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Supporting Kindergarten Classroom Teachers: Improving Literacy with Young English Learners

An Action Research Report
By Rachel Higgins

Supporting Kindergarten Classroom Teachers:
Improving Literacy with Young English Learners

By Rachel Higgins

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St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

The intent of this research was to determine to what extent will Kindergarten teachers' feeling of efficacy when working with EL students increase when given: personalized support in using the SIOP model, technology opportunities for students to work on academic vocabulary in their first language, and training on how to make their lesson content more comprehensible to their EL students. The study involved two Kindergarten teachers in two suburban elementary schools. Data collection methods included two pre- and post-project surveys, three collaborative lesson planning sessions, three classroom observations, and three post-observation meetings. Neither participant felt it was beneficial to add a technology component as a means of reinforcing the content academic vocabulary in the EL student's first language. However, both participants' comfort level increased as a result of the collaboration and training. This study proved to be an effective method that improved participants' feeling of efficacy when working with their EL students.

“In the last two decades, the growth rate of [newly enrolled] English-language learners (ELLs) was 169% compared to only 12% of the general school population” (Taboada & Rutherford, 2011, p. 113). As a result, many teacher training programs are including specialized sections that address working with diverse students, such as ELLs (Yawkey, Jackson, Wang, & Chuang, 2003). However, Short and Eschevarria (2004) discovered “few states require that teachers of core content areas have any background knowledge or training in second-language acquisition, English as a second language (ESL methods), or cross-cultural communication” (p. 10). That means general education teachers who have years, or decades, of experience, may have limited training on best practices for teaching the ELLs in their current classrooms (Yawkey et al., 2003; Minaya-Rowe, 2004; Eun & Heining-Boynton, 2007). With increasing emphasis on literacy and many states’ adoption of Common Core Standards, classroom teachers often find themselves feeling unprepared to help their ELs meet the new literacy requirements in English (Minaya-Rowe, 2014; Eun & Heining-Boynton, 2007).

Some studies have explored how professional development can improve or change teacher efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, Booker, 2013; Eun & Heining-Boynton, 2007). According to Ross and Bruce (2007), “teacher efficacy is a teacher’s expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning....Teacher efficacy is a self-perception, not an objective measure of teaching effectiveness” (p. 50). These studies arrived at similar conclusions: teachers with a high sense of efficacy were more likely to try new teaching ideas, apply various classroom management techniques, spend additional time with low-achieving students, set higher goals for themselves professionally, and encourage their students to persevere, despite home circumstances (Ross & Bruce, 2007; Oakes et al., 2013). Eun and Heining-Boynton (2007) “...confirmed

that teachers with strong efficacy beliefs revealed a high level of impact from professional-development experiences regarding their classroom practices” (pp. 42-43).

According to Goldenberg’s (2013) research, the first aspect for all educators to consider, prior to instruction, is the student’s English proficiency level. Since 2002, several states, including Minnesota, joined World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) to help determine proficiency in English. WIDA offers a standardized assessment tool, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS), which measures academic language proficiency in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (WIDA, 2013). The content areas cover social language, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. The proficiency levels are 1 – Entering, 2- Beginning, 3 – Developing, 4 – Expanding, 5 – Bridging, and 6 – Proficient (WIDA, 2013). Saunders, Goldenberg, and Marcelletti (2013) discovered that students will acquire and use social language more quickly than academic language. The general consensus among other researchers indicates that it takes between 5-7 years for students to acquire the same academic language as an English-only speaking peer (Butler & Hakuta, 2009; WIDA, 2013).

Several studies have also been conducted to determine which reading interventions provide the most appropriate support for ELLs as they improve their English literacy skills (Quirk & Beem, 2012; Begeny, J., Ross, S., Greene, D., Mitchell, R., & Whitehouse, M., 2012; WIDA, 2013; Kamps, Abbott, M., Greenwood, C., Arreaga-Mayer, C., Wills, H., Longstaff, J., & Walton, C., 2007). Response to Intervention (RtI) is a “systematic, data-based assessment and instruction framework” (WIDA, 2013, p. 5) recently used in schools and districts across the United States, whose sole purpose is to “close the gap” between those who are reading at-grade level and those

who struggle (Quirk & Beem, 2012; Kamps et al., 2007). When considering if an EL should start a reading intervention, one should review multiple measures and consider the appropriateness of the specific intervention (WIDA, 2013). EL students have demonstrated success when participating in appropriate 20-30 minute Tier 2 instructional, small groups that worked on repeated reading, modeled correct phrase fluency, embedded early literacy skills such as decoding, phonics, and phonemic awareness while behavior was managed through positive interactions (Kamps et al., 2007; Benegy et al., 2012).

