Reading comprehension: English language learners

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"They [ELLs] can no longer be thought of as a group apart from the mainstream-in today's culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, they are the mainstream"

Gibbons, 2002, p. 13.

Personal History and Motivation

Language acquisition has been a passion of mine for many years. Having received a teaching area in French as part of my Bachelors of Education at the University of Victoria (UVic), I enthusiastically enrolled in three, four-week French immersion courses in Quebec City, Vancouver and Victoria. Following this I lived in Quebec and attended the University of Sherbrooke to augment my bilingual skills and work toward fluency. After completing my degree at UVic, with great excitement, I travelled to St. Gaudens and lived in the south of France for a year. Subsequently, due to my second language acquisition (SLA), I was hired at Bayside Middle School and taught grades 6-8 French as a second language (FSL).

My passion unexpectedly broadened when I became a 'host mom' for the International Student Program (ISP) at Cowichan High School in Duncan. I temporarily hosted a ten-year old boy for five weeks from Thailand named "Earth". I was introduced to a brand new world of language acquisition, English language learning (ELL). This provided the catalyst to remain a 'host mom', through the ISP, and adopt a 17 year-old Chinese boy for one full school year. I became intrigued and highly motivated to learn more about English language learners (ELLs). Previously, when I taught FSL I never wondered how French language learners (FLLs) were cognitively acquiring their new

language. However, I became very curious about ELLs and wondered if they acquired English the same way as native English speakers. What happens when there is a completely different phonological system? What about social, cultural, political issues and influences? What are the best pedagogical practices to enhance second language acquisition? These and many more questions compelled me to apply for my masters of education at UVic, Language and Literacy with a focus on ELL's reading comprehension.

"In British Columbia, there were 34,176 ESL students enrolled in provincial schools in 1990 and 60,301 by 2002" (Toohey & Derwing, 2006). "Minority language students, especially Hispanic and Native groups, have been characterized by high drop out rates and poor academic achievement" (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 19). Through my readings and course work I became familiar with the hardships and academic challenges that some ELLs confront. A high percentage of drop out rates can be attributed to a number of factors, the largest being ELL's inability to cope with school curricula and language demands. Cummins and Early found that it takes ELLs approximately two to three years to gain basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and five to seven years to gain cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALP). As an educator, I understand the significance of academic proficiency, specifically reading comprehension, as it not only crosses all content areas, but it is a vital skill to ensure understanding and success in order to meet graduation requirements. It is imperative that ELLs develop their reading comprehension through an intentional, balanced and multifaceted program, thereby facilitating academic competence and increasing their chances of graduation.

Challenging my desire to support ELLs and the importance of reading comprehension I applied to teach in the International Student Program (ISP) in Duncan. After my first summer with the ISP, teaching a class of adolescent ELLs, it became transparent the array of academic, cultural, social stressors and pressures some ELLs endure everyday in and outside of school. Bourdieu's (1984) reproduction theory states that ELLs do not have the cultural and social capital that mainstream learners have. This may or may not be true depending whether ELLs are voluntary or involuntary minorities determining their experience and type of pressures. Some of the ISP students were very keen to be in Canada and taking full advantage of what the program had to offer (voluntary). Other students, it was possible that their adventure was parent driven, they were there against their will (involuntary). Ogbu (1992) purports that involuntary minorities usually enter a country against their will and this can cause possible domination of one group over another, creating a subordinated culture. It is this group of involuntary minorities that may experience increased difficulties in ELL academic competence.

Ogbu (1992) further challenges Bourdieu's (1984) reproduction theory arguing that voluntary minorities tend to meet achievement standards while involuntary minorities tend not to meet achievement standards. Ogbu describes voluntary minorities as minorities who, by choice, have made the decision to move to another country. Voluntary minorities seem to have initial cultural and language difficulties however they do not seem to experience school failure. Supporting Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital needed for academic success, the 'hidden curriculum' (values, attitudes and principles) implied to create social conformity, may not necessarily be a block for voluntary

minorities. If parents brought their children to the new country seeking a better standard of living, they will undoubtedly have positive attitudes towards education with high academic expectations for their children.

In a study of elementary ELL achievement, Broomes (2013) found that, ELL students proficient in grade 3 maintained proficiency in grade 6. However, non-proficient grade 3 immigrant students not only became proficient by grade 6, but contrary to seminal literature, outperformed Canadian-born students. The previous results may be explained by Cummins' (1977) research findings, that having a second language "…did not account for achievement…" (p. 4) and that generally allophone parents have higher academic standards and expectations of their children (Broomes, 2013) than native-born Canadians. Thus voluntary immigrants may not experience similar anxieties, tensions or drop out rates as involuntary immigrants. Knowing this difference about ELLs can make a vast difference, not only in planning educationally for students but also guiding them holistically to be successful learners.

By following my passion for educating ELLs, I hope to gain a deep understanding of reading comprehension in relation to ELLs as reading comprehension, however broad, is a needed and valued area of research and application for ELLs. The research questions that guided my examination are: 1) What are the theoretical understandings regarding reading comprehension in ELLs? 2) What are the research based pedagogical practices for use with ELLs in developing their reading comprehension? These guiding questions coupled with my passion for ELL have encouraged me to focus on reading comprehension in ELLs.

By obtaining my masters degree I would like to contribute to the literature base on ELL reading comprehension thereby facilitating academic competence for some struggling and disadvantaged ELLs. With increasing diversity of Canadian culture and classrooms, educators need to apply research based learning activities thereby providing the most effective curriculum that may not only increase communicative and academic competence, but may also contribute to developing more self confident independent life learners able to contribute to society.

Reading Comprehension: BC Curriculum Documents

"The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2013, p.3).

This mission statement pertains to native English speakers (NESs) as well as ELLs. ELL: A guide for ELL specialists (1999) states, "Since 1990, the number of students identified as needing ELL services in BC has more than tripled" (p.7). The British Columbia Ministry of Education provides a number of documents to support the growing heterogeneity in our B.C. schools. "Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework" (2008) addresses key diversity concepts, goals, provincial policies, implications and actions to support diversity and guiding legislation. The Ministry of Education provides five more supporting documents specific to ELLs, ELL specialists and classroom teachers. They include: (1) ELL policy and guidelines (2) ELL: A guide for classroom teachers (3) ELL: A guide for ELL specialists, (4) ELL standards and (5) Students from refugee backgrounds: A guide for teachers and schools. These ELL ministry documents outline the ELL services along with a framework for ELL initial and/or ongoing assessment and intervention.

To qualify for Ministry ELL services, a new arrival will be assessed for English language proficiency in all areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing relevant to the student's age. This in itself may not be enough information to offer a complete depiction of an ELL for full assessment. Previous schooling (report cards), proficiency in their first language (L1), parental input and the importance of cultural, social and emotional needs are considered. If eligible, the new student will receive funding up to five school years throughout the ten months of each school year and be tested annually to determine ongoing progress and qualification. What if after these five years the student is still struggling? Coupled with the fact that ELLs may or not be adjusting to their new home life they may also be continuing to struggle with BICS and CALP (Cummins & Early, 2011). Considering that the research literature and the Ministry of Education both support the evidence that ELLs may lag behind NESs by three to seven years, is it fair to terminate services after five years? The Ministry of Education, providing for this, states that an ELL may continue with ministry services if annual assessments determine funding is still needed after the allotted five years.

According to the Graduation Requirements Order (ELL policy and guidelines, 2013) ELLs are held to the same standard as NESs and "…must follow provincial curricula except when they are unable to demonstrate learning in relation to the expected learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide for a course or subject or grade" (p. 8). If an ELL is not meeting these requirements then an instructional plan is established where instruction and assessment might be adapted or modified to suit the learner's needs. Research on effective instructional practices can be found in the ministry documents, ELL: A guide for classroom teachers (2013) and ELL: A guide for

ELL specialists (1999). If an ELL is progressing to the widely held expectations of the provincial curriculum then they are assessed according to the BC Performance Standards in reading, writing, numeracy, social responsibility, healthy living, information and communications technology integration. Letter grades are only applied where an ELL is capable of meeting these standards. The Ministry of Education ELL Standards (2013) is used to report on an ELL's level of English competency to supplement the various approaches to ELL. In light of this local context, I seek here to understand the underpinnings of reading comprehension in ELLs and the pedagogical recommendations for working with them.

