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A Case Study of Best Practices in Teaching Reading to English Language Learning Second Graders

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for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in Linguistics from
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by

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Abstract

This paper outlines observations of teacher practice in English as a second language (ESL) reading instruction from a case study conducted in a public elementary school. The instructional context of two second grade English language learners (ELLs) was constructed using data gathered in observations of teacher practice and interviews with the second grade classroom teacher, ESL tutor, Reading Recovery teacher, and school and district administrators. Field notes from the Reading Recovery classroom, where thorough and challenging literacy instruction was observed, served as a key component to this study. The data gathered was also used to glean an understanding of the complete learning environment that surrounds ELLs in this school. This school provides a strong and encouraging learning environment in which there is a large amount of potential for ELLs to excel. However, this paper discusses the negative impact of gaps in school and district ESL program management on instruction for ELLs. Additionally, this report finds that a lack of coordination between teachers has resulted in instruction that does not provide ELLs with a balanced and cohesive literacy program. Finally, study concludes with recommendations for both the school and district on how they may successfully increase the instructional supports that they provide for ELL students and their teachers.

Keywords: English language learner, ESL literacy, Reading Recovery, ESL program management

A Case Study of Best Practices in Teaching Reading to English Language Learning Second
Graders

My interest in the field of ethnography in English as a second language (ESL) began with an internship working with the education component of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) in the summer of 2009. My duties consisted of surveying the ESL programs of NCLR's affiliate charter schools and writing a descriptive analysis of the services they provide to their English language learners (ELLs). The school models I encountered ranged from pull-out instruction to two-way immersion programs, generally with bilingual staff and the luxury of a linguistically homogenous school population. In that internship I developed a broad knowledge base of best ESL practice in several different regions across the United States, which left me with an interest in doing field work to get a more nuanced understanding of best practices in teaching ESL. I was also interested to conduct this research in the public school system in order to gain a better understanding of the different challenges public schools face compared to the charter schools affiliated with NCLR.

To narrow my study, I focused my research question on best practices in teaching reading to ELLs in a local public school. By focusing on this one aspect of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), the purpose was not only to understand best reading practice. I also sought to understand the cultural factors that shape the instructional context of ELLs. The theory that informs my research is critical pedagogy. This approach to analysis of teaching and learning is based on the philosophy of Paulo Freire. According to Freire, teaching and learning should be a direct reflection of the students' worlds because it is this reflection of their own worlds that engages them in the educational process (Freire, 1993). The practical implication of critical pedagogy in the context of developing early readers is that young readers should be

prepared for a future of thinking critically about reading. This is accomplished by engaging readers with texts that reflect their individual “interests, cultural resources, knowledge, and skills,” which introduces students to the idea that reading is not just a learning activity but also a way to actively connect their school learning to life outside out of school (McLean, Boling, & Rowsell, 2009, p. 161).

I began my study, which I conceived as an application of critical pedagogy, in a local, suburban elementary school in order to examine best practices in teaching reading to ELLs. The study began as a participant observation (a combination of observations of teacher practice and interviews with teachers and program administrators) to identify broad themes and implications for ESL reading instruction. However, my research soon evolved into a case study of this school, as several interesting themes arose that distinguished its ESL program as unique. I also became very invested personally in the education of the two students whom I observed and tutored as part of my proposal to the school for permission to conduct this study.

Thus, from the outset of my research, I intended my final report to be the recommendations that I would offer to the school administrators and teachers that could improve their ESL instruction. Over a period of three months, I conducted twenty observations and five interviews and can unequivocally state that this school has built an encouraging learning environment for its ELLs. However, due to insufficient training for mainstream teachers and ESL paraprofessionals as well as a lack of communication from administrators who are knowledgeable about best practices in TESOL, there are gaps in the ESL instructional program. I present my conclusions in the following report, which is divided into four sections. First is an in-depth literature review that explores issues of second language reading development and best practices in ESL program management. Next is an overview of my methodology, followed by a

presentation of my findings. The report concludes with a discussion of the school's current needs and what I believe are practical recommendations for the school and the district.

Literature Review

Reading Instruction

There is an extensive body of research on first language early literacy development; in contrast, however, research in second language literacy development is quite limited. The research that does exist argues that for both first and second language learners, learning to read is a process that develops through the consolidation of children's knowledge of the world, the English language, and concepts of print conventions and written text (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 154). Lesaux and Siegel conducted a longitudinal study that compares reading development in native English speaking (NES) and English language learning (ELL) students from kindergarten through second grade. They found that though ELLs initially struggled, falling behind the other kindergarteners, by the second grade, a majority of ELLs had matched the progress of their NES peers. They also found that in grade-level tasks of word reading, rapid naming, real word and non-word spelling, and arithmetic, ELLs significantly outperformed the NES students (Lesaux and Siegel, 2003, p. 1016). However, even though the reading development process can follow the same general path, ELLs approach English literacy with manifestly varied background knowledge and life experiences that constitute a unique and profound challenge to literacy instruction. Thus, successful teachers of reading to ELLs require two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of approaches that are generally successful in teaching reading to all students and also an understanding of how best practices in teaching ELLs differ from reading instruction for mainstream students.

In April 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) published a comprehensive report on early literacy development, focusing the study exclusively on reading development in NES students. In its report, the NRP identified three main categories of reading instruction: alphabets, a term that includes phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, comprehension (both vocabulary development and text comprehension instruction), and fluency. Phonemic awareness instruction focuses specifically on the manipulation of phonemes, the smallest units of spoken language, in words or syllables. Phonics instruction, on the other hand, refers to instruction in written letter-sound correspondences in reading and spelling. In its analysis, the NRP found that phonemic awareness instruction was most effective in enhancing phonics skills when children received systematic and explicit instruction in manipulating phonemes with letters. The report also noted that the most effective tasks focused on only one or two types of manipulations. (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000).

Both phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are crucial to early reading development and are considered the best predictors of reading success in the first two years of schooling for NES students (Adams, 1990, p. 55). According to a 2007 report published by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), these two features are also the best predictors of ELLs' success in learning to read. However variances in first language orthographies and letter-sound correspondence patterns can create specific difficulties for these children (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL], 2007). Antunez (2002) notes several considerations that must be taken into account when instructing ELLs in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. First, she explains that emergent readers who are not literate in their first language may have difficulty even associating spoken words with printed text. Extensive research has shown that first language literacy promotes the positive transfer of knowledge of phonological awareness and

print concepts (Carlo, 2009). However, interference from the first language (L1) often occurs when letters in students' L1 correspond to different sounds in the second language. For example, students literate in languages with non-Roman alphabets must first learn the letters of the English alphabet. Furthermore, students literate in logographic writing systems—such as Chinese—or syllabic ones—such as Japanese—must learn an entirely new symbol system before learning to read English (Antunez, 2002).

An additional challenge for ELLs learning to read is the fact that unlike some languages like Spanish (which has nearly phonemic spelling) English orthography is opaque, meaning it does not have a one-to-one letter-sound correspondence. Beginning readers not only have to learn the sounds of each letter, but they must also learn to recognize that the same letter in different environments can correspond to different sounds. Because there is such variance in L1 orthographies and symbol systems, teachers need to understand that students with different L1 and literacy backgrounds will progress in different ways. Despite these challenges, teachers can be highly effective in phonics instruction with proper understanding of their students' L1 systems and how literacy in different orthographies and symbol systems will affect their English reading development (Antunez, 2002; Lems, Miller, & Soro 2010).

Reading comprehension is developed mainly through instruction in vocabulary development and text comprehension. Taffe, Blachowicz, and Fisher (2009) outline three parameters for effective vocabulary instruction for diverse learners:

1. Students learn in an environment that is concept-rich, language-rich, and word-rich.
2. Students are taught the meanings of individual words, with a focus on deep understanding and lasting retention.

3. Students are taught strategies for becoming independent word learners. (p. 322)

As is the case with phonics instruction, the techniques for developing an ELL's vocabulary are nearly identical to those for NES students. Creating a literature rich classroom environment through the display of books and dictionaries, use of word walls, picture cards, word sorts and other strategies are all effective techniques for teaching vocabulary to any emergent reader (Lems et al., 2010; Peregoy & Boyle 2008). But again, teachers of ELLs must be aware of the diverse background issues that create difficulties for their students. Specifically, since most NES kindergarteners begin school with an English vocabulary of 5000-7000 words, ELLs begin formal reading instruction at a severe disadvantage compared to their peers (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Moreover, a young child's primary source of vocabulary input is conversation with a parent or other adult. The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) adds that children's vocabularies are boosted significantly when adults read to them and they read independently (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement [CIERA], 2006). Generally, young children's vocabularies are developed indirectly, but relying solely on indirect input has harmful implications for ELLs. Many ELLs do not receive English input in the home, and parents of ELLs may not typically read to their children in English. Also, due to both socioeconomic and cultural factors, ELLs may not have books in their homes in English or their first language and may rarely ever be read to by their parents at home (CAL, 2007).