However, Wessels (2011) discovered that the student's knowledge and usage of academic vocabulary is the greatest indicator of success in literacy. Taboada and Rutherford (2011) summarized it best, "academic vocabulary comprises the technical words that are needed for comprehension of academic texts" (p. 114). According to Wessels (2011), there are several important aspects of a successful vocabulary lesson: students need to access their prior knowledge on the subject, connect new vocabulary words with ones they are already familiar with, practice the new words, and experience or notice those words in multiple ways while using higher level thinking skills.

As an EL teacher, many of my ESL Methods courses emphasized how to incorporate the above components into effective lessons. One of the most important parts of my job is recognizing what academic vocabulary my students are lacking, introducing those words in multiple ways, and allowing enough repetition for them to become meaningful and useful (Short & Echevarria, 2004). To help organize and prioritize the content and linguistic objectives within each lesson, I use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). According to Pascopella (2011), "SIOP is a popular, research-based and validated model of sheltered instruction that many districts use" (p. 32). The SIOP model resulted from a seven-year

research project, and it provides a framework for classroom teachers to more effectively instruct EL students: identify the language demands of the content course; plan language objectives for all lessons and make them explicit to students; emphasize academic vocabulary development; activate and strengthen background knowledge; promote oral interaction and extended academic talk; review vocabulary and content concepts; and give students feedback on language use in class (Short & Echevarria, 2004, pp. 11-13).

In my work with EL students, I only have between 20-30 minutes each day to work with each EL group. This isn't enough time to ensure my students receive direct literacy instruction along with guided practice which will result in increased literacy skills and English proficiency. Collaboration with classroom teachers is one of the most effective, and efficient ways, to teach our students. The following question guided my study:- to what extent will Kindergarten teachers' feeling of efficacy increase when given: personalized support in using the SIOP model; technology opportunities for students to work on academic vocabulary in their first language, and training on how to make their lesson content more comprehensible to their EL students?

My project was conducted in two elementary schools in a suburban school district with two female Kindergarten teachers, who have EL students in their classrooms. One teacher has a small EL cluster in full-day Kindergarten. The other teacher teaches half-day Kindergarten, and has only one EL student in her class. Her EL student is not receiving EL services this year due to parent refusal. The first languages of the ELs are Spanish and Russian. Both teachers have noticed that their EL students are behind other English-only speaking students in their literacy skills. At this time, all of their EL students are participating in reading interventions. As a result, each teacher agreed to participate in hopes of helping their ELs improve their literacy skills in English.

Description of the Research Process

I collected qualitative data between January and March, 2014 by creating four teacher surveys, collaborating on six lesson plans, observing six classroom lessons, and conducting two pre- and two post-project interviews.

The first step I took was to create two electronic surveys that measured the teacher's comfort level with two aspects of my research project: SIOP and technology (see Appendixes A and B). Each participant completed both Google forms online prior to our pre-project interview. The purpose of each survey was to help define the baseline measuring their comfort level and feelings of efficacy when instructing EL students, as well as their desire to learn new instruction techniques and incorporate technological lesson activities. I organized the results by assigning each participant a letter: A and B.

One of the most important questions on the Teacher Comfort survey inquired how flexible each would be to revise her lesson plans into a new format. The purpose of this question was based on SIOP's model of incorporating both content and linguistic objectives. If the participant was unwilling or inflexible in revising her lesson plan format, then learning SIOP's format could be an overwhelming experience for her. Since both participants had some exposure to SIOP prior to the project, they were somewhat familiar with the new lesson format. As a result, each responded with a high willingness to incorporate linguistic objectives into their lessons; neither felt it would be stressful. However, both requested one-on-one support so they could learn how to identify and include appropriate linguistic objectives.

On the Technology survey, both participants had access to iPads in their classroom. As a result of the district's focus on technology, each teacher was given an iPad earlier this year. In addition, each building purchased several iPads for student use.

