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50 Using Story Listening and Free Voluntary Reading to strengthen Fluency in the Second Language High School Classroom
Ruth Stimart

In recent years, many world language teachers have abandoned the traditional grammar translation model of instruction which emphasizes the study of the structure of the language, and opted for a comprehension-based approach which emphasizes the message of the communication. Rather than rote memorization of thematic vocabulary lists, and instruction of grammar rules, many teachers are employing comprehensible input through storytelling and reading to help students naturally comprehend messages. In order to build the foundation for students to be able to understand and produce the language, they need an abundance of rich, interesting comprehensible input. Researchers among this camp suggest that story is the best way to give input, as good stories are compelling and of high interest to students. Many studies have examined how the use of storytelling paired with student reading affects language acquisition of adult language learners or students of English as a Foreign Language. This study investigates if a combination of storytelling and Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) would improve enjoyment, add confidence and lead to higher acquisition of high frequency vocabulary for high school students in the context of a Spanish class in a Christian private school in the United States.
CURRENT RESEARCH AND TRENDS IN VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: EMPHASIS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Amanda M. Ferris

The development of vocabulary knowledge and skills is critical for reading comprehension and other literacy skills. Elementary aged children begin school with varying amounts of vocabulary and English Language Learners (ELLs) come with significantly less than their English speaking peers. Researchers and educators have given consideration to which words to teach, instructional methods to use, and how to assess student learning to ensure all students have the opportunity for both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge necessary for reading comprehension. Current research of English only and ELLs students shows positive effects for extended and embedded vocabulary instruction of high-utility Tier II words. Measures of assessment for vocabulary is limited and further development is needed to aid teachers in simple tools for classroom use that are appropriate for primary-aged students and ELLs. The field of research for vocabulary development of ELLs is limited. Further research, including longitudinal research is needed to evaluate instructional practices and effects of dual language development to better equip teachers to maximize vocabulary learning and close the gap between ELLs and English speaking peers.

Words are important and the knowledge of them is critical for all of life. They allow us to communicate with one another and with God. Words can bring life, destroy life, and give comfort and hope in a broken world. God chose words to communicate with humans to express himself that we may know him, love him, and follow him. Therefore, the knowledge and understanding of words is of utmost importance for all of life.

To be a literate person, it is fundamental to have a broad knowledge of the meaning of words and how to appropriately use them in multiple contexts. This is recognized by the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CC-ELA) which includes vocabulary acquisition and usage as a component of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Language (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010), thus signifying the importance of vocabulary development as a necessary component of literacy instruction. These three anchor standards are broken down into grade-level standards beginning at the kindergarten level progressing all the way up through 12th grade, consequently emphasizing the importance of vocabulary development as a necessary component of literacy instruction. Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition and knowledge are closely intertwined with other aspects of literacy, including listening and reading comprehension, as it provides context and links to prior knowledge that allows for understanding.

The development of vocabulary word occurs in children and adults incidentally and explicitly through intentional learning. Learning of vocabulary does not occur at the same rate for all students. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and English language learners (ELLs) enter school with significantly smaller vocabularies than their English-speaking peers or those of higher economic status (McKeown & Beck, 2014; Carlo, et al., 2004). Thus, these students begin school with a disadvantage for multiple literacy skills, including reading comprehension. If word knowledge is key to reading comprehension, then development of vocabulary is of utmost importance for English speakers and ELLs alike.

It is important that all students have opportunities to acquire vocabulary skills as they grow and develop into becoming literate members of society and as image-bearers to know and display the glory of God through words. Therefore, I desired to know what current research says about vocabulary development in order to become a more knowledgeable educator. Specifically, I wanted to learn what methods of instruction are effective and beneficial to enable my ELL students and native English speakers to develop in their vocabulary knowledge. The ELL students at my school score low on vocabulary on standardized testing. My desire is to learn about specific instructional practices that are effective for ELLs and closing the achievement gap between them and native English speakers.

Methods of Research

The primary sources I used in my research were ERIC and EBSCO databases. I found the terms “vocabulary development” and “vocabulary instruction” were the most helpful in searching, but they provided a vast number of articles. Narrowing the search to focus on elementary-aged students, ELLs, and multilingual students allowed me to identify specific studies related to my topic. Additionally, the work by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan in Bringing Words to Life (2013) provided me with current and significant studies to review. The number of studies that focused on elementary-aged ELL, multilingual and bilingual students was meager and not always current. Some older studies are included due to the lack of current studies in this field. During my
review, three main topics arose that I will discuss here 1) word selection, 2) types of vocabulary instruction, and 3) assessment.

Vocabulary Word Choice

The amount of words in the English language is enormous. It is impossible for students in their K-12 education to learn all of them. Therefore, methods of selecting specific words to teach is necessary. Two main ways of categorizing and selecting vocabulary words emerged in the literature: tiered vocabulary and word lists.

Tiered Vocabulary

In my review of literature, the most widely recognized method for categorizing and selecting vocabulary words for instruction purposes was developed by Beck et al. (2008, 2013). They developed a three-tiered system of categorizing words based on frequency and utility. Tier I words are made up of basic, high-frequency vocabulary words that can be mostly acquired through conversational English. They estimate there are around 8,000 Tier I word families. These are words that English-only (EO) students need little to no formal instruction to know. Even ELLs often master these words quickly due to the high exposure in oral English that is embedded in a sociocultural and contextual framework to ease the learning. Thus Tier I words need little instruction even for ELLs. The words in Tier II and Tier III contain what is generally known as academic vocabulary. Tier II words are comprised of general academic words which are described as “high utility [words] for mature language users and are found across a variety of domains” (Beck et al., 2013, p. 9). These words are not as likely to be learned in conversational English but are critical to reading comprehension and becoming a literate member of society. An estimated 7,000 word families fall in this category. For ELLs these words are more challenging to learn as they are less likely to encounter them in everyday speech and are less concrete making them harder to understand. While these challenges are real, it makes the Tier II words all the more important for ELL students to learn to help them bridge the gap. Finally, Tier III words are content or domain specific academic words. These words are used less frequently in conversational or printed English outside of their academic domain.

Beck et al. (2013) suggested that teachers dedicate their focus and efforts for vocabulary instruction on Tier II words, stating “a rich knowledge of words in the second tier can have a powerful impact on verbal functioning” (p. 9) and thus on reading comprehension and other literacy skills. Tier III words are important for comprehension, but only when studying the specific academic content. Therefore, it is suggested to teach Tier III words at the time when the knowledge is needed. The Common Core English Language Arts State Standards (CCELA) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) recognize and promote the tiered system as Appendix A provides a guide for teachers to identify words of different tiers. Additionally, the books *Bringing Words to Life* (Beck et al., 2013) and *Creating Robust Vocabulary* (Beck et al., 2008) also give practical advice for selecting Tier II vocabulary from reading texts.

Word Lists

Another approach found in selecting vocabulary to study is word lists. Andrew Biemiller (2009, 2012) and Coxhead (2000) developed word lists specifically with ELLs in mind. Biemiller focused on word lists for elementary-aged ELLs by identifying high-priority word meanings that are necessary for students to understand. The primary-aged list includes 3,000 word meanings for all learners of which 1,600 words are high-priority for ELLs. The upper-elementary list contains 3,000 word meanings for all learners of which 2,900 words are high-priority for ELLs in the upper-elementary. The high-priority words for ELLs were determined based on knowing that students’ prior vocabulary knowledge is used to build new words upon. Similarly, Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word List (AWL) is focused on identifying word families that are most frequent and important for ELLs. However, Coxhead’s list is geared towards English speakers of other languages and is not as commonly used with elementary students. Many of the words identified on the AWL would also be considered Tier II words; therefore, it can be a useful tool for teachers to reference when selecting words for ELLs.

Vocabulary Instructional Methods

For clarity and further explanation, I will group vocabulary instructional methods found in research and classroom practices into three primary types 1) extended, 2) embedded, and 3) incidental or exposure. Extended vocabulary instruction is teacher-directed instruction of vocabulary words with extensive follow-up by multiple exposures, interactions, and practice with the target words to deepen understanding. Embedded vocabulary instruction is when the meaning of a word is supplied within the text. For independent readers, the definition immediately follows the target word in the text. For younger children where text is often read aloud, definitions for target words are presented orally when the word is read. In embedded instruction, there is no other instruction or purposeful exposure supplied. Incidental instruction has two definitions. One is simply when targeted words are encountered in a text with no explanation. Students are to gain meaning of the word from the context of the reading. Another form of incidental instruction has a focus on oral and productive vocabulary development. In this type, teachers and adults model vocabulary usage with or without explanation during
daily interactions. Within each of these categories there are some variations of the instructional methods that will be explored later.

