

St. Catherine University

SOPHIA

Masters of Arts in Education Action Research
Papers

Education

5-2017

"Effects of Front-loading Vocabulary for English as a Second Language Learners

Mandy L. Downs

St. Catherine University, mldowns@stkate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Downs, Mandy L.. (2017). "Effects of Front-loading Vocabulary for English as a Second Language Learners. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website:
<https://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/209>

This Action Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Arts in Education Action Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.

Effects of Front-loading Vocabulary for
English as a Second Language Learners

An Action Research Report

By Mandy Lee Downs

Effects of Front-loading Vocabulary for English as a Second Language Learners

Submitted on April 5, 2017

In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

Mandy L. Downs

Saint Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor _____

Date _____

Abstract

This action research investigated the effects of front-loading vocabulary on four-year-old English as a second language learners (ESL). Fourteen 4-year-old children were included in the study. Two were native English speakers and the remaining 12 were ESL students. The sources of data included a daily log of the children's attention during a read aloud, parent feedback, a personal field journal and pre and post intervention vocabulary assessments. Children with stronger English language knowledge displayed an increase in their vocabulary and participation. Due to the increase in vocabulary and participation in English speaking children, I will continue to front-load vocabulary while conducting further action research to explore what other methods of reading or vocabulary words may better increase the vocabulary acquisition of ESL students.

Keywords: vocabulary, English as a second language (ESL), front-load

Before my first daughter was born 14 years ago, I was reading to her in utero. Since the day she was born, I talked to her about everything in her environment and read to her as she rolled along on the floor learning to crawl. By the time she was a toddler, she could quote her books and knew when I skipped a word. Her language comprehension and verbal ability never ceased to amaze me. Today, my experience with my three daughters combined with my love of reading is apparent in my classroom. Read-aloud time is always an important part of my day. Even when children have busy hands, I know that their ears are listening.

In the first weeks of the 2016-2017 school year at an international school in Italy, I became the teacher of sixteen active four year old children; seven female and nine male. Of these children attending the full-day program, only two were native English speakers. The remaining students were: native Hebrew speakers (3), native Italian speakers (8), a native Chinese speaker (1), a native French speaker (1), and a native Albanian speaker (1). All of these children had at least one parent that speaks English; however, English was not the primary language spoken in the home for 14 out of 16 children.

Eight of these children had attended the pre-school the previous year, in the 3-year-old classroom. Of those 8, five became limited English speakers; they are able to satisfy routine classroom requests and have a basic understanding of most social interactions. The other children were new to the school, and 2 out of eight of those children were also limited English speakers. Among the others, 2 were native English speakers and 2 were advanced non-native (fluent) English speakers. There are 2 teacher's assistants that speak English and Italian in the classroom.

During language intensive activities, such as our daily morning meeting, small group meeting and story reading, the children appeared to lose interest quickly. I reviewed the

activities carefully, ensuring that they were developmentally appropriate. I verified that the length of our meeting and reading times did not exceed the length of their attention span. For weeks, I watched the children to see when I was losing their interest and it did not appear that their attention span was improving. While sitting on the floor, they looked to be on top of one another. I arranged the seating so that the children were not distracted by peers, and introduced chairs to create personal boundaries for sprawling legs and wiggly feet. This intervention appeared to help, but only slightly. Throughout my observations, one thing that stood out was the interest of the 2 English speakers and the 2 fluent non-native English speaker. They always maintained a higher level of interest. I hypothesized that if the others had more English language understanding, they would have a greater degree of interest as well.

I began collecting research from various sources with the theme of effective vocabulary instruction. Throughout my research, read-alouds were commonly used to improve vocabulary, comprehension, oral language, and background knowledge (Kindle, 2010). I considered my use of read-alouds in the classroom and contemplated my reading technique. I had used read-alouds to introduce school rules, conflict resolution, playground safety, educational themes, and, of course, creativity and imagination. I consider myself to be a very animated reader but I questioned if this would be enough to facilitate participation and an increase in vocabulary acquisition.

After reviewing literature, I found that the interest of preschool children during a story read aloud has proven to be most successful with adult mediation. Effective teachers create a conversation between the children, the text, and the teacher to facilitate word learning. In four studies, a single reading with word meaning explanations led to an average of 15% gain in word

meanings known, while in six studies, repeated readings with word meaning explanations led to an average 26% gain in word meanings known (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

The logical inference is that, to facilitate an increase in vocabulary, I would pre-read the material I select for the week and choose key words that would typically need explanation. Prior to reading, I would pre-teach, also known as front-load, the vocabulary in addition to providing an explanation when encountering the word in the story. This action research was conducted to determine what effect front-loading vocabulary words during a read-aloud has on facilitating participation and increasing the vocabulary of four-year-old English language learners.

Review of Literature

English language learners are children who are learning English as a second language and live in homes where a language other than English is spoken (Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008). English language learners are the fastest growing group of students in the United States public school system. A 2008 report by the Pew Hispanic Center says the number of Hispanic students in the nation's public schools nearly doubled from 1990 to 2006. The report also cites a U.S. Census Bureau estimate that by 2050, the Hispanic school-age population will outnumber the non-Hispanic white public school population (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008).

As English language learners enter kindergarten, they often fall behind their peers in skills necessary to read. A 2007 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on reading indicates that 70% of fourth-grade English language learners and 71% of eighth-grade English language learners scored below basic reading ability. Although the statistics are upsetting, research indicates that if these children receive effective literacy instruction, these children can achieve grade-level literacy skills (Waits, Campbell, Gau, Jacobs, Rex, & Hess, 2006 as cited in Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008). Educators must be prepared to teach this

growing population of English language learners with practical skills and knowledge indicative of a quality education.

In the present paper, increasing the interest of preschool children during a story read aloud to improve the vocabulary of English language learners by front loading vocabulary is investigated. It is hypothesized that English language learners who are actively engaged in story circle are more likely to increase their vocabulary.

Reading aloud has proven to be an effective vehicle for vocabulary acquisition. "Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development and is the single most important activity for reading success" (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000). Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not frequently a part of everyday speech (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Early childhood teachers have a significant responsibility to support literacy development based on current knowledge and research (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000).

