

Daily Reading Interventions to Help Targeted English as a Second Language (ESL) and Non-ESL Students

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Deer Park Elementary School is located in Centreville, VA in Fairfax County. It has approximately nine hundred students, 47 of which are enrolled in the ESL program. This school also includes a special needs preschool program. The ESL children are integrated into the regular education classrooms and receive support by the ESL teacher through inclusion methods and pull-out instruction as needed.

In second grade, the ESL instructor, Mrs. Hedberg team teaches with the second grade homeroom teacher, Mrs. Greaver during her Language Arts block. During Reading Workshop, all of the children rotate through organized classroom centers including a guided reading group with one of the teachers. This approach allows each child to receive direct reading instruction from a teacher each day. The team teaching approach made daily reading groups possible.

Reasoning

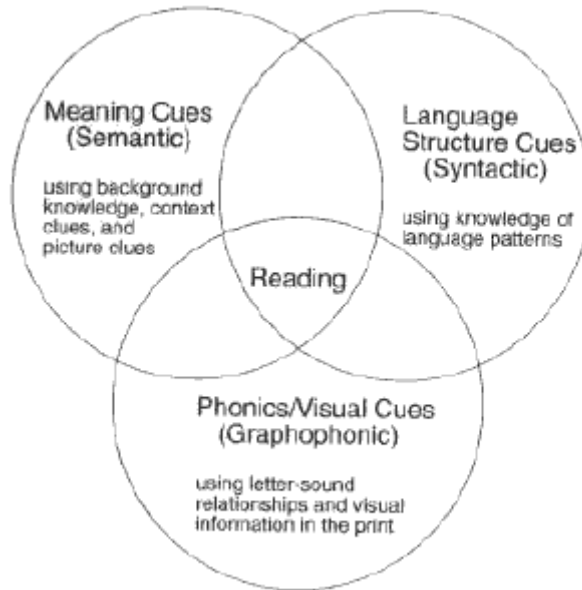
At the conclusion of the 1999-2000 school year, it became evident to Mrs. Greaver and Mrs. Hedberg that most of the second graders had made greater reading improvement than expected. For this reason they began to look at the cause of this progress, including daily reading interventions provided at school and at home. They noted that the children who been provided regular practice rereading texts with their parents at home made marked improvement over their peers who were not provided the same experiences. In particular, although the ESL children made progress, they lagged behind their non-ESL peers.

Mrs. Greaver and Mrs. Hedberg know many children in the ESL program do not receive interaction in English at home because of weak or no English proficiency or lack of reading materials in the native language. Culturally many families rely on the schools to educate their children. For these reasons the teachers decided to develop a program which would provide the ESL children and families opportunities to read at home.

Theoretical Rationale

In Fairfax County Public Schools, teachers focus their reading instruction to include the three cueing systems. Students are instructed in how to use semantic

or meaning cues, syntactic or language structure cues, and graphophonic or visual cues when reading (Fowler, Jackson & McCallum, 1995). Marie Clay, (1991) states that a proficient reader relies more heavily on the meaning and structure cueing systems and uses as little visual knowledge as possible.



In Primary Purposes, FCPS, 1995.

Through observation, it was noticed that the ESL students rely heavily on graphophonic and semantic cues and seem to ignore syntactic cues. For example, often children read line from a story and substitute a word for a difficult word in the text. Most native speakers hear that the word they substituted does not make sense and they reread for meaning and self correct. However, the second language learners who were observed kept on reading even though the text did not make sense due to the fact that English is their second language. They seemed to want to just finish reading rather than make sense of the text. Often students of limited English proficiency use poor reading strategies such as reading word for word (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). This absence of the syntactic cueing system in their reading has a negative effect on their reading comprehension. It has also been noted that the struggling non-ESL readers rely heavily on the graphophonic cueing system.

