperform in their academic studies (Echevarria, Powers, & Short, 2006; Gunderson, 2007). In the United States for example, fourth grade ESL learners scored well below non-ESL learners in various subject areas within national standardized tests, including 35-points, 24-points, and 32-points below in reading comprehension, math, and science respectively (Goldenberg, 2010). Given this evidence, it would appear that a large proportion of children enrolled in elementary schools within Canadian multi-cultural cities, are at an academic disadvantage, simply based on their mother tongue.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that English literacy and reading comprehension are fundamental to the success of students across all academic disciplines and are consequently of great concern for teachers, school boards, and curriculum developers alike, as they must collectively find ways to integrate effective literacy instruction throughout all areas of the curriculum. Despite this collective effort within academic institutions for children, the issue of how individual teachers aid in literacy and reading comprehension development comes to the forefront and is a personal concern of mine within my professional career. To teach effectively to every student, teachers must employ approaches that are conducive to a number of learning styles, for example, by using an array of auditory, visual and kinaesthetic approaches. By using an assortment

of tools and methods to teach, teachers practice what is called differentiated instruction. However, this matter is made more challenging when teachers have a variety of students in their classroom who do not speak English as their first language, who are learning to speak, listen, read, and write in English while at school. The issue of differentiated instruction is further compounded by the need for teachers to incorporate a variety of teaching methods to accommodate the many learning styles present in one classroom, to using methods of instruction that favour both native and non-native English students as well. The issues and challenges associated with English literacy and reading comprehension within diverse classrooms have also been evidenced through my personal experiences in teaching at an inner city school in Scarborough, Ontario during teacher's college. I was placed in a school where a majority of students came from non-English-speaking backgrounds (e.g. Tamil, Punjabi). In that school, specific, contained ESL classrooms, that is, specialized classrooms within schools which cater to the unique needs of ESL learners, were not a feasible option for all of these students due to a lack of resources. Additionally, I noticed that literacy scores on standardized tests (in 2007-2009) for grades 3 and 6 in this school were much lower than the provincial average; in fact, they were the lowest in their school district (Education Quality and Accountability Office [EQAQO], 2010). As a result of this, I wondered what teachers could do to improve literacy for these children learning English as a second language (L2). Additionally, after doing some research into this area, I found an abundance of studies on this topic related to native English speakers; however, a large gap exists on instructional approaches to literacy for L2 learners.

Purpose and Research Question

Many government bodies overseeing education have recognized the need for ESL services and have subsequently developed policies, guidelines and funding programs in this area (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). Despite this progress and the goals outlined in various documents, it is important that individual teachers, with the support of educational bodies (e.g. Ministries of Education, School Boards, and individual schools), achieve these objectives and foster an environment where students can be successful in English literacy as well as reading comprehension through day-to-day activities within the classroom setting. It is simply not feasible for this to be achieved solely as a result of ESL specific programs. Accordingly, teachers must also be given the appropriate education and tools to promote literacy such that ESL learners can attain proficiency levels as close to native-speakers as possible.

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to review empirical research evidence pertaining to the implementation of various instructional approaches geared towards improving reading comprehension in ESL learners. Here, the term ESL is used to describe and refer to students who do not speak English as their first language, who have not yet become fluent in English, and whose primary language spoken out of school is not English.

This evidence will be reviewed and critically examined to answer the question: What are the most effective instructional practices teachers can adopt for improving reading comprehension in elementary school aged, ESL students, enrolled in kindergarten to grade eight classrooms?

Results from this investigation will provide an overview to assist elementary school teachers in choosing and implementing effective reading comprehension strategies within their classrooms as well as assist researchers in developing new instructional methods and strategies within this domain.

CHAPTER 2: Methods and Conceptual Background

The following section seeks to describe and discuss the data collection and analysis process for this investigation.

Data Collection & Evaluation

To obtain the research for this review, a broad, online search was done through Google Scholar and the University of British Columbia's library website using the following search terms: "L2 reading strategies", "reading strategies", "ESL reading", "ESL literacy", "ESL reading comprehension" and "effective instructional approaches to teach reading". Additionally, reference lists were reviewed and relevant studies were gathered from a seminal report published by the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (Shanahan & Beck, 2006). Furthermore, articles were obtained from discussions and course reading lists recommended through my coursework¹ while enrolled at the University of British Columbia. The primary focus of the literature and courses described was reading comprehension in ESL students and was thus deemed appropriate for the inclusion in this study.