To maximize learning, teachers need to determine the most efficient manner of reading (Kindle, 2009). Brief explanations of one or two sentences, when presented in the context of a supportive text, can be sufficient for children to make initial connections between words and their meanings (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). A characteristic of high-quality read-aloud is adult mediation to facilitate word learning. In a study conducted by Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002), read aloud styles were examined to determine their effectiveness in learning for grades 1 and 3. Three forms of reading were studied: reading with the absence of movement and explanation; interactional reading, a style of reading where you ask questions and construct meaning from written text; and last, performance reading, also called fluent oral reading.

Performance reading is the practice of asking students to repeat the reading of memorable phrases, sounds, and added gestures as if acting or "performing in a play." At the conclusion of the Brabham and Lynch-Brown study, the authors found that reading with the absence of movement and word explanation provided the least amount of benefit concerning vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary acquisition exhibited significantly higher mean gains when interactional readings were conducted compared with performance reading. The findings of this study confirmed that teacher explanations and student discussions of the read aloud story are critical factors that have the most significant impact on the students' learning of words and the construction of their meaning.

In a similar study, through observations of kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers reading to students, Beck and McKeown (2001) found that focusing on important text ideas and scaffolding children's responses and ideas are key to successful reading. According to Beck and McKeown, research suggests that the most valuable aspect of a read aloud is that it gives children the ability to make sense of ideas presented to them from a situation that is not taking place at the moment. To make this experience successful, the reader should help children to make sense of what is happening and reflect on story content. Beck and McKeown suggest:

awareness of the distinction between constructing meaning of ideas in a text and simply retrieving information from the text; understanding the difficulty of the task young children face in gaining meaning from decontextualized language; designing questions that encourage children to talk about and connect ideas and developing follow-up questions that scaffold, building meaning from those ideas; helping students to meaningfully incorporate their background knowledge and reduce the kind of surface association of knowledge that brings forth a

hodgepodge of personal anecdotes; awareness of how pictures can draw attention away from processing the linguistic content in a text, and thus attention to the timing of the use of pictures; and taking advantage of the sophisticated words found in trade books by using them as a source of explicit vocabulary activities.

(Vol 55, 1, pg. 10, 2001)

Front-loading vocabulary is pre-teaching vocabulary and it is used as an instructional strategy to facilitate student comprehension. (Rebora, 2016). When front loading vocabulary or discussing the story, the question may arise as to whether the vocabulary instruction should be in English or if the teacher should provide a bridge to the native language of the student. In a research study conducted by Lugo-Neris, Jackson, and Goldstein (2010), the authors examined whether English-only vocabulary instruction or English vocabulary instruction enhanced with bridging produced greater word learning during a storybook reading. In this study, 22 Spanish-speaking children learning English (ages 4-6) were assigned to receive two weeks of (a) word expansions in English or (b) English reading with word development in Spanish. The results revealed that vocabulary bridging into the child's strongest language demonstrated significant improvement in naming, receptive knowledge, and expressive definition.

Likewise, authors Mendez, Crais, Castro, and Kainz (2015) examined the role of the language of vocabulary instruction in promoting English vocabulary in preschool Latino dual language learners (DLLs). The authors compared the effectiveness of using English as the primary language of vocabulary without bridging into the mother tongue of vocabulary. The study concluded that there are benefits of strategically combining the first and second language to promote English and Spanish vocabulary development.

Selecting vocabulary for English language learning students is essential. The first step in a vocabulary intervention is determining which words to use (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Biemiller, 2010; Marulis & Neuman, 2010; Neuman, 2011; Spencer, Goldstein, & Kaminski, 2012). It is essential that opportunities for learning target words are relevant and meaningful to the learner (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). One commonly used method for vocabulary is a three-tiered approach by Beck et al. (2002). In the three-level approach, tier one is basic vocabulary. Typically, children will learn these words from everyday interactions; however, many Tier one words may be unknown to English language learners. Some Tier one words are idioms (like “let’s hit the books”). These phrases may need to be explained to English language learners (Calderón, August, Durán, Madden, Slavin, & Gil, 2003). Tier two words are high-frequency words used by mature language users. Educators frequently draw students' attention to Tier two words. These words "can have a powerful effect on verbal functioning" (p. 8). Last, Tier three words, are low-frequency words that are unique to particular disciplines, such as geography and science (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)

In a study by Larson and Rahn (2015), the authors conducted an analysis of Sesame Street's *Word on the Street initiative*. This study examined how the Word on the Street initiative aligned with research-based practices for choosing and teaching vocabulary to preschool children and considered how speech-language pathologists could use educational media to supplement traditional vocabulary instruction. In the study, the researchers used a vocabulary selection hierarchy to analyze 170 target words across seven seasons of *Word on the Street* to judge the appropriateness for vocabulary instruction in a preschool class. The authors then coded vocabulary instruction to determine frequency and types of teaching strategies used within this educational program. This study concluded that "vocabulary instruction during *Word on the*

Street could be improved by targeting only high-utility words, maximizing learning opportunities during all segments, and increasing strategies that promote deep processing" (Larson & Rahn, 2015).

In summary, it was hypothesized that English language learners who are actively engaged in story circle are more likely to increase their vocabulary. Research has demonstrated that the interest of preschool children during a story read aloud has proven to be most successful with adult intervention. Teachers should create a dialogue between the students and the material to facilitate word learning. To increase the vocabulary of English language learners through front-loading vocabulary, bridging into the child's strongest language has proven to be efficient. Also, to front-load vocabulary, the careful selection of vocabulary is essential for English language learning students. It is suggested that tier two words are most effective and that target words are relevant and meaningful to the learner.

Methodology

Prior to the four-week study, I selected a weekly vocabulary theme. The theme for week one was sequence, week two was opposites, week three was animals in winter and week four was color mixing. After choosing a theme for each week, I selected the daily reading material. I chose books that were age appropriate for 4-5 year-old children and would be of personal interest to the children in my class. I read through each book and noted the high frequency, or tier two words that would serve as the target vocabulary. There were 20 vocabulary words in total, including five target words for each week.