Direct input strategies, meaning both explicit vocabulary instruction and instruction in word-learning strategies, are crucial to ELLs' vocabulary development. Preteaching vocabulary and implementing pre-reading techniques are indispensable tools in enhancing a student's

knowledge and comfort before reading a new text (Bamford & Day, 1997 as cited in Lems et al., 2010, p. 174). ELLs also require more explicit instruction in how to use context clues, dictionaries, and other tools that aid in deciphering meaning (CIERA, 2006). Furthermore, findings by Proctor, August, Carlo, and Snow (2005) suggest that teachers focus on “literacy engagements that embed vocabulary tasks to develop a depth and breadth of world knowledge, teaching cognate strategies, and providing a wide range of interesting texts to read” (Proctor et al., 2005 p. 254 as cited in Goodin et al., 2009, p. 343). Finally, Peregoy and Boyle (2008) note the importance of maintaining awareness of the goal of vocabulary development for ELLs when designing a balanced instructional program. Teachers should remain conscious of the idea that the aim of vocabulary development is “for students to be able to use words effectively to achieve their communicative goals across a wide range of [oral and written] communication events” (p. 208).

Comprehension is the process by which readers engage with texts for the purpose of deriving meaning (NRP, 2000). This may be the most difficult task for ELL readers, even those who are advanced decoders of language. Research shows that even if only 2% of the words in a text are unfamiliar, it will negatively impact reading comprehension (Goodin et al., 2009, p. 343). On top of this, ELLs face the challenge of interpreting figurative language, colloquial phrases, and idioms that are often sources of confusion (Antunez, 2002). Lems et al., (2010) explain that:

Even when decoding is no longer very effortful, it is still much harder to move along through a text and construct meaning from it as we read in a new language.

We might describe this as a real-time “delay.” When the rate of processing

meaning from text can't "catch up" with the rate of our decoding, the result may be the strange phenomenon of decoding but not comprehending. (p. 171)

Additionally, Grabe (1991) notes that while most first language readers anticipate comprehension, second language readers anticipate difficulty when approaching new texts (p. 378). The implication of this claim is that teachers need to provide ELLs with metacognitive reading strategies to learn how to think about and negotiate meaning from unfamiliar texts. Anderson (1999) adds:

Meaning does not reside in the text itself. Meaning is reached when the reader integrates personal background knowledge, purpose for reading, reading strategies, and the text to get meaning. Teachers facilitate the process by teaching learners how to do this. One possibility that teachers can consider is to get readers to monitor their reading comprehension by being cognitively aware of what they are doing when they read and then being metacognitively able to discuss how they arrived at comprehending the text. (39)

The CIERA suggests a multiple-strategy method for teaching comprehension that combines instruction in monitoring strategies, use of graphic and semantic organizers, question-answering instruction, question generation, recognition of story and organizational structures, and summarizing. As these are effective techniques for beginning readers of any background, teachers can support ELLs while using classroom time to teach all of their students how to implement these strategies through a combination of direct explanation, teacher modeling, teacher-guided practice and application, and classroom cooperative learning activities (CIERA, 2006).

The most precise definition of reading fluency is the “ability to read a text accurately and quickly” (CIERA, 2006, p. 19). Lems et al., (2010) expand upon this definition, saying it is the “ability to recognize words and simultaneously construct meaning from connected text” (p. 148). Classroom instruction in reading fluency most often takes two forms. The first, guided oral reading, can vary in its appearances but is generally a small group activity wherein students take turns reading passages orally, eliciting systematic feedback from their teacher. A study by Baker and Good (1995) examines the correlation between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension measures in a group of 50 bilingual ELLs and 26 NES students. The study concludes that “[curriculum-based oral] reading in English may be a better measure of English reading proficiency than English oral language proficiency for bilingual students” (p. 573). When teachers have ELLs read aloud, they can gain an understanding of the students’ overall comprehension in silent reading. Teachers can use this knowledge to inform instruction for their ELLs and the feedback that they offer them.

According to CIERA (2006), teachers can best promote oral reading development by modeling fluency through guided oral reading or a similar activity. Modeling of fluent reading is a two-step technique that teachers can implement in the classroom and also encourage parents to use at home. The type of text the teacher chooses is crucial because fluency develops through continued opportunities for the student to read fluidly and successfully. Texts should be clear and familiar, falling within each student’s independent reading level. If texts are too difficult, readers become overburdened with the decoding process and lose comprehension. Firstly, teachers need to read texts clearly and deliberately, emphasizing prosody and the smooth flow of fluent reading. Secondly, they should give students the opportunity to repeat the passage and elicit

feedback from the teacher. This process should be repeated frequently in each guided reading session (CIERA, 2006, 23).

In the past, the literature generally agreed that independent silent reading boosts reading achievement and fluency. Krashen (1993) reviewed scores of studies (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (1998), Alexander (1986), Foertsch (1992), Applebee (1978), Brink (1939), Gallo (1968), and Salyer (1987), among several others) and found that nearly every one concluded that there was a correlation between independent silent reading and literacy development, “even when different tests, different methods of probing reading habits, and different definitions of free reading [were] used” (p. 7). However, controversy now surrounds these claims. The NRP argues that nearly all of these studies are correlational, and their conclusions do not reflect causation. Furthermore, the NRP states that there is no way of knowing whether increased reading increases achievement or “that better readers simply choose to read more” (p. 12). Thus, in its report, the NRP concludes that:

...even though encouraging students to read more is intuitively appealing, there is still not sufficient research evidence obtained from studies of high methodological quality to support the idea that such efforts reliably increase how much students read or that such programs result in improved reading skills. (p. 13)

However, the conclusions of the NRP have also faced criticism. Krashen (2001) points out several inconsistencies in the NRP’s analysis and that the NRP limited its review to 14 studies. In an expanded review of 53 studies (including the 14 of the NRP), Krashen found that “[sustained silent reading] students did as well or better than comparison students in 50 out of 53 comparisons” (p. 120). Most reviews acknowledge that whether or not teachers should devote classroom instructional time to independent reading is still up for debate; however without

question, teachers should encourage their students to read often and for leisure. At the very least, children are likely to become more comfortable and willing to read a wide variety of texts, an outcome that is never harmful to reading development (CAL, 2007; Kuhn & Rasinski, 2009; Lems et al., 2010).

Regardless of the method teachers choose to implement in the classroom, they must take special considerations in teaching fluency to ELLs. Kuhn and Rasinski (2009) emphasize the importance of daily routines in the delivery of fluency instruction for diverse learners. They maintain that the best technique is to choose any instructional program (such as guided oral reading) and ensure to implement it daily and rigorously (p. 372). With regard to ELLs, Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, and Paris (1998) emphasize that if possible, teachers should initially develop first language reading to promote the positive transfer of print awareness and fluency skills. If this is not possible, extensive instruction in oral language development is necessary. Teachers should combine oral development with modeling of reading fluency to give ELLs “an understanding of the structure of spoken English words and of the language and content of the material they are reading” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, as cited in Antunez, 2002, p. 9). This method equips ELLs who are just beginning formal literacy instruction with the tools they need for long-term success.