Studies generated from the aforementioned search methods were chosen based on their empirical nature as well as their potential contribution to answering the research question at hand. More specifically, abstracts (when available) and articles were systematically reviewed and assessed based on the implications pertaining to the

¹ LLED553, LLED550 – Courses taken through the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia

instructional approaches of reading comprehension discussed in each. Originally, only experimental studies were to be chosen for this investigation; however, due to the limited number of experimental studies in ESL reading comprehension, I have expanded my inclusion criteria to consist of other types of studies as well, including case studies and observational studies.

Conceptual Background

A limited number of studies exist in the area of reading comprehension in young ESL students. In a recent report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, less than 20 experimental research studies were identified as specifically looking at the effect of instruction on literacy in language-minority students (Shanahan & Beck, 2006). As a result of this limitation, some of the studies included in this literature review are quite dated. However, prior to presenting these studies, it is important to briefly review some reading models that have dominated research in theories of language acquisition as these often provide a framework of literacy instruction for students learning English.

One model, developed by Gough (1976, as cited in Gunderson, 2007), stresses the bottom-up nature of reading and emphasizes that successful reading is achieved through phonemic awareness and knowledge of sound-letter correspondences. In this model, the reader obtains information from print by decoding letters in order to recognize the word the letters create. This model is quite serial, as comprehension occurs in steps. Fluency is also an important component in this model because Gough proposed that if print is processed too slowly, it will be lost from memory and a poor reader will result. There are many similar bottom-up models that attempt to explain the

reading process, most of which emphasize the role of phonics in comprehension. This view of reading has been influential in directing the kind of literacy instruction given in school, for example, with the use of basal readers (Gunderson, 2007). Goodman (1967, as cited in Gunderson, 2007), however, proposed quite a different model of reading, called the *Psycholinguistic Model*. This top-down model suggests that reading is like a guessing game, a selective and cyclical process, where the context of words and reader's background knowledge enable a reader to predict and make sense of what they read. With this model, readers scan text and make predictions on what they expect to see, based on what they know. If the reader makes a mistake (or miscue) in what they read or feels that the text does not make sense to them, they will go back to re-read and search their memory for related syntactic and semantic cues. Top-down models value the active contribution of the reader in the comprehension process, have implications in reading instruction (e.g., with whole texts) and have been useful in attempting to understand the reading process of first and second-language. Other models have combined these two theories; however, strengths and weaknesses exist in each model and thus there is no single model which seems to adequately describe the processes involved in reading. Specific for ESL students, the Bernhardt Model involves a number of hypothesized relationships between different factors in reading that can change depending on proficiency (Gunderson, 2007). For example, as proficiency in a target language increases, word recognition errors decreases, but syntax errors increase until syntax is better understood.

Although there is no reading model that has been successful in confirming the reading process, these models are valuable because they assist in guiding research

and literacy instruction for first- and second-language learners, as well as provide some understanding of the factors that are involved in successful reading comprehension. A brief introduction of reading models was given to enable a better understanding of the research developed in the area of reading comprehension, and will be useful for comparing the results and factors that contribute to reading discussed in the various studies. In the remainder of this literature review, impacts on reading comprehension will be explored by looking at different instructional approaches to various aspects of literacy development: phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, reading strategies and oral language development. These subtitles were chosen based on their importance in reading models and based on the frequency of these factors noted in the research as having an impact on reading comprehension.

CHAPTER 3: Results

The following section outlines instructional approaches discussed in the research literature which have been found to influence English literacy and reading comprehension in ESL learners. These approaches include phonemic instruction, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, comprehension strategies, as well as oral language development and are discussed within the context of the various reading models described previously.