To assess whether the children knew the target vocabulary words before the study, I created two scripted questions with corresponding images for each vocabulary word. For example, in week three, during the animals in the winter theme, I assessed which children knew

the word “hibernate.” I printed an image of a bear sleeping in a cave. I showed the picture and asked the question, “What is this bear going to do all winter long?” For the second question, I printed three images of bears. Two of the pictures depict bears playing and eating while the third depicts a bear hibernating in a cave. I then asked the child to “point to the picture that shows hibernate” as I showed the image.

The study began on Monday, January 30, 2017, and concluded four weeks later on February 17, 2017. On each Monday, during a time of the day when the children were participating in learning centers, I sat at a desk in the language center to individually pre-assess each child. I recorded their responses on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet (see appendix A). If the child answered the question with the correct vocabulary word, I indicated “yes” on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet. If the child indicated that they did not know the target vocabulary word, I checked the “no” response. For the second question, I recorded “yes” on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet if the child pointed to the correct image and “no” if the child indicated the incorrect image. The vocabulary assessment was conducted on the first day of each week for four weeks for a total of four assessments.

For the first week, I gathered baseline data. Throughout this week, I read a book by Eric Carle each day. I did not front-load vocabulary. The book was read straight through without discussion or front-loading of vocabulary. During the second through the fourth weeks, vocabulary was front-loaded. I would pause at the vocabulary words when they appeared in the text and ask questions or briefly define the word. Likewise, if a child asked for further explanation or discussion, I would pause to explain and discuss.

While reading the books, my assistant recorded the interest of each child on the Teacher Observation Log (see appendix B). I recorded field notes one time daily for four weeks; a total

of twenty notes for the entire study. By using the Teacher Observation Log, my assistant provided insight into whether and for how long front-loading vocabulary increases the interest and participation of children during a read aloud. The Teacher Observation Log was for recording how long the children were authentically engaged and actively participating, compliant--participating less than half of the time and do not appear to be engaged, passive--joining the activity but not engaging or rebellious--refusing to participate, acting disruptively and attempting to substitute alternative activities.

At the end of each reading session, I recorded my observational field notes. I recorded field notes one time daily for four weeks for a total of twenty notes. I recorded detailed information about the book read, the implementation of the intervention, the children's responses, comments, questions and their participation during the front-loading and read aloud. As a participant-observer, I compared these field notes with my colleague's "Teacher Observation Log" to check for biases and a different perspectives.

At the end of each week, on Friday, a vocabulary acquisition assessment was conducted in the same manner as the Monday vocabulary assessment. During the same time of the day, I sat at a desk in the language center to individually assess each child and I recorded each of the responses on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet. If the child answered the question with the correct vocabulary word, I indicated "yes" on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet. If the child indicated that they did not know the target vocabulary word, I checked the "no" response. For the second question, I recorded "yes" on the Vocabulary Assessment Spreadsheet if the child pointed to the correct image and "no" if the child indicated the incorrect image. This assessment indicated whether the children who were unable to identify the target vocabulary words at the beginning of the week were able to identify them at the end of the week. The

vocabulary acquisition assessment was conducted on the last day of each week for four weeks for a total of four assessments.

On Friday, a Parent Feedback Questionnaire (see appendix C) was sent home with each child; four questionnaires were sent in total for this study. The questionnaire assessed whether or not the children used or expressed an understanding of the target vocabulary words at home. By completing this short list of questions, parents provided an alternative understanding of whether their child had learned the target vocabulary and could express an understanding. The questionnaire was created in both English and Italian, but all parents opted to have the English version as each family has at least one parent that speaks English.

At the end of each day, the Vocabulary Assessment and Teacher Observation Logs were both stripped of identifiers. To do this, I created a document that contained a numeric code for each child and it remained on my computer throughout the study. Each day, I removed the name of each child from the Vocabulary Assessment form and Teacher Log and replaced them with the numeric code providing confidentiality for each child.

Analysis of Data

At the conclusion of the four weeks, I analyzed the information that was gathered using four data sources: Vocabulary Assessments, a daily Teacher Observation Log, weekly Parent Feedback and Observational Field Notes. During the analysis, I looked for student participation patterns and increased vocabulary knowledge in the ESL children. The purpose of the data collected was to observe what effect front-loading vocabulary would have on English Language Learners.

The first data analyzed was the vocabulary pre- and post-test assessments. This data was evaluated to determine any changes in student vocabulary recognition that may have taken place

during the weekly intervention. The children were assessed at the beginning of the week and again at the end of the week to gain knowledge of whether they could comprehend and identify the target vocabulary words. There were five target vocabulary words assessed each week using two different questions. There were 14 students participating in the study which gave a sample size of 140 total data points. Figure 1 illustrates the results of the students' understanding on the vocabulary pre-assessment and post assessment.



Figure 1. Student Vocabulary Assessment results. A horizontal bar graph illustrating students' performance change in response to the intervention.

In week one, during the baseline study, the children were assessed pre and post intervention but the daily reading was absent of any vocabulary front-loading. In week one, there was a 2.9% improvement in the post-intervention responses and 0% had a worsened response or an incorrect post-test answer with the presence of a correct pre-test response.

Front-loading began in week two. Based on my journal notes regarding the interest level of children in week one, books with a short reading time of approximately 6 minutes were chosen. All of the books emphasized the vocabulary words that were being front-loaded. In

week two, there was a 10.7% improvement in the post-intervention responses. Week two, however, had the most significant amount of worsened responses. A worsened response indicates wrong post assessment answers after a correct pre-assessment answer. It is unclear why there were 26 incorrect post-assessment answers after correct responses were recorded during the pre-test. It was noted that 50% of the children were actively engaged in the read aloud for that week. It is unlikely that the children knew the vocabulary and forgot it during the week. There were no notes in my field observations to correlate with this. Perhaps there was a distraction I was not aware of within the classroom environment.