Reading Recovery is a short term intervention program that targets first grade students performing in the lower 5% of readers. Students in this program receive one-one-one instruction from a trained Reading Recovery teacher in 30 minute sessions that last an average of 12-20 weeks (Reading Recovery Council of North America [RRCNA], 2010). Some criticism surrounds Reading Recovery, most of which questions the depth of its effectiveness and the degree to which students maintain positive gains over time. In a longitudinal study of student

reading performance from first through fourth grade, Hiebert (1994) found that only 5.5% of students who received Reading Recovery intervention were still reading at average grade level by grade four (p. 23). However, more recent studies claim that the effects are long-lasting. A similar study from London University's Institute of Education assessed reading performance in third grade students. The researchers found that students who received Reading Recovery intervention were still on track to start the fourth grade reading at grade level. In contrast, third graders who had been below average readers in first grade but did not receive Reading Recovery remained behind their peers, reading on average at a second grade level (Ward, 2010).¹

ESL Program Management and Coordination

The literature about the administration of ESL programs is thin. The majority of the recommendations for successful programs focus on in-service teacher training and techniques for teachers of ELLs to implement in diverse classrooms. Unfortunately, that recommendation reflects a general lack of administrative support for teachers in the form of in-service training, which means that the responsibility for success in teaching ELLs falls predominantly on teachers who are left uninformed about best practices. A second issue that arises is how administrators can best encourage collaboration between ESL and content teachers in the context of competing interests. Several studies suggest that successful ESL programming and the resolution of competing interests depends on thorough program reviews that are conducted by school administrators, and others point out the importance of resolving issues of status of TESOL in the school.

Lopez and Dubetz (1999) outline the findings of Community School District Ten in a review of its different ESL programs. As New York City's largest school district, it has vast socioeconomic and linguistic diversity among its ELLs. In its study, the district found that the

most successful ESL programs were similar in one aspect: their administrations performed regular systemic reviews of their programs and their ELL populations. It may seem intuitive, but it was this continual assessment that kept administrators updated about which needs were being met, which were not being met, and what new needs had arisen since the previous review. The findings add that if administrators are not aware of the gaps in their ESL programs, they cannot properly support the teachers who are often left feeling overwhelmed with the responsibility of meeting ELLs' needs alone.

In reaction to Lopez and Dubetz (1999), Dahlman and Hoffman (2009) sought to find what features distinguished successful program reviews. The best review team, they found, is composed of a combination of outside evaluators, school teachers, and support staff who are involved in all aspects of ESL education. They name the principal as the most integral member of the review team because s/he serves as the central link between the school, the district, and the outside community. Dahlman and Hoffman explain that:

As an active but equal status member of the team, the administrator sends a message that the ESL program is a high priority. Along these lines, the administrator helps to insure [*sic*] that all voices will be heard, that recommendations from the program review will be taken seriously, and that resources will be allocated for its implementation. Given this stance, other staff (i.e., teachers) who witness the administrator's participation in the review are more likely to engage in, and commit to, the decisions and recommendations resulting from this work. (p. 23-24)

Essentially, the principal lends credibility to the ESL program review. Furthermore, this review can succeed only if all of its parties understand the importance of improving ESL programs and are actively engaged in the process.

For principals in the beginning stages of supervising an ESL program, Valentin (1993) presents an outline of initial steps to take. He notes that successful programs consolidate efforts of administrators, school counselors, teachers, and community partners. Most importantly, he emphasizes that school and district administration must acknowledge that a diverse language population “is likely to be permanent,” and he emphasizes the need for proactive programs to address their needs (p. 31). As in Dahlman and Hoffman’s model, the school principal serves as the chief organizer, staying updated on the needs of all of the partners of this program and acting as a liaison between the school and district administration. Valentin also recommends in-service training for school counselors to prepare them to serve the specific needs of ELLs and their families. When counselors reach out to ensure that ELL students’ non-academic needs (i.e. food, housing, etc.) are met, they relieve teachers of extra responsibilities. It is also important that counselors receive training about how to initiate contact with parents of ELLs who are often unaware of the extra resources and services schools and the counselors can provide. This is not to say that teachers should not be in contact with ELL parents, but rather that including counselors in this process allows teachers to focus their efforts on meeting students’ academic and language needs better (Valentin, 1993).

The literature points out that the issue of TESOL status and the best way to encourage cooperation between ESL and mainstream teachers are ongoing challenges that administrators must confront in schools. Davison (2006) explains that encouraging cooperation between teachers to combine expertise and maximize success may seem intuitive, but he points out that

cooperation is not simple to foster. He presents an extensive breakdown of elements of effective collaboration between ESL and content teachers, which includes:

...the need to establish a clear conceptualisation of the task, the incorporation of explicit goals for ESL development into curriculum and assessment planning processes, the negotiation of a shared understanding of ESL and mainstream teachers' roles/responsibilities, the adoption of common curriculum planning proformas and processes, experimentation with diversity as a resource to promote effective learning for all students, the development of articulated and flexible pathways for ESL learning support, and the establishment of systematic mechanisms for monitoring evaluation and feedback. (p. 456)

As if that weren't enough, Davison points out that classroom teachers and ESL staff may have competing ideas about what constitute appropriate priorities in instructional planning. Therefore, he maintains that "often such partnerships are associated with the subordination of ESL to the content area and an imbalance between teachers in terms of curriculum authority, responsibility and opportunities for input" (p. 456). It is often the case that ESL teachers have to prove two things to content teachers: their expertise in the field of language development and the priority of English language instruction. In response to research promoting collaboration in instructional planning between classroom and ESL teachers, a review by Short and Echevarria (1999) concludes that this collaboration is difficult because "content specialists immersed in the discourse of their discipline do not easily recognise the language demands of curriculum, let alone the language-learning needs and opportunities, whilst ESL teachers struggle to 'cover the content' and easily lose direction and control" (as cited in Davison, 2006, p. 457). It is incumbent

upon school administrators to cultivate an environment where collaboration rather than competition is standard operating procedure for instructional planning.

Though the principal is the key administrative figure in the review and administration of a successful ESL program, s/he cannot succeed without a fully qualified support staff. Houk (2005) breaks down these qualifications:

There are two important components of a comprehensive plan to create a staff of educators ready and able to work successfully with English language learners: first, the staff must, as much as possible, reflect the community that it serves...Secondly, it is crucial that staff who work with English language learners in any capacity be trained in social, political, linguistic, and cultural dynamics of education. (p. 35)

Houk believes that these characteristics should apply equally to mainstream teachers, ESL teachers, reading specialists, and paraeducators who work with ELLs.

There is extensive literature in the field of professional development for teachers of ELLs that includes recommendations for best practices in teaching reading to ELLs. However, the conclusions of this research can be misinterpreted as being easily implemented. In fact, many of the recommendations aimed at teachers would only be successful if they were implemented in a thoroughly supportive instructional context. Many studies, for example, emphasize that school staff must develop a knowledge base about ELL students' diverse cultures, their L1 literacy, and how these may affect the development of literacy in English (see Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1966; Ferreiro & Teberosk, 1982; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Huey, 1908; Lareau, 1989; Leichter, 1984; Leseman & DeJong, 1998; and Marvin & Wright, 1997, as cited in Edwards, Paratore, & Roser, 2009, p. 78). This knowledge base is built by staff as they gather information

concerning students' L1 cultures, establish a strong and ongoing dialogue with ELLs' parents, and learn about the literacy backgrounds of both students and their families. Houk (2005) encourages schools to display photographs of families and to create spaces where families can gather within the school, welcoming them as participants in their students' education. Houk believes that when schools learn about students' family cultures, teachers and paraeducators can develop insights into the language resources to which ELLs have access (p. 13).

It is often especially challenging to engage parents of ELLs who may be unfamiliar with standard American school practices. Thus, teachers are encouraged to make extra efforts to reach out to these families, using whatever resources available to them. Schools must be conscious of how contact with parents is even initiated. Traditionally, the primary means of communication from schools is through written notes home, which poses two problems for families of ELLs. First, in most cases, these notes are exclusively in English, a clear obstacle for monolingual families. Second, in contrast to English-speaking parents, parents of ELLs may have little experience with a school culture that values parental engagement and may not expect contact from teachers inviting them to attend parent conferences or other classroom events. Teachers can misinterpret the absence of ELL parents from particular events as a lack of interest, when in fact, these parents are simply unaware of what is happening in the school (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, 8). This makes clear the need for varied and continued outreach programs to welcome parents and acclimate them to the school environment. If possible, districts could employ a community liaison or designate a family outreach coordinator who can establish and maintain contact with parents of ELL students. These liaisons can also serve as mediators between parents and teachers to make certain that parents do not feel intimidated in the formal school environment (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

It is crucial that schools develop a knowledge base about family literacy if they are to develop a challenging curriculum that promotes long-term success for all students. As Potter (1989) explains: “Children will have many teachers in their lives, but only one family. It must be the family who helps maintain the continuity of the child’s education” (p. 28). First of all, schools must understand that cultural attitudes towards literacy vary and that ELLs may come from homes that define literacy in different ways. Whereas American culture typically promotes home literacy and encourages parents to read to their children, ELLs may come from home cultures without this tradition. All staff involved in teaching reading need to know whether their students read at home and if their parents read to them so that the school can plan and implement the most effect supports for students and their families. Second, they must also know about access to reading materials; ELLs from low income homes may not have access to nearly as many books (in English or their first language) as do their middle class peers. In a study comparing the print environments of four low- and middle-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Neuman and Celano (2001) found that there was not a single bookstore in either of the low-income communities. In contrast, there were ten in the two middle-class neighborhoods. They also reported that the low-income neighborhoods “had smaller overall collections in their public library, fewer books per child, and more limited nighttime hours than those in the middle-income communities” (p. 22). Lastly, Edwards et al. (2009) note that ELLs’ homes may be sources of print, but these texts may not necessarily be of the same types found in schools. They state that ELL children may find it difficult to apply “the literacy knowledge and abilities promoted by the parents and other caregivers” in school. To overcome this obstacle, they recommend that schools initiate “home-school” partnerships based on a continued exchange of information, to “enable schools and families to see parent involvement as a shared

responsibility” (p. 89). Clearly, school staff need to develop a thorough understanding of the cultural and social factors that may inhibit the development of reading skills in their ELL students.