Instruction in phonemic awareness

Instruction in phonemic awareness has traditionally played a large role in reading programs. This bottom-up approach to reading instruction is useful to include in this review to attempt to verify the validity and success of using a bottom-up reading model as a foundation to teaching reading. Stuart (1999) compared the use of an explicit phonemic instruction and phonic intervention program, called *Jolly Phonics*, with a Big Book approach, which involves using shared reading during story time. This study took place with 112 four and five year olds, 96 of them being native speakers of Sylheti. Each reading approach took place in three different classrooms from five schools and was implemented for 1 hour a day over a 12-week period. Explicit phonemic instruction was the most beneficial for students as significant positive effects of *Jolly Phonics* were found over the Big Book instruction on the acquisition of phonological awareness and their ability to apply an understanding of phonological concepts in reading. These effects were still significant one year later on standardized and experimental tests of

reading and spelling. In another study by Larson (1996, as cited in Shanahan & Beck, 2006), explicit instruction on phonemic awareness of simple consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words (e.g. *dog, hat*) in two experimental groups proved to be better for children than a no treatment control group that did not stress explicit instruction. Thirty-three Spanish-speaking students were given 5 weeks of instruction. In the first treatment group, students were taught in Spanish first, then in English, whereas in the second treatment group, only English was used. In post-tests of decoding and spelling, all students in the treatment groups scored significantly higher than their control group counterparts. Surprisingly, there was no advantage for students who received instruction in their native language of Spanish, over the students in the English-only group.

Chiappe, Siegel and Wade-Wooley (2002) found a correlation between phonological awareness and reading difficulties. First-grade ESL students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in this study had lower scores on phonological tasks such as pseudoword recognition, phoneme recognition, and phoneme deletion/substitution than their monolingual counterparts from the same classrooms who were classified as having average reading abilities. It is clear that phonics and phonological awareness plays an important role in reading comprehension and perhaps these should be explicitly taught for that reason.

Phonology also seems to play an important role in predicting reading disabilities in both ESL and native-English speaking students. For example, in a longitudinal case study done with 872 students from Vancouver, it was found that problems in phonological processing and phoneme identification in kindergarten played a large role

in determining whether or not an ESL student would be at risk for being classified as having a reading disability when they got to Grade 3; however being a student of ESL was not itself a factor in predicting future reading skills (Lipka & Siegel, 2007). In this study, students were subjected to a wide variety of assessments, both in kindergarten and Grade 3, which tested for phonological processing, lexical access, syntactic awareness, memory, fluency, and reading comprehension. There were 33 different languages spoken among students in the ESL category, the largest language groups being Cantonese/Mandarin, followed by Farsi, Slavic, Japanese, Korean, Pilipino and Tagalog. Upon completion of this study, it also appeared that L1 Grade 3 students performed significantly better than their ESL counterparts on measures of syntactic awareness as determined by an oral cloze test. This study is important in that it suggests teachers focus on improving phonological awareness and letter recognition among young kindergarten students and also should focus on teaching concepts of syntax as well.

Related to the notion of creating letter-sound correspondences is the issue of spelling. Clarke (1988) looked at whether or not stressing traditional or invented spelling among Grade 1 students would have an effect on their spelling and reading achievement. This research was completed with 102 Grade 1 students from 4 different classrooms in Ottawa over a period of 5 months. Two classrooms stressed traditional, standard English spelling, and 2 classrooms stressed invented spellings. Data was obtained through classroom observations, assessments of children's writings samples, and through a variety of word recognition and reading comprehension tests. By the end of the 5 months, children who used invented spelling had significantly longer writing

samples and skill in spelling than did students from the traditional spelling classrooms. Additionally, students who used invented spelling were able to better read nonsense words and experienced gains in passage comprehension. Perhaps the large amount of writing students did also contributed to these results. Although this study is not specific for students of ESL, it can provide insight on the kinds of advantages students can obtain from an instructional approach that allows them the freedom to explore and create their own methods of decoding and forming grapheme-phoneme relationships. Given the results obtained from Lipka and Siegel (2007), it may appear that ESL students could benefit from being encouraged to use invented spelling.