Both participants expressed an interest in learning about various apps which would be helpful for their EL students. Participant B already had an iPad station during Reader's Workshop which integrated a few apps that focused on building phonics and phonemic awareness skills. In contrast, Participant A was not using student iPads because her building technology specialist had them and was loading more district approved apps. Neither participant had considered looking for apps in their EL students' first languages as a means of pre-teaching and supporting academic vocabulary growth. However, both were open to the idea.

Next, I scheduled a pre-project interview with the participants to discuss my project in greater detail, answer questions about the surveys, and schedule observations. Both teachers expressed their enthusiasm for the project. They had experience working with EL students, and were motivated to learn more ways to help their students grow academically. In addition, both presented concerns of feeling unprepared and worried that they wouldn't know how to add linguistic objectives. There was also an apprehension about the amount of time it would take to collaborate. Time is a valuable commodity for classroom teachers. Finding time in their already busy schedules to learn a new model of lesson planning was worrisome. Next, we created a timeline that outlined when I would collaborate on lesson planning, when I would observe three classroom lessons, and when we would have three post-observations discussions. In response to their uneasiness about the time requirement for collaboration, I decided to combine post-observation discussions with planning the next lesson. For example, we discussed Observation #1 before planning Observation #2.

During each lesson planning meeting, the participant decided which lesson to modify with a content and linguistic objective. We identified key academic vocabulary

along with other SIOP strategies: incorporating realia, using meaningful visuals, accessing background knowledge, and providing additional opportunities for guided and independent practice. After each lesson planning meeting, I created materials that the participants would use to differentiate their instruction. Some of the materials included word sort pictures with color-coding which highlighted word families, photographs of the students doing fun activities at school, bilingual books, and worksheets with key academic vocabulary that the student could bring home and complete with her parents before the official school lesson. The teachers were very interested in learning how I created the materials, why I chose certain pictures, and why I used color to highlight word endings, so we spent time in our planning sessions discussing my instructional decisions for the materials. For this project, Participant A chose to focus on and modify the following lessons: writing about the tooth fairy (Observation A1), completing the weekly word sort (Observation A2), and writing about being an astronaut (Observation A3). Participant B chose to focus on writing about a small moment (Observation B1), creating and writing character traits of a fictional penguin (Observation B2), and learning about the four seasons (Observation B3). While I met with each participant, I took notes to document our conversations, their thoughts and goals, and any materials I created to help them meet their goals. I kept the same notebook throughout the research project, and added anecdotal notes while observing each lesson. We met a total of five times within the six week period, and I observed three classroom lessons for each participant. At the end of the project, participants completed post-project surveys: Teacher Comfort Survey and Technology Survey (see Appendixes C and D). I compiled their survey responses into a spreadsheet in order to analyze their opinions and attitudes about the various components.

In the next section, I analyze all of the data sources to determine to what extent each participant's feeling of efficacy increased as a result of collaborating to create three SIOP lesson plans, using technology as a means to support academic vocabulary in each student's first language, and making her lesson content more comprehensible to her EL students.

Data Analysis

I collected data with the pre-project Teacher Comfort Survey and Technology Survey during the first week in January, and the results for each of the pre-project survey were analyzed separately.

In the Teacher Comfort Survey, the first question asked if the participants had heard of SIOP. While both had heard of it, neither had received training. When asked about their comfort level learning a new lesson format, they responded positively (see Question 3 in Figure 1). Additionally, I wanted to find out if they thought the amount of time learning the new format would affect their current lesson planning. Each participant rated how they thought the SIOP model would affect their lesson planning: Participant A was more concerned about the additional time commitment, while Participant B felt it would be a fairly easy transition (see Question 4 in Figure 1).