Generally, ELLs learning to read require a balanced literacy environment that supports their specific cultural and language development needs. The school principal is the key figure in facilitating this environment and has two primary responsibilities to the ESL program: implementing continual review for the purpose of remaining proactive in meeting the program’s needs and maintaining a school setting that promotes collaboration between teachers, counselors, specialists, paraeducators, and all other staff who work with ELLs. Schools need to take extra efforts to engage the families of ELLs and bring them into the school as partners in their children’s education. When schools build a strong knowledge base of ELLs’ family and literacy backgrounds and incorporate this knowledge into ESL reading instruction, they immerse ELLs in an encouraging classroom environment, in which teachers can successfully implement best reading practices.

Methods

Site and Participants

The school in this case study is a public, suburban elementary school with 620 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Minority students account for about 25% of the student population, and there are 23 students classified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students.² The school’s ESL program is an English-immersion, pull-out model. The program is unique from many ESL programs in that the LEP tutors are not under the administration of the school but rather, are part-time employees who are placed in schools, trained, and supervised, by a district instructional specialist.

In this study, I conducted observations of each of the following teachers' instructional practice: the mainstream teacher, Ms. Taylor³, two LEP tutors, Ms. Cary and Ms. Davidson, and Ms. Jackson, the Reading Recovery teacher. In addition to my observation of teacher practice in the classroom, I observed each of the students while they worked independently with a computer phonics instruction program, and I observed the one ELL student, Nichole, who had daily Reading Recovery sessions with Ms. Jackson. I followed these two students in various instructional settings in the school, but it is my observations of teacher practice that inform the conclusions rather than the progress of the individual students.

I chose this school as a site for this case study because another William and Mary student had conducted a prior observational study in the Reading Recovery classroom at the school. That student described an ELL who had demonstrated a sudden and unusually rapid development in both her reading and English language proficiency that seemed to coincide with her placement in Reading Recovery. I sought to discover whether that student's rapid progress was an anomalous event or if Reading Recovery programs have significant implications for ELL students' language abilities.

My participants in this study were two ELLs and four members of the instructional staff. The two ELLs I observed for the purposes of this report came from the same 2nd grade classroom. The first student, Nichole, is a German and English-speaking female, raised in Germany, who moved to the United States with her parents and began school in September 2009. Her mother is German, and her father is American. She attended German school and had not studied English prior to her move to the United States but learned conversational English at home. Joshua was born into a Mandarin-speaking community in New York, where he attended

Mandarin school for two years; like Nichole, he also began the 2nd grade in September. He neither spoke nor read English at that time.

Data Collection Procedures

Over the course of 20 observations from December 2009 to February 2010, I spent six to twelve hours a week observing and recording field notes in each of the aforementioned classes. The students' afternoons began with 45 minutes of pull-out ESL tutoring, followed by 15 minutes of computer phonics instruction. Nichole's pull-out session consisted of one-on-one tutoring held in a large multipurpose room that instructors also used for special education tutoring sessions during that hour. Joshua received ESL tutoring in a smaller conference room used for library storage. He shared the first 30 minutes of each session with Ben, a Spanish-speaking kindergartner. Afterwards, Nichole and Joshua participated in the last two reading centers in the mainstream classroom. Their reading centers began with 15 minutes of computer reading activities and ended with 10 minutes in a guided reading group with Ms. Taylor. By the mid-year testing that took place in January 2010, Nichole had excelled so far ahead of Joshua in her reading development that Ms. Taylor restructured the reading groups and placed Nichole in a group with her peers. As a result, Joshua stopped receiving guided reading instruction. Instead, he spent that time listening to books on tape. Nichole received 30 minutes of pull-out Reading Recovery instruction after the conclusion of reading centers.

During each of these sessions, I followed the students and recorded hand-written field notes that focused primarily on reading instruction activities. I noted each activity with its time of duration. In addition to the classroom learning activities, I noted the teachers' interactions with their students. The instances in which Nichole and Joshua were in separate classrooms, I split my time between the two rooms, alternating between which classroom I attended first.

Occasionally, a teacher would ask me to assist with certain tasks such as listening as Nichole read to me or guiding Joshua through a worksheet. In these instances I would stop taking notes and update them immediately after I finished working with the student.

Another source of data in this study came from the interviews⁴ that I conducted with each member of the instructional staff who worked with the two ELLs. This includes the mainstream teacher, Ms. Taylor, Joshua's LEP tutor, Ms. Davidson, and the Reading Recovery teacher, Ms. Jackson. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview Ms. Cary because she left her position before the end of my study due to personal reasons. I also conducted one interview with the Vice Principal charged with ESL administration, Ms. Samuels, and another with Dr. Jacobson, the instructional specialist. With the permission of the teachers and administrators, I recorded and transcribed each of these interviews; however, in compliance with the school's policy protecting student identity, all responses remain confidential.

Purpose

The teacher observations targeted each of the specific aspects related to reading instruction and the general instruction of ELL students. In the first week of observations, I gathered an understanding of the cultural context surrounding ELLs in this school. I explored the learning environment that surrounded literacy instruction and if teachers and administrators made accommodations to this environment to promote success for ELLs. From the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy, I did not only examine how teachers taught ELLs to read; I was also critical of whether or not they were teaching minority language students how to use literacy as a tool to empower themselves and strengthen their educations.

In the participant interviews, I targeted the teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards techniques for ESL literacy instruction. The interview questions varied based on the role each

teacher or administrator played in the students' reading development. In the interview of the Reading Recovery teacher, my primary goal was to learn about the features of Reading Recovery curricula that best promoted reading development in ELLs. From the two administrator interviews, I gleaned information about in-service training that taught teachers how to meet the special needs of ELL students. I also sought to learn about the school and district attitudes towards ESL programming in general and what efforts administrators are making to improve ESL instruction. During the vice principal interview, I also gained information about the demographic and cultural composition of this school and its ESL program.

The mainstream teacher is the central figure in Nichole and Joshua's instruction. Consequently, from her, I elicited information about her cooperation with the Reading Recovery teacher and LEP tutors to construct complete reading curricula for her ELL students. Also, because she is the point of contact for students' parents, I sought to learn how she and the school gather information about ELLs' families and whether they use that information to inform instruction for ELLs. Though I targeted this heavily in Ms. Taylor's interview, I also addressed ELL family background and family literacy in each interview. Because these features are so crucial to understanding ELLs' language and reading development, my goal in gathering this information was twofold. First, I sought to discover whether teachers and administrators were aware of the critical role family literacy plays in students' reading development. Second, the efforts that the teachers and administrators take to gather information on family backgrounds provide clear insight into the programs that the school institutionalizes to deliver individualized instruction to each ELL.

Data Analysis

I initially sorted my data into two main categories. The first included any information from the field notes or interviews that reflected the learning environment of ELLs within this school. This included information regarding teachers' training in TESOL practice, teacher and administrator attitudes about the priority of the ESL program, and coordination of instruction between teachers and administrators. I also included data within this grouping that reflected how the school gathered information about ELLs' family backgrounds and how it maintained communication with students' parents. The second category included all data directly relevant to reading curricula. These data came from observations of specific activities and teaching strategies from each of the classrooms.