Project Overview

In chapter 1 I outlined my personal history and motivation for best practices for ELLs and highlighted the significance of my research focus. Reading comprehension expectations, supported by the Ministry ELL documents, although mandated by the Ministry Performance Standards, hold ELLs to a standard that may or may not be attainable. Therefore, ELL best practices based on empirical evidence are essential in helping to better inform teachers. In chapter 2, I outline the theoretical frameworks of reading comprehension, background knowledge and vocabulary development grounded in two theories: schema theory and the construction-integration theory, along with a review of the scholarly literature on reading comprehension. Furthermore, in chapter 2, through the literature review, I investigate research based best practices in ELL instruction. In chapter 3, I offer recommendations for ELL teaching practices based on my review of the literature and reflect on my personal learning experiences with relation to my course discussions, readings and this project. I conclude with some policy change

within the Ministry of Education policies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Requirements for high school graduation can be an enormous challenge for some minority students with inherent dangers for their future well-being and high school diploma. This inherent lack of higher learning opportunities puts minority students and ELLs at a distinct disadvantage. By 2018, it is projected that over one half of all children in the U.S. will be minority, non-white children (Hernandez & Napierala, 2013). According to The Gauntlet (Dunkley, 2000, Introduction) "Three out of four English as a Second Language high school students will drop out before graduation," says a study by University of Calgary professors Dr. David Watt and Dr. Hetty Roessingh (1994). The results of a study by Toohey and Derwing (2006) indicate that "approximately 60% of the ESL students in the Vancouver School District graduated from high school" (p. 11), whereas the B.C. Ministry of Education reports that in 2004, "80% of ESL students receiving support graduated" (p. 12). Difference provinces may have different standards therefore explaining the discrepant statistics. Despite these inconsistent reports, the drop out rates may be attributed to a number of factors, the largest being an English language learner's (ELL's) inability to keep up with the high school curriculum.

Most immigrants enter the education system with an achievement gap between themselves and NESs (Cummins & Early, 2011). In British Columbia, if ELLs qualify, they can receive up to four or five years of learning support (ELL policy and guidelines, 2013). Research by Cummins and Early argue that it takes approximately two-three years for BICS and five to seven years for CALP. Therefore, the allotted five years of

governmental support is likely not enough time to close the achievement gap between ELLs and NESs.

The main focus of my project is to investigate the research on reading comprehension in ELLs and research based pedagogical practices to enhance an ELL's reading comprehension. Such practices as, stimulating prior knowledge, explicit vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies will aid in an ELL's overall language acquisition and literacy competence. Such foundations to be discussed to support this demand are the theoretical foundations of reading such as: the bottom-up theory of reading, the top-down theory of reading, the interactive theory of reading and the transactional theory of reading and further sociocultural perspectives on reading. Also examined are first (L1) and second language (L2) reading connections, the construction-integration model, schema theory and ELLs, formal and content schemata, cultural schemata and the cultural funds of knowledge. Finally, pedagogical practices to enhance an ELL's reading comprehension are discussed.

Theoretical Foundations of Reading

To reach academic success across all content areas, it is crucial to develop reading competency and proficiency by deriving meaning from content-driven texts. Eckes and Law (2010) state that "For all learners, at every age and every level of proficiency, reading *must* be for meaning: if you are not getting meaning, you are not reading, you are simply "barking at text" (p. 144, cited in Smith, 1973) or as Stanovich (1980) puts it "word calling" (p. 320). Deriving meaning from print is a highly multifaceted and interactive process between the reader, the text and the activity. Acquiring meaning from text can be gratifying for some while extremely difficult for others. It is imperative to

provide a sound literacy program meeting the needs of all learners at all levels. To gain a global understanding of how reading occurs (how readers make sense of text) it is important to examine the historical and current theories of reading including: bottom-up theory, top-down theory, interactive theory, transactional theory and the current sociocultural perspectives on reading.

Bottom-up Theory of Reading

The bottom up theory, popular in the 1970's, hypothesized that readers simply decode letters by assigning sounds, combining sounds into words, parsing words into sentences and deriving meaning from text. A linear, and somewhat authoritarian, transaction between the reader and the text, the bottom-up theory of reading is a cognitive information-processing model proceeding from lower order to higher order stages of comprehension (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Influenced by behaviourist psychology, the bottom up, or data-driven theory, can be depicted by a metaphorical computer of input, interpretation and output, acutely, without feedback.

Various bottom-up models of reading and word recognition have been introduced to the literature such as Gough & Tunmer (1986) claiming that comprehension is a result of decoding and language comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) theory of automaticity argues that certain decoding skills must become automatic thereby freeing up other cognitive process for comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels admit that, "In its present simple form, the [their] model does not spell out higher-order linguistic operations such as parsing (analyze a sentence into its syntactic parts) predictive processing (when a student is able to read and predict simultaneously), and contextual effects on comprehension" (p. 319).

By attempting to explain the unobservable cognitive processes, both theories formed an integral part in the evolution of reading comprehension, however the bottom-up theories of reading "…runs into difficulty because they usually contain no mechanism whereby higher level processes can effect lower levels" (Stanovich, 1980, p. 34; Rumelhart, 1977) characterizing the reader as a passive participant. Encompassing higher levels of processing such as prior knowledge and reading strategies creates a more robust cognitive process, much more than simply decoding and the use of linguistic skills.

Top-down Theory of Reading

A psycholinguistic theory of reading (Goodman, 1967), implies that readers are able to acquire, comprehend and produce language by relying on linguistic cueing. Goodman argues that reading is a psycholinguistic process, although somewhat of a "guessing" game. The top-down theory of reading, also a cognitive view, suggests that readers constructs and builds upon their knowledge about the topic, the text structure, vocabulary development and letter-sound relations (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). "If the reader gives little attention to organizing meanings into new codes for storage, it is not surprising that he later finds he cannot recall what he has been reading" (Stanovich, 1980, p. 320). A top-down theory of reading compensates for this working memory loss and decoding dependence by the inclusion of metacognitive processing skills and the background knowledge of the reader.

Metacognitive processing allows the reader to rely on their prior knowledge while make predictions and inferences about the text. Good readers make connections between the text and their personal experiences at the same time questioning and critiquing what the author is claiming. The reader becomes a much more active and engaged learner,

"reading to learn" confirming their hypothesis and creating new knowledge (Stanovich, 1980). The ability to build new knowledge on existing knowledge was first articulated as schema theory by Bartlett in 1950. Nevertheless, ther have been challenges to top-down, psycholinguistic theories of reading. "Recent research indicates that what the reader brings to the reading task is more pervasive and more powerful than the general psycholinguistic model suggests" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 556).

As texts increase in difficulty, reading comprehension can not always match the top-down hypothesis-testing model therefore even good readers will rely on bottom up processing to decipher words in order to comprehend new concepts. Stanovich (1980) claimed, "In these models, higher-level processes (i.e., hypothesis-testing based on contextual expectancies) are usually less implicated in the performance of poorer readers" (p. 36). Additionally, readers who do not share the same cultural constructs may have difficulty drawing on the needed cultural schemata postulated by top-down theories. Drucker (2003) asserts, "It is not surprising researchers found that children had better reading comprehension and reading efficiency with texts that were culturally familiar" (p. 25). Thus, a model that utilizes both bottom-up and top-down theories, such as the interactive theory, might offer such solutions for a more balanced view of reading comprehension.

Interactive Theory of Reading

The interactive theory, a nonlinear view of reading, brings together both bottom-up and top-down theories of reading comprehension when needed by the reader. Rumelhart (1977) outlines the interactive processes to include: word order within sentences (syntactic information); message construction (semantic information); visual

input (orthographic information) and word knowledge (lexical information). They can work in a compensatory manner, where one or both levels of processing can be working at any one time.. "Thus, each level of processing is not merely a data source for higher levels, but instead seeks to synthesize the stimulus based on its own analysis and the constraints imposed by both higher and lower-level processes" (Stanovich, 1980, p. 35). The constraints of both theories becomes invaluable in aiding struggling readers at all levels.

Stanovich (1980) elaborated on Rumelhart's (1977) interactive theory by extending the model to include the compensatory process. The interactive-compensatory model becomes advantageous for conceptualizing struggling readers who can utilize pre-, during and post reading strategies, contextual factors, comprehension strategies and their background knowledge to build their schemata. Vocabulary and reading strategies must be explicitly taught with a gradual release of responsibility from the teacher while scaffolding within the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Both Rumelhart's interactive and Stanovich's interactive-compensatory theories have demonstrated compatibility with information processing (bottom-up) and cognitive processing (top-down) adaptations, yet failing to consider the social and cultural contexts of the reader.

Transactional Theory of Reading

Highlighting that learning is highly social and culturally influenced, the transactional theory of reading borrows from the cognitivist views of psychology providing a unique perspective on text experience. Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional reading comprehension theory "involves both the author's text and what the reader brings

to it" (p.14). Rosenblatt (1986) adopts a Deweyian view suggesting that, "transaction to indicate a reciprocal, mutually defining relationship in which the elements or parts are aspects or phrases of a total situation or event" (p.122). The interaction then, becomes a transaction generating a reciprocal relationship that is fluid and dynamic expanding the mutual assumptions between the reader and text.

Rosenblatt (1986) goes on to explain that, "Reading is a transactional process that goes on between a particular reader and a particular text at a particular time and under particular circumstances" (p.123). This complex 'to and fro' transaction creates a new experience or a 'poem' possibly influencing future choices (Rosenblatt 1994). She believes that the reader will create their own interpretation of the text thus having an opinion that can be heard and discussed amongst others. The result could be less competition between students, as everyones' interpretation would be correct, therefore combining other perspectives and building on the initial reading experience.