Fluency

Fluency is another aspect of reading instruction that has been looked at in some studies, as fluency is a facilitator for reading comprehension. Fluency is a component in Gough's reading model, as it is said to help students remember what they read. Denton (2000) examined two tutoring interventions for Spanish-speaking students in grades 2-5 that taught either phonics or fluency directly. Students in the control group received only the instruction in their classrooms. Students in the phonics group made more progress in word reading; however, students in the fluency group made more progress in oral reading accuracy and fluency. It is important and interesting to note that neither treatment group had significant gains over the control group in tests of word identification, analysis, or comprehension. It seems that no clear conclusions can be reached from this study, and any significant results cannot be determined due to the nature of the teaching or the amount of extra instruction. In contrast to Denton, a study

in favour of fluency instruction comes from De la Colina, Parker, Hasbrouck, and Lara-Alecio (2001), where 74 Spanish-speaking students in grades 1 and 2 received direct fluency instruction for 45 minutes, 3 times a week, for 12 weeks, 9 weeks, or 7 weeks. Regardless of the length of instruction, students in all three groups improved in oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. It is evident from these studies that fluency plays an important factor in reading comprehension and should be included in reading models for both ESL and non-ESL students.

Vocabulary Acquisition

In addition to fluency, vocabulary development is also an important factor in literacy and reading comprehension. Vocabulary acquisition was targeted in a study by Vaughn-Shavuo (1990), whereby first grade Spanish-speaking students were taught a total of 31 words for 30 minutes per day over a 3 week period. Students were randomly assigned to a group where either words were presented in a sentence, or in a second group where words were presented in meaningful narratives, on flashcards with pictures, or in students' own dictated sentences. Students in the second group learned significantly more vocabulary words than the children in the first group. This study is important because it shows the value of providing multimodal meaningful contexts when introducing new vocabulary.

Similarly, Leseaux, Kieffer, Faller and Kelley (2010) focused on providing students with vocabulary instruction in context. They conducted an academic intervention study involving 476 linguistically diverse Grade 6 students from seven California urban middle schools. This study involved 13 treatment classrooms where the 18-week intervention took place and 8 control classrooms. In the treatment groups,

teachers were trained and were told exactly how to present vocabulary instruction in their classrooms via a script. The target vocabulary words were embedded in texts and were frequently used and practiced orally and in a variety of different activities. Students were not just given a list of words to memorize out of context. In the control classrooms, vocabulary was not an explicit focus as it was in the treatment groups. Instead, literary analysis and related comprehension activities were most commonly observed. Data were collected via observations, teacher logs, and through a variety of standardized and researcher-created tests given to students. By the end of the study, the treatment groups significantly differed from the control groups on learning target words, morphological awareness and were engaged in more academic discussions. Improvements in reading comprehension were only marginally significant in the treatment group and no differences were observed on reading vocabulary (i.e., acquiring new, non-target words while reading). Additionally, it is worthy to note that there were no differences observed between ESL and English monolingual students. This study shows that a context based approach to teaching vocabulary (i.e., embedded in text) coupled with multiple techniques to scaffold this knowledge (e.g., through writing, oral discussions, etc.) is somewhat promising. It is unknown which of the activities and strategies most helped students learn the target vocabulary, however. Although the slight gains in reading comprehension for the treatment group seem promising in favour of this intervention, it appears that perhaps effective teaching varies for each student and explicit vocabulary instruction and interventions do not impact reading as much as hypothesized.

Teaching vocabulary orally is also beneficial for some students, as indicated by Perez (1981). Seventy-five Spanish-speaking third graders received 20 minutes of daily oral language instruction in word meanings, with a focus on compound words, synonyms, antonyms and multiple meanings. These students showed significant improvement in fluency and answering questions about text they read over a control group that only read text aloud and answered questions on it. Another study that examined the effects of enhanced vocabulary teaching found that fifth graders who received thematic vocabulary instruction in their native language first, before the vocabulary words were introduced in English improved on both word learning and reading comprehension (Carlo et al., 2004). Oral language may have been a significant factor in both of these studies; however, it is difficult to determine whether the oral emphasis or the extended vocabulary instruction was the main factor in improving comprehension.

Teachers can modify their vocabulary instruction by integrating explicit morphology instruction into their lessons. This distinct component of vocabulary instruction also acts as a comprehension strategy students can independently use to making sense of new text passages they come across. Morphology involves breaking down words into meaningful parts (e.g., prefixes, root words, suffixes, etc) to better understand the meaning of the word and the part of speech it functions as. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) found a significant relationship between knowledge of morphology and reading comprehension in 111 fourth and fifth grade students (87 Spanish ESL students and 24 native English speakers), and that this knowledge of morphology was equally beneficial for both native and non-native groups of students. Morphology instruction was

not only found to increase fluency and reading comprehension scores, but also acts as a comprehension strategy for deciphering the meaning of new words.