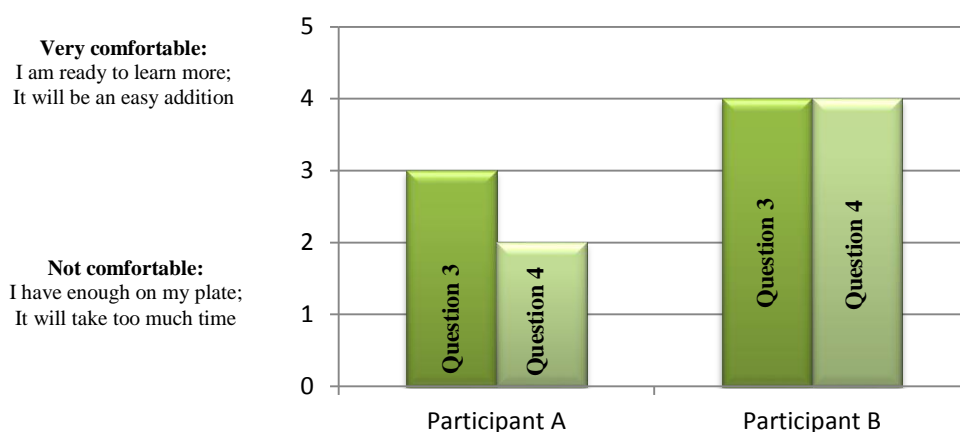


Figure 1. (3) How do you feel about learning a new style of lesson planning?

(4) How do you think using the SIOP model to adapt your lesson plans will impact your current lesson planning?

Next, I asked them to comment on how they predicted using the SIOP format would change how they teach. Participant A responded, “It will add more depth to the lesson” (personal communication, January 7, 2014). Participant B’s answer differed somewhat: “I think this will help me reach all students, particularly make the lesson content clear and comprehensible for my EL students, and provide them with the academic vocabulary needed to succeed” (personal communication, January 5, 2014). Finally, each participant shared the best method for me to help them learn the SIOP format. Again, their responses were similar in that they both requested examples and modeling while working on each lesson plan.

In the Technology Survey, Participant B indicated that she has iPads that students can use during the school day. Participant A only had one iPad for students to share. Neither participant had used apps to teach vocabulary; however, Participant B taught early pre-literacy skills with the apps “Endless Alphabet” and “Letter School.” Both

indicated they would be interested in using technology to help their EL students build their vocabulary. Participant A wanted to learn more about how technology could provide academic vocabulary support in Russian, her EL student's first language. In contrast, Participant B shared her concern about using technology to reinforce academic vocabulary in Spanish with her EL students because both are English-dominant. Instead, we decided to use English apps since neither EL student has ever been exposed to academic Spanish.

The next data that were analyzed were the classroom observations. As mentioned previously, Participant A chose the following lessons: Observation A1 was a Writer's Workshop lesson about the tooth fairy; Observation A2 was the weekly word sort of word families: ug, un, and ut; and Observation A3 was a writing lesson about going into space. Participant B chose to focus on writing about a small moment for Observation B1, creating and writing character traits of a fictional penguin for Observation B2, and a lesson on the four seasons for Observation B3.

While planning Observation A1, we discovered that the tooth fairy does not exist in Russian culture. This was an important discovery because it meant the student would not have any background knowledge of the story or the character. Some families share tales about a mouse with their young children; however, it isn't common. As a result, we did not create any first language materials, or find any technological opportunities, to pre-teach the key vocabulary or concepts prior to the lesson. Instead, Participant A focused on using comprehensible input techniques as part of her SIOP format. For example, she pointed at the tooth fairy in the storybook every time she read the words "tooth fairy." After the story, the students were asked to share what they thought the tooth fairy did with the teeth once she collected them. Participant A followed the SIOP writing

instruction format by repeating each student's idea using the sentence frame "I think the tooth fairy takes all the teeth and..." to reinforce the English vocabulary as well as the sentence structure. She felt the lesson went well, and was confident that her EL student understood the concept of the tooth fairy. Prior to this lesson, she hadn't considered that the tooth fairy is different, or nonexistent, in other cultures. It is an important part of everyday life in Kindergarten in the United States since most students lose their first tooth at age five. This lesson was helpful in building her understanding of how Russian culture differs from US culture.

In preparation for Observation A2, I copied the weekly word sort words and pictures. Next, I colored the endings of each word: *_ug* (green), *_un* (yellow), and *_ut* (pink). This made the activity more visual. In addition, I created a worksheet for the EL student to discuss and complete at home with her parents in Russian prior to the classroom lesson. The worksheet included photographs that matched each printed word, but differed slightly from the sketched pictures that are part of the school's curriculum. The goal of creating and sending home the materials ahead of the lesson was to give her an opportunity to "play around" with the English sort while discussing the words at home in Russian. It became a pre-teaching, home activity. On the day of the observation, Participant A modeled how to sort the pictures by matching the pictures that rhymed. Next, she modeled how to read each word, and then put it below the matching picture. When she dismissed the students, the EL student completed the sort independently within 10 minutes. The only word the EL student couldn't remember was *shut*. Again, Participant A felt this lesson was a success. Prior to this project, her EL student constantly asked for help with the names of each picture. She also struggled with recognizing rhymes in English.