According to Rosenblatt (1986) text interactions fall somewhere on a continuum either as an efferent or aesthetic stance. The efferent or public stance is the literal meaning or what the reader will gain from the text. The aesthetic or private stance involves the sensitive and the affective elements of text meaning. Situated in socio-cultural theory and perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) the readers' experiences are neither completely efferent nor completely aesthetic. The transactional theory lends itself well to the social and cultural needs of the adolescent providing personal and emotional responses and more importantly social interaction.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Reading

Socially contextualized literacy promotes pedagogical practices that account for dynamic and diverse learner communities. Underscoring achievement gaps in literacy development, sociocultural perspectives on reading comprehension highlight such diversities considering social, cultural, historical, background knowledge and even motivational effects on the learner's reading experience (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). A more collaborative method, the sociocultural perspective, takes into account outside influences such as: school characteristics, learning environments, class activities, parental input, instructional characteristics and the student's imaginative world (Lanter, 2006). Lev Vygotsky (1978), a classic Russian psychologist, saw human learning as innately social. Gibbons (2002) posits that,

> While we are all biologically able to acquire language, what language we learn, how adept we are at using it and the purposes for which we are able to use it are a matter of the social contexts and situations we have been in: in a very real sense, what and how we learn depends very much on the company we keep (p. 8).

Thus the sociocultural theory not only focuses on the impact of instruction and how learning takes place, but also strongly emphasizes the influence of adults and peers on the learning process, their social, cultural capital and power relations.

Perry (2012) offers a critical overview of three sociocultural perspectives: (1) literacy as social practice, (2) multi-literacies, and (3) critical literacy. Literacy as social practice can be described as "what people *do* with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it" (p. 54). What students do with texts are observable events and the unobservable "why", is based on beliefs, values, attitudes, power structures and relations (Perry, 2012). Bourdieu's (1984) theory of social and cultural

capital argues that a student's educational success will depend on how much of the "hidden" (educational values, attitudes and principles) or social curriculum minority students are able to reproduce and embody. Thus, literacy as social practice denotes a combination of visible and inferred functions of text (see figure 1, Perry, 2012, p. 56) as one part of the overall literacy practice.
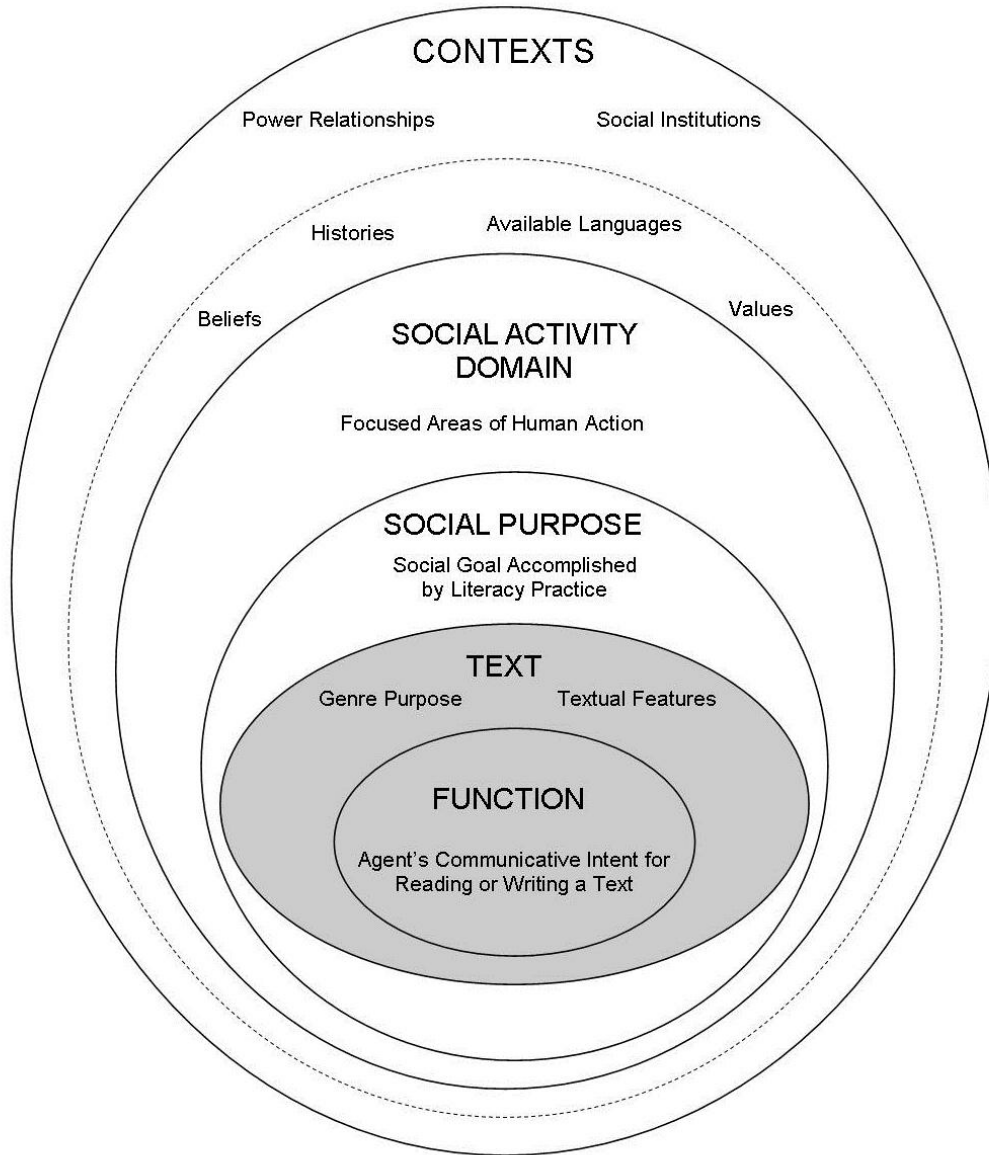
As you can see from figure 1,literacy learning and inferring reading comprehension, is a holistic complex endeavor that calls for a multi-faceted approach to teaching. There is the observable, or intended function of the text, to include the genre and the text features. Then there is the unobservable, or the inferred aspects of the learner's experience, which include social, cultural, historical, background knowledge, motivational effects along with the influence of adults and peers.

The theory of multi-literacies extends beyond print text to allow expression and meaning-making through a multitude of modalities such as: visual, gestural, spatial, audial or digital (Perry, 2012). These digital, or new literacies provide other options other than traditional print literacy. A third component of a sociocultural perspective, critical literacies, stresses power, empowerment, agency and identity. Freire (2001, cited in, Perry, 2012) "defined literacy as a process of *conscientizacao*, or conscious, which means taking the printed word, connecting to the world, and then using that for purposes of empowerment" (p. 60).

Therefore educators need to be cognizant that students come to school with varying degrees of literacy tools, social and cultural capital, limiting or augmenting opportunity. It is our job to aid in decreasing achievement gaps for students whose families and communities practice literacy in ways that may differ from those in the

mainstream or in positions of power. By taking into account the historical and

Figure 1. *Model of a literacy practice.*

CONTEXTS

Power Relationships   Social Institutions

Histories   Available Languages

Beliefs   Values

SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN

Focused Areas of Human Action

SOCIAL PURPOSE

Social Goal Accomplished
by Literacy Practice

TEXT

Genre Purpose   Textual Features

FUNCTION

Agent's Communicative Intent for
Reading or Writing a Text

Model of a Literacy Practice

The areas shaded in gray represent an observable *literacy event*, while the unshaded areas represent inferred aspects of the larger *literacy practice* that contextualize and shape the event.

Reprinted from Purcell-Gates, V., Perry, K.H., & Briseño, A. (2011). Analyzing Literacy Practice: Grounded Theory to Model. *Research in the Teaching of English, 45*(4), 439-458. Copyright 2011 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Used with permission.

foundations of reading comprehension, educators can design curricula and make assessment choices that support meaningful and engaging experiences with texts in all its forms for all learners.

The same yet different: First and Second Language Reading

Acquiring a new language, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, can be challenging. There is much empirical evidence arguing that L1 literacy skills are crucial in L2 acquisition (Krashen,1989; Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007), yet the two processes have distinct differences requiring specific instructional programs. Up until the late 1960's English-only education prevailed throughout the United States immersing ELLs in an all-English educational environment. The Bilingual Education Act (1968), that stipulated, teaching the child in both their L1 and their L2, was implemented guaranteeing ELL's equivalent curriculum as that offered to NESs. According to Cummins (1979), "the strategy to view languages separately fails to take into account the close developmental relationship between L1 and L2 and underestimates the totality of an ELL's conceptual repertoire" (p. 224). ELLs have typically lagged behind NESs in academic achievement especially reading. It has been reported that it takes ELLs at least 5 to 10 years to attain grade-level norms in reading (Cummins, 1977). Recently, many independent research studies have shown a positive relationship between L1 literacy skills and language and literacy skills gained in L2 (Cummins, 1979; Lipka & Siegel, 2012; Proctor, August, Carlo & Snow, 2005; Quirk & Beem, 2012; Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). A number of hypotheses have been proposed to support bilingual education and L2 development based on L1 proficiencies within an English environment.