When I studied those data closely, it became clear that there were four categories with which I could describe thoroughly the entire context of ELL literacy instruction at the school. I therefore re-sorted my data based on these four categories: teacher training, program management and coordination, family outreach, and explicit literacy instruction

Results

Overview of the Instructional Context

Several factors shape the learning environment of ELLs in this school. In addition to the home cultures which they bring to school, ELLs learn in particular classroom environments in a school that attempts to implement district policies related to TESOL. Nichole and Joshua both began the school year as emergent, level 1 readers. However, by the time my observations began, Nichole had reached instructional level 9; whereas, Joshua had not progressed beyond letter recognition and identification of high-frequency sight words. Likewise, in the course of this study, Nichole advanced an additional nine reading levels, and her teachers anticipated she

would be reading on grade level by the end of February 2010. Joshua, on the other hand, continued through emergent reading activities and could only read level 1 books with heavy assistance from his tutor.

The discrepancy between Nichole and Joshua's progress was due to the fact that their teachers designed very different instructional programs for them based on their levels of oral English proficiency. Nichole's teachers and LEP tutor used her oral feedback to assess her progress and regularly adapt her reading instruction, but they were unable to do this with Joshua. Nichole also benefited from a highly trained Reading Recovery teacher, who modified her instruction to meet Nichole's specific needs. In the following section, I will outline the major factors that contributed to the discrepancy between the instructional programs I observed. In this discussion, I will explore the need for adequate in-service training, greater ESL program coordination, and increased family outreach efforts. I will also discuss Nichole and Joshua's reading development in the context of the NRP's three categories of teaching reading and will also include family literacy in this discussion.

Lack of In-service Training for Mainstream Teachers and TESOL Paraprofessionals

In my interview with Ms. Taylor, the classroom teacher, she reported that she had never received training in teaching ELLs. Ms. Taylor maintained that not once in her 21 years of elementary teaching experience had she ever received guidance in how to adapt instructional strategies to include ELLs in the mainstream classroom. She also commented that the school administration did not offer adequate resources or information concerning best instructional practices for ELLs to support teachers facing the recent influx of beginning language learners. This was evident in comments Ms. Taylor made concerning her ability to interact with Nichole versus Joshua. Ms. Taylor noted that Nichole's much more advanced oral proficiency allowed

her to instruct Nichole as if she were any other beginning reader. Thus, she could take Nichole through guided reading texts appropriate for her low reading proficiency level and provide additional support by teaching fundamental literacy skills through phonological discrimination or word sorting activities. However, Ms. Taylor mentioned more than once in her interview that she and Joshua struggled to develop his oral communication skills. She concluded that she was simply unaware of effective practices to teach reading to beginning language learners like Joshua.

Though Ms. Jackson's Reading Recovery training is extensive, she has not received professional development in strategies appropriate for teaching ELLs to read. The increased presence of ELLs in her classroom has taught Ms. Jackson to adapt instruction for ELLs, this in spite of a lack of assistance from the district in the form of in-service training. This has not been detrimental to Nichole because she is still receiving scaffolded, challenging instruction, a primary feature of L2 literacy development (Houk, 2005). Ms. Jackson uses standard reading development strategies with Nichole but also implements techniques she found successful when working in the past with ELL students. Since Nichole is not officially enrolled in the Reading Recovery program, meaning her test data are not included in the national database that tracks student progress, Ms. Jackson strays from Reading Recovery practice when she thinks that doing so will benefit Nichole. For example, Reading Recovery guidelines do not permit teachers to review level assessments with their students nor reveal which mistakes they made; however, Ms. Jackson offers Nichole as much feedback as possible. She will take Nichole back through the stories she has read and allow her to correct any errors. Additionally, Reading Recovery requires that every session begin with a warm-up story from the previous day, but Ms. Jackson will give Nichole the choice to warm-up with new texts, explaining her belief that it is more beneficial for

Nichole to read as many texts as possible. Ms. Jackson did note that Nichole's progress has been exceptional and that in the past teaching reading skills to ELLs with lower English proficiency levels has been difficult. Thus, despite her success, she also would benefit from explicit training in teaching second language reading.

Dr. Jacobson, the school division instructional specialist, is responsible for the hiring, training, and scheduling of all LEP tutors in the district. In her interview, she outlined the framework of the LEP tutoring system and explained the role of the LEP tutor. Within the district, she estimated there are 15 LEP tutors and one licensed ESL teacher who divides her time between two different high schools. When asked about professional development, Dr. Jacobson informed me that the district cannot afford to offer much in the way of in-service training for LEP tutors. Instead of regular training, professional development consists of three or four half-day sessions each school year. One surprising challenge that Dr. Jacobson revealed is that few qualifications are required to obtain employment as a LEP tutor. The minimum education requirement to fill an LEP tutoring position is a high school degree. Dr. Jacobson further noted that though many of the district's tutors have backgrounds in education and some are licensed teachers, there are several who are not. Moreover, only a small minority of all tutors have prior experience working with ELLs. The minimal credentials required of LEP tutors, their lack of training, and limited experience with ELLs all limit the breadth and depth of the in-service training that Dr. Jacobson herself offers. She feels that in-service programming about best TESOL practices would be beyond the capabilities of the tutors. Thus, rather than focusing in-service training on best instructional practices, she feels she must instead focus on acquiring materials and curricula that are so easy to use that any tutor can learn to implement them despite minimal training, understanding of TESOL, or knowledge of second language acquisition.

Ms. Davidson informed me that in the few professional development sessions that the district offered this year, reading instruction was not addressed. The district expects tutors to read with their students every day, but the only mandate is that tutors have their students keep a daily writing journal. Newly implemented this year, this practice is in reaction to last year's assessments that showed writing to be the weakest skill among ELL students. Other than that mandate, LEP tutors receive no explicit instructions about how they should teach reading and writing to ELLs. Commenting specifically on reading instruction, Dr. Jacobson explained that the tutors are in place as supports to the district's standard reading curriculum as implemented by the mainstream teachers and reading specialists. This curriculum is available on the district website for tutors to access if desired; however, according to Dr. Jacobson, the tutor's role is not to provide explicit literacy instruction. Rather, tutors are in place to communicate with the mainstream teacher, to learn her classroom literacy goals, and to provide the supports that she needs to help students reach those goals.

I observed the effects of the lack of instructional training in both LEP tutors' pull-out sessions. Both Ms. Davidson and Ms. Cary have backgrounds in education, but neither is trained or licensed in teaching ESL. The data gathered from Ms. Cary's classroom is unfortunately limited because during the time of my observations, she took extended time off and eventually left her position for personal reasons. However, the sessions that I did observe were structured, balanced, and targeted Nichole's phonological awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary development. Although Ms. Cary's TESOL training is minimal, she did demonstrate a common sense understanding of successful teaching techniques for ELLs from her previous experience as a classroom teacher. For example, in explaining Nichole's daily illustrated journal writing, she commented that this method had been especially useful for past ELLs because it provided

structure for beginning students but flexibility that encouraged advanced students to be more creative and elaborate in their writing.

Though Ms. Cary's pull-out sessions were productive, I observed gaps in her instruction. For example, Nichole often spent her instructional time completing various practice exercises rather than receiving direct instruction in different subject areas. Ms. Cary would guide Nichole through her activities, which she generally carried out with great ease. However, research warns that the lack of rigorous ESL instruction risks enabling stagnation in the pull-out classroom because it does not promote constructive feedback from the teacher (Lems et al., 2010, p. 17). Despite the fact that at the beginning of my study Nichole was at an instructional reading level of 9, she was only reading level 2 and 3 books during her pull-out sessions. She flawlessly read through these texts and, consequently, would not elicit helpful instruction from Ms. Cary. This observation is consistent with Dr. Jacobson's comments that she trains LEP tutors to implement pre-packaged, hands-on activities rather than provide individualized instruction for ELLs.

My observations of Ms. Davidson's classroom revealed the more severe and unfortunate effects of the district's approach to tutor training, as she was at a continual loss as to what activities were appropriate for ELLs of Joshua's level. Ms. Davidson is in her second year as an LEP tutor and first year at this particular school, and her only ESL training has come from Dr. Jacobson's professional development sessions. The activities she planned for Joshua and Ben were without context or explicit language goals. The topics and subject areas covered also varied extensively and were random as they lacked a clear flow of objectives from one day to the next. Her indecision about level-appropriate lesson planning for Joshua was exacerbated by Ben's presence in the classroom. Ben garnered more individual attention and required easier activities for his lower proficiency level. The result is that Joshua spent his time participating in easy

activities such as arts and crafts, counting, and basic letter recognition, all skills he had already mastered. Alternatively, Joshua independently performed tasks closer to his own proficiency level; however, because he performed these tasks without guidance, they would also be below his instructional level.