In her final lesson, Observation A3, Participant A focused on a science lesson about space. Prior the lesson, I modified a short book titled *Space* (Page, 2014) by adding Russian text. The student took the book home the night before the lesson, and was asked to read it with her parents. The goal was to pre-teach the academic vocabulary in both languages prior to the lesson. The next day, students watched a Magic School Bus video about visiting the Big Dipper. Afterwards, the students were asked to write about where they would go if they were astronauts. Participant A, following the SIOP pre-writing instructional format, led a short classroom discussion, and repeated the students ideas to help solidify the vocabulary and sentence structure for her EL student. Next, the students went to their tables and completed the following sentence independently: “If I were an astronaut, I would go to _____ and bring _____.” The student quickly wrote that she would go to a star and bring her dog. Participant A felt the lesson was satisfied with the results because, in the past, her EL student would copy what others around her were writing. No one else at her table wrote about going to a star and taking a dog.

Participant B chose lessons that differed from Participant A. Observation B1 was a Writer’s Workshop lesson that focused on writing about a “small moment.” Students had been asked to bring pictures from home about fun or important events. In the writing activity at school, the students would fill out a “watermelon” worksheet by identifying their main idea, and then list a single word in each “seed,” one detail about their small moment. During our pre-observation meeting, we discovered that one of her EL students had not brought any pictures from home. I suggested that she use one of the classroom Halloween pictures since he had been very excited about his Spiderman costume. This ensured that the student had solid background knowledge about the event. And if he struggled with thinking of and writing his ideas, Participant B could ask appropriate

prompting questions. On the day of the lesson, Participant B started by sharing her picture of eating breakfast with Disney characters. Following the SIOP writing format, she modeled writing her main idea on the title line, and then asked the class to help her decide what “seeds” to include. Afterwards, she had the students choose one picture, and then turn and talk about it with their carpet buddy. For her EL students, she asked them to use specific pictures that she and I pre-selected for them. By pre-selecting the pictures, she was able to predict the type of academic vocabulary the EL students would access, and allowed her to help them describe their pictures in simple, complete sentences. She repeated their ideas using simple sentence frames: “I went to ___ with ___” and “I played with _____.” After the students finished talking about their ideas, she dismissed them to their tables to complete the worksheet. Again, she checked in with the EL students first to ensure they remembered what they were going to write. During our post-observation discussion, she commented that she thought the lesson went well. She used some general sentence frames during Morning Meeting, but had not included them in Writer’s Workshop. In fact, the district’s Writer’s Workshop curriculum discourages using sentence frames. She noticed that her EL students typically struggled to start writing during past lessons, but were able to start right away after this lesson.

In Observation B2, the students created their own fictional penguin. When preparing for the lesson, I suggested that Participant B focus on nouns as her linguistic objective. I found a Notebook file, a type of interactive whiteboard software, in which the students could sort pictures into the three noun categories: person, place, or thing. This would follow SIOP’s recommendation of making the lesson very visual and interactive. The activity would also help activate prior knowledge and model academic vocabulary that the EL students could access and write later in the lesson. On the day of the

observation, Participant B started by reading *The Emperor's Egg* (Jenkins, 2002). During the story, she had the students signal if a word was a noun by giving a thumbs-up or thumbs-down signal. Afterwards, the students went over to the interactive whiteboard, and sorted pictures of nouns into the three categories: person, place, and thing. Next, she modeled how to complete the worksheet by using nouns to fill in the blanks, and then dismissed them to work at their tables. Unfortunately, the EL students were unable to complete the worksheet because they left the room to participate in their reading intervention group. However, Participant B asked the students to share their ideas with her before they left. When we reflected on the lesson, she still felt that it was successful. Previously, the EL students have been hesitant to participate in large group discussions. In this lesson, they participated during all of the activities, and shared creative and original ideas of how they would describe their penguin once they returned from their reading group.