One such theoretical framework is the interdependence hypothesis. Cummins

(1979) claims that, "…the level of L2 competence which a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins" (p. 233). The chance of L2 academic success increases when an adequate level of cognitively and academically developed L1 skills exist (Cummins, 1979; Lipka & Siegel, 2012; Proctor et al., 2005; Quirk & Beem, 2012; Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). Therefore higher language proficiency in L1 will usually achieve higher L2 competencies (Chuang, Joshi & Dixon, 2012; Jiang, 2011).

The cross-linguistic skills that a child possesses in their L1 can be of great benefit for the development of similar L2 abilities (Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). Jiang (2011), addresses the threshold hypotheses proposing a certain level of L1 proficiency must be obtained before L2 can benefit. This threshold of linguistic competence is necessary to possibly avert cognitive delays and recognize the benefits of bilingualism on cognitive academic processing. These two frameworks advocating for bilingual education rely on the transaction between background information, motivation of the student and teaching practices. Despite the somewhat obvious connections between L1 and L2 acquisition the true linguistic complexities cannot be overlooked.

Koda (2004), a professor of Japanese and second language acquisition, has centered most of her research on the development of second language reading competence and cross-linguistic synergy. She discusses the intricacies of cross-linguistic reading skills transfer and reminds us of the need to differentiate L1 from L2 reading. Firstly, L2 language instruction more often then not commences before sufficient L1 linguistic knowledge has been acquired. L1 reading processing is happening in a single language whereas L2 reading requires dual-language instruction. Koda underscores, "In

view of these distinctions, it is obvious that L2 research must go beyond the standard array of variables essential in L1 reading that underlie successful comprehension in a given language" (p. 10). Moreover, Koda proposes that reading research should include language proficiency in both the L1 and L2, as "L2 reading is cross-linguistic in nature, involving at least two languages" (p. 5). With regards to L2 classroom instruction, she gives attention to the following areas: decoding, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, text structure, main idea detection, and background knowledge strategies (Koda, 2004). Koda highlights the way in which the learner's ability to map information makes it possible to read new words through analogy and inference rather than by rote memory. Learners need to pay adequate attention to the word's meaning while focusing on its sound. Koda suggests,

> Students must acquire an explicit understanding of how their writing system works. Meaning extraction must be part of decoding training. Symbol-to-sound mappings must be practiced in meaningful contexts. A distinction must be made between teaching words and teaching how to learn words (p. 256).

With the advent of bilingual education ELLs use their L1 linguistic skills to augment their L2 acquisition and competencies. Cross-linguistic application has not only demonstrated a positive correlation to academic achievement but the social and emotional impacts for the ELL, such as creating friendships and managing cultural differences,, are immeasurable. L2 instruction, differentiated from L1 instruction, is specific and unique.

Schema Theory and the Importance of Background Knowledge

Schema theory has an impressive history dating back to Immanuel Kant in 1781 (Kant, I., & Weigelt, M, 2007). He stated that new information and new concepts only have meaning if they relate to something that a person already knows. In 1926, gestalt psychologist, Jean Piaget, known for his theory of cognitive development, coined the

term 'schema'.

> He suggested that children sort the knowledge they acquire of the world through their experiences and interactions into groupings known as schemata. When new information is acquired, it can either be assimilated into existing schemata, accommodated through revising an existing schema or creating an entirely new category of information (Melendez & Pritchard, 1985, p. 400).

Piaget's theory of accommodation and assimilation implies that children adjust what they observe to match their private perceptions to fit their real world. Fredric Bartlett, in 1950, in his classic book Remembering, later formalized the term 'schema theory'. "His [Bartlett's] key assumption of previous knowledge, affecting the processing of new stimuli, was illustrated in the famous 'portrait d'homme' series" (Carbon & Albrecht, 2012).

To comprehend language, either in a written or spoken form, information must relate to the reader's background knowledge. Schema theory supports reading comprehension in ELLs as they encounter new information and assimilate it with prior knowledge about the world around them. Melendez and Pritchard (1985) state that:

> Essentially schema theory of comprehension is the idea that, when people encounter new information, they attempt to understand it by fitting it into what they already know about the world, schemata being the mental structures that store people's knowledge in memory (p. 400).

Vital to all learners including ELLs, it is critical to draw on background knowledge, especially social and cultural aspects, to facilitate text comprehension.

Schema theory has been heavily relied upon in understanding many reading processes and reading instruction with a heavy emphasis in schemata activation and application. Recently the importance and understanding of schema theory has come under close scrutiny (Nassaji, 2007). Dr. Nassaji, a linguistics professor from the University of

Victoria argues that schema theory becomes problematic when schemata must be activated first in order to build on prior knowledge.

Nassaji (2007) proposes "…an alternative perspective, a construction-integration model of discourse comprehension, [and discusses how this perspective,] when applied to L2 reading comprehension, offers a fundamentally different and more detailed account of the role of knowledge and knowledge-based processes that L2 researchers had previously tried to explain within schema-theoretic principles" (p. 79). First of all, Nassaji argues that the integration of numbers and nonsense symbols presents a problem for schema theory, if meaning is a prerequisite, as integration can take place even at a low level. He also states that past research provides evidence that schemata are activated, not created. He questions how an emergent reader learns how to read if they have to wait to activate a preexisting schema. What Nassaji is proposing is that learning and the process of comprehension is a combination of not only constructing the background knowledge but also integrating the new information.

Secondly, schema theory suggests that all knowledge is gained by way of adding onto preexisting knowledge. Research in L1 reading comprehension, that can be transferred to L2 reading comprehension, states that this process does not happen in just a top-down mode but also a bottom-up mode and that they function together. This alternative perspective is based on text recall and memory. Nassaji (2007) argues "The idea of text-based-construction processes and the principles underlying integration processes, particularly when combined with ideas from memory and recall research, may help us understand and explain the effects of many knowledge-based processes that are not explained adequately in the context of schema theory in L2 reading" (p. 92). It is how

these complex cognitive processes are encoded and stored in memory. He posits that knowledge based processes are far too complicated to "be accounted for by a simple expectation driven conception of the role of knowledge" (p. 102). Therefore memory based models such as the proposed construction-integration model allows a framework in which researchers can further explore many of the cognitive processes in L2 reading comprehension.

The construction-integration theory suggests that schema theory may be an over simplified notion of activation. In fact, construction-integration theory builds a more complete model of comprehension. This more extensive framework combines an accurate text reading stored in working memory along with a situation model whereby mental representation is combined with prior knowledge (Duke, Pearson, Strachan & Billman, 2011). Duke et al. (2011) state this model can be a positive and virtuous cycle as opposed to a vicious cycle if learners possess the required background knowledge and working memory capacity for reading comprehension. Text comprehension involves a much more complex process whereby one must first possess the ability to decipher the syntactic structure of a sentence to create meaning blocks, or a text base. If not restrained by our knowledge base (knowledge of the world), this bottom-up process to create a mental representation uses the top-down process of previously constructed prior knowledge and integrates it into working memory (Kintsch, 1988). Both the construction and integration phases work together in order to draw inferences in either a coherent or irrelevant manner depending on the strength of either system (Nassaji, 2007). Consequently, as reading comprehension is a complex labyrinth, it is even more imperative that ELLs who are potentially lagging behind NESs in cognitive academic proficiency receive explicit

reading instruction building on their prior knowledge in order to store needed skills in working memory.

Formal and Content Schemata and English Language Learners

Reading comprehension goes far beyond linguistic knowledge (Burgoyne, Whiteley & Hutchinson 2013; Carrell 1987). Recent research indicates that what the reader brings to the reading task is pervasive and powerful. Consequently, background knowledge in reading comprehension comes in many forms. Two forms to be analyzed here are formal schemata (rhetorical organizational structures) and content schemata (prior knowledge of written content). If an ELL fails to comprehend a certain text it may be an inability to retrieve certain schemata or the reader does not possess the needed schemata to comprehend the organizational structures or written content. Either way "…there is a mis-match between what the writer anticipates the reader can do to extract meaning from the text and what the reader is actually able to do" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 560). Not surprisingly, research indicates that ELLs perform better on familiar topics than unfamiliar ones. Carrell and Eisterhold argue that when content is held at a constant but story schemata are disrupted, ELL's comprehension is affected, although they do not say how.

A study by Carrell (1987) demonstrated the combined results of both formal and content schemata. Two groups of 28 students, one Muslim and the other Catholic, read historical texts one from their culture and one from another culture. (Cultural affects and effects will be discussed in a later section). Each text followed an expected content and formal framework with a similar outline and text headings. Participants, after reading the text, answered multiple-choice questions and produced written recall answers. Based on

the findings, Carrell not surprisingly determined that familiar content and familiar form scored the highest for both groups whereas unfamiliar content and unfamiliar form scored the lowest for both groups. Familiar content and unfamiliar form were easiest for participants while unfamiliar content and familiar form were difficult for participants. Therefore, content is generally more important than text form in ELL reader success (Carrell 1987; Carell & Eisterhold 1983).