In week three, I continued the intervention with longer books that were selected around the theme of animals in winter. I chose this theme because it's a particular area of interest for the children in my class. As with previous weeks, the books emphasized the vocabulary words that were being front-loaded. In week three, there was a 36.4% improvement in post-intervention responses with 0% worsening. It is not surprising that week three had the highest overall improvement for the entire study because the children had a strong interest in the topic. During this week, it was noted in my observational field journal that the children were excited to ask questions and share their thoughts post read-aloud. The children in this class are fascinated at the idea of animals being present but unseen throughout winter and were eager to name these concepts (i.e. "to sleep in winter is to hibernate").

In the final week, week four, I continued the intervention with books that utilized props. The theme was color mixing and, as with all of the other weeks, the books emphasized the vocabulary words that were being front-loaded. In week four, 2.1% of the responses worsened while 21.4% improved.

While looking at the cumulative overall improvement per child, over the course of the intervention, 64-97% of the children answered the questions the same on the pre and post vocabulary assessment. Individually, children 2, 5, 7 and 9 demonstrated the highest improvement, while children 3, 4, 8, 10 and 12 have almost demonstrated a plateau in performance. Figure 2 illustrates the results of the students' cumulative overall improvement.

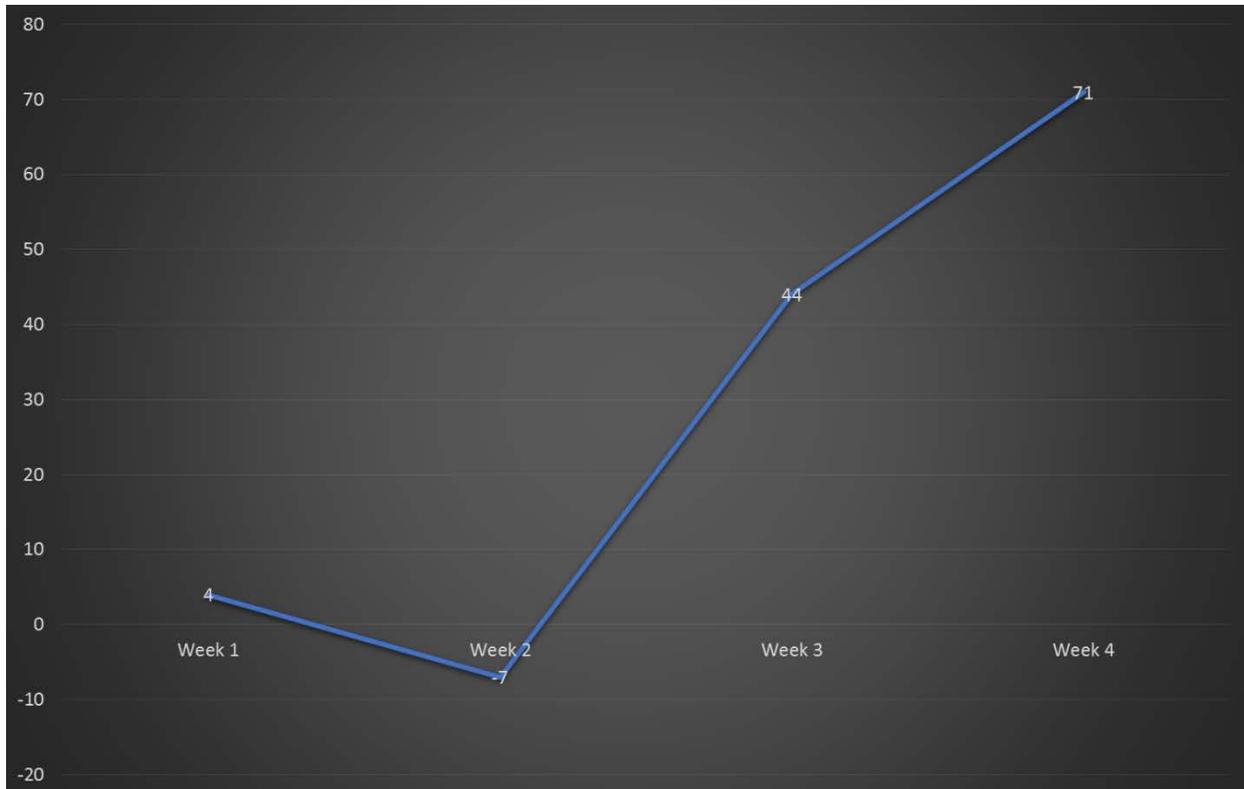


Figure 2. Student Cumulative Vocabulary Improvement Graph. A line graph illustrating student performance over the four week intervention.

The second data source analyzed was the Teacher Observation Log used during the daily read aloud for the 4 week study. The purpose of this data source was to track student engagement and participation. When coding the data, 5 was used when students were authentically engaged and actively participating. 4 was used when students were compliant; children who were participating less than half of the time and did not appear to be engaged. 3 was used when children appeared passive; children who are joining the activity but not engaging. 2 was used to indicate rebellion; rebellious students are identified as children who refuse to participate, act disruptive, or attempt to substitute alternative activities. 1 was used for children with no data.