Program Management and Coordination

The biggest weakness in this school's literacy program and its ESL instruction overall is in the ESL program management. The negative implications of this are critical, namely that positive instruction in practice in this school is not a reflection of the school or district environment but rather the efforts of individual teachers. Research shows that when all of the teachers are highly trained in their positions, the negative effects of an uncoordinated ESL program are not detrimental. In this case, ELLs are at the greatest risk of receiving repeated instruction or conflicting techniques (Houk, 2005). However, in this school, the negative effects have been severe, especially for Joshua.

As Dahlman and Hoffman (2009) explain, the chief role of the administrator of an ESL program is to ensure the priority of the program and promote this understanding among the other staff members. In her interview, Vice Principal Samuels revealed strong insight into her responsibility to establish the ESL program as a priority within the school. Though her formal responsibilities to the program are only to screen and keep track of ELLs and coordinate the tutors' schedules, she has taken on a more active role in managing the program. Informed by her background in special education, Ms. Samuels described her personal goal to provide every individual student with the best education possible, regardless of minority or ELL status. She offered as an example her efforts to establish firm relationships with ELL families. She noted that she always meets with the parents of ELLs upon their enrollment in school but first ensures

that she has an L1 translator available. By communicating to parents through a translator in their L1, she shows them that they are welcome in the school where they have someone with whom they can communicate, which is the first step in engaging them in their children's educations (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

Ms. Samuels has a clear desire to improve instruction for ELLs, who are perhaps the school's most needful learners; however, the teachers and tutors who are discouraged by the lack of support from the school district are less hopeful. Ms. Samuels maintains improving the ESL program as a priority in her mind, but she has not successfully promoted this mindset throughout the rest of the school. This failure is due to the fact that she can only work with the limited resources offered to her by the district, which is ultimately responsible for meeting the needs of the LEP tutors. The unfortunate reality of the situation is that as long as the program is not a priority on the district level, it cannot improve in spite of Ms. Samuel's best efforts. The result of this divided structure has left the LEP tutors neglected by a district that is not fully meeting their needs and on the fringes of a school that wishes to support them but cannot.

Due to budgetary limitations, the district has reduced the number of instructional hours for LEP tutors. This has resulted in practices that are contrary to district policy and have been harmful for ELLs. The LEP tutors are part-time employees and paid on an hourly basis. Due to a \$50,000 budget deficit in LEP salary from the previous year, supervisors like Jacobson have had to impose strict limits on the number of hours that tutors work. As of this year, tutors are only allotted one hour of paid planning time per week, which limits the amount of time tutors actually spend in the school. Additionally, Ms. Davidson explained that district policy states that tutors are to work with students individually unless they can be grouped with other students in the same grade and who are performing at the same proficiency level. Despite that policy, the district

paired Joshua with Ben because the budget crisis did not permit the supervisor to employ the tutor for enough hours to work with them separately. Ms. Davidson commented that Ben's presence has held back Joshua's instruction because it forces her to reserve all higher-level academic tasks to the final 15 minutes of the session in which she is alone with Joshua. However, after 30 minutes of kindergarten-level activities, Joshua would become bored, unfocused, and difficult to manage, and he would often act out and refuse to complete the tasks Ms. Davidson had planned for him.⁵

The district's vision of the proper role for LEP tutors dictates that they are in place to support classroom teachers and not instruct, which means that the content of their instruction is defined by the mainstream teachers. As Davison (2006) makes clear, this structure creates a hierarchical framework that can be problematic without a strong sense of equal partnership between the mainstream and ESL teachers. The district's system creates the need for the mainstream teacher to take the ESL classroom into account when planning curricula. However, Davison explains that the mainstream teacher can neglect this task if she views ESL services as less important than classroom instruction or if she views the ESL teacher as less skilled (p. 458). This structure also requires constant two-way communication between the ESL and mainstream teachers so that each may clearly understand what progress ELLs are making and what support they need to meet classroom goals. Though I did not observe an attitude of superiority in Ms. Taylor, she did lack regular communication with the LEP tutors. Thus, the result has been that tutors receive no curricular guidance on the district level and only minimal direction within the school.

Currently, there is no mechanism in place that promotes the coordination of instruction for ESL students. Each teacher demonstrated that she is devoted to fulfilling her responsibilities

within the classroom, but because of a lack of communication between them, their students are not receiving a coordinated instructional program. Exacerbating the situation is the distance between the LEP tutors and the school staff. Ms. Davidson and Ms. Cary are not required to be present at school staff meetings, and as hourly employees, there is no incentive for them to attend of their own accord. Additionally, the LEP tutors are not included on the school website or in staff social events. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Taylor both commented that a separation existed between the tutors and other teachers in the school. Neither teacher personally interacts with the tutors on a regular basis. Ms. Taylor submits written weekly plans that outline classroom goals in reading and mathematics along with suggested activities. Though Ms. Taylor is consistent in submitting her weekly plans, Ms. Davidson commented that of the six teachers with whom she works, only two regularly submit these planning sheets.

Family Outreach

The school culture is highly encouraging of parental involvement in their children's educations; however, there are no organized efforts that reach out to the families of ELLs. Nor is there a standard process for teachers to gather information on students' home cultures and language backgrounds. After Ms. Samuels welcomes ELL parents, responsibility for maintaining contact shifts predominantly to the mainstream teacher. Annual parent-teacher conferences are held in October of each school year, and all other conferences are scheduled as needed. Additionally, Ms. Taylor sends students home with daily indicators of their classroom behavior for parents to sign and return. Ms. Jackson requests permission from each mainstream teacher to attend parent conferences. She also sends home daily progress reports as well as detailed quarterly reports. In contrast, no formal measures are taken by the LEP tutors to communicate with the parents of their students.

Ms. Samuels informed me that the school is the only one in the district with a full-time, community liaison on staff, but her work does not contribute to furthering the understanding of ELLs' home cultures. She works with families of low socioeconomic status and provides resources and assistance in regard to housing and food. The information she gathers concerning students' families is generally confidential and only shared with teachers on a need-to-know basis. Though she has worked with ELL families in the past, they do not make up a large percentage of the population that she currently serves.

The Reading Recovery teachers use their Title I funding to host quarterly after school workshops focused explicitly on promoting home literacy, and this year, Ms. Jackson instituted smaller monthly programs wherein parents come before or after school to read and play learning games with their children. These programs have been effective in increasing overall parental involvement in Reading Recovery, but they have not increased engagement with parents of ELLs. The monthly programs have brought more parents into the Reading Recovery classroom (where they are welcome to observe sessions) and to the quarterly, educational workshops. Parents of ELLs enrolled in Reading Recovery have shown regular attendance to these events. However, the information provided is only in English, and the school's bilingual paraeducators are not always present to translate. Thus, Ms. Jackson noted that interacting with ELL parents at these workshops has been difficult, and she has not seen the same increase in engagement with ELL parents that she has seen with other families.

Unlike Ms. Samuels, none of the teachers or tutors implement extra efforts to communicate with the parents of ELLs. Except for the parent-teacher conference, all forms of communication occur through notes home. Unfortunately, this practice is widespread in spite of research confirming that written communication is an ineffective means of reaching ELL parents

(Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Because the school's ELL population is predominantly Spanish-speaking, some descriptive information about the school's special education and Reading Recovery programs is available in Spanish. However, the majority of communication regarding school events or student behavior occurs in English.

Implications for Literacy Instruction

Detailed below are my specific findings with regard to Nichole and Joshua's daily reading instruction. These findings describe Nichole and Joshua's individual literacy programs and the methods and strategies I observed in each classroom.

Despite the lack of coordination, Nichole's teachers individually managed her instruction quite effectively, offering a broad range of tasks that targeted the three basic areas of literacy. Most significantly, the Reading Recovery program ensured that Nichole received rigorous reading instruction on a daily basis. Nichole practiced phonics daily through the Breakthrough to Literacy® program, a computer program designed for kindergartners struggling with early literacy development. However, even on the highest instructional level, the tasks were far below her abilities. Eventually, Ms. Taylor took her off the program, allowing her to spend more time in reading centers in the mainstream classroom. Nichole participated in the same activities as her peers in reading centers, including sorting tasks that tested higher level phonological awareness. In contrast to the phonics program, these tasks included all forms of sound-letter correspondences, such as digraphs and diphthongs.