Cultural Schemata and English Language Learners

The ability to make inferences from a text message is only possible if the appropriate story schemata have been stored in memory. Rumelhart (1977) posits that, "comprehension is an extension of perception" (p. 168). If ELLs do not have the culture specific schemata then they grapple with perception and text inference becomes problematic. Text comprehension requires a reader to make many inferences not explicitly stated in the story. By providing the necessary background information ELLs can build the needed schemata "…both from the bottom up that is, lower level hypotheses are "suggesting" higher level ones (the appearance of the word "restaurant' suggests the "restaurant script") and from the top down that is, higher level hypotheses are predicting (and inferring) the existence of lower level ones" (Rumelhart, p. 168). Therefore, it is crucial that practitioners provide ample L2 cultural background knowledge whereby ELLs can build appropriate schemata to promote text comprehension.

We learn to speak from an innate desire to have our basic survival needs met. Eskey (2002) posits that not all cultures learn to read therefore learning to read is a "culturally learned behavior" (p. 7). We may learn to read but fail to comprehend when

content, formal and possibly cultural schemata are not part of our prior knowledge. Not only activating cultural background knowledge but also ensuring L2 culture is explicitly clarified is central to best aid our diverse ELLs and their diverse learning needs.

Drucker (2003), states that comprehension is more than linguistic knowledge. She adds an interesting piece of evidence affecting schema theory: "…students better remembered and comprehended those texts most similar to their native cultures" (p. 25). Drucker continues, "It is not surprising researchers found that the children had better reading comprehension and reading efficiency with texts that were culturally familiar" (p. 25). Hence, pedagogical practices that explicitly clarify L2 cultures may increase comprehension and the ability to infer text messages.

The purpose of a study by Burgoyne, Whiteley and Hutchinson (2013) was to determine the effects of culture and experience on background knowledge and comprehension. Sixteen grade three ELLs' and sixteen NESs' comprehension was measured using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability standardized test to ensure all students received enough background information to answer the inference questions. Burgoyne et al. found that with enough relevant background knowledge provided, ELLs and NESs performed just as well on inference questions; however, ELLs performed weaker on the simile questions, which could be related to cultural issues. This study supports once again the known importance of activating background knowledge or prior knowledge before expected assignments or projects (Cummins & Early, 2011).

Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) studied the cross-cultural interferences affecting reading comprehension and schema theory. Such influences can potentially create cultural mismatches for the ELL and make reading extremely difficult if not impossible.

Being sensitive on a global level, Carrell and Eisterhold highlighted three areas of needed sensitivity: covert cultural information (the hidden or underlying meanings), social-cultural meaning (the societal influences on culture) and culture specific values (what a society values or not).

A foundational study by Steffensen, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) demonstrated the importance of cross-cultural schemata on L2 reading comprehension. In this experiment, two different adult cultural groups, one American and the other Indian (natives of India), read and recalled two different letters based on a typical American and Indian wedding. Reading time, amount of text recall, modifications of the text and the important and unimportant text elements were tested. Not surprisingly, researchers found that subjects read the culturally familiar text faster, recalled more information and created more culturally appropriate distortions (extensions of text) and elaborations (modifications of text). Steffensen et al. report "…ever since Barlett's day the actual instances of distortions, intrusions, gaps and inferences in text recall have provided the most compelling evidence of the role of background knowledge in discourse comprehension and memory" (p. 20).

By creating a mismatch experiment, Steffensen et al. (1979), argue that "between the schemata presupposed by a text and the schemata the reader possesses, highlights the enormous importance of the reader's existing knowledge of the content of a text" (p. 26). However, as all subjects resided in Illinois, it was possible that the Indian subjects were naturally familiar with some of the American wedding traditions and customs conceivably biasing the Indian results. Nonetheless, being cognizant of the cultural familiarity or unfamiliarity of a text can reduce the possible schematic mismatches for

ELLs, thereby facilitating L2 acquisition and linguistic competency. Not only does cultural background in general affect an ELL's reading comprehension, but specific home and community life can have a significant impact as well.

Cultural Funds of Knowledge

Nurturing a culturally and linguistically sensitive classroom is beneficial for all members of the learning community, advancing social justice while challenging L2 deficit theories. The Cultural Funds of Knowledge (FoK), an additive framework, encourages teachers to link theory and practice by supporting students' identity as cultural beings. Wolf (1966) originally coined the term "to define resources and knowledge that households manipulate to make ends meet in the household economy" (cited in Hogg, 2011, p. 667). Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) defined FoK as "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing" (p. 134). This familial historical and cultural knowledge can be used to look beyond assessment data and recognize prior knowledge, building on student and family strengths. FoK advocates for marginalized and minority students, who are very capable but often intellectually misjudged. Using ethnographic analysis Moll et al., argues that schools need to utilize the personal and labour history of the family as a social and intellectual resource for the classroom and school. Bilingual students are able to take full advantage of their L1 and community history to excel in projects and assignments. By utilizing their private home and community resources, students become actively engaged learners, possibly expanding their limits and exceeding curriculum expectations.

FoK pertains explicitly to social, economic, political, historical and productive

skills and abilities within the home and community, a contrast to culture in the broader

sense. By visiting families in their surroundings and communities, teachers become the

bridge between the student's FoK and the classroom event (Gonzalez et al., 1995). A

mediator and agent of social change, teachers utilize students' FoK to create a broad

range of personal, authentic and real world activities. In a reciprocal relationship with

practitioners, parents become a rich cognitive resource for educational change and

improvement "expressing human social interdependence" (p. 447).

A transformative process between community, teacher and student, FoK supply

necessary background information creating an additive, rather than subtractive learning

environment. L2 learners feel valued and " [this] empowerment can be defined as the

collaborative relations of power" (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 25). ELLs, using their FoK

are able to challenge the coercive classroom power relations creating a collaborative

creation of power between their community, school, teacher and themselves. Cummins

and Early posit that within this interpersonal space, an ELL's identity is affirmed and

"…extends Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the ZPD beyond the cognitive sphere into the

realms of affective development and power relations" (p. 26). By incorporating funds of

knowledge, all learners receive authentic engaging literacy, fostering a sense of

community where the teacher knows and appreciates the multiple layers of the child who

eagerly demonstrates their intelligence with pride.

Vocabulary Instruction and ELL Reading Comprehension

Exploring a potential causal link between vocabulary and reading comprehension,

Baumann (2009) discusses six hypotheses entitled, knowledge, instrumentalist, aptitude,

access, input and metalinguistic hypotheses. Each hypothesis contributes to the reading

comprehension process at varying times depending on the learner's needs. The

knowledge hypothesis theorizes that overall knowledge or schema determines a learner's

vocabulary base while the instrumentalist view assumes that word meanings are causal

with reading comprehension. The aptitude hypothesis suggests that word knowledge is a

result of innate intelligence or I.Q. The input concept emphasizes that language

acquisition is based on information that is understandable and challenging at the same

time. Finally, the metalinguistic approach proposes that part of the aptitude hypothesis is

the learners' ability to reflect upon and shape language. The intricacies of the vocabulary

and reading comprehension connection cannot be explained by one such hypothesis

alone. L1 and L2 learners will draw from all six hypotheses at varying times in differing

combinations depending on their needs and strengths at a certain time and with a specific

activity. Considering these hypotheses combined with research-based vocabulary

practices can support word knowledge and reading comprehension for ELLs.

A theoretically based instructional vocabulary framework is needed to ensure that

ELLs are obtaining a rigorous and multifaceted vocabulary program. Graves (2006)

highlights four areas to consider with ELL vocabulary instruction:

> (1) Students need to develop their oral language skills in both their native
> language and in English, (2) Students need to develop a basic oral and reading
> vocabulary of the most frequent English words, (3) Students need a vocabulary
> much larger than 2,000 words and (4) Students need to master word-learning
> strategies-using context, using word parts, and using the dictionary (p. 34).

These four considerations will be discussed below as will Graves' four-part model of

vocabulary instruction involving rich and varied language experiences, teaching

individual words, word-learning strategies and fostering word consciousness. Graves'

four-part model provides direction for robust, enriching and intentional instruction within

a multifaceted and durational program. In the following section, I discuss the literature on instructional practices for ELL readers.

Research based pedagogical practices and ELL reading comprehension?