Comprehension Strategies

Some studies have been done to specifically target the effects of using other, different comprehension strategies in reading. These strategies greatly vary; however, some of them discussed in this section include self-questioning, using context to gain meaning, and using one's first language to understand English. Swicegood (1990) examined the impact of self-questioning while reading in a sample of Spanish-speaking third graders and found that this did not improve reading comprehension in either Spanish or English. Interestingly, this result differs from similar studies with native English speakers (Shanahan & Beck, 2006), suggesting that different strategies are used by native English than by ESL students. Reading comprehension was also studied in 58 high school Haitian Creole-speaking and Spanish-speaking students (Shames, 1998). The students were divided into three experimental groups that were taught different reading strategies: 1) writing narratives, focusing on vocabulary, translation, and grammar, 2) comprehension strategies (e.g. the Know-Want-Learn [KWL] strategy), and 3) a combination of the first two strategies. This year-long study showed that Groups 2 and 3 outperformed both a control group and Group 1 on measures of reading comprehension. A specific focus on strategy instruction, then, may be more beneficial to some groups of L2 learners than others.

As opposed to using phonetic skills, it was found that third grade Turkish- and Moroccan-speaking students relied on their background knowledge for comprehension

in reading culturally relevant texts in Dutch (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). Similarly, Hacqueboard (1994, as cited in Shanahan & Beck, 2006) found that Turkish students learning Dutch were successfully able to answer global and conceptual level questions about text, as opposed to questions on micro-level information (e.g., words and clauses), suggesting that top-down processing was the main reading strategy used for comprehension.

Other studies have been done to show the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy training on reading comprehension. In an experimental study which involved a linguistically diverse group of 26 ESL students in 4 classrooms, it was found that children in the two classrooms who received experience-text-relationship strategy instruction or semantic mapping instruction outperformed the control classrooms on reading comprehension and the individuals in the treatment groups improved on reading comprehension in post-tests (Carrell, Pharis & Liberto, 1989). Although this study was done with a very small number of students, it does demonstrate that top-down strategy instruction can improve reading comprehension in ESL students, especially in tests of answering open-ended questions about a passage of text. The effectiveness of the strategies were found to depend on individual learning styles, which provides further evidence to the fact that teachers should take into account their students' preferences, learning styles and strengths when considering what might be an effective instructional approach to reading comprehension.

In addition to the comprehension strategies mentioned, teachers should also incorporate predicting, clarifying, visualizing, and summarizing with explicit instruction

on how to carry out each strategy, as these instructional strategies scaffold, build upon and enhance students' existing knowledge of what they read (Smith & Read, 2009).

Other comprehension strategies involve transferring knowledge of a first language into understanding words in a second language (e.g., word cognates, similar writing systems). In learning English, this strategy is reported as being useful from students who speak Roman-related alphabet languages and not useful for students who come from other language backgrounds (e.g. Vietnamese, Tamil, Arabic; Gunderson, 2007). Interestingly, a majority of these students (60%) report that watching English television is the best way to acquire English and achieve success in classrooms. This may then indicate the importance of listening and oral language in successful literacy development. Additionally, some groups of students favour certain comprehension strategies over others, and this depends on what is used to read in their first language. For example, Mandarin ESL students utilize more bottom-up strategies such as breaking down a word into smaller parts and matching whereas Arabic ESL students favour top-down strategies such as skimming for gist and making connections (Abbott, 2006).

McKeown, Beck and Blake (2009) did a study to compare the effectiveness of content-based, strategy-based and basal instruction on reading comprehension in three groups of students in Grade 5, and then again when these students got to Grade 6. In this study, 2 classrooms used content instruction, 2 classrooms used strategy instruction, and 2 classrooms acted as a control group, using only basal readers (n=119). In the strategy groups, students were encouraged to use such strategies as highlighting text, predicting, self-questioning and note-taking. In the content groups,