In her final lesson, Observation B3, Participant B also chose to focus on a science lesson; however, it was part of the Weather and Seasons unit. When we discussed ways to pre-teach the academic vocabulary, I suggested the YouTube video “4 Seasons in a Year” (Harry Kindergarten Music, 2014). She showed the video ahead of time to her EL students on her iPad as a way to pre-teach the academic vocabulary. In addition, she pulled up pictures of each season and the students described what they saw. This created a shared experience that reinforced the academic vocabulary from the song. On the day of the observation, Participant B started with the video. To her surprise, both EL students tried to sing along. Afterwards, she showed pictures on her interactive whiteboard of each season and asked the students to correctly identify the season with their carpet buddy. In addition, she asked to explain why they knew it was that particular season. The lesson

was going well, and the students were engaged. Unfortunately, she had to stop the lesson a little early because it was time for Art. When we reflected on the lesson, she felt the pre-teaching was extremely helpful. While trying to pre-teach the vocabulary, one EL student kept mixing up spring and summer when he looked at pictures on her iPad. However, during the observation, he correctly identified each season. Also, the students were excited about the song since they “already knew it.” Music seemed to help the students learn the vocabulary more quickly.

Upon analyzing both sets of observations, I identified that both participants used at least one form of technology during the project. Participant A showed a video to reinforce science academic vocabulary while Participant B used her iPad and interactive whiteboard. In addition, both participants successfully pre-taught academic vocabulary. However, their methods of delivery and the usage of the students’ first language were different. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the report.

The final data sources I collected were the post-project Technology Survey and Teacher Comfort Survey. The purpose of was to determine how participants used technology to teach academic vocabulary, and to what extent the teacher’s comfort level and feeling of efficacy increased as a result of their participant in this project.

Through the post-project Technology survey, both participants indicated an interest in using iPads, or other kinds of technology, on a regular basis to help their EL students master academic vocabulary and concepts. Neither used technology to pre-teach academic vocabulary in their students’ first language. Participant A commented, “It would be nice to include the use of iPads during Reader’s Workshop to assist EL students by front loading information before a class lesson. This would be an independent way for students to learn/become familiar with vocabulary.” Participant B had similar thoughts.

She wrote, “Both students seemed to feel more confident participating in group discussions. They seemed engaged and participated more, as they were familiar with the songs and topics we were discussing.”

In the post-project Teacher Comfort Survey, the participants agreed that the SIOP training was helpful. They also expressed an interest in attending a formal SIOP training seminar, as long as it occurred outside of the school year. Next, both participants indicated an increased comfort level in using the new lesson format (see Figure 2).

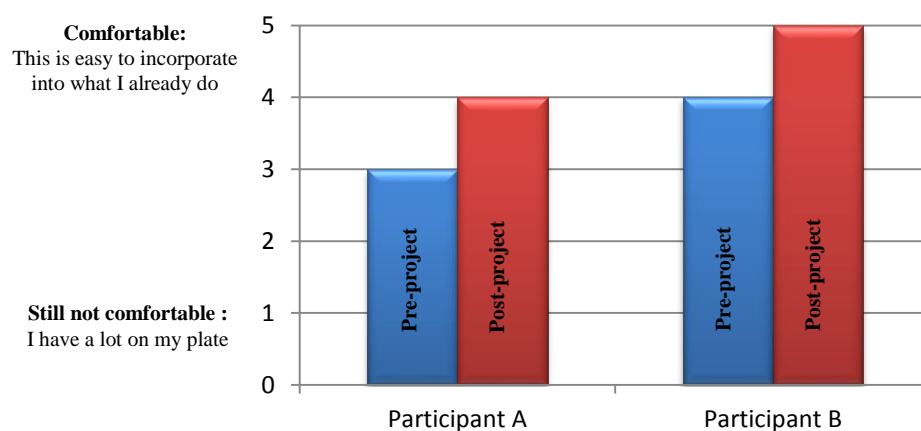


Figure 2. How do you feel about the new style of lesson planning?

They were also asked to share comments about our collaboration, the most helpful and least helpful parts. Participant A found discussing language outcomes and techniques for teaching the academic vocabulary most helpful. Participant B appreciated learning more about her students’ educational background and culture. She also felt that when she shared her concerns, I listened and worked with her to find new solutions that made the lessons more comprehensive to the EL students. In addition, both participants indicated their appreciation for the increase of their students’ participation during class. Participant B felt the biggest challenge during this project was finding a common time to collaborate. Participant A had similar concerns, but did not feel it was terribly difficult or stressful. At

the end of the survey, each participant was encouraged to share suggestions for how to change or improve this project in the future. Their responses will be shared below in the Action Plan section.