Reading comprehension and vocabulary development are a complex labyrinth. Increased vocabulary knowledge directly correlates to higher reading comprehension levels and potentially closing the reading comprehension gap between ELLs and NESs (Carlo et al., 2004). By increasing vocabulary acquisition, access to academic texts increases thereby increasing an ELL's chance of graduation (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005). L1 learners enter school knowing approximately 5,000-7,000 words while ELLs can enter with a considerably lower number even to the point where they may be at risk of being falsely diagnosed as learning disabled (August et al., 2005). It is imperative that ELLs, who are potentially lagging behind NESs, in cognitive academic proficiency, receive explicit vocabulary instruction in order to store needed vocabulary skills in working memory (Proctor et al., 2005). Yet, L2 vocabulary instruction has not always been a priority of L2 teaching (Celuce-Murcia, 2001). In response to the above research, the last decade has focused on vocabulary instruction as much as grammar instruction. Foundational research by Cummins (1979) supports explicit vocabulary instruction that is similar for both NESs and ELLs.

ELL research in the area of reading comprehension, specifically vocabulary development (August et al., 2005; Carlo et al., 2004), has shown that ELLs not only lack breadth of words but also the required depth of word knowledge. Depth of word knowledge entails the syntactic, semantic, graphophonic, morphology, phonology, polysemy, and literal connotations of word meanings. ELL instructors can use an ELL's

L1 (Cummins & Early, 2011) if this language shares cognates and a similar alphabetic system with comparable visual appearances and sounds (Jiang, Sawaki & Sabatini, 2012). Second language acquisition research has shown that an ELL's recall and word meaning comprehension can be augmented using their knowledge of cognates to infer word meaning. August et al., argue, "These characteristics include (1) the degree of phonological transparency between the cognates, and (2) the degree of orthographic overlap shared by the cognate pair" (p. 54). Thus educators must provide intentional and authentic word learning activities, as incidental vocabulary instruction can be unreliable and decontextualized.

Research-based vocabulary instruction of high frequency words in rich sematic contexts can aid in closing the academic gap between ELLs and NESs. Vocabulary acquisition is germane to an ELL's reading comprehension therefore Beck, McKewon and Kucan (2002) have outlined three levels of vocabulary words to assist an ELL's vocabulary instruction. Tier 1 words are mostly basic every day high frequency words that rarely need instruction, usually easily labeled by students. Tier 2 words are usually high utility more complex and possibly abstract words such as: between, among, shy, embarrassed or cognates and false cognates. These words are usually found in grade-level texts and need pre-teaching and explicit instruction. Tier 3 words are domain specific low frequency words, found mostly in upper grade texts such as: amoeba or isotope. ELLs can either translate them in English or describe them in their L1. If an ELL grapples with too many unknown words then text comprehension can be interrupted, interfering with recall and understanding of word meanings. Therefore, time attended to explicit vocabulary instruction directly correlates to academic language development.

Wide reading, including read-alouds, is another research-based activity where ELLs can increase vocabulary recall and word meaning comprehension (Baumann, 2009; Blachowicz, & Fisher, 2011). However, reading a book aloud does not automatically increase an ELL's vocabulary depth and breadth. August et al. (2005) and Chung (2012) highlight the strategic exposure of ELLs to diverse and rare words found in more advanced texts then compared to independent reading level texts. They also emphasize the need for repeated readings (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012) with explicit word explanations, meaningful and connected post-activities. There are a number of online student directed reinforcement activities such as Word Wizards (See Appendix 1) that can be worked on at home with or without parental involvement. It is imperative that vocabulary intervention for ELLs be supported by constant review and multiple exposures of word knowledge (Graves, 2006) to aid in working memory (Nassaji, 2007; Kintsch, 1988; Duke et al., 2011).

Sustained independent reading supports the notion of constant vocabulary review thereby enhancing the depth of word knowledge. Increased exposure to written texts via self-selected independent reading improves reading development and vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1989). He endorses the input hypothesis by advocating for more comprehensible input, "children who grow up in print-rich environments also have better vocabularies" (p. 442). Also, Krashen posits that language acquisition can occur without instruction. "It has been shown that ELLs acquire rules of grammar that have never been taught" (p. 443). However a study by Carlo et al., (2004) argues that incidental vocabulary learning is not a reliable strategy for ELLs as they are less able to use context and linguistic clues. Therefore incidental word learning by sustained independent reading

needs to be accompanied with explicit vocabulary instruction as more than 2% of unknown words inhibits comprehension and word learning (Carlo et al. 2004).

It is crucial to provide an explicit and authentic ELL instructional program, one supported by the construction-integration framework, where a more reciprocal and complete model of reading comprehension exists. "This causal and virtuous relationship combines an accurate text reading stored in working memory along with the construction of world knowledge" (Kintsch, 1988, p. 179). ELLs may increase their chances of storing needed vocabulary strategies in working memory "by actively linking to semantic retrieval cues, which is not an automatic process but one that requires strategic action and effort on the part of the reader/learner" (p. 171). As academic proficiency transcends all subject content areas and texts, it is essential that ELLs develop their reading comprehension and vocabulary skills through an intentional, balanced and multifaceted program, thereby facilitating academic competence and improving access to education and the benefits of society.

Summary

Robust, authentic and multi-facted ELL word learning programs rely on an understanding of the importance of explicit reading strategies, background knowledge and the foundational cross linguistic reading theories and hypotheses. Principally, research demonstrates the dynamic impact teachers can exhibit with a thorough understanding of an ELL's background knowledge. This extensive understanding includes viewing the student holistically in relation to their affective, social, cultural, historical, economic and familial components. Nurturing a culturally and linguistically sensitive classroom is beneficial for all members of the learning community, advancing

social justice while focusing on the impact of instruction and how learning takes place. Teachers who provide authentic and engaging literacy, fostering a sense of community where the multiple layers of the child are appreciated promote a learning environment where students eagerly demonstrate their capabilities in all their languages.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLICATIONS: Promising Classroom Practices, Recommended readings for teachers and the Role of the Ministry of Education

In this chapter, I focus on an example of a strong research-based practice for use with ELLs to support their reading comprehension—the use of multimodal identity texts. In addition, I briefly annotate three articles on pedagogical practices for ELLs that I recommend to teachers who are striving to improve their practices with ELL readers. From this practical professional perspective, I finally return to the B.C. Ministry of Education Roles and Responsibilities and argue that some of their policies are not reflective or congruent with the research on what ELLs need.

Multimodal identity texts: a valuable ELL activity

There is unequivocal evidence that L1 usage is advantageous for ELLs in L2 acquisition (Cummins & Early, 2011). These researchers advocate using 'identity texts' to bridge the language and cultural barriers experienced by most immigrants. Identity texts both affirm and acknowledge the importance of ELL's own cultural capital by using their L1 to build upon and access the dominant language of power. They argue that, "identity texts represent a powerful pedagogical tool to promote equity for students from marginalized social backgrounds" (p. 4). When a student's engagement is linked to their identities, not only can instruction function at a much higher level, there is a transformation and affirmation of identity (Cummins, 2013). This affirmation of identity increases the ELL's literacy engagement and sense of academic accomplishment along with increasing their self-confidence and willingness to improve their L2. It becomes a powerful narrative of competence where the L1 becomes something to be proud of rather than one of shame or embarrassment. The once failing or passive student now feels a

sense of accomplishment taking on a role of authority as they demonstrate their competence through multi-literacies.

In using multimodal texts, the educator provides engaging opportunities to empower students by using their L1 to expand their identities. Affirmation of identities and bilingual talents can be showcased through a variety of modalities. Such multi-modal tasks may include: constructing dual language books, describing where they live using Google Earth, explaining beliefs using power point presentations, engaging the community (family and friends) to describe differences and or similarities between cultures, using iMovie and Slide Show to compare, contrast, design or develop ideas, thoughts and events relative to their own culture. This globalized multi-dimensional learning creates a sense of belonging and can raise an ELL's status in the eyes of their peers.

Cummins and Early (2011) specifically outline identity texts as one form of modality whereby using their L1, social and cultural capital, students are able to demonstrate their academic capabilities. Students use their L1 talents, culture and history to challenge the societal power relations and symbolic violence using identity negotiation. Peers, practitioners and parents hear the diverse voices, providing ELLs with agency. I believe that in order to be an effective practitioner and educator of all students in an authentic engaging manner, identities need to be valued, respected and incorporated in the classroom learning environment, instruction and learning opportunities in explicit ways.

Three pieces of research are outlined here to support the concept of identity texts: a video interview (Cummins, 2013), an action research study on engaging literacies

(Cummins & Schecter, 2003) and a book, entitled: Identity texts: the collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools (Cummins & Early, 2011). All three resources highlight the effects of cultural and linguistic preservation that serve to support ELLs in developing their overall literacy. In order for language acquisition and academic competence to occur, Cummins claims that literacy must be engaging. He illuminates that, "Literacy engagement is [actually] a stronger predictor of reading achievement than SES" (Cummins, video interview, October 3, 2013). Therefore, engaging ELLs and challenging assumptions is of vital importance.