Two different teaching and learning theories support these instructional methods. Extended vocabulary instruction is rooted in the cognitive processing theory (McKeown & Beck, 2014). The “active processing–active or attentive mental manipulation of ideas–” (McKeown & Beck, 2014, p. 521) and seeing and manipulating the target words in the initial context and multiple other contexts is what helps students mediate the new information and make connections to prior learning, thus enabling them to know the target words at a deeper level. The socio-cultural theory of learning undergirds embedded instruction. The initial context and situation of the targeted word helps students mediate the meaning of the words as they are presented, allowing them to retain the meaning of them (Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015; McKeown & Beck, 2014). This is the only context necessary for learning the meaning of the word.

The goal of extended vocabulary instruction is deep meaning of the targeted vocabulary words with the purpose of students being able to use the words effectively in everyday speech and writing along with the improvement of reading comprehension. This goes beyond the traditional view of vocabulary learning as knowing the definition for a targeted word.

**Extended Vocabulary Instruction**

Extended vocabulary instruction is an effective method for developing vocabulary of preschool and primary students. (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli Jr., & Kapp, 2009; Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015; McKeown & Beck, 2014). A study with preschool children yielded large effect sizes of 1.06 to 1.24 when extended instruction was compared to incidental exposure (Lotus-Rattan, e. al., 2016). Three activities using both pictures and other contexts were used to reinforce the target words. The week-long study assessed word knowledge with expressive and receptive measures. However, the focus remained on definitions of the word; therefore, it is unknown the depth of knowledge that students gained through the extended instruction. McKeown and Beck (2014) sought to measure not only definitional word knowledge of Kindergarteners but “higher-order language processing… of context integration, listening comprehension, and production” (p. 522) when instructed in the rich manner they found that the context integration and production measure showed minor gains, while the listening comprehension task did not show gains over the other instructional methods. A longer study with similar measures may indicate differently the effects of extended vocabulary instruction on listening comprehension as this study was just one week in duration (McKeown & Beck, 2014). Likewise, Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli Jr, and Kapp (2009), sought to measure depth of learning with extended instruction. The results suggest that depth of knowledge, as measured by assessments that included higher-level contextual knowledge in novel contexts, is stronger with the use of extended instruction. However, depth of knowledge of words may take reinforcement over time to ensure that these word meanings remain strong (Coyne, et al., 2009).

Carlo, et al. (2004) built upon the previous research in vocabulary instruction by confirming that the same strategies found effective with EO students are effective with ELL students. The results of the study showed gains for both the ELL and EO fourth and fifth grade students in both word knowledge and reading comprehension. Additionally, the authors confirmed that word knowledge did positively affect reading comprehension. Although this study is more than 10 years old, it is significant as it was the first to focus on instructional strategies and effectiveness with ELL students. More recently, August, Artzi, and Barr (2016) conducted a study comparing embedded versus extended instructional strategies with third and fourth grade ELL students. Students in both groups made gains in vocabulary knowledge; however, the extended instructional group made greater gains showing the strength of extended instruction for developing depth of knowledge with Tier II and Tier III words.

One study focused on the effectiveness of extended instruction for Spanish-speaking ELL students when instruction was provided in Spanish (Cena, et al., 2013). The four-week long study on Spanish-speaking English learning first-graders found explicit extended instruction in Spanish was effective for developing a deeper vocabulary knowledge than non-extended instruction. This study adds to the effectiveness of extended instruction regardless of the language of instruction. While there was no significant effect on English language proficiency, vocabulary instruction in the home language is a possible way to strengthen ELL students English vocabulary development and reading ability (Cena, et al., 2013). Furthermore, according to research continuing to develop vocabulary and literacy skills in another language does not appear to hinder English literacy learning (Uchikoshi, 2014).

One unique study of extended vocabulary instruction did not use a common text from which targeted words are chosen to study, rather this study relied upon classroom content for the selection of words (St. John & Vance, 2014). Students successfully gained knowledge of the Tier II targeted words through small group intervention using extended methods based on the work of Beck et al. (2013). The design and methodology of the study was weak, yet this study may indicate that
Extended vocabulary instruction can be effective without a text.

**Embedded Vocabulary Instruction**

While extended vocabulary instruction aims at depth of word knowledge, embedded vocabulary instruction can allow for breadth of vocabulary development. Several research studies of Beck et al. (2013) indicate that primary-aged children can be successful learning between three and 10 Tier II words per story when using extended vocabulary instruction. If students learn 10 words per week over 40 weeks of school that is 400 words. This is a significant amount of words, but when compared to the 4,000-word deficit that second grade students with lower vocabulary knowledge need to learn to match their peers, 400 words is a small increase (Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli Jr., & Kapp, 2009). The concern is that the gap between students with lower and higher level vocabulary knowledge remains constant or grows larger as both groups of students acquire more words. Thus a Matthew Effect develops between the two groups of students in vocabulary knowledge and reading ability (Stanovich, 1986).

Embedded instruction offers the potential of requiring less instructional time for learning new words, therefore, providing an opportunity to learn more words than extended instruction which may lessen the Matthew Effect. However, these words are learned at a lower level of understanding making it difficult to determine their impact on reading comprehension (Coyne, et al., 2009).

August, et al., (2016) suggested that embedded instruction was effective in teaching targeted words to ELL students as it yielded effect size gains of .57 in word knowledge. Embedded instruction, while less effective than extended instruction, is better than no vocabulary instruction or incidental instruction when learning academic vocabulary for ELLs (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). Coyne et al. (2009) recommend that embedded instruction is most effective for Tier II words that have immediate consequences for reading comprehension, thus, allowing students to gain a breadth of vocabulary knowledge that can become a basis for deeper learning through additional instruction or incidental exposure at another time.

Instructional Practices and Activities. Since research shows that both extended and embedded instructional methods can positively affect vocabulary development of all students, it is important for classroom teachers to know what kind of instructional practices and activities support these methods. To support both methods, a best practice is to present student-friendly definitions and pre-teach for ELL students (August, et al., 2016; Beck, et al., 2013; Silverman & Hines, 2009). Additionally, for extended instruction, specific classroom activities that allow for students to manipulate words and word meanings include: interactive word walls, graphic organizers and concept maps, written and oral sentence frames, use of cognates for ELL students, morphological analysis, word associations, and cloze sentences (August, et al., 2016; Beck, et al., 2013; Carlo, et al., 2004; Donnelly & Roe, 2010; Manyak, 2010). Other ideas instructional practices can be found in vocabulary instruction books such as *101 Strategies to Make Academic Vocabulary Stick* (2017). However, teachers need to evaluate activities in such books against the purposes for extended instruction.

**Incidental Vocabulary Instruction**

Incidental vocabulary instruction or exposure to sophisticated words through daily classroom interactions is a method to add breadth to students’ vocabularies without direct instruction (Lane & Allen, 2010). While incidental instruction is less formal, it still requires intentional and thoughtful planning from teachers. Additionally, like extended instruction, it is necessary for students to have multiple and varied encounters with the target word to develop the meaning in an oral context (Lane & Allen, 2010). Lane and Allen (2010) proposed that teachers make use of adult-child interactions to develop word consciousness. Strategies for this include modeling usage of complex words by building these words into daily classroom routines to ensure repetition and exposure to the word in multiple ways. While these strategies focus on oral language through incidental instruction they are indicative of “robust vocabulary instruction” according to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2008; 2013). However, the recommendations of Lane and Allen (2010) do not pertain to vocabulary learning in a storybook context. Text based incidental vocabulary learning is the least effective method for learning new words (August, et al., 2016; Coyne, et al., 2009). Students show very small effects with incidental or exposure instruction (Coyne, et al., 2009; Lotus-Rattan, et al., 2016).

**Assessment of Vocabulary**

Multiple choice, true/false, reading comprehension, and cloze sentences are non-standard measures commonly used by teachers to measure vocabulary learned in the classroom context. However, each of these create barriers for younger elementary students as they each require reading and writing knowledge, making them only successful with upper elementary students (Kearns & Biemiller, 2010/2011). Furthermore, the focus is often on low-level knowledge of word definitions, which makes it difficult to know the wider implications on high-order learning tasks such as reading comprehension (McKeown & Beck, 2014). Yet, multiple choice and true/false assessments have potential to measure low-level knowledge all the way to more sophisticated
nuances of word meanings due to their flexibility (Beck, et al., 2013). While they have potential for confusing word knowledge and guessing the correct answer, multiple choice tests remain reliable measures for determining vocabulary ability and maintain a high correlation with reading comprehension levels (Beck, et al., 2013). Beck, et al. (2013) also suggested turning instructional activities that strive to develop deeper knowledge of words into assessments. These include the use of example/non-example, having students explain their choices for choosing an answer on a closed assessment, open ended questions that require students to use the word in context, and “context interpretation” tasks in which students respond to questions about sentences containing target words” (p. 106).