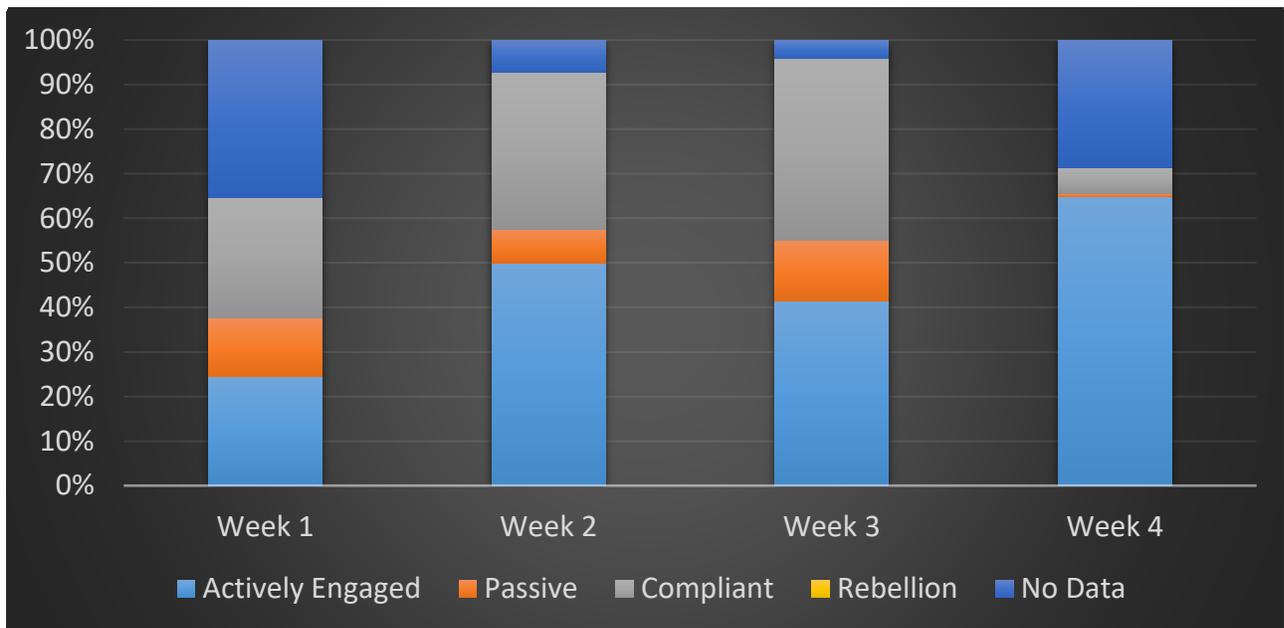


Figure 3 Reading Engagement

In week one, due to late arrivals and absences, no data was collected for 35.4% of students. 26.9% of the children were compliant; participating less than half of the time and did not appear to be engaged. 24.5% of the children were actively engaged in the reading while 13.2% of the children were passive; joining the activity but not engaging. 0% were rebellious. It was noted that the children were looking for a way to participate. I did not encourage or discourage participation but remained neutral. The absence of front-loading and discussion may have led to less interest from the students. Figure 4 demonstrates the student activity for week one.

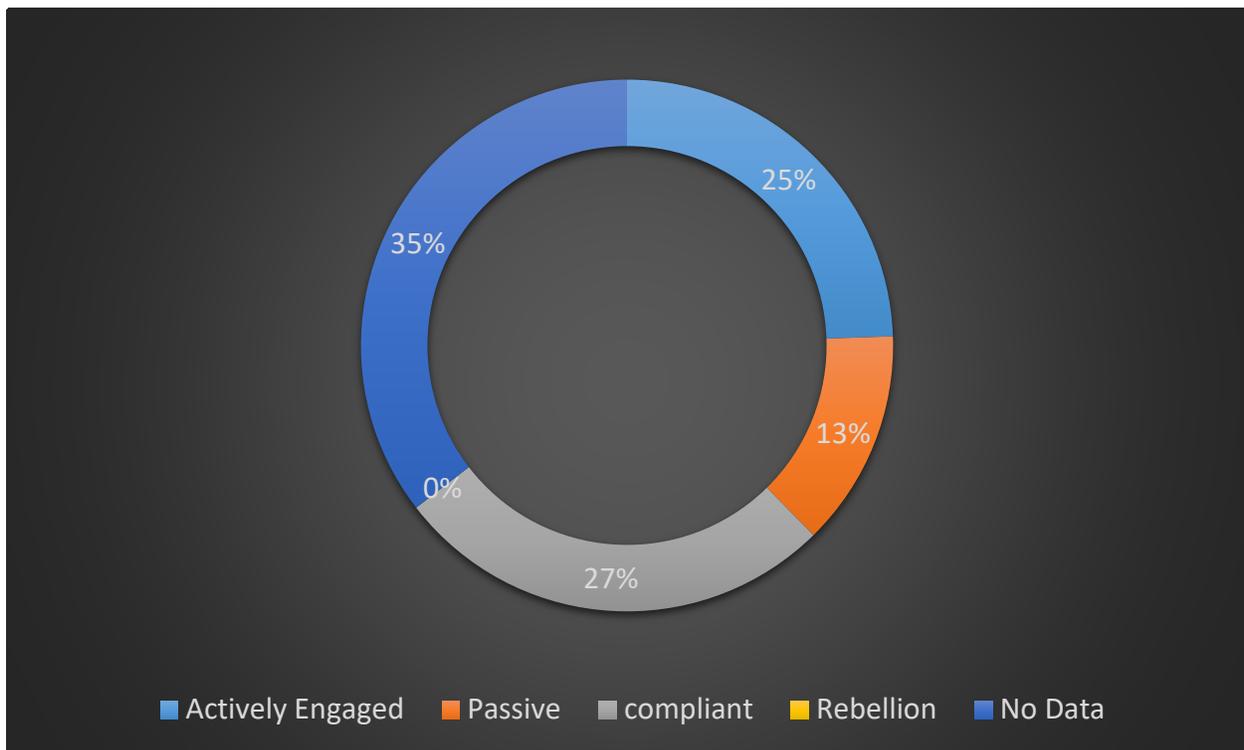


Figure 4. Week one student engagement

In week two, there was a significant decrease in the amount of data that was not collected; from 35.4% down to 7.1%. The amount of children who were compliant increased from 26.9% to 35.4% and the amount of actively engaged children more than doubled from 24.5% to 50%. 7.5% of the children were passive and 0% were rebellious. I believe the increase in interest was due to the presence of front-loading and post read-aloud discussion. Figure 5 demonstrates the student activity for week two.