Both the mainstream and Reading Recovery teachers targeted comprehension and vocabulary development. Ms. Taylor did so through Nichole's guided reading group and also through independent assignments from the class reading textbook. In Reading Recovery, Ms. Jackson employed two strategies to teach vocabulary. With each text, she high-lighted new

words during pre-reading, while facilitating discussion of the text's pictures to help Nichole negotiate the meaning of these new words. Additionally during each session, Ms. Jackson noted any words with which Nichole consistently struggled. In following sessions, she would break the words down into smaller, familiar parts or else would teach them through analogy to words that Nichole had already studied. Regular comprehension checks are not a feature of Reading Recovery. These checks are instead incorporated into the level assessments. After each story, the reader is asked three comprehension questions: two content-based and one based on inference. However, Ms. Jackson explained that she continually tracks Nichole's comprehension based on her ability to comment on the events of each story. If she feels Nichole is struggling, she will provide any needed supports to boost her understanding.

I observed two characteristics of literacy development that were exclusive to the Reading Recovery classroom. The first was instruction that targeted oral reading development and reading fluency, which is the ability to quickly and accurately recognize words while simultaneously constructing meaning from a text (Lems et al., 2010, p. 148). The teacher began each session with a warm-up reading, a text with which Nichole was already familiar. This warm-up would build Nichole's comfort and confidence in her ability to learn in the lesson. Ms. Jackson targeted fluent oral reading throughout each session by ensuring that Nichole read her stories to "sound like talking." If Nichole's oral reading was choppy and uneven, Ms. Jackson would re-read particular trouble spots and demonstrate fluidity through exaggerated inflection that emphasized the story's flow. Nichole would then repeat these same sections. In one particular instance, I observed Ms. Jackson modeling fluid reading that followed punctuation marks rather than line or page breaks. In doing so, she explained to Nichole that sentences can be

broken up between pages, but the separate parts must be read together in order to comprehend their full meaning.

The second feature of literacy instruction unique to Reading Recovery is the development of literary awareness. The initial Reading Recovery observational survey includes a Concepts About Print test that examines students' familiarity with books and their level of print awareness. This section targets knowledge of punctuation, reading from left to right, capital versus lowercase letters, and other extraneous features of English literacy. Ms. Jackson commented that students' performance on this section also serves as an assessment of whether or not they are being read to at home. In her comments, she stressed the importance of encouraging parents to read to their children in order to develop their print awareness. Thus, the Reading Recovery teachers use the aforementioned quarterly workshops to teach parents how to support their children's reading at home and boost their children's familiarity and comfort with reading.

My observation notes revealed that the main concern of Joshua's classroom teacher and LEP tutor was what seemed to them to be the slow development of his oral proficiency. Developing Joshua's oral language was their clear priority; consequently, they did not develop a cohesive literacy program for Joshua. The only domain in which Joshua received daily instruction was in phonological awareness through the Breakthrough® program. Since he demonstrated progress in this area, his classroom teacher and tutor developed his phonics skills more than any other reading skills. In the ESL classroom, this phonics development took the form of rudimentary tasks like coloring letter worksheets or going through a set of alphabet picture cards. Occasionally, Joshua created his own picture cards, spelling out the words with the help of his tutor.

I could draw few specific conclusions from my observations concerning the other features of Joshua's reading instruction. Ms. Davidson developed Joshua's vocabulary through the use of picture cards of different "real-life" objects such as clothing and food. Additionally, Ms. Davidson did read at least one book to Joshua everyday. However, this was always reserved for the last 15 minutes of each session. Thus, it was rare that she could take Joshua through pre-reading or read each book with him more than once to clarify the meaning of key vocabulary words or check his comprehension. The Breakthrough® program also included at least one story with detailed comprehension questions that gradually increased with difficulty.

Initially, Ms. Taylor paired Joshua with Nichole in a guided reading group, which created a challenging reading environment for him. Nichole often read passages from the reading textbook to Joshua, with Ms. Taylor checking his comprehension throughout. For a short time, Ms. Taylor attempted to guide Joshua through the Bob Books® series, in which he showed slow but consistent progress. However, by mid-year testing, Nichole had excelled so far ahead of Joshua that Ms. Taylor dissolved their reading group, which ended Joshua's instruction with the Bob Books®. Nichole eventually joined a reading group of her peers, while Joshua spent that time listening to books on tape.

Unfortunately, the other key features of a complete literacy curriculum, such as the development of print awareness and incorporation of family literacy, are irrelevant in the discussion of Joshua's reading development. Neither Ms. Taylor nor Ms. Davidson demonstrated knowledge of his language or literacy background. Throughout the course of my observations, I observed no incorporation of students' home cultures or the use of culturally relevant texts in any of the classrooms discussed above. As Houk (2005) explains, the first step in designing an ESL literacy program is learning about the students' experiences and home cultures. Unfortunately,

this school has not taken this step, resulting in literacy instruction that risks being tangential to the lives of its ELLs.

Discussion

Both Joshua and Nichole are privileged to learn in a positive and encouraging school environment. However, gaps in program management and lack of training in TESOL practice are hindering teachers from fully meeting ELL students' needs. Finding practical solutions to fill these gaps in a time of limited resources and tightening budgets can require creativity, but these solutions are not beyond reach. Below I have outlined the major program weaknesses that arose in my findings followed by a list of practical recommendations that the school and district can take to address them.

The unique organization of this tutoring system has created a need for coordination on three levels: between the school and district administrators, between the school administration and teachers, and between mainstream and pull-out teachers. The greatest obstacle Vice Principal Samuels has faced in elevating the priority of ESL in this school has been the management of tutors who are in her school but not officially under her administration. Despite her best efforts, staying updated on the tutors' training, instructional practice, progress, and needs is quite difficult. She also has no means to support the tutors through in-service training programs because it is the district's responsibility to provide LEP tutors with all materials, resources, and training. She does her best to reach out to the instructional specialist when faced with a specific need such as a scheduling concern, but otherwise, she has little communication with Dr. Jacobson.

On the school level, the teachers whom I observed are not working together to coordinate instruction for Nichole and Joshua. Neither has the school administration taken a role to establish

an environment that promotes this communication. ELLs would benefit from more direct interaction between school administration, teachers, and the LEP tutors. With greater communication, teachers and tutors can share ideas, resources, and strategies and coordinate efforts to complement instruction in each classroom.

Due to budgetary constraints, TESOL professional development has been inconsistent, and the school district has failed to provide sufficient training for teachers and LEP tutors. Since the district combines professional development for all K-12 LEP tutors into large group sessions, these training sessions cannot address specific issues that face tutors of specific grade and language proficiency levels. Also, because of low qualifications to fill tutoring positions, professional development trains tutors to implement hands-on activities rather than instructional techniques in the classroom. In her interview, Ms. Davidson emphasized her lack of training and experience working with ELLs and stated that the district does not offer an adequate level of training to the LEP tutors. Ms. Taylor added that her own lack of training has overwhelmed her as she is unfamiliar with the recommended practices for teaching ELLs. Thus, both mainstream teachers and LEP tutors are in need of continued in-service training in basic principles of second language acquisition and TESOL.

One particular challenge mentioned by the instructional specialist, vice principal, mainstream teacher, and LEP tutor is the recent increase in beginning language learners, for which the school and district were unprepared. The lack of preparation was clear in the discrepancy between Joshua and Nichole's quality of instruction. As Joshua is still emerging from his silent period, his teachers do not think it is possible to assess his learning without sufficient oral output. They seem to believe that the measurement of learning outcomes can only be accomplished through the learner's oral production. As a result, Joshua's tutors and teachers

have focused on improving his spoken language skills and have delayed literacy instruction. However, this approach risks Joshua falling further behind in his English literacy development. Instead, Joshua needs a detailed instructional plan that simultaneously develops productive and receptive language skills. With the right training, Ms. Davidson and Ms. Taylor can learn to properly assess his learning outcomes and adjust instructional planning as is appropriate.