students were instructed to attend to text ideas, build mental representations, and use existing knowledge to comprehend. After each approach was implemented for five weeks (in each grade), students were tested using a variety of assessments (e.g., oral recall, sentence verification tasks, comprehension monitoring, etc.) Surprisingly, there were no significant differences in reading comprehension for any of the groups – they all performed similarly and adequately on this measure. Some data indicate a favour towards the content approach, as these students showed more length and quality in recall for narrative texts and longer responses in discussions. From these results, it appears that there may not be any single most effective approach to teaching reading comprehension, but that a crucial factor lies in the teachers themselves and their ability to convey information and engage students. Similarly, an observational study of four grade one classrooms in California shows a link between high reading achievement from students and instructional variables (Gersten, Baker, Haager, & Graves, 2005). Teachers which produced the highest growth in reading with their students focused more on fluency (e.g., reciting sight words), vocabulary development, and comprehension, than did teachers from low-performance classrooms, which stressed grammar, syntax, memorization and pronunciation. Teachers from the high-performance classrooms were rated by the researchers as being more engaging (e.g., acting out vocabulary words, having discussion to elicit critical thinking, etc.), planning activities more thoroughly (e.g., activities that transitioned well from the previous), and having activities that were more time appropriate than teachers from low performance classrooms (e.g., 20-minute activities in high-performance classrooms versus 45-minute activities in low-performance classrooms). From this study, it appears that instructional

variables and differently styles in teaching do play a role in student achievement in reading.

Oral Language Development

The importance of developing one's oral abilities in a new language has benefits for reading comprehension, as indicated in some of the studies previously discussed (e.g., Perez, 1981). For example, McCauley and McCauley (1992) demonstrate that doing choral reading with ESL students improves reading comprehension, along with providing a variety of other gains in language development because choral reading creates a low-anxiety environment, involves repeated practice, provides comprehensible input, includes an element of drama, and demonstrates fluency. Furthermore, Graves, Graves, Gersten and Haager (2004) observed literacy practices in 14 first grade classrooms with high numbers of students from various non-English-speaking backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Cantonese, Spanish, Somali, etc.) for two years. They found the highest number of fluent readers came from classrooms that emphasized explicit models of proficient reading performance, daily attention to struggling readers, high student engagement, oral language development, and attention to vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Oral language development was also associated with reading comprehension in a study where the literacy development of 261 Spanish-speaking children was tracked from grades 1-6 (Nakamoto, Lindsey & Manis, 2007). It was found that reading comprehension decreased over time when oral language development decreased as well. It appears that there is a connection between oral language and reading; thus, if reading proficiency is to be developed and sustained, oral

language should be reinforced and included as an important part of literacy instruction for ESL students. Teachers can practice a number of supportive strategies for improving oral language development that will enable their students to become more familiar with English: small grouping of students, sharing time, dramatic play, puppet play, storybook reading, directed listening-thinking activities, and wordless picture books (Barone & Xu, 2008).

CHAPTER 4: Discussion

After exploring different models of reading, approaches to instruction and their effects on reading comprehension in ESL students, it is clear that there are gaps in this area of literature due to the limited number of studies in this domain and the complex nature of the reading process. In regards to answering my research question, there is no definitive approach that has been deemed “the most effective”, because attention to different aspects of language yield opposing results in different studies. For example, a focus on teaching explicit fluency in one study may be beneficial for a certain group of learners, but not beneficial for another. Additionally, after reviewing some of the research, there is no model that accounts for all the reading factors and outcomes discussed in each. I hypothesize that neither bottom-up nor top-down approaches to reading on their own are the most effective for reading comprehension. Instead, I believe the research shows that a mixed, interactive model of reading offers the best practices to increase reading comprehension in ESL students. I believe that top-down processing plays a large role in ESL readers, as using context and background knowledge to comprehend text makes reading relevant, meaningful, and is an accessible strategy for all learners. However, strategy usage may depend on the first language of a student, as some groups of language speakers favour different reading strategies over others (Abbott, 2006). This information suggests that neither a bottom-up or top-down reading model alone is helpful for designers of literacy programs to adopt. None of the reading models discussed can account for all the results observed in

studies of reading comprehension, thus literacy programs should be restructured to fit with a more integrative model.

Comprehensible input is a key factor in making any lesson effective for students. After reviewing some of the literature, it seems that literacy instruction for successful readers depends on instruction in and attention to all aspects of language, including vocabulary and oral development.