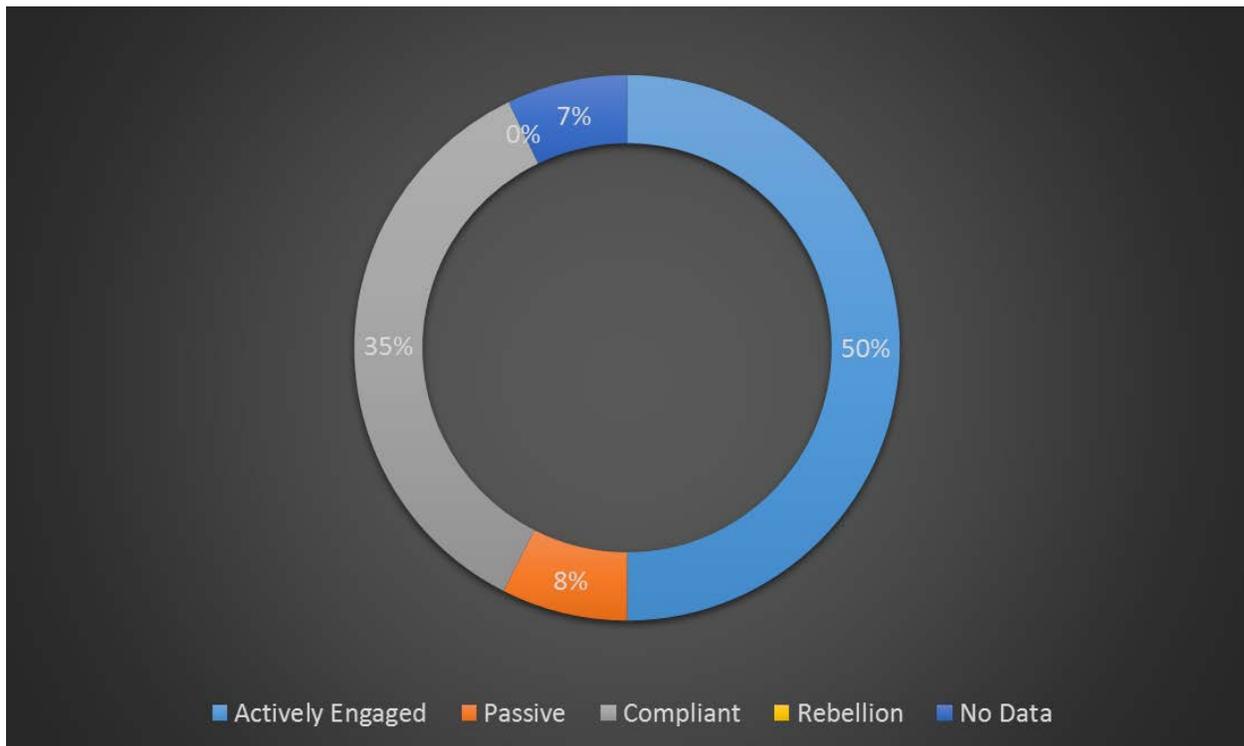


Figure 5. Week two student engagement

While week three had the highest overall improvement for vocabulary acquisition, it was not the same for engagement. Week three had a decrease in the number of children actively engaged and an increase in the children who were compliant. The children who were actively engaged decreased from 50% to 41.5% and the children who were compliant increased from 35.4% to 40.7%. There was no data collected for 4.2% of the children. No children were rebellious and 13.6% of the children were passive; an increase from the previous week's 7.5%. Although the children were not authentically engaged in the story, it was noted that they had "thoughtful insight and observations" in our post read-aloud discussion. The discussion utilized the vocabulary in a holistic way and may have contributed to the increased acquisition during this week. Figure 6 demonstrates the student activity for week three.

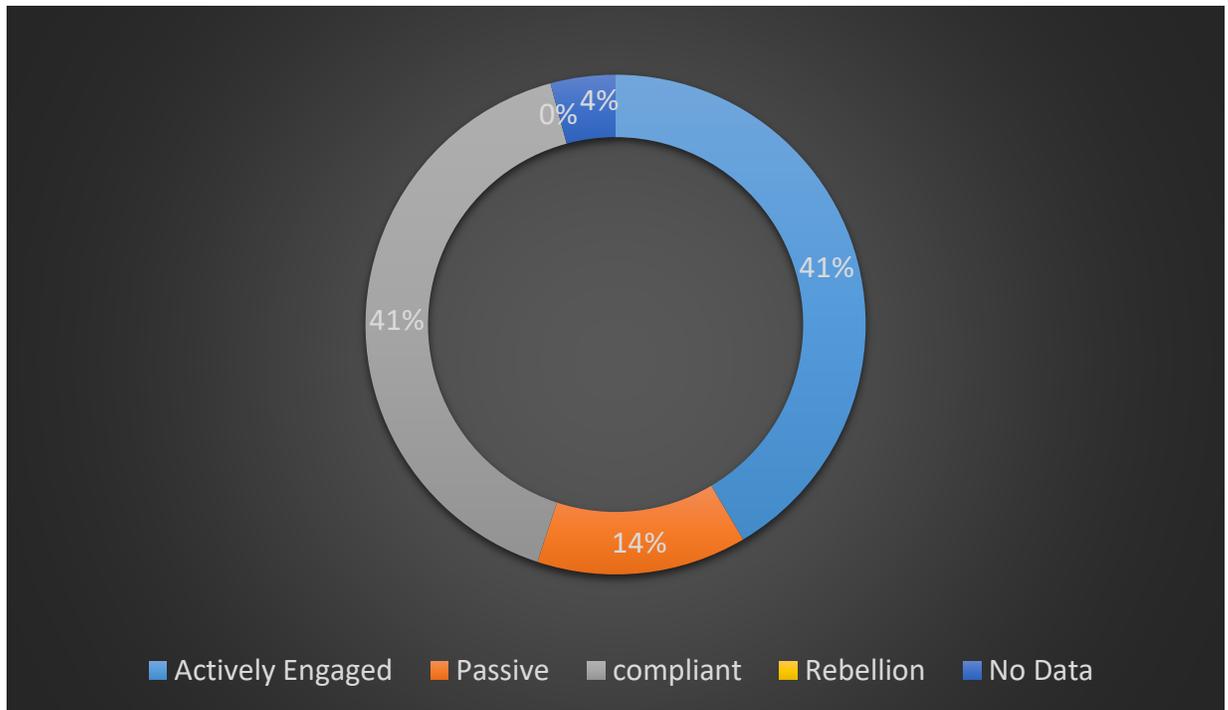


Figure 6. Week three student engagement

Week four had the highest engagement for the entire study, however, it did not correspond to the largest increase in vocabulary acquisition. 64.8% of the children were actively engaged. 0.8% of the children were passive and 5.8% were compliant. No data was collected for 28.6% of the children and 0% of the children were rebellious during the study. Week four corresponds with the use of props and interactive stories in addition to front-loading the vocabulary. Figure 7 demonstrates the student activity for week four.