Collaboration was an effective professional development option as the participants learned how to incorporate linguistic objectives alongside their content objectives. In addition, each participant communicated in the surveys and conversations how their feeling of efficacy increased after they reflected on the specialized lessons in which their EL students demonstrated more confidence in classroom discussions, worked independently on writing activities, and used their new academic vocabulary in small and large group settings. The use of the SIOP format for lesson planning proved to be an effective and efficient way to teach the participants how to incorporate linguistic objectives into their daily lessons. As they learned how to identify linguistic objectives, each participant became more confident in finding ways to reach their EL students outside of the project observations.

My research project generated data that indicated an increase in participants' comfort levels to learn and implement best practice strategies when instructing EL students. Each greatly appreciated the individualized lesson planning support as well as the customized materials. During the project, both participants noted their surprise at the vast amount of academic vocabulary that is part of every lesson, even at a Kindergarten level, and then started proactively identifying vocabulary that needed to be explicitly taught.

Another key factor that helped each participant was learning more about their EL students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Participant A was able to use her EL student's first language, Russian, during pre-teaching activities while Participant B chose

not to use any Spanish. The students' educational backgrounds and home language played a role in determining which language to use when pre-teaching the academic vocabulary. Participant A's student did not attend preschool, and Kindergarten was her first experience with English. At the beginning of the year, her parents refused ESL services for their daughter. They are bilingual, but they choose to speak only Russian at home as a way to preserve their culture and language. In addition, her EL student attends Russian school once a week where she is learning to read and write in Russian. One of Participant B's students attended an English-speaking preschool, while the other had not. Both students live in homes where Spanish and English are used simultaneously. While her students understand social Spanish, they are English-dominant. Neither received instruction in academic Spanish prior to entering Kindergarten. Learning about their EL students proved to be a vital part of seeing the value of, and internalizing, the SIOP model. It also created opportunities for each participant to learn and explore more about cultural differences that are present in various curriculum activities. Collaborating with the participants about their students on an individual level helped them differentiate their instruction.

Action Plan

In the future, I will continue my focus on sharing my EL students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds with their classroom teachers. To accomplish this, I will use WIDA's framework: "learning environment factors, academic achievement and instructional factors, oral language and literacy factors, personal and family factors, physical and psychological factors, previous schooling factors, and cross-cultural factors" (2013, p. 5).

It is important to note that some districts may not have the means to hire cultural liaisons, while others have easy access to them as well as bilingual and/or bicultural educational assistants. During this project, I consulted our district's Russian Cultural Liaison on a regular basis. In a situation where the district does not have a cultural liaison or language specialist, a teacher could pursue the following options to learn more about the linguistic, cultural, and educational background of his/her student: complete an online search to learn more about the first language, history of the country, or heritage of his/her student; contact an interpreting agency; contact another school district which serves a similar EL population; contact the State; contact a family member of the student who is bilingual/bicultural; or, as a last resort, have the student help communicate between home and school.

Another successful factor of this project was the creation of materials that pre-taught key vocabulary and concepts. If this portion of the study had been excluded, I do not feel that the participants would have felt an increase in their efficacy. However, it was most beneficial that the participants in this study were open to allowing access to materials in their students' first languages. Creating these materials was the most time-intensive commitment on my part. In many cases, it required the participation of our district's Russian Cultural Liaison. She consulted on my questions about the tooth fairy, and provided written translations for the book about space. If Participant B's students had required materials in Spanish, I would have requested assistance from our district's Spanish Cultural Liaison. Since these materials boosted the confidence of the participants to such a great extent, I will continue finding, creating, and collecting materials in various languages that can be used to pre-teach vocabulary and concepts. In addition, I hope to find more apps in different languages which can be used on iPads or tablets. The

participants were encouraged to share how their thoughts on how to improve future studies. Participant B indicated that she would like to continue collaborating on a regular basis. “We work very well together and I have seen first-hand how collaboration benefits our students.” Participant A’s comment about the use of technology reflected my own: “It would be interesting to try using technology more to see if there is a difference in comprehension.” It was my original intent to create individualized lessons that could be viewed on the classroom iPads as a means to pre-teach academic vocabulary and concepts in the students’ first languages. Unfortunately, the conditions of the present study did not allow for it. A future study focused on using technology as a means to pre-teach academic vocabulary and concepts in EL students’ first languages would explore if this resource would be a beneficial resource for classroom teachers. If such a study occurred, I would also recommend tracking the amount of time it would take to create the customized first-language materials. It would also be worth researching how many materials, which already exist in other languages, match existing curriculum and standards, and are readily available for classroom teachers to use with their EL students.