The most common assessment to measure vocabulary knowledge of young children is the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Third Edition (PPVT–III). This standardized measure demands intense time with one-on-one testing and relies on pictorial identification, thus limiting the type of words assessed to ones with concrete representations (Kearns & Biemiller, 2010/2011). Therefore, the PPVT–III does not allow for the assessment of less frequent words described as Tier II. Kearns and Biemiller (2010/2011) developed another measure called the Two-Question Vocabulary Measure (TQVM) to use with younger elementary students. The TQVM has multiple advantages over the PPVT–III, while maintaining validity. The oral presentation allows the assessment to be administered to a group of children in a timely manner. The targeted vocabulary is embedded in a linguistic context, allowing for nearly any word to be assessed.

Finally, the TQVM questions “tap deeper into the student’s knowledge of word meanings” (Kearns & Biemiller, 2010/2011, p. 34) thus supporting the ideas of Beck, et al. (2013) that more than word recognition is necessary to know a word. The goal of TQVM is for classroom teachers, particularly in K-2, to utilize this “Two-questions” method to be able to assess the robust vocabulary instruction that research suggests is necessary for increasing vocabulary knowledge (Kearns & Biemiller, 2010/2011).

Recommendations

In general, much research on vocabulary development and instruction has occurred in the recent decade. The research and current books on vocabulary instruction provide insight and guidance to teachers as they choose vocabulary words for instruction. With limited time for vocabulary, instruction it is useful for teachers to know what words to focus on that may have greater impact beyond the vocabulary lesson. Furthermore, research suggests that the same words are important for both ELL and English speaking students thus making it easier to not have two different lists of words to teach.

The research clearly suggests that both extended and embedded instruction are effective methods to learn vocabulary. Research and current books on vocabulary instruction give a plethora of suggestions for instructional activities and tools that follow either of these methods. These resources are useful for teachers as they plan classroom instruction based on best practices in ways that honors the nature of the learner. Furthermore, it is helpful to know that research suggests that both ELL and English speaking students will benefit from the same instructional methods. The limitations of classroom time make it essential for teachers to make decisions as to which words to teach for depth versus which to teach for breadth along with the quantity of words to teach. It would be beneficial to have research that evaluates the benefits of combining extended and embedded instruction.

Current, research centers primarily on native English speakers with some ELL students participating in studies. It was challenging to find research that focused only on ELL students and vocabulary instruction. The duration of these studies tended to be short, thus limiting the understanding of long-term effects of different vocabulary instructional methods and the impact on reading comprehension. On the other hand, the availability of articles discussing the importance of vocabulary development and ideas for instructional activities for ELL students was plentiful. It would be helpful to have further research studies testing the effectiveness of specific instructional activities with ELL students over longer time periods especially given the consideration that learning a new language takes multiple years.

The research showed that assessment of vocabulary and word knowledge is challenging to measure. Most of the existing measures are not friendly to classroom use especially for primary age students nor do they measure the depth of word knowledge encouraged through extended instruction. However, current research gives guidance to teachers in creating assessments for their classroom that measure depth of knowledge and not just definitional knowledge. I think it would be helpful for additional research to focus on assessment tools that measure depth of knowledge. This area of future research has the potential to enable teachers to easily develop and choose appropriate assessment techniques that can measure success and drive further instruction. Thus making assessments an integral part of the learning cycle propels students forward as they become increasingly more skilled in their understanding of language in its many forms.
References


CURRENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN HIGH SCHOOL WRITING INSTRUCTION

Caroline A. Kimball

Writing is a skill taught in every year of a student's education, and it is necessary for college and career; however, in 2004 alone, corporations spent 3.1 billion dollars to re-teach employees to write. With more careers requiring good writing skills, the question of why students are not better equipped with this skill arises. Certain practices have improved high school writing over the years. After years of ineffective teaching, we have learned that Process Writing Approach and Grammar does improve student writing. Research prompted the field of writing instruction to correct course and produce better practices. Writing in the twenty-first century involves the added dimensions of technology and assessment, where technology can serve as a pedagogical help while assessment permits teaching to measure performance and learning. These are key in shaping the future of writing instruction. Further research into assessment and its impact on student writing is needed. Also, research into the effectiveness of a combination of practices would be helpful as most classrooms are not “all one practice or nothing” in instruction.

Writing is a necessary skill for success in higher education and future careers. Those who do not learn to write well are at a disadvantage as their grades suffer and they are not sufficiently prepared for the working world. “Two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility, certain types of writing are commonly required, and an estimated $3 billion is spent each year training employees to write” (Addison & McGee, 2010, p. 151). Opportunities for advancement within many careers are limited as writing is a key to advancement (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 3). For years, there has been a call for improvement of students’ writing skills and instruction in high school and college.

We need to help diversify the types of writing taught through a vertical curriculum that begins in high school, continues through college, and specifically fosters transfer across contexts. Promoting a balanced emphasis on literary analysis alongside rhetorical analysis in high school could lead to students who are better prepared for the writing required of them in college and the workplace. Here we imagine an interdisciplinary curriculum in high school and college English departments that does not displace literary studies but rather re-establishes the importance of English studies broadly conceived at all levels and within all disciplines. (Addison & McGee, 2010, p. 170)

Writing instruction is necessary as learning to write is not a naturally absorbed skill. It requires diligence to achieve competency. Even though the history of writing education began in the Greek empire, it became essential to mass education during the nineteenth century when public education was established in the United States. Yet, the emphasis in writing instruction has changed greatly over the years, progressing from mechanics to content and creativity. Then, during the 1960s and 1970s, writing instruction that had been product-oriented became process-oriented as research suggested that grammar and other detailed instruction in mechanics did not improve students’ writing ability (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012). Various pedagogical approaches have emerged since then in order to teach writing more effectively. Process Writing Approach/Process Genre Approach, Socio-cultural Historical Approach, Grammar Instruction, and Evidence-Based Practice are currently the major emphases in writing instruction. Overlapping all of these are questions related to technology/digital tools and assessment.

In my junior English III class, my students’ writing skills each year have been lacking basic understanding in content and form, not to mention grammar and punctuation. Students should have a fundamental understanding of writing, but my students are clearly only a part of the growing trend of students lacking fundamental writing skills (Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016). It is not that they have not received writing instruction, but they have not retained it. They are talented students with potential beyond what they believe, so why have they not retained and progressed in their skills as writers? My goal as an educator of junior English students is to lead them in the process of synthesizing all that they have learned until this time in their education. I love and care for these unique and valued persons, and I yearn for them to achieve all they can. In attempting to unravel the curious conundrum of their lack of skills, I examined research on the practice of high school writing instruction published during the past fifteen years.

Search Methodologies

In my research, I consulted various databases linked to the Covenant College Anna E. Kresge Memorial Library: ERIC, JSTOR, Ebsco. I searched generally for “high school writing instruction,” and for specific practices: “process writing,” “grammar instruction,” “socio-cultural historical,” “evidence-based practice,” “writing
in the 21st century.” Peer-reviewed journal articles from the last 10 or so years were selected as well as meta-analyses of the major literature. Two books, *Preparing to Teach Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice* (2010) and *Handbook of Writing Research* (2016), were also consulted.

**Current Research and Practices**

**Process Writing Approach and Process Genre Approach**

The Process Writing Approach had been developed for twenty years before it emerged as a main choice for classroom writing instruction (Lucas, 1993). Currently, “[the process approach to writing instruction is one of the most popular methods] for teaching writing” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). Williams (2014) highlights the work, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, based on research during the 1960s which applied empirical designs and methodologies to address pedagogical questions regarding the subject of writing. Writing is identified as a process with many stages (p. 56-57). Even though there is no universally accepted definition for the method (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham & Sandmel, 2011), the Process Writing Approach is a writing instruction practice in which students progress through stages/cycles/steps of learning: “planning (setting goals, generating ideas, organizing ideas), translating (putting a writing plan into action), and reviewing (evaluating, editing, revising)” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396; Williams, 2014; Lucas, 1993; van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & van Steendam, 2016).

The Process Writing Approach shifts from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. Instead of giving long lectures about how to write, the teacher lectures for ten minutes before having students write and work through part of the writing cycle (Williams, 2014). These parts included revision and planning (Torrance, 2016; Langford, 2015) because the Process Writing Approach requires time for students to write in class, choosing their own topics, developing purpose statements, drafting and reflecting, and then redrafting their pieces. Small groups of students work together to discuss and critique their writing with the goal of improvement. The teacher becomes a coach directing the entire process.