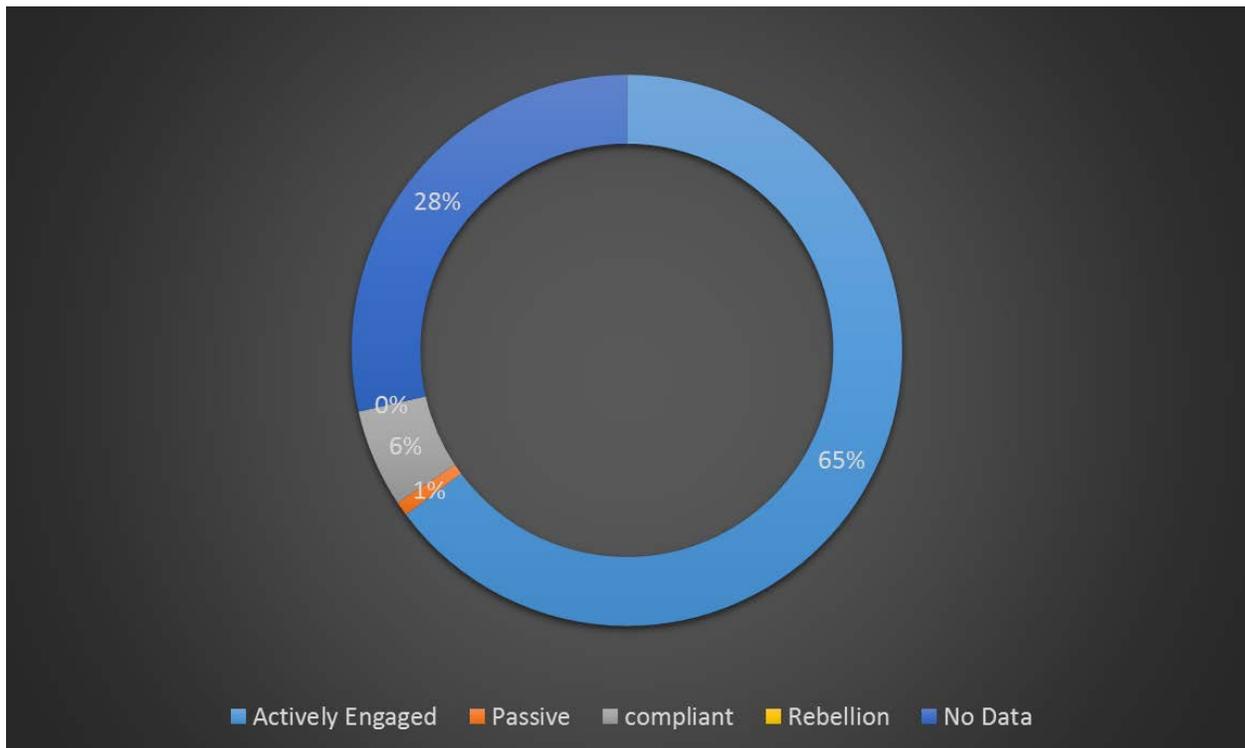


Figure 7. Week four student engagement

The third source of data analyzed was the Observational Field Notes that I completed daily. In the Field Notes, I recorded the books that I read and the comments or questions that I received from the children. The largest vocabulary increase occurred during week three. When analyzing the Field Notes, I was able to see that the books read that week were books about animals in winter; a particular area of interest for my students. In week four, I had the highest level of active engagement. By reading my reflections in the Notes, I was able to see that I used props during that week.

The final source of data analyzed was the Parent Feedback forms. These forms were sent out each week, a total of four times. In week one, 8 parents returned the forms. In week two, 11 parents returned the forms. In week three, 8 parents returned the form and in week four, I received 7. A common thread was the fact that most children did not use the vocabulary words at home. As one parent pointed out, many of the children do not speak English at home and the use of an English word would be unusual in daily conversation. Many children, however, spoke positively about the lesson when asked by their parents.

My research question was: To what effect does front-loading vocabulary have on English Language Learners? Analysis of the data revealed that the highest improvement was seen in children 2, 5, 7, 9 and 14. These five children are the strongest English speakers in the class. Two of these children are native English speakers and the other three are comprised of two advanced non-native (fluent) English speakers and one limited English speaker. Figure 8 demonstrates the cumulative improvement per child.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Child 1	0	0	4	6
Child 2	0	-2	6	8
Child 3	0	-1	0	1
Child 4	0	0	2	2
Child 5	2	3	5	9
Child 6	0	-1	3	5
Child 7	2	0	4	10
Child 8	0	2	2	2
Child 9	0	0	6	9
Child 10	0	-4	0	0
Child 11	0	-2	3	5
Child 12	0	-3	-3	-1
Child 13	0	-1	3	3
Child 14	0	2	9	12
Overall	4	-7	44	71

Figure 8. Cumulative improvement per child

It was hypothesized that English language learners who are actively engaged in story circle are more likely to increase their vocabulary. The children in this study demonstrated the largest vocabulary acquisition when actively engaged in post read-aloud discussion as opposed to being actively engaged in the read-aloud. It is my conclusion that front-loading vocabulary has a positive effect on all students, however, the greatest impact was seen in native English speakers.

Action Plan

My research demonstrated a positive effect on the vocabulary acquisition and interest level of all children participating in the study. The greatest impact was seen in children with a stronger English language knowledge than the ESL students. The two native English speakers that participated in the study and two children with a strong working vocabulary had the greatest increase in their vocabulary acquisition. The focus of the study was to see what effect front-loading vocabulary has on the English as a second language students.