I cannot confidently conclude which portion was more helpful to each participant: collaboration or learning the SIOP model. From my observations, I can conclude that they complemented each other. In other words, each participant might not have felt successful without learning SIOP as a way to incorporate linguistic objectives; however, simply learning SIOP might not have been successful without our collaboration on how to implement those same objectives. My recommendation for classroom teachers would be to attend SIOP training, and then collaborate with a language specialist as a way to internalize the method.

It is important to note that the sample size for this study was small, so the results might not be replicated in a larger study. Originally, five Kindergarten classroom teachers were invited to participate. Three made a verbal commitment; however, one declined participation in early January because she felt she would not have enough time to collaborate. In future studies, this type of project might seem overwhelming to classroom teachers when they consider the time commitment for collaboration. I have observed that classroom teachers continually have greater expectations placed on them in regard to tracking their students' progress, attending meetings, and participating in various committees. Lesson planning time is a valuable and rare commodity. In the future, a study such as this might have more success in regard to participation if offered to classroom teachers who have a larger population of EL students.

In summary, the results from this study reflected my expectations. I anticipated that collaboration between an EL and classroom teacher would be an effective method to build the confidence and efficacy of the classroom teacher. Another option for a future study would be co-teaching. Participant B and I have co-taught Reader's and Writer's Workshop for the past three years. In my experience and observations, co-teaching is another highly effective collaboration model in which classroom teachers learn how to incorporate linguistic objectives in their daily lessons.

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Appendix A

Pre-Research Teacher Comfort Survey*SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Lesson Plans*

1. Have you ever heard of SIOP? Yes No

2. Have you received SIOP training? Yes No

SIOP is a style of lesson planning that focuses on teaching content and language objectives in each lesson.

3. How do you feel about learning a new style of lesson planning?

1 2 3 4 5

Not comfortable – I have enough on my plate Very comfortable – I am ready to learn more

4. How do think using the SIOP model to adapt your lesson plans will impact your current lesson planning?

1 2 3 4 5

It will take too much time It will be an easy addition

5. Adding a language objective (i.e. focusing on adjectives, verbs, or –ing words) takes time and practice. Explain how you think highlighting a linguistic objective to each lesson might change how you teach:

6. Please explain the best way for me to help you learn SIOP:

Appendix B

Helping English Learners in the Classroom: Technology*Pre-Research Technology Survey*

1. Do you have an iPad (tablet) in your classroom that your students can use?

Yes No

2. Do you use electronic apps with your ELs to help them master early literacy skills

(phonemic awareness, phonics, etc)?

Yes No

If so, what are they?

3. Do you use electronic apps with your ELs to help them learn English vocabulary?

Yes No

If so, what are they?

4. If available, would you incorporate an app (in the student's first language) into your lesson in

order to help him or her build vocabulary?

Yes No

Please explain your answer:

Appendix C

Post-Research Teacher Comfort Survey*SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Lesson Plans*

1. Did you find SIOP training helpful?

Yes

No

Other:

2. How do you feel about the new style of lesson planning?

1 2 3 4 5

Still not comfortable – I have a lot on my plate Comfortable – this is easy to

incorporate into

what I already do

3. Would you be interested in attending a formal SIOP training seminar?

Yes

No

Maybe

4. What was the most helpful part of our collaboration?

5. What was the least helpful part of our collaboration?

6. What changes would you make if we did this again?

Appendix D

Helping English Learners in the Classroom: Technology*Post-Research Technology Survey*

1. Did you use any technology activities did you use to pre-teach academic vocabulary in the student's first language?

Yes No

If yes, please explain what you used:

2. Do you feel the students learned the new vocabulary more quickly?

Yes No Not sure

3. Would you use different technology activities on a regular basis?

Yes No

Please explain your answer:

4. Please share any other comments about using technology with ELs.