Implications

It is evident that there are various strategies used to instruct ESL students in English literacy and reading comprehension. Despite this, it is important to discern how the multitude of approaches impacts teachers in their day-to-day classroom activities as well as how the research discussed in this investigation can be used to develop better and more effective strategies to instruct ESL students in the future. Approaches to teaching to reading comprehension must be conducive with the learning styles of the students involved, should reflect what is found in the literature, and should be practical for teachers to implement on a daily basis.

Implications for Teachers

Several of the studies reviewed allude to the fact that using a balanced reading program is the most effective approach to increasing reading comprehension in all learners (e.g., Lipka & Seigel, 2007) and the studies outlined above call attention to the fact that teachers should focus on all aspects of language development and use multifaceted instruction to maximize their students' ability to comprehend texts. This means that teachers should provide their students with comprehensible input,

phonological awareness, syntax based instruction, content instruction, develop oral language, and use a variety of scaffolding activities (e.g., writing, conversations with partners, mind maps, etc.). Direct and explicit instruction is helpful, but allowing students the freedom to explore language and make their own connections is also beneficial. In some instances where teachers do not adopt a balanced literacy program, for example, by focusing on one type of instruction, they can still create successful readers as long as they convey information clearly and are able to engage and motivate students (as seen from McKeown et al., 2009). In these cases, it seems that the most effective instructional approach for teaching reading comprehension to any student is simply to be a good teacher. Additionally, it is important for teachers to take into account the background language of their students when creating literacy tests so they can avoid using questions that favour certain reading strategies, which may put some students at a disadvantage. A more interactive reading model should be embraced when designing literacy lessons, especially in classrooms with a diverse population of learners, as this would help students from various cultural backgrounds to become more successful readers by enabling them to capitalize on their strengths and improve on areas of weakness.

A possible explanation for why some interventions appear not to be successful with minority language students learning English may be that these students do not have enough English proficiency to begin with. Higher levels of English proficiency are associated with an increased learning of vocabulary, and the more linguistic competence a student has in a language results in more acquired gains (August & Shanahan, 2006). This may support the notion of direct, explicit literacy instruction

among second language learners, to facilitate and strengthen proficiency in their target language.

Some alternative implications for literacy instruction not discussed in great detail throughout this paper may be found in bilingual education, through writing interventions, and approaches that promote motivation and inclusion. Language-minority students who are literate in their first language are likely to be advantaged when learning a second language (August & Shanahan, 2006); thus it may be beneficial for teachers to adopt an instructional approach to literacy that involves the native language of the students. Although implementing bilingual education seems to offer many potential gains in reading achievement, this is a daunting task, especially in classrooms with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Implications for Future Research

Future research in this area should focus on longitudinal effects of reading interventions and approaches implemented in young students. Additionally, more experimental studies are warranted in this field. It would also be worth investigating the effects of different instructional approaches and strategies on reading comprehension. Specifically, both attempting to isolate the effectiveness of particular strategies and broadening the scope of instructional approaches to include a variety of other tools (including the use of digital media or incorporating dramatic arts into language pedagogy) will be useful in finding ways to promote and maintain successful readers. Based on experience, the literature and my understanding of reading programs, reading models upon which the foundation of some reading programs are built should be revised to reflect and be more inclusive of the results seen in the literature surrounding

reading comprehension instruction for students learning English as an additional language. Furthermore, it would be advantageous and insightful to explore the reading strategies most employed by ESL students, perhaps through the use of interviews.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, M. L. (2006). ESL reading strategies: Differences in Arabic and Mandarin speaker test performance. *Language Learning*, 56 (4): 633-670.
- Barone, D. M. & Xu, S. H. (2008). Literacy instruction for English language learners, Pre K-2. New York: Guilford Press.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2009). ESL Policy and Guidelines. Accessed on August 10, 2010 from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/guidelines.pdf>
- Carlo, M. S., August, D., McLaughlin, B., Snow, C. E., Dressler, C., Lippman, D., Lively, T., & White, C. (2004). Closing the gap: Addressing the vocabulary needs of English language learners in bilingual and mainstream classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(2): 188-215
- Carrell, P. L., Pharis, B. G. & Liberto, J. C. (1989). Metacognitive strategy training for ESL reading. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23 (4): 647-678
- Chiappe, P., Siegel, L. S. & Wade-Wooley, L. (2002). Linguistic diversity and the development of reading skills: a longitudinal study. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 6 (4): 369-400
- Clarke, L. K. (1988). Invented versus traditional spelling in first graders' writing: Effects on Learning to Spell and Read, *Research in the Teaching of English*, 22 (3): 281-309
- De la Colina, M. G., Parker, R. I., Hasbrouck, J. E. & Lara-Alecio, R. (2001). Intensive intervention in reading fluency for at-risk beginning Spanish readers. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 25(4): 503-538
- Denton, C. A. (2000). *The efficacy of two English reading interventions in a bilingual education program*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Droop, M. & Verhoeven, L. (1998). Background knowledge, linguistic complexity, and second-language reading comprehension. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30(7): 253-271
- Echevarria, J., Powers, K. & Short, D. (2006). School Reform and Standards-Based Education: A Model for English-Language Learners. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(4), 195-210.

- Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2010). Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Primary and Junior Divisions, 2008-2009. Accessed on February 17, 2010 from <https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/pbs/Listing.aspx>
- Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Haager, D. & Graves, A. W. (2005). Exploring the role of teacher quality in predicting reading outcomes for first-grade English learners. *Remedial and Special Education, 26* (4): 197-206.
- Goldenberg, C. (2010). Improving Achievement for English Learners: Conclusions from Recent Reviews and Emerging Research. In G. Li & P.A. Edwards (Eds.) *Best Practices in ELL Instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Graves, A. W., Gersten, R. & Haager, D. (2004). Literacy instruction in multiple-language first-grade classrooms: Linking student outcomes to observed instructional practice. *Learning Disability Research & Practice, 19*(4): 262-272
- Gunderson, L. (2007). *English-only Instruction and Immigrant Students in Secondary School*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kieffer, M. J. & Lesaux, N. K. (2007). Breaking down words to build meaning: Morphology, vocabulary and reading comprehension in the urban classroom. *The Reading Teacher, 61* (2): 134-144.
- Lesaux, N. K., Kieffer, M. J., Faller, S. E. & Kelley, J. G. (2010). The effectiveness and ease of implementation of an academic vocabulary intervention for linguistically diverse students in urban middle schools. *Reading Research Quarterly, 15* (2): 196-228
- Lipka, O. & Siegel, L. S. (2007). The development of reading skills in children with English as a second language. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 11* (2): 105-131
- McCauley, J. K. & McCauley, D. S. (1992). *The Reading Teacher, 5*(7): 526-533
- McKeown, M. G., Beck, I. L. & Blake, R. G. K. (2009). Rethinking reading comprehension instruction: A comparison of Instruction for Strategies and Content Approaches. *Reading Research Quarterly, 44* (3): 218-253
- Nakamoto, J., Lindsey, K. A. & Manis, F. R. (2007). A longitudinal analysis of English language learners' word decoding and reading comprehension. *Reading and Writing, 20*: 691-719
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). English Language Learners – ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to grade 12. Accessed August 10, 2010, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/index.html>

- Perez, E. (1981). Oral language competence improves reading skills of Mexican American third graders. *Reading Teacher*, 35(1): 24-27
- Shames, R. (1998). *The effects of a community language learning/comprehension processing strategies model on second language reading comprehension*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton.
- Shanahan, T. & Beck, I. L. (2006). Effective literacy teaching for English-language learners. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, J. & Read, S. (2009). *Early literacy instruction: Teaching reading and writing in today's primary grades* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Stuart, M. (1999). Getting ready for reading: Early phoneme awareness and phonics teaching improves reading and spelling in inner-city second language learners. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69(4): 587-605
- Swicegood, M. A. (1990). *The effects of metacognitive reading strategy training on the reading performance and student reading analysis strategies of third grade Spanish-dominant students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Toronto District School Board. (2010). English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development. Retrieved from: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/site/viewitem.asp?siteid=13&menuid=573&pageid=455> on August 10, 2010.
- Vancouver School Board. (2010). Our District. Retrieved from <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/about-vsbs> on August 10, 2010.
- Vaughn-Shavuo, F. (1990). *Using story grammar and language experience for improving recall and comprehension in the teaching of ESL to Spanish-dominant first-graders*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hofstra University, Hempstead.