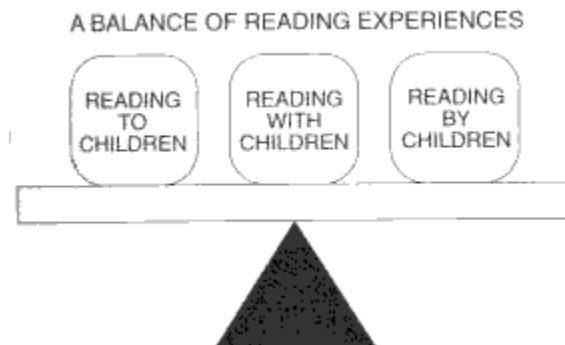
The semantic cueing system depends largely on a child's background knowledge. Many ESL students targeted within the project have not had enough opportunities due to their life experiences. Research has shown that one's prior knowledge is a positive predictor of reading comprehension. "Students with a limited range of personal or educational experiences on a reading topic will have little to draw on in constructing meaning from text," (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Therefore, Mrs. Greaver and Mrs. Hedberg have stressed the importance

of tapping the children's' prior knowledge during guided reading. In addition, these teachers have recognized the importance of using visuals, story maps, KWL charts, realia (real objects), as well as books that contain many picture cues to provide scaffolding. O'Malley and Valdez Pierce, (1996) recommend that teachers working with ESL students reduce the language demands by providing them with contextual supports such as visual or graphic organizers.

Marie Clay, (1991) states that teacher's words provide a good language model and that children need the opportunity not only to hear language, but also to respond and discover that their answers have been understood. Also, the child needs to hear a fluent reading of interesting storybooks to tune an ear to literacy language. The teachers felt that books on tape could substitute for the listening experience that native English speaking children receive at home. For this reason a take-home listening/reading program was established.

Instructional Environment

Fairfax County Public Schools stress the importance of a balance of reading experiences in the primary classroom, (Fowler, Jackson, & McCallum, 1995).



In Primary Purposes, FCPS, 1995.)

Throughout the day, the second grade children are involved in guided reading groups with a teacher and reading centers where they read independently and with a peer. The children also are exposed to more advance literature through read-alouds. "Listening to the teacher read aloud provides a model for fluent reading and familiarizes children with the more formal language found in books" (Fowler, Jackson & McCallum 1995). This type of experiences is especially important for ESL children who have had limited experience with printed materials in their native language and/or English.

The Research Project

This project was designed to enhance Language Arts instruction for the second language learner and targeted at-risk students. A question developed...

"How will daily reading interventions with targeted ESL and non ESL readers affect achievement in Language Arts?"

This question resulted from the teachers' experience with prior second grade readers who made exceptional progress. The children were provided additional opportunities for practice and fluency through the use of volunteers and a take-home reading program. In the classroom, the students are instructed in daily directed guided reading groups where they are introduced to new texts, participate in oral discussion, and complete activities to build comprehension. In addition to guided reading groups, parent volunteers, trained to provide appropriate prompts for struggling readers, provide daily opportunities for children to reread texts for fluency. Also, volunteers practice with spelling words and phonemic awareness through games and activities. Each child is provided with a tape recorder and checks out books/tapes for at home listening with a parent. Fifth grade buddies come daily for a period of twenty minutes to play phonics based games and reread familiar texts.

We predicted that these additional experiences would give our targeted students the opportunities for growth that other children receive regularly in their home environments on a daily basis. Our program included the following:

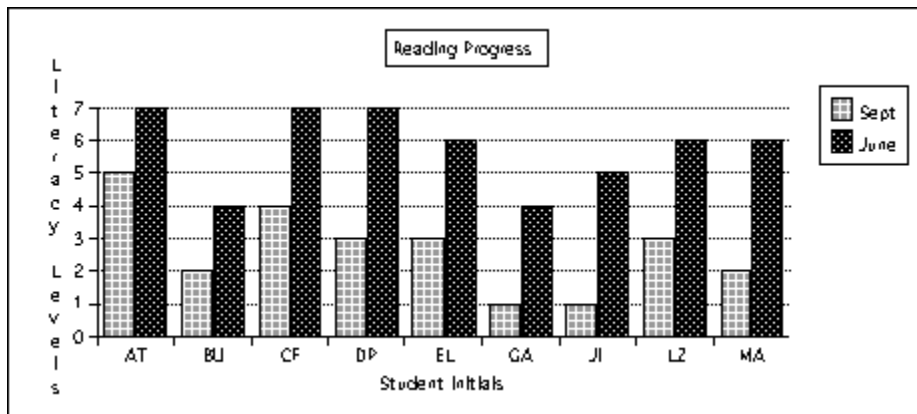
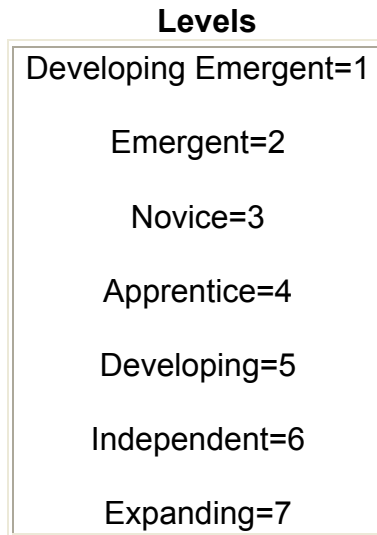
- Nine targeted second graders, six are enrolled in the Deer Park ESL program. All nine children are functioning below grade level benchmarks.
- The second grade classroom teacher and ESL teacher, plus at least two primary parent volunteers will be involved in this project.
- A quiet place to work is a perfect location for this project. Each child requires a tape player for at-home use and a collection of books with tapes (we recorded our own voices reading stories to enhance our collection).
- A collection of appropriate guided reading books. (PM Readers were purchased with money obtained through a grant written by Mrs. Greaver and Mrs. Hedberg.)
- A small group of dedicated, reliable volunteers is necessary for this project. We used two volunteers who came twice a week for approximately two hours per visit.

Outcomes and Data

It was expected that the students would: 1) advance at least two reading divisions in the FCPS literacy scale 2) develop a greater range of reading/writing skills 3) develop a stronger, more fluent voice while reading 4) show a positive attitude towards reading and writing.

The results of the program were supportive of the prediction. Each child made progress in the the targeted areas as measured by running records, DRA's and QRI's. Attitudinal surveys and self assessments were also utilized. The teachers

were very pleased with the children's enthusiasm and willingness to participate. The following graph displays the resulting progress made by the children in reading.



Conclusions

This research project involved many different pieces with varying amounts of success. The main focus of the program was building reading fluency and comprehension. It involved daily guided reading instruction, take-home books on tape, fluency reading bags with reading log, and reading activities with volunteers. In the area of writing, the children were engaged in writing workshop daily. They had opportunities to share their writing aloud and participate in mini lessons focusing on writing aspects. Due to the fact that more emphasis in this project was placed on reading, rather than writing, the progress in reading among the students was more significant.

The teachers felt that the take-home books on tape were successful. It was reported that in one of the families, the non-English speaking parents were listening to the tapes, as well as the student. The children enjoyed choosing the

books, and providing the tape recorders for each family allowed all to participate. However, the tapes and books often were left at home for long periods of time. The teachers felt that often some of the parents did not follow through and ensure that the child was returning the tapes on a regular basis. The teachers wondered if adding a list of required activities for each bag might encourage participation.

The fluency reading bags eventually experienced the same difficulties as the books on tape. A few of the children continually left their bags at home and did not do the required nightly reading. Interestingly, those are the children who did not make as much progress as those who reread nightly.

The use of volunteers was significant. Through training and guidance, the volunteers were able to guide the children in their selection of the books and tapes and provide daily opportunities for the children to reread books from their guided reading lessons. It was discovered that reliable volunteers that can donate time weekly to the project is extremely important for success. The two parent volunteers in this program were able to get to know the children very well, socially and academically. They were quite helpful in giving the teachers feedback on the progress and struggles of the children as well. Volunteers who cannot come as frequently may not be as successful.

Our fifth grade buddy class worked with our targeted students rereading familiar texts and playing simple phonics games. The children were under the guidance of the parent volunteer and the relationship between the children grew quickly. The fifth graders were taught how to respond to the children in a positive way and the second graders enjoyed their guidance.

Of course the teachers feel that because of their team teaching approach, the children made incredible progress. Every child in the classroom read with a teacher each day and that effort in itself has made an incredible difference in the children's self-esteem and their enthusiasm for reading. It is anticipated that this team will use this program in the next school year and hopes to expand it to the first and third grade levels.