Reading Recovery instruction has supported Nichole's remarkable success in literacy development. The most beneficial aspect of Reading Recovery is that it provides ELLs with regular, explicit reading instruction. In Nichole's case, it was especially effective because it supplemented a complete reading program within her mainstream classroom where she participated in reading centers and guided reading time. This success complements the literature, stressing that ELLs succeed with the same structured beginning literacy instruction as NES students. Like their English-speaking peers, ELLs excel when teachers challenge them through reading curricula that provide explicit feedback and individualized supports based on specific language and literacy backgrounds (Antunez, 2002). However, both Ms. Taylor and Ms. Jackson noted that Nichole's success was atypical of their beginning ELLs because her oral proficiency was sufficiently advanced and made their assessment of her learning unproblematic.

Suggestions and Implications

According to Dahlman and Hoffman (2009), administrators do not need to overhaul their entire programs to implement change. Rather, they can take measures towards improvement by evaluating current resources and reallocating them to target the greatest needs of the program. Most importantly, they argue, school administration should implement and oversee continual program review to remain proactive in addressing major concerns before they arise. Thus, the

suggestions I propose below serve to address current program needs; however, these can only be the first step in a long-term plan of improvement.

On the district level, the LEP tutoring program has two primary needs. Despite the cost, training for tutors is a necessity before they begin their work in an LEP tutoring position. Also, in-service professional development needs to offer tutors more than the hands-on techniques that Dr. Jacobson emphasizes. If the district feels that training in basic second language acquisition and ESL teaching strategies is beyond the ability of some tutors, it may consider changing the qualifications for tutoring positions. ESL instruction is critical to ensure that ELLs receive the appropriate supports they need, and despite fiscal pressures, the district should strive to require that LEP tutors have educational training beyond a high school diploma. At the very least, these tutors should have a background in language acquisition or frequent in-service training. Effective in-service workshops can help tutors become familiar with research-based techniques known to improve English language development. These workshops can target specific strategies for ESL literacy such as the language experience approach, reading and writing workshops, story reenactments, and teacher read alouds.⁶

Changes need to take place in spite of the current budget deficit. As Dr. Jacobson acknowledged, the ELL population will continue to grow regardless of budget increase or crisis. However, improvement does not require overhaul but a thorough reevaluation of current spending. As an example, one Oregon school district successfully managed to transform its ESL program from pull-out English immersion to a late-exit model with L1 literacy development. The district carried out this project without any outside funding or significant ESL budget increase; “it was just a matter of reallocating energy and resources” (Houk 2005, p. 24). This is not to say that this school district did not take considerable efforts to see this project through. Rather, the

implication for Dr. Jacobson's program is that change is possible even within the restrictions of the district's existing resources. For example, Dr. Jacobson noted that she was directing recent stimulus funds towards the acquisition of electronic dictionaries for each LEP tutor. This action is part of the district's approach of gathering hands-on materials. Alternatively, the district could invest those funds in the tutors themselves through training or curriculum development.

As an initial step, the district should use the resources it currently has to assess program needs and make the changes required to meet those needs in this school and throughout the school district. For example, schools can be encouraged to strengthen relationships with community partners that facilitate outreach to ELL families. The district could help facilitate this process by locating potential partners for each of their schools. Schools no doubt already have existing community partnerships, but they should ensure that they have at least one partnership specifically designed to meet the needs of their ELLs or ESL program.

This school in particular, because of its proximity to William and Mary, can take advantage of the College as a source of tutors who speak or study the L1 of ELLs and their families. This would break down the communication barriers that the teachers feel have been hindering them especially in the case of beginning language learners like Joshua.⁷ Tutors who speak the ELLs' home languages can also help the school reach out to parents and facilitate better communication between families and the school. If possible, this communication should take forms beyond the written note home, either through phone calls or in person meetings. At the very least, the school could use its bilingual paraeducators and tutors to translate school documents for the families of ELLs. If families know that they have partners in the school with whom they can communicate, they will be more inclined to come into the classroom, to work with teachers, and to become active participants in their children's learning. Just as Ms. Jackson

invites parents to observe Reading Recovery sessions, the other teachers can also invite parents of ELLs into the classroom to observe instructional time. This is especially useful for engaging families who have recently entered the country and who may be unfamiliar with standard classroom practices in the U.S.

William and Mary could also be used as a source of educational resources. Professors and students from the School of Education and undergraduate teaching English as a second language minor are strong resources for topics of ESL education. The school could even form a partnership with the College and welcome more education researchers to assist in the analysis of program needs and in the search for practical solutions that address them.

The school administration should take more initiative to facilitate interaction between the teachers and LEP tutors. Tutors need to work with the mainstream teachers and use their expertise in ESL to complement mainstream instruction. Though the mainstream teachers are required to submit weekly curricula and goals, Ms. Davidson does not receive these forms from every teacher with whom she works. As a higher party, the administration can take a proactive role in bringing these two groups together and strengthening their collaboration. For example, the school could enforce the requirement that teachers submit weekly curricula to the LEP tutors. However, it would be more beneficial for administrators to encourage in-person meetings between tutors and classroom teachers and provide more opportunities for these interactions. Additionally, the school could require that all pull-out specialists (including LEP tutors, Reading Recovery teachers, special education tutors, and paraeducators) attend parent-teacher meetings or at least submit written evaluation forms to the mainstream teacher for these conferences.

The school administration could also take measures to emphasize the priority of the ESL program so that classroom teachers will appreciate the LEP tutors as valuable resources. School-

wide programming focused specifically on ESL issues could introduce the other teachers to the importance of ESL services. This program could also emphasize the necessity for regular in-person meetings between the teachers and tutors to facilitate the process of continued engagement. Additionally, the LEP tutors' contact information is not listed on the school website, nor do they have personal pages on the site like the teachers and paraeducators. This unintentionally creates the sentiment that their work is of less importance than that of the other teachers. The administration should take small measures like including the LEP tutors on the school website, in staff or grade-level meetings, and inviting them to already existing monthly social events to combat their isolation within the school and ease the process of building relationships with other teachers.

Lastly, the most important recommendation I can provide for the ESL literacy program is that the district adopt a broad-based, cohesive, and challenging curriculum designed specifically for ELLs. On the district website, there are comprehensive curriculum guides for each K-12 subject area. These include the core subject areas as well as reading, foreign language, technology, and the fine arts. However, ESL education is not included. Neither is ESL literacy addressed in the K-5 reading curriculum guide. The district may consider investing funds into developing a similar curriculum guide specifically for ELL literacy or the ESL program.⁸

Conclusion

In this school, there is a great amount of potential for ELLs to excel. In my attempt to glean best practices in literacy instruction, I found that first, there is a need for a "best environment" to exist so that teachers can carry out these practices. The principle of providing the best possible education for every student is a strong feature of this school's instructional context. Increased support from school and district administrators for ELLs and their teachers

will help strengthen the implementation of this principle in every domain. The school and district administration is responsible for taking the initiative to consolidate the efforts of teachers, students, and their families to create a strong learning environment. Balanced, supported literacy instruction for ELLs in this context will not fail.

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Footnotes

¹ Literature exploring the effectiveness of Reading Recovery with ELLs is scarce. The U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse conducted a review of 13 studies of Reading Recovery and ELLs. However, the report was inconclusive because 11 of the studies did not meet clearinghouse evidence standards due to inadequate control groupings (Zehr, 2010).

² Consistent with the school district's terminology, I use LEP to label the tutors in the school. Otherwise, I use the label ELL for students and ESL for the overall program.

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout this report to protect the identities of teachers and students.

⁴ In compliance with William and Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee protocol, informed written consent was obtained from each interview subject.

⁵ After my observations ended, I learned from Ms. Davidson that Ms. Samuels eventually gave her permission to work with Joshua and Ben in two separate 30 minute sessions rather than in one hour-long block.

⁶ For a comprehensive list of practical techniques for ESL instruction see Herrell and Jordan's *50 Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners* (Pearson Education, Inc., 2008).

⁷ In the time since the end of this study, a Mandarin-speaking student from William and Mary has begun working with Joshua in the classroom on a weekly basis.

⁸ For more specific ideas for ESL programs, consult the What Works Clearinghouse website (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) to find instructional strategies for both beginning reading and English language learning. This website also has a collection of intervention reports that evaluate

research specifically on curricula and instructional strategies for ELLs and offers ratings of best practices for different features of English language development. The Center for Applied Linguistics (<http://www.cal.org/topics/ell/>) is also a reliable resource for literature on ESL teaching strategies and institutes for teacher education.