I believe that there are benefits to front-loading vocabulary and I would like to continue to implement front-loading during the daily read aloud. In an effort to increase the vocabulary of ESL students, I will include tier one vocabulary words. Research indicates that tier one words are basic words rarely taught in school (Beck, McKeown, M.G. & Kucan, 2002). Throughout this action research study, I focused on tier two words. Tier two words are high frequency words for mature language users and are found across a variety of domains. In reflection, I question whether tier two words were too challenging for the ESL students and, as a result, I would include tier one words to observe their effect on vocabulary acquisition in the future.

Further, I would also like to tie the reading to an education theme that is carried out in other areas of the classroom. This action research project isolated the daily read aloud. I hypothesize that if the daily read aloud was connected to the classroom learning centers, songs, and lessons, that vocabulary acquisition would be greater as a result of increased exposure to vocabulary words.

Most students expressed positive feelings about the vocabulary assessments, however, the children demonstrated a preference for pointing at images rather than responding verbally. The children were asked two questions to assess whether they knew the vocabulary word prior to the

study. The first question was a direct inquiry asking the children to verbally identify the image. This required the children to demonstrate a higher level of understanding. If the child was unable to answer question 1, I asked the second question that required a lower level of thinking. The second question asked the child to point to one of three images, of which one depicted the correct target vocabulary word and the other two images did not. The children had a slight preference to question two. This led me to believe that many of the children could comprehend the word when the image was present but were unable remember the actual word for application. Because of the preferences to non-verbal communication, I would increase the amount of concrete objects in my vocabulary acquisition assessments. Concrete objects proved to be a useful tool in this action research project. The most significant increase in student interest occurred in week four when I incorporated the use of props and interactive books. In future read alouds, I will look for ways to incorporate concrete objects to keep children engaged.

Previous research has demonstrated that bridging into the child's strongest language is beneficial to the improvement of naming, receptive knowledge and expressive definitions. This study did not bridge language as there were multiple languages represented in the environment. It would be interesting to investigate the effect of bridging in future studies where the classroom had predominantly bi-lingual children with the same native language.

The parent feedback for this action research was insignificant. In future studies, I would use another form of data collection. Due to the fact that most families spoke another language in the home, the children rarely or never spoke the English vocabulary words in conversation with their parents. This did not allow the parents to observe the children in an organic way. Instead, parents prompted the children with the vocabulary words and asked for story details from the daily read aloud.

Most students expressed enthusiasm about learning new vocabulary words. I noticed the children especially excited to listen for the vocabulary words in the daily read aloud. In addition, they liked paraphrasing the meaning of the word or speculating what they thought the word meant prior to hearing it in the context of the story. The children appeared to gain confidence in the vocabulary assessments as time went on. I believe that this occurred because I did not confirm whether their answers were correct or not, and they believed the answers to be correct. By the fourth week, one child was overheard saying, "I know all of these things!"

The overall results from this research show a positive influence in both vocabulary acquisition and student interest. It is my belief that front-loading vocabulary can be a supporting factor in acquiring vocabulary through read alouds. I believe that the selection of the target vocabulary words is an important factor that needs to be considered for the audience. I also believe that multiple exposures to the target vocabulary would increase the likelihood of vocabulary acquisition.

Appendix B
Teacher Observation Log

	11:20 a.m.				11:25 a.m.				11:30 a.m.				11:40 a.m.				11:45 a.m.			
	AE	COM	PASS	REB																
Child 1																				
Child 2																				
Child 3																				
Child 4																				
Child 5																				
Child 6																				
Child 7																				
Child 8																				
Child 9																				
Child 10																				
Child 11																				
Child 12																				
Child 13																				
Child 14																				
Child 15																				
Child 16																				

AE: Authentically engaged and actively participating. COM: Compliant—Participating less than half of the time and do not appear to be engaged.
 PASS: Passive—joining the activity but not engaging.
 REB: Rebellion—students refuse to participate, act disruptive, and attempt to substitute alternative activities.

References

- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (2001). Text talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(1), 10-20.
- Biemiller, A., & Boote, C. (2006). An effective method for building meaning vocabulary in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 44-62.
- Brabham, E.G., & Lynch-Brown, C. (2002). Effects of teachers' reading-aloud styles on vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of students in early elementary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(3), 465-473.
- Calderón, M., August, D., Durán, D., Madden, N., Slavin, R. & M. Gil (2003 and in press). *Spanish to English Transitional Reading: Teacher's Manual*. Baltimore, MD: The Success for All Foundation.
- Kindle, K. J. (2008). *Word learning during read alouds: A study of practice and potential in primary classrooms* (Order No. 3323553). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304601836).
- Neuman, S.B., Copple C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2012). Guided Reading: The Romance and the Reality. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(4), 268–284. doi: 10.1002/TRTR.01123

- Fry, R., & Gonzalez, F. (2008). *A profile of Hispanic public school students*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/08/26/one-in-five-and-growing-fast-a-profile-of-hispanic-public-school-students/>
- Kindle, K. J. (2009). Vocabulary Development During Read-Alouds: Primary Practices. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(3), 202-211.
- Larson, A. L., & Rahn, N. L. (2015). Vocabulary Instruction on Sesame Street: A Content Analysis of the Word on the Street Initiative. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 46(3), 207.
- Lugo-Neris, M. J., Jackson, C. W., & Goldstein, H. (2010). Facilitating Vocabulary Acquisition of Young English Language Learners. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 41(3), 314.
- Méndez, L. I., Crais, E. R., Castro, D. C., & Kainz, K. (2015). A Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Vocabulary Approach for Young Latino Dual Language Learners. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research*, 58(1), 93.
- Rebora, A. (2016). Making a Difference. *Education Week*, 02(01), Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/tsb/articles/2008/09/10/01tomlinson.h02.html>
- Restrepo, M. A., & Towle-Harmon, M. (2008). Addressing emergent literacy in English-language learners skills. *ASHA Leader*, 13(13), 10-13.
- Stahl, S. A., & Nagy, W. E. (2006). *Teaching word meanings*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.