Literacy can become engaging in a number of ways. Firstly, ELLs need early literacy intervention with high volumes of reading input with writing output while increasing academic language through text and classroom exposure (Cummins & Schecter, 2003). Additionally, retrieving an ELL's prior knowledge through quality tasks is imperative. Cummins (2013) maintains that, "All of the cognitive psychology research states that students' prior knowledge is the foundation for learning…if prior knowledge is left out of the equation then learning is shallow, superficial and temporary" (Cummins, video interview, October 3, 2013). Educators also need to challenge an ELL's cognition guided by Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) of higher-level thinking to create higher-level tasks. Although ELLs may initially have low-level English proficiency, they are capable of demonstrating high-level academic tasks. By incorporating their L1, ELLs are capable of demonstrating their intelligence and augmenting their L2 as languages are interdependent, transferring compatible knowledge from their L1 to their L2.

Cummins (2013) creates 'identity texts' to bridge the language and cultural barriers experienced by most immigrants. Identity texts both affirm and acknowledge the

importance of an ELL's own cultural capital by using their L1 to build upon and access the dominant language of power. Cummins purports that this is not a 'zero sum game' where one gains and another looses (Cummins, video interview, October 3, 2013). ELLs, using their L1 and bilingual talents, showcase their competencies and narrate their own experiences. When a student's engagement is linked to their identities, not only can instruction function at a much higher level, there is transformation and affirmation of identity (Cummins & Early, 2011). This affirmation of identity increases an ELL's literacy engagement and sense of academic accomplishment along with increasing their self-confidence and willingness to improve their L2. It becomes a powerful narrative of competence where the L1 is a proud source of knowledge and understanding.

Similar to the FoK framework, the construction and use of identity texts incorporate the use of L1 and L2 (Moll et al, 1992) as well as increasing the target audience involving peers, parents, grand parents and the extended community. Cummins (2013) advocates that engaging multi-modal projects that narrate their experiences and affirms their identity helps to develop "collaborative relationships of power" (Cummins, video interview, October 3, 2013). Collaborative relationships of power, promotes an additive framework of bilingual education where students and teachers create a reciprocal relationship of trust and respect where diverse cultures and languages are viewed as assets to academic achievement. Thus, educators need to continue challenging societal, pedagogical and political assumptions around mandated curriculums and standardized testing. Cummins stresses the importance of research based applications as well as incorporating the notion of a 'depth versus breadth' curriculum. The educator provides engaging opportunities while the student becomes empowered by their L1 expanding

their identities. Where an immigrant once felt possible discrimination, banning their L1, there becomes an absolute synergy shared by all. Through this reciprocal and collaborative process, an ELL's culture can become valued and legitimized which not only impacts the cognitive but also the affective domain.

Identity texts provide ELLs the ability to access their prior knowledge, and use their L1 while engaged in activities that support positive relationships between their teachers, peers and the community. Where once they were possibly passive and timid they are able to find their agency with pride. ELLs can create a powerful image of "not only who they are but what they can be" (Cummins, video interview, October 3, 2013). As an educator, I feel that if our tasks and projects can positively impact the affective domain for ELLs, then we have made an impression by validating the learner's identity and that is far more profound than the assignment itself. With this in mind, I am recommending three important readings for my colleagues supporting the importance of igniting an ELL's background knowledge.

My Recommended Readings for teachers on Pedagogical Practices and ELLs

In reflecting on which articles would be most helpful in supporting teachers in implementing robust reading instructional practices, I was repeatedly drawn to three authors: Cummins et al. (2005), Drucker (2003) and Gambrell (2011), all of whom contributed significantly to my own understanding of what is best practice for ELLs in relation to reading comprehension.

This first article by Cummins et al., (2005), examines the creation of identity texts and the impact these cross-language literacy activities can have on an ELL's self image. The authors of this journal are Canadian educators ranging from professors, PhD students

and superintendents to elementary school teachers in the York Region District School Board in Toronto, Canada. They base their article on research, personal observation and the written and visual evidence of events during their action research at Thornwood Elementary. Cummins' et al., goal was to highlight the need for classroom teachers and ELL specialists to include identity texts as part of the curricula, thereby increasing ELL motivation and self-confidence by affirming their cultural identity. Thornwood Public School, where more than 40 different home languages exist, pioneered the process of the dual language identity text. Through this process, Thornwood Elementary created the Dual Language Showcase Website (See Appendix 2). The website was created to share their identity texts with their peers, parents and relatives in both Canada and their home countries. Dual language books, a form of identity texts, are a valuable tool to support the integration of new students giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their L1 intelligence and feelings. Cummins et al., concludes by expressing the benefits of supporting identity texts: they engage background knowledge, create a deep understanding transferring knowledge from one context to another, using the inquiry method students take control over their learning, the audience becomes an authentic source of validation, uses the encoded L1 to foster L2 acquisition, cultural and linguistic expression, enables ELLs to invest their identities in learning, reciprocal identity negotiation between student and teacher. This article is significant as identity texts allow ELLs to use multimodalities to express their academic talents and it affirms the funds of knowledge by involving parents and family within the community. It is important to keep in mind that human relations are nourished as much by affect as cognition (Gambrell, 2011).

A second noteworthy article by Drucker (2003) supports the notion of cross-linguistic transfer between L1 and L2. This article highlights some areas of L2 reading acquisition that are different from L1 learning. Drucker bases her article on research representing best ELL practices that are illustrative and not prescriptive. Her stated goal is to examine five areas possibly affecting L2 reading comprehension: conversational versus academic proficiency, orthography and phonology, cultural differences and schema and vocabulary development. The author then provides practical suggestions, strategies and resources to enhance L2 reading comprehension difficulties. She highlights two very important factors in L2 acquisition. Firstly, there is a difference between the L1 and L2 acquisition of interpersonal communicative skills and the cognitive academic language proficiency. ELLs are able to acquire conversational skills at a much faster rate than academic skills. She stresses that NESs do not wait for ELLs to catch up as it takes five or seven years to close the initial gap. Secondly, the author recognizes the need for comprehensible input that is at or preferably just above the ELLs current abilities. The author provides a very helpful chart on page 23 outlining "Suggested Strategy Implementation" including eleven ELL strategies, and provides information about what level to implement them and when to implement them. The eleven strategies include: previewing, choral reading, shared reading, paired reading, books with tapes, multicultural literature, language experience, interactive writing, a total physical response, narrow reading and read aloud. She highlights four specific activities of significant importance: choral reading including gestures, paired reading with the inclusion of rebus symbols, the language experience approach and simultaneous listening and reading of audiotaped stories. This article is of particular importance because it

provides an excellent overview of best literacy practices in general for both NESs and ELLs.

The final article by Gambrell (2011) provides practical classroom ideas, and a research based reading framework to enhance intrinsic motivation and student engagement. Gambrell highlights reading motivation and engagement by focusing on seven rules of engagement (along with classroom tips) where students are more motivated to read when: 1) the reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives, 2) they have access to a wide range of reading materials, 3) they have ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading, 4) they have opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks, 5) they have opportunities to socially interact with others about the text they are reading, 6) they have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts and 7) classroom incentives reflect the value and importance of reading. Gambrell has included a highly useful web link recommending a motivational lesson plan utilizing greeting cards (See Appendix 3). This article is significant because it emphasizes the necessity for social interaction between students, which also promotes interest, and engagement in reading.

It is evident from reading these articles and others, and reflecting on the basic reading theories from earlier, that there is much overlap between pedagogical practices for ELLs and NESs. A critical distinction however, is the degree of explicitness required in instruction, the necessity for drawing on cultural funds of knowledge (for example the creation of identity texts) and the requirement to build vocabulary before reading as part of the important draw on background knowledge. All of this takes time and support and also calls on policy makers to ensure that the necessary supports are in place, for a

sufficient length of time, to make achievement more attainable for ELLs. In the following

section, I discuss the Ministry's roles and responsibilities for the education of ELLs.

B.C. Ministry of Education Roles and Responsibilities

"The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to
become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills
and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a
prosperous and sustainable economy" (ELL policy and guidelines, 2013, p.3).

Based on my review of the literature and the Ministry of Education policy

documents, there are a number of implications for teaching ELLs in the province of

British Columbia. BC schools are experiencing an increase of diverse immigrant

populations especially in the Greater Vancouver area. Not only are some teachers feeling

the pressures of teaching ELLs and the extra demands of a diverse classroom, so are

some ELLs, in my opinion, experiencing great hardship and even culture shock when

entering a classroom setting not knowing the native language or understanding the

country's culture. Nonetheless, educators are trying to provide this divergent and

dynamic group with communicative and academic skills in order to be successful within

Canadian society.

The American Bilingual Education Act (1968) now ensures that ELLs are able to

use their L1 in acquiring an L2. There is much evidence supporting a positive

relationship between L1 literacy skills and language skills gained in L2 and that L1

literacy skills are crucial in L2 acquisition (Cummins, 1979; Krashen, 1989; Lipka &

Siegel, 2012; Proctor et al., 2005; Quirk & Beem, 2012; Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). The

interdependence theory (Chuang et al., 2012 & Cummins, 1979) and the threshold

hypothesis (Jiang, 2011), both provide evidence that utilizing a L1 in learning a L2 not

only has many affective benefits but also enhances academic competence in the L2. Even

with this foundational evidence many policy makers and educators rely on the concept of English immersion and incidental L2 language attainment for L2 acquisition.