Critiques of the process approach to writing instruction have stated that writing is only a part of a curriculum, and that peer workshops did not seem workable in a public-school classroom (Williams, 2014, p. 59). Indeed, “the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008), [stated] only 33% of eighth-grade and 24% of 12th-grade students perform at or above the proficient level in writing…. If partial mastery is interpreted as performing below grade level, then 67% of eighth-grade and 76% of 12th-grade students can be considered as writing below grade level” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). Therefore, teachers and administration have called for reform to writing instruction. The Writer’s Workshop (another name for the process approach) has been used exclusively, or in combination with more traditional skills instruction. Along with this, the National Writing Project “provides professional development in how to use the process writing approach to more than 100,000 teachers a year” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

So how effective is the Process Writing Approach? Graham and Sandmel (2011) investigated this writing approach and concluded that the approach was helping students learn to write in general education classes, but only moderately. However, students classified as struggling writers did not experience improvement in writing skills nor were they motivated to write. While the Process Approach provides tools for writing instruction, it is not sufficient on its own (Tudor, 2016; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). The National Writing Project, which began in 1974 and “focuses the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of our nation’s educators on sustained efforts to improved writing and learning for all learners” (“The National Writing Project”), has added more specific instructions over the years (Graham & Perin, 2007). The Process Genre Writing Approach is an adaptation of the Process Writing Approach, combining traditional writing approaches, while providing students with genre knowledge (Tudor, 2016). This approach involves a process where “learners identify why, to whom, what and how they will produce a text…[They] are guided through key processes, including planning and drafting…[and] will probably jump between these stages as necessary in preparation for a final draft” (Tudor, 2016, p. 3).

**Sociocultural Historical Approach**

The Sociocultural Historical Approach for instruction in writing has emerged as a result of the interconnected global community which has been created by today’s technology. Technology and the occupational required tasks in the twenty-first century demand that workers are able to communicate in many mediums (Bazerman, 2016; Bazerman, 2011; Kwok, Ganding, Hull, & Moje, 2016). Charles Bazerman (2016) states the foundations of this approach: “Writing is a social technology designed to communicate among people. It is learned and produced in social circumstances, establishes social relationships, changes the writer’s social presence, creates shared meanings, and accomplishes social action” (p. 11). Writing happens within a social, cultural, and historical setting, and that setting dictates how a writer responds. Every choice is grounded within one’s social
background and culture, and these shape the student’s writing and learning process (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012).

Writing education occurs within the academic environment that assigns and tests the skill (Kwok, et al., 2016; Bazerman, 2011). However, while writing opportunities occur in a specific career or field, they do not naturally materialize in the school environment. Students are not receiving specific writing instruction with “authentic functions and situations for the development of writing… [as this instruction] is often at odds with mandated assessments and standards framed around decontextualized skills” (Hillocks, 2002). The Sociocultural Historical Approach is instruction with the premise that learning transpires within practice, so that repetition with this approach builds knowledge, ability, and understanding as to how to use technology (Kwok, et al., 2016, p. 258). Practice and participation in real-world activities are the missing links within the high school classroom. Kwok, et al. (2016) raise the crux of the issue within high school writing as this: “literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (p. 258-259). As students write for specific situations, the experience of those situations facilitates learning (Bazerman, 2016). Therefore, the high school writing experience should provide those developmental opportunities.

Grammar Instruction

Since the 1960s, the debate as to the effectiveness of grammar instruction has been waxing and waning (Hudson, 2016; Jones, Myhill, & Bailey, 2013; Locke, 2009; Robinson & Feng, 2016; Williams, 2014). Studies from the early 1960s were summarized by Herman Muller at the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, when he stated that “grammatical knowledge did little to improve speaking and writing and that ‘the teaching of grammar has been chiefly a waste of time’ (1967: 68)” (Locke, 2009, p. 183). After the conference, and based upon recent research in the following years during which grammar instruction was concluded to be ineffectual in the support of language and writing development, most “Anglophone countries” abandoned grammar instruction. However, in the last twenty years, other researchers have revisited the previous realizations and concluded that the earlier research had missed the mark (Jones et al., 2013; Locke 2009, Hudson, 2016, Williams, 2014).

Much educational policy of today is based upon the findings of the education research of the 1960s and 1970s. Because of the gaps in grammar pedagogy, as well as the need for clarification of terms, new research and investigations have developed. One main area for teachers to consider is the context in which grammar is taught. There is a difference between teaching grammar and applying grammar. Teaching grammar is instruction in the terms, ideas, and organization of grammar leading to knowledge about grammar. However, applying grammar is using the knowledge about grammar in subjects, like when writing about other instructional areas. The key is to realize that teaching grammar alone will not effect improvement in writing, as the many studies of the twentieth century have revealed. In fact, “explicit instruction in grammar…[specifically,] grammatical patterns such as modal verbs, and [application of the] taught grammar directly to writing tasks…does indeed improve writing” (Hudson, 2016, p. 296). This idea is summarized by Bush, Weaver, Anderson and Bills.

Drawing on theory and practice… rather than trying to ‘cover’ all grammatical skills, something traditionally done in many classrooms, teachers can more successfully teach less grammar with better results by focusing on key grammatical options and skills in the context of actual writing, through the writing process and over time (2006, p. 77).

Another area to be considered as to whether grammar instruction is helpful in the writing process is the teacher’s own competence and confidence. In education and research through the 1970s, teachers were considered experts in grammar. Since grammar instruction faded from the academic world in the 1970s, many educators do not have the grammar knowledge or experience to teach grammar with confidence, so it is not difficult to believe that few students have learned the basics of grammar. Teachers are the key variable in educating students, yet this is an ever-changing variable as with people involved in any educational research project. Clarification of the teachers’ grammar skills within the research studies is necessary in order to understand what the results reveal (Hudson, 2016; Jones, et al., 2013). Hudson (2016) asserts, “[One explanation for the decline in grammar teaching during the early 20th century is that universities failed to provide the academic training that future teachers needed” (p. 295). For effectiveness, the application of grammar instruction to the process of writing is dependent upon the teacher who instructs.

Evidence-based Practice

With the call for educational reform in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, increased accountability to standards-based criteria, and the demand for positive student impact, the need for evidence-based practices (EBP) arose. There was and is a research-practice gap, meaning “there is a disparity between the findings of scientific research on effective educational practices and what actually occurs in schools and classrooms” (Cook, Smith, & Tankersley, 2012, p. 495). To fill this gap, the process encompasses using research evidence to determine the best manner to instruct, assess, and manage stu-
Students. These EBPs are shown repeatedly to be effective through scientific testing.

EBPs “[represent] a systematic approach to determining which research-based practices are supported by a sufficient number of research studies that (a) are of high methodological quality, (b) use appropriate research designs that allow for assessment of effectiveness, and (c) demonstrate meaningful effect sizes such that they merit educators’ trust that the practice works. (p. 497)

Researchers have reviewed multiple studies which include quantitative and qualitative studies to identify EBPs. The effectiveness is measured over time, across different research designs, and has to have a positive effect upon students’ writing. The more comprehensive the criteria in the studies, the more trusted the outcomes (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016, p. 211; Graham & Gillespie, 2011). “Basically, EBPs provide a more trustworthy source of information when compared to practices acquired through professional opinion and teachers’ experiences” (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016, p. 213).

Teachers should consider the EBPs with their knowledge of their students, themselves, and school context, and choose the best strategies to meet the needs of their students (Graham & Gillespie, 2011; Graham, et al., 2016). The general EBPs in writing have been established by researchers for the classroom instruction of writing: Graham, Harris, and Chambers (2016) provide a “general roadmap [or] set of guidelines for teaching writing based on [their] collective findings...[These] are principles for teaching writing to students in grades 1 to 12...[resulting] in six evidence-based recommendations: 1. Write; 2. Create a supportive writing environment; 3. Teach writing skills, strategies, knowledge, and motivation; 4. Provide feedback; 5. Use 21st-century writing tools; and 6. Use writing as a tool to support student learning” (pp. 220-221). It was concluded by Troia (2014) that students must be given ample time to write, as this is a major reason for the lack of students’ abilities to write, and write every day, in all subjects as the EBPs attest.

**Writing Instruction in the Twenty-first Century Technology/Digital Tools**

Since the progression of media, from films being shown in the classroom and video tapes to present-day smartphones, smartboards, and computers, technology has developed and has the possibility to impact learning. Teachers are bombarded with a plethora of possibilities to use technology, mostly with the idea of improving instruction, however not utilizing the technology to its potential (Williams, 2014). In most cases, classroom technologies are employed by the teachers for presentational purposes supporting traditional methods of teaching (Applebee and Langer, 2011). As technology is an ever-present part of the twenty-first century world, educators are exploring how to balance its use in the classroom. When Applebee and Langer (2011) published their review of Applebee’s 1979-1980 study, *Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas*, the technology Applebee mentioned was only computers and word processors. The classroom has transformed in the 37 years since then, however. “Students use the computer as a text processor, as a source of information, and as a tool for communication” (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, p. 189).

Blankenship and Margarella (2014) report several findings from their literature “review of relevant research on writing, technology, and instruction” (p. 150). First, they found that when technology is used appropriately and effectively, there are possibilities of student writing improvement. They realized from the literature that technology and media are utilized within the classroom, but more attention is to be given to the manner in which students create with the technology. They reported that level of integration of information, with immediate access to primary sources, helped to improve student writing. Second, Blankenship and Margarella (2014) discovered students were motivated and inspired by the utilization of technology. In other words, students, who were not learning, are reengaged through the use of technology to the learning process, demonstrated in improved scores and a stronger learning process. Finally, Blankenship and Margarella (2014) reveal that the interaction with the available technologies in the classroom may develop stronger grasps of the writing concepts. For example, when the teacher provides primary sources within a PowerPoint presentation and students immediately interact with those sources, deeper learning occurs. The traditional classroom lecture format about the primary sources is changed with the use of technologies that bring the primary sources directly to the classroom (pp. 150-153).

For writing instruction, “technology changes the concept of text” (Italics in original text; Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, p. 190). With diverse communication in the digital space, Schriver (as noted by Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012) stated, “Writing is now ‘just’ one of the production systems within document design or information design” (p. 190). The concept of text envelops more than the words on a page, but images, and video may also be considered text. The definition of a literate person has also changed into a person who is a “critical thinker and consumer of information and aware of the variety of meaning inherent to multiple media forms... [as well as] continuously learning and updating their knowledge of how to use...
technologies and how to communicate within them” (p. 190).

Because of many new “texts,” the question of language and what is permitted and taught arises. High school students use “text speak” or “net talk” when texting, Snapchatting, or emailing. This is abbreviated language or slang for the teen population. The idea of this becoming acceptable writing has been suggested by some educators, however. Williams (2014) clarifies that slang is the method of communication of a closed group (in this case, high school students) that helps members identify with the group. This is one reason why it is not prudent to permit this type of text into students’ formal writing. Another reason is that the educator’s goal is to improve students’ writing, and to help them write with language associated with the different disciplines/subjects and careers. Slang is not permitted in these areas, and students’ instruction is to improve their skill in writing (p. 245). As mentioned earlier, with the rising cost of re-teaching employees to write, the necessity of instruction in writing becomes acute (Graham, 2008).

Technology presents more than a mode for writing in the classroom. It is utilized to assist in the entirety of the writing process, to motivate students, and to help student retention of material. This is realized in special population classrooms (Blankenship & Margarella, 2014; Saulsburry, Kilpatrick, Wolbers, & Dostal, 2015). “Special population classrooms are defined as classrooms catering to special education students, students with emotional, physical, or behavioral disabilities, minority students and English language learners” (Blankenship & Margarella, 2014, p. 153). These classrooms have utilized technology from instruction to assessment, much more so than regular classrooms. Technology fills the gaps in the needs special populations’ students have, while connecting the students to the world outside of the classroom. Saulsburry et al. (2015) demonstrated the capacities in which technology helped students to create a writing project. Every aspect of the project, from topic to “publication,” was linked to a specific technology: Skype, wireless keyboard, Word document, and tablets. For their students with hearing and behavior difficulties, the digital tools were integrated into the instruction to meet the needs of each student. “We are living in a technology-infused world where most of our students live digitally connected lives. Integrating technology and finding the right digital tools motivates our students and fits their lives. It also fits into effective instructional patterns” (p. 34).

Assessment

In the day of instant information, assessment of writing is challenging. A teacher may determine a student’s ability to write by the student’s performance in response to an assignment. The written text is assessed, not the process within the student’s mind as to how that text was created (Williams, 2014; Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012). Assessment is the core of education. In today’s culture of high stakes’ testing and the results of student learning for validation of education, more pressure than ever is upon the teacher to prepare and produce students who perform well (Deane, 2011).

Paul Deane (2011) discusses the balance between the testing situation and real-world writing. For the teacher or administrator, issues of a controlled environment, assigned topic, no sources, and time limits, create an atmosphere for consistency, objectivity, and fairness. For the participant working though the test, the opposite is the case. “Progress in writing assessment requires us to reconcile the twin virtues of validity and cost, which are so often in tension, and which may lead to fundamentally different solutions, with fundamentally different implications for instruction” (Deane, 2011, p. 2).

Teachers decide “the how” and “the what” that is to be graded. As writing is a slow process of growth, the specificity of what is assessed aids the student in the accomplishment of the task (Williams, 2014; Hillocks, 2008). The question arises, if a student receives an A at the end of a school year, did improvement and learning happen? As this is an issue of consistency, multiple tasks, as well as multiple raters are needed in order to reveal true grades (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, p. 212). To help with this dilemma, formative and summative assessments can provide multiple tasks and grades. Formative assessments are observing student progression in a skill and giving correction and direction as a student works. Summative assessments reflect the overall performance on the assignment. The goal is to have formative assessments provide the growth opportunities so that the summative grades are high and writing development ensues (Williams, 2014).

Conclusions

With the writing skills crisis and the amount of money being expended to train people to write, many of whom have had high school and college educations, issues have been researched and discussions have been written to attempt to discover the needs of instructing students in their writing skills. Each practice provides helpful and insightful approaches to instruct students in writing. Process Writing Approach has infiltrated writing instruction as well as other sectors of education and careers. Research demonstrates that while it is a popular approach to teach writing, it does not motivate or help struggling students. Also, it has been modified to create the Process Genre Approach for writing instruction.

Sociocultural Historical Approaches are more recent and reflect the changes in global communication. Bazer-
man (2016) and Kwok, Ganding, Hull, and Moje (2016) mention that the whole experience of the writer’s past and culture is a part of their writing. The importance of authentic situations for writing are key to this approach to teach writing. While the Sociocultural Historical Approach is fairly new, direct grammar instruction is old. While earlier research has concluded that grammar instruction is not helpful to the improvement of student writing, Hudson (2016) pinpoints the reasons missed by previous research which concluded grammar had no effect upon writing. Grammar, taught in and of itself, does not improve writing, yet when grammar is taught and then applied to writing, it has been found positively to affect students’ writing.

The last approach examined was Evidence-Based Practices, which with the standards-based and high stakes’ testing, are necessary tools for teachers to bring to the classroom. The components of Evidence-Based Practices include creation of a supportive writing environment, learning writing strategies, knowledge, and motivation, receiving feedback, utilizing twenty-first century tools, and finally, using writing as a tool.

The explosion of many new technologies has changed writing instruction in some ways, and in others writing has remained unaltered. Writing may be completed on a computer or tablet, but the process and form are the same as in the past. Technology may reengage students to write, but it is not being utilized as much as it could be by educators. Assessment, such as Common Core National Standards, is a challenge dominating education in the age of instant information, and pressuring teachers to produce results in the classroom. The question, as to what the goals of the assessments in performance or learning are, creates tension between teachers, administrators, parents, and government. Besides the results from national standardized testing, I would like to see data gathered on the local level, to support a teacher who grades all of her students’ essays, etc., without the luxury of many raters.

One recurring thought which I noticed throughout the literature is the necessity of every approach being utilized by the educator. In my own instruction of writing, there has been parts of each of the four practices taught. One approach alone cannot cover the training needed for students’ growth as writers. Each approach offers a part of the whole in the needs for students’ writing. Localized research, investigating the use of two or more practices would help writing instruction teachers to understand what actually is effective and helpful for their students.

As I have attempted to bring useful technology into the classroom, I am realizing that I need to be proactive in bringing it to help the “educational spaces” of my students. In other words, refuse to use it as enhanced chalk boards or “fancier” activities, but as tools to permit and push students to stretch their learning as far as possible. Students learn in different ways. My job as their teacher is to address every “aspect of the learner,” as they are created in the image of God: the aesthetic being, communicating being, emotional being, moral being, physical being, rational being, and social being. Addressing each aspect will provide the opportunities for my students to deeply learn all that God has for them. Writing is a learned skill which requires time and diligence; fortunately, there is more research to be discovered and examined to improve my instruction and lead my students’ in their growth as writers.