Cummins and Early (2011) found that it takes ELLs approximately three years to gain BICS and five to seven years to gain CALP. It has also been reported that it takes ELLs at least 5 to 10 years to attain grade-level norms in reading (Cummins & Early, 2011). With all this empirical evidence it is obvious that ELLs need academic support with government funding for most of their elementary and high school years. This is currently not the case.

If it is truly the purpose of the B.C. school system to ensure ELLs become literate and contributing members of society, then I feel it is the government's responsibility to provide continual ELL support until the student demonstrates academic literacy and competence. ELLs are held to the same grade 12 graduation standards as NESs, however, I question whether an ELL who is not only lagging behind an NES by 5-7 years in academic competence and taking 5-10 years to obtain grade level norms would ever be able to close the academic gap and "develop their individual potential" and fully "contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy" (ELL policy and guidelines, 2013, p.3). It is the government's obligation to ensure that educators are offered professional development by which they may develop understanding and skill in implementing the ELL pedagogical research literature.

Another implication continues to hinge on the responsibility of government policy and policy makers. All of the ELL documents produced by the Ministry of Education that ELL specialists and regular classroom teachers rely on are very dated (1999). Three ELL

policy documents were updated in May 2013 only to change the acronym from ESL to ELL. This is disheartening for the academic advancement of ELLs and current support for specialist and classroom teachers as there was no effort to include current research ideas on how to support ELLs.

Further implications reside within the B.C. Ministry of Education's reporting on K-12 student statistics (2013-2014). Public and independent school statistics indicate that the total ELL enrollment has remained consistent across public and independent schools ranging from 64-65,000 students (B.C. Ministry of Education, reporting, page 1), however a closer look across grades highlights a problematic and disconcerting statistic. Elementary B.C. provincial student statistics-2013/2014 (B.C. Ministry of Education, reporting, page 19) outline a significant decrease in enrolled public school ELLs from grade four (7,986) to grade seven (2,831). The problem with the reporting is that it is not consistent. It does not indicate where ELLs are going if the total public and independent school ELL enrollment is remaining constant but the specific grade numbers decline from grades 4 to 12.

However the Elementary B.C. provincial student statistics-2013/2014 independent school ELL enrollment remains relatively consistent between grades four (363) to grade seven (298). This is puzzling for a few reasons. The documents do not clarify whether the public school ELLs have used their allotted five years of funding and support thereby returning to the classroom, or they have met the English language standards and became independent learners or left the public school system entirely.

Also, there is a troubling reduction in the number of secondary ELLs according to the B.C. provincial student statistics-2013/2014 (p. 25), in grade 11 (2,113) and grade 12

(1,687). Contrary to independent elementary enrollment, the secondary independent

school ELL enrollment also sees a significant decrease from grade 8 (155) to grade 12

(19). These statistics have been relatively consistent for these grades and schools over the

past five years. Policy makers need to be cognizant that academic texts and tasks

continue to increase in difficulty commencing in grade four possibly explaining the drop

off from grade four to five. Or possibly as above, the five-year mandated ELL funding

and support may have been reached. Also noted, as the grade eleven and twelve

requirements become more taxing ELL numbers coincidentally dropped. Once again the

documents do not clarify whether ELLs have met the English language standards thereby

becoming independent learners, completely left the public school system or possibly

returned to their host country.

Initially there was no limit to the number of years an ELL would receive funding

and academic support. As of 1990, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has stated

that ELLs, if qualifying through testing, can receive funding and support up to five years.

The change in policy could not have been based on empirical evidence. These statistics

are perplexing on a few accounts. These statistics could be implying that for ELLs to

meet the B.C. Ministry of Education academic requirements, from grade 4 forward, are

simply too difficult. Therefore I question the limitation of the 5-year funding timeframe

for ELLs. I am very curious to know where the elementary and secondary ELL students

are going to obtain their education. Thus, I question once again the present length of ELL

support and make four recommendations for policy change.

Recommendations for ELL policy change

The evidence is clear according to the B.C. student statistics from 2009-2014 that ELLs are struggling to attain academic success within our public and independent school systems. I would like to make four recommendations. (1) As this government document has a section entitled Special Reports, Aboriginal students: How are we doing? (2013-2014) I would like to recommend that policy makers incorporate a section entitled, "English language learners: How are we doing?" (2) I would also suggest a section to denote the number and what percentages of ELLs receive support with funding. (3) I would recommend that policy makers of ELL support documents update the ELL: policy, guidelines and resources on a more regular basis to keep a breast of the current research to support ELLs. Currently policies are between five and fifteen years old. This lack of updating contradicts the last three roles and responsibilities of the Ministry's obligations to ELLs (British Columbia Ministry of Education, ELL: a guide for English language specialists, 1999, p. 44). (4) My final, and the most significant recommendation, is based on Cummins and Early (2011) data that it takes ELLs at least 5 to 10 years to attain grade-level norms in reading. Thus, I recommend that policy makers return to the original era, pre-1990, when there was continual support for ELLs who required it in order to aid in closing the achievement gap between NESs and ELLs. If immigration rates continue to rise (a governmental decision) then policy makers need to take evidence-based research and update their policy, guidelines and resources to meet the disparaging fact that ELLs disappear from our school systems.

Summary

Koda (2004) stresses the importance of cross-linguistic reading skills and reminds us of the need to differentiate from L1 and L2 reading. L2 language instruction more often then not commences before sufficient L1 linguistic knowledge has been acquired therefore understanding the pedagogical and classroom implications for ELLs is critical as L2 reading comprehension requires dual-language instruction.

Identity texts as a form of dual language instruction, respects an ELL's L1 and culture. The incorporation of identity texts increases literacy engagement, which allows for higher level thinking bridging relations between peers, teachers and the community. As noted in the B.C. Ministry of Education public school documents, ELL numbers decline in grade five and eleven. Thus, identity texts may contribute to increasing the graduation rates of diverse students and closing the academic gap between NESs and ELLs.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the University of Victoria to complete my Masters in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on ELLs and reading comprehension, after 26 years of public school teaching, had many more challenges and growth opportunities than I could ever have imagined. The personal and academic growth was immeasurable. After my first day I posted this comment on Facebook, "I just experienced my first night class in graduate school, I did not understand a word the professor said, and they were speaking English!" I very quickly put together about 50 flashcards combined with definitions for words such as hegemony, ethos, agency, decontextualized, marginalized and even pedagogy. The farm girl from the Malahat was lost. Not only was academia demanding, I had to enroll in

writing 'therapy', booking 2-3 sessions a week at the UVic writing center. I soon came to realize that I, like and ELL, was now learning a third language. I was not only a voluntary immigrant being immersed in a foreign language and culture but also a visual minority at 50 years old. My learning curve was extremely steep and taxing however; being highly motivated, I accepted the challenge, persevered, and obtained a deeper knowledge base of reading comprehension and ELLs.

I developed a deeper and broader understanding of the theoretical frameworks of ELL vocabulary development and reading comprehension. In addition, I also expanded my understandings regarding the pedagogical and classroom practices required to construct research-based curricula. I explored the theoretical reading and sociocultural concepts, L1 and L2 interdependencies, and the critical role of learner background knowledge. I have gleaned a robust appreciation for the empirical foundations to better teach ELL reading comprehension.

In order to provide a multifaceted and dynamic learning environment I realized the importance of considering the complete student, encompassing their prior knowledge and their full sociocultural background. This means fully getting to know and understand your students culturally, historically, their family and parental influences, including how they are motivated. The sociocultural perspective on literacy learning takes these needs into consideration while teaching ELLs.

What I have grown to appreciate is that, whether a NES or an ELL, all students possess varying degrees of Canadian social and cultural capital. This social and cultural capital (values, attitudes and principles) that native-born Canadians tend to possess can be rather challenging and problematic for ELLs and immigrants to acquire. If may take

years to understand the subtle nuances of a new culture. Students who become familiar with the Canadian cultural and societal norms can consciously use this knowledge for societal advancements if needed or disregard the underlying social curriculum. This choice may create opportunities or prevent them. As I am now cognizant of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of social and cultural capital I have a better understanding of pedagogical practice and the need to appreciate the diverse backgrounds of all students.

Since reading comprehension transcends all subject areas, developing theoretical understandings and researched based pedagogical practices are essential in order to aid ELL reading comprehension which in turn could increase access to higher levels of education in order to be successful within Canadian society.

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Appendix 1

A practical website for ELL vocabulary development:

Word Wizards
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/word-wizards-students-making-150.html

Appendix 2

Thornwood Elementary created the Dual Language Showcase Website

(http:///thornwood.peelschools.org/Dual).

Appendix 3

Gambrell has included a highly useful web link recommending a motivational lesson plan utilizing greeting cards.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/using-greeting-cards-motivate-1066.html.