References


CURRENT TRENDS AND RESEARCH IN SECOND LANGUAGE VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Andrew R. Sharpe

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of knowledge of a language. Though overlooked for a time, interest in the role of vocabulary in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has grown over recent years. As a result, much research focuses on how to best promote vocabulary development among second language (L2) learners. Several trends from the literature on how to foster L2 vocabulary development include meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and language-focused learning. The increasing role of technology in language learning is also evident, particularly in the area of language-focused learning. While the literature dealing with each trend suggests positive impacts on L2 vocabulary development, further research is needed on the topic, particularly among high school learners of Spanish as a second language.

The development of a second language (L2) is a complex process involving knowledge of multiple linguistic components. One of the primary factors is knowledge of vocabulary. The role of vocabulary in second language acquisition (SLA) has experienced increased interest among researchers in recent years (Tan, 2016). In fact, beginning in the late 20th century, a “renaissance” of interest in vocabulary’s impact on language and literacy commenced (Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2007). As a result of this recent prioritization of vocabulary in language study, the focus of research has shifted increasingly to understanding how learners most effectively acquire it. This shift has led scholars to place substantial emphasis on vocabulary’s function in the language acquisition process (Tan, 2016).

As a high school Spanish language instructor, I have also become increasingly interested in the role of vocabulary in my own students’ L2 development. My interest arose out of observing the performance of level two students in recent years, especially upon their entry into my class every fall semester. Despite deficiencies in other aspects of language, one of the major problems that seems most debilitating to students when entering my second year course is lack of vocabulary. That is, many students do not master level one vocabulary well enough to use that vocabulary either receptively or actively the following year in level two. This lack of vocabulary puts students at a disadvantage in the course as they are less able to comprehend the target language, leading to additional problems such as apathy and low academic performance. Thus, my students’ lack of vocabulary prompted me to question ways to improve their vocabulary development so that they may experience success in Spanish II and desire to study the language at higher levels.

In order to consider how to improve my students’ Spanish vocabulary, I explored the scholarly literature on current trends and research in L2 vocabulary development. In beginning my review of the literature, I repeatedly encountered references to the work of Paul Nation. A prominent scholar that shifted the focus of the field of SLA to consider the role of vocabulary, Nation exerted extensive influence on linguistic investigation throughout his career (Horst, 2010). Because of his dominance in the field, below are findings from the literature organized around broad approaches to vocabulary development proposed by Nation and Chung (2009).

Search Methodologies

I began my research in the reference section of the library, using handbooks of language teaching for overviews of L2 vocabulary development. From there, I searched for recent peer-reviewed articles in the online databases ERIC and EBSCO. I used a variety of search terms such as “L2 vocabulary development,” “Spanish vocabulary development,” and “vocabulary acquisition” and restricted my research to peer-reviewed articles published within the last 15 years.

Current Trends and Research

Meaning-Focused Input

One of the prominent strands of research into vocabulary development has been in the area of meaning-focused input. Nation and Chung (2009) define meaning-focused input as “learning via comprehensible input obtained through listening and reading” (p. 549). Through this approach, teachers make language comprehensible by providing meaning of unfamiliar words through translations or brief explanations (Nation & Chung, 2009).

Within the meaning-focused input approach, two different methods divide the literature. One trend exploring the relation between vocabulary gains and input has been in the area of extensive reading, in which learners read many texts they find personally fascinating (Nation & Chung, 2009). Another area of focus in the field of L2 vocabulary development through meaning-focused input has been on incidental vocabulary acquisition. Pigada and Schmitt (2006) note that incidental vocabulary acquisition also involves learning through meaningful target language input, though involving much less text than in extensive reading.

Several recent studies indicate positive L2 vocabulary development through meaning-focused input via extensive reading (Horst, 2005; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Pietilä &
Though her study involved a small sample size, Horst (2005) found that adult English language learner immigrants in Canada made impressive gains in L2 vocabulary through extensive reading. Participants had access to a library of graded readers on a variety of topics from which they were encouraged to read extensively. After six-weeks, personalized post-tests revealed that all participants made gains in knowledge of both frequent and infrequent words.

Likewise, in a case study involving a similar exploration of extensive reading, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) also found large gains in L2 vocabulary knowledge among their sole adult participant. After a one-month study in which a Greek and English speaking adult learner of French read one graded reader each week, the researchers conducted an extensive interview post-test to measure vocabulary gains. Pigada and Schmitt’s (2006) results “show that substantial learning of the target words occurred during the extensive reading treatment…” (p. 12). While not generalizable to other settings, the case study lends additional support to the practice of extensive reading.

Further, in an experimental study involving a much larger sample size of 330 participants, Pietilä and Merikivi (2014) also examined the influence of extensive reading on L2 vocabulary, both receptive and productive. This study involved Finish adolescent learners of English in secondary school settings. Through questionnaires to gauge student English language reading practices and a comparison of pre-test and post-test scores, the researchers found that the more students read outside of class in English, the larger their vocabularies.

Studies have also suggested that learners grow their L2 vocabulary through more modest amounts of input via incidental acquisition (Rott, 2004; Reynolds, 2014; Barcroft, 2015). However, research studies have differed in their specific findings on the extent to which incidental acquisition promotes vocabulary growth. Working with university intermediate-level L2 German learners, Rott (2004) examined receptive vocabulary gains after output tasks and a reading only task. Though a small study size of only 35 participants, the study’s findings suggest reading, unenhanced by additional production tasks, is equally effective in promoting vocabulary development as output tasks.

While Rott’s (2004) work lends support to the notion that reading alone is as effective as other methods to teach vocabulary, more recent studies have questioned this conclusion. Reynolds (2004) investigated vocabulary development through incidental acquisition among English L1 participants and English L2 participants. The study measured participants’ knowledge of fictional words unique to a particular English-language novel after they read the text. Qualitative data revealed that all participants found the novel to be fun to read and thus felt compelled to finish the book. The findings of the study suggested, however, that English L1 participants made much larger vocabulary gains than English L2 participants from reading the unenhanced novel. The L2 participants learned some of the novel words, but the method was not as effective as with the L1 group.

Barcroft (2015) also questions the efficacy of vocabulary development through incidental acquisition as presented by Rott (2004). Barcroft’s (2015) study involved Spanish-speaking intermediate learners of English at a Mexican university. For the study, certain students simply read a short text in English while other students read the same text, but with certain words left blank in order to promote word retrieval. The post-test results revealed that the retrieval group had higher vocabulary gains, implying that reading plus a retrieval task led to more learning.

While most studies of incidental vocabulary acquisition involve input through reading, Horst (2010) carried out a study to measure incidental vocabulary acquisition through listening to a teacher’s spoken L2 communication. The findings involving adult L2 English students revealed that listening to speaking alone was not an efficient vocabulary development method. Horst (2010) concludes in agreement with Barcroft (2015) that reading plus other activities is crucial to vocabulary development.

Vocabulary development through meaning-focused input, especially through reading, offers several advantages as a method. First, the meaning-focused input supports learner autonomy, allowing learners to develop their vocabulary outside of class. For example, activities like reading by the beach or before bed do not require classroom presence or teacher direction (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). As a second and related point, texts for meaning-focused input should be interesting, promoting motivation for student engagement with the target language (Nation & Chung, 2009). Reynolds (2015) records how participants felt compelled to finish their book despite their difficulty because the text was genuinely interesting. Thus this approach lends itself to empowering language learners to acquire vocabulary at their own pace out of interest in what they read. Lastly, Horst (2005) suggests that meaning-focused input through extensive reading may also be a way to promote learning of less common words in the L2.

There are also disadvantages to meaning-focused input as a method of vocabulary development. For one, meaning-focused input through reading is difficult for beginning L2 learners. There are simply too many unknown words in a text for novice learners (Horst, 2005). Thus, it is an approach with limited accessibility, being better suited for intermediate and advanced learners who can engage in extensive reading. Further, to promote meaning-focused input through extensive reading requires a library of L2 texts at appropriate levels. Horst (2005) acquired a library of 150 titles for her study, a feat that would be complicated to achieve logistically and financially for many learners and instructors.
Considering the findings from the literature and the advantages and disadvantages of meaning-focused input towards vocabulary development, a few classroom implications are evident. To start, reading should be an important part of the L2 curriculum. Reading is an activity that instructors should encourage as much as possible, because reading provides additional opportunity for learners to acquire vocabulary. However, reading should not be the only activity in an L2 classroom. Other activities can complement reading to support L2 vocabulary growth (Horst, 2010; Barcroft, 2015).

Meaning-Focused Output

Another trend in vocabulary development is meaning-focused output. Nation and Chung (2009) define meaning-focused output as “learning through speaking and writing” (p. 551). This approach to vocabulary development occurs in the language classroom through interpersonal tasks like role plays and pair-work as well as through individual writing tasks. In contrast to the passive nature of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output emphasizes learning through creating language (Nation & Chung, 2009).

The findings of two studies on L2 vocabulary development through meaning-focused output emphasize the role of active involvement through writing in vocabulary learning (Laufer, 2003; Kim, 2008b). While these studies do not deny the role of reading in language acquisition, their findings suggest that tasks requiring more involvement than reading alone lead to greater vocabulary acquisition. For example, Laufer (2003) conducted three experiments involving groups of high school and college L2 English learners. The results of each experiment, measured by pre-tests and post-tests, indicated that students required to complete a productive task with vocabulary, like writing sentences, displayed better recall of vocabulary than students that only encountered vocabulary in a text. Similarly, Kim (2008b) found that adult learners of English also showed more vocabulary retention after more involved writing tasks than after simply reading.

Other studies of meaning-focused output have focused on learner collaboration as a factor in L2 vocabulary development (De la Fuente, 2006; Kim, 2008a; Dobao, 2014; Tocaimaza-Hatch & Walls, 2016). These studies emphasize the production of language in interpersonal communication. For example, in the study by De la Fuente (2006), university learners of Spanish that engaged in task-based learning with lots of opportunities for speaking demonstrated higher long-term vocabulary knowledge than students in traditional class settings with more limited chances to speak.

Kim (2008a) also found collaboration to be a factor in promoting vocabulary development in her study of L2 learners of Korean. In an experiment involving a listening exercise, study results indicated that students who worked together in the target language to retell the information of the recording demonstrated more vocabulary acquisition than those that worked alone. Kim (2008a) concludes “…learners can co-construct knowledge in their L2 and build their vocabulary knowledge through collaborative dialogue” (p. 126).

Adding to the findings of Kim (2008a) regarding the collaborative co-constitution of vocabulary knowledge is the work of Dobao (2014). In studying intermediate learners of Spanish at an American university, Dobao (2014) compared how work on a writing project in partners and groups of four contributes to vocabulary development. Though not measuring long-term retention of vocabulary, the study results indicate that group collaboration was more effective than partner work for the purpose of vocabulary development. Overall, groups collectively generated more vocabulary terms than partner pairs, leading to increased opportunity for vocabulary learning.

In a more recent study focusing on advanced university-level Spanish language learners, Tocaimaza-Hatch and Walls (2016) researched the effect of an output-based service learning project on learner vocabulary levels. In requiring learners in pairs to translate signage into the target language, participants had to collaborate and produce language that would be helpful to native speakers in the area. The findings of the study demonstrated that all participants learned vocabulary as a result of the project, with the vocabulary learning occurring as a result of the collaborative translation process.

Meaning-focused output approaches to vocabulary development offer advantages and disadvantages to learners and instructors. As an advantage, meaning-focused output approaches are supportive of the social nature of learners. Through encouraging production of language, these approaches foster collaboration and interaction in the construction of knowledge. However, as a disadvantage, output-based approaches often require a community of learners for such interaction to occur. This inhibits a certain amount of learning to be possible for independent learners not in classroom settings.

Regarding implications for the classroom, it would seem that output-based approaches for vocabulary learning should be a part of an instructional program. First, as Laufer (2003) and Kim (2008b) demonstrated, teachers should not only provide target language reading input, but also foster meaningful productive response to such input. Additionally, teachers should encourage collaborative problem-solving in the target language among not only partners but also small groups, as the latter was shown to generate higher amounts of vocabulary usage (Dobao, 2014). Lastly, learners should be encouraged to produce the target language in project-based learning for authentic audiences. Such output has been shown to develop vocabulary depth and language control (Tocaimaza-Hatch & Walls, 2016).
Language-Focused Learning

A third major vocabulary development approach is what Nation and Chung (2009) call “language-focused learning.” This method involves “deliberate learning and the deliberate study of vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies” (Nation & Chung, 2009). A variety of vocabulary-learning tools support this method, from flashcards and dictionaries to increasingly prevalent computer programs (Nation & Chung, 2009).

One of the most effective language-focused learning methods is through the study of bilingual flashcards (Nation & Chung, 2009). Two recent studies involving L2 learners of English demonstrated further support for the effectiveness of flashcards in vocabulary learning. Dizon (2016) found Quizlet, the online flashcard service, to be effective in teaching academic vocabulary to Japanese university students. While the sample size of the study was extremely small, Dizon’s (2016) students demonstrated vocabulary growth on a vocabulary levels test after use of Quizlet flashcards. The study’s findings also demonstrated positive student perceptions toward Quizlet’s platform for vocabulary study, with a majority of the students in the study using the mobile-phone application instead of the computer-based website. Students noted that they enjoyed using the Quizlet flashcards out of class for their ease of use and their accessibility anywhere on their mobile phones.

In a different context with adult Iranian EFL learners, Naeimi and Foo (2015) also reported use of language-focused learning methods like flashcards to be effective. In this experimental study, the researchers compared the use of indirect methods of vocabulary learning, like group discussion, with direct learning methods, such as the study of flashcards with terms and definitions. The pre-test and post-test differences suggested that the language-focused approach of flashcard study led to higher scores. Like the Dizon (2015) study, Naeimi and Foo (2016) also reported student enjoyment of the simplicity of flash cards as a manner to review their vocabulary.

In addition to the use of flashcards is the strategy training element of language-focused learning. Strategy training involves teaching students to use a variety of tools, like dictionaries, and procedures, like deciphering word meanings from context (Nation & Chung, 2009). Two studies proved supportive of strategy training as a language-focused vocabulary development method. Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009) demonstrated that students with strategy training made greater gains in L2 vocabulary development than students who did not receive such training. In their study involving Japanese university level learners of English, students in the control group received no instruction in strategy training while the experimental group received explicit instruction in vocabulary learning strategies. The findings indicate the explicit strategy instruction was more effective in promoting vocabulary learning than no instruction, though students avoided certain strategies due to their perceived inefficiencies. Interestingly, Sagara and Alba (2006) noted the effectiveness of strategy training as well, while also noting certain strategies as being more effective than others. Sagara and Alba (2006) studied a large sample of English-speaking university level learners of Spanish to measure how a variety of strategies would impact their L2 vocabulary learning. After providing students with instruction centered around rote memorization, semantic mapping, and keyword associations, their pre-test and post-test analyses revealed that the keyword method generated highest gains in vocabulary retention. In their discussion of results, Sagara and Alba (2006) indicate that “teaching L2 learners to employ strategies requiring deeper processing results in better temporary retention, which in turn increases the probability of establishing permanent representations for newly learned L2 word” (p. 237).

A recent development in language-focused learning of vocabulary is in the area of computer programs. Technology continues to change the way teachers prepare instruction, while also opening up increasing opportunities for students to engage in language learning independently. The rise of the internet-connected mobile phone has even made language learning feasible on portable hand-held devices. With such mobile technology, a variety of vocabulary learning tasks previously restricted to classroom settings are now available on demand from any location (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017).

One of the newest internet-based applications for language learning is Duolingo. Duolingo is a web-based program for mobile phones that allows learners to study a variety of languages for free. The application provides opportunities for learners to practice language through a variety of tasks from matching exercises to translation. It also includes listening and speaking exercises to simulate authentic language use. Duolingo takes advantages of a gaming interface to motivate learners. For example, users that pass to a new level experience celebratory sounds and images (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017). Overall, Duolingo includes mostly elements of language-focused learning like direct pairing tasks of vocabulary from first language to the second language. However, it also includes elements of meaning-focused output as well as meaning-focused input through reading and listening to statements. As Krashen argues (2014) “It is clearly aimed at conscious learning, although some subconscious acquisition of language is inevitable, as students hear and read samples of the language” (p. 13).

Studies have shown that students largely have positive attitudes towards the use of Duolingo as a language learning tool (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012; Botero & Questier, 2016). According to Botero and Questier (2012), surveys of university-aged Colombian users of Duolingo demonstrated their satisfaction with the application as a language learning tool.
program in general, and specifically as a way to improve vocabulary. Vesselinov and Grego (2012) also found high satisfaction with Duolingo among participants in their study, with more than 90 percent planning to continue their use of the program beyond the conclusion of the experiment. Yet interestingly, despite the seemingly high popularity of Duolingo, Botero and Questier (2012) found in their surveys that students used the application much less than expected. Student usage was so low that the Botero and Questier study was suggestive of a high effectiveness of the application, it should be noted that their independent investigation was in fact funded by Duolingo.

Nevertheless, the findings of Vesselinov and Grego (2012) on Duolingo found the application to be an effective language learning method for those users that remained in the study by following the minimum usage guidelines. With a participant sample consisting of American English-speaking adults learning Spanish, the researchers found that highest improvements in language ability were for those learners that began with the lowest levels. The more Spanish language knowledge a user had, the lower the improvement level after using Duolingo. Lastly, while the findings of Vesselinov and Grego (2012) were suggestive of a high effectiveness of the application, it should be noted that their independent investigation was in fact funded by Duolingo.

Like other approaches to vocabulary development, language-focused learning presents several advantages. In its favor, the approach recognizes the rational nature of learners to detect patterns, make word associations, and employ strategies to better learn vocabulary. As demonstrated by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), such strategies have shown to provide support for vocabulary development. Another advantage to such language-focused learning is the way in which it supports independent learning and learner autonomy. Whether flashcards are digital or physical, learners enjoy the ability to easily use them as a way to review vocabulary (Dizon, 2015; Naeimi & Foo, 2016). Students do not have to be in a classroom or with a teacher to grow their vocabulary. Lastly, as evidenced by Duolingo, learners increasingly perceive language-focused learning as an enjoyable experience (Botero & Questier, 2012).

Language-focused learning presents a couple of disadvantages as well. For one, the independent learning available through flashcards or Duolingo is only as effective as the learner is disciplined. As Botero and Questier (2012) suggested about Duolingo, learners may indicate enjoyment of the platform, while also failing to consistently make use of it. Further, language-focused learning contains little to develop the social and communicative aspect of language learning. A lack of human interaction inherent with resources like Duolingo may lead to merely a passive knowledge of vocabulary and one that is not equipped for engaging in native-speaker human interactions (Nushi & Eqbali, 2016).

For maximum effectiveness in the classroom, instructors should direct and oversee language-focused learning. For example, teachers should provide direct instruction on vocabulary learning strategies (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009). They should also “constantly provide guidance” for students using language-focused learning tools like online flashcards on Quizlet (Dizon, 2016, p. 51). Even with the user-friendly Duolingo application, teacher encouragement and mentoring is necessary for students to make the most of the resource (Botero & Questier, 2012).

Conclusions

The recent research literature reveals various lines of investigation into the topic of vocabulary development. Each trend offers insights into the nature of vocabulary growth among learners, with elements of multiple approaches able to coexist in a formal course setting. While vocabulary was formerly of little interest to SLA researchers, Tan (2016) argues “the question today is no longer ‘Should we focus on vocabulary?’ or ‘What kind of vocabulary should we teach?’ but rather ‘How do we get students to learn vocabulary effectively?’” (p. 89). Yet, despite this new consensus on the importance of vocabulary and the work done in recent years, there is room for much investigation.

One of the major gaps in the literature on trends in vocabulary development regards the fact that most research has focused on the vocabulary of learners of English as a second language. While certainly the findings of such studies have implications for instructors of second languages other than English, there exists a need for further research into L2 vocabulary development among languages other than English. Specifically, much benefit would occur from research into L2 vocabulary development among English-speaking learners of Spanish, particularly given the position of Spanish as a world language and the top language of study for students in the United States. Moreover, there is a further need for research directly focused on L2 vocabulary development among students in formal secondary school classrooms. Most vocabulary-based research has focused on university and adult learners of language.

Given the current state of the literature, I conclude by recommending further research in the area of vocabulary development among high school L2 learners of Spanish in the United States. While the current state of research is informative, teachers and administrators of secondary schools would greatly benefit from additional research in order to better serve their students as Spanish language learners.

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ENGAGING STORIES IN A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASS: CURRENT TRENDS IN THE COMPREHENSION BASED METHOD

Ruth Stimart

Over the past few decades, a shift has occurred in Language Arts instruction from teaching students about the structure of their primary language to improving literacy and fluency through the study of literature and writing. Similarly there has been a movement in second language instruction to improve second language proficiency through engaging with stories rather than by studying verb and sentence structure as if they are equations. This paper investigates some of the research that has been conducted in recent years that lead many second language instructors to believe that students become more proficient in the second language by engaging with the language in context, particularly by the use of stories. Two approaches to engaging with a story rise to the surface: the class read-aloud which engages students in a shared story through listening, and free voluntary reading which allows students to choose a level-appropriate book to engage them in a story interesting to them using the second language as a vehicle. Some of the leading researchers in second language acquisition argue for a combination of the two.

World language teachers today seem to be much divided. They tend to fall into one of two camps: those who adhere to the Comprehension Hypothesis and those who maintain the Skill-Building Hypothesis. “The Comprehension Hypothesis says that we acquire (not learn) language when we understand messages, oral and written. When we develop linguistic competence in this way our goal is usually not to acquire language, but to understand the message. The development of language competence is a by-product” (Krashen 2011).

“The Skill-Building Hypothesis says that we first must learn rules consciously and then practice them in output until they become “automatic”: In other words, consciously learned knowledge becomes “acquired” knowledge. When we develop linguistic competences in this way, our goal is to get better at the language. Any other information we pick up along the way is a by-product” (Krashen 2011).

The camp with which a teacher philosophically aligns will inform the use and purpose of reading in a second language (L2) classroom. Is the purpose of reading to expose students to an abundance of rich vocabulary where the highest frequency words are repeated again and again, naturally leading to acquisition? Is learning a by-product of reading as in Comprehension-Based Methods, more commonly referred to as CI (Comprehensible Input methods)? Or, is reading used to help students practice specific grammar structures and vocabulary lists (Skill Building Methods)? Most of this literature review will be underneath the umbrella of Comprehension Based Methods, however, some of the studies will compare those methods to traditional methods which fall under the Skill-building camp.

Through my investigation, I found that CI practitioners agreed that compelling stories are the best way to deliver comprehensible input. This review examine studies that investigated various methods of engaging students with stories under two main categories: shared stories and independent reading, particularly Story Listening and Free Voluntary Reading.

Search Methodologies

To find information about reading and the use of stories in an L2 class, I used ERIC and JSTOR to search the following terms: Free voluntary reading, FVR, silent sustained reading, SSR, extensive reading and ER. I tried to find other ways for approaching text in an L2 class, but focused mostly on FVR because that is my action research topic. I also investigated “Story Listening”; for those studies and articles, I went directly to the website of the researcher, Beniko Mason, who coined the phrase Story Listening. I already knew that Stephen Krashen had researched and written a lot about reading in an L2 classroom. Both researchers had an abundance of research linked to their websites.

I tried to narrow the list to English Speakers reading in Spanish, however, that search was too narrow, as most of the research has been done with English as a Foreign Language, not English Speakers learning a Romance language. I searched the IFLT (International Forum on Language Teaching) journals as many of their articles are about L2 reading. Finally, I looked at the reference lists of the research papers that I found hoping to find specific studies to read.

Current Trends and Research

There is an abundance of text from which to choose for use in an L2 classroom: children’s literature, graded readers, comic books and informational texts are a few. Some texts have been written specifically for L2 learners sheltering vocabulary to purposely use higher frequency vocabulary. There are also different ways of approaching the text. This study examines the use of stories both as shared class experiences as in read-alouds (such as Story Listening) or a whole class novel as well as independent reading (such as Free Voluntary Reading). I was interested to see how a combination of these types of encounters with stories could work together to provide an engaging L2 class in which student proficiency would grow.
Shared Experience

Some advantages to a shared story is that it is that it is easier to manage the learning experience when everyone is engaging the same story, assessment is easier and all students receive exposure to the same vocabulary. With a good text, such as a compelling story, the class has a shared-experience and shared “relationships” with the characters. Students tend to make inside jokes with their shared knowledge of character and plot lines.

“Reading as a family (Class) has bound us together as sharing an adventure always does. We know the same people. We have gone through emotional crises together as we felt anger, sadness, fear, gladness, and tenderness in the world of the book we were reading. Something happens to us that is better experienced than described- a kind of enlarging of heart- when we encounter passages full of grand language and noble thoughts.

Much of our secret family (class) idioms come from the books we have read together. I say “secret” because a specialness surrounds it. You need to have shared the book to know what the phrase means, and when we use it, it’s communication of the heart” (Hunt, 2002).

Some areas of disadvantage are within motivation and interest; if the students are not selecting the material, it may be of no interest to them. It is difficult to engage with text outside of one’s interests. Students need motivation both to begin and persist. Students are unique, God has created them with different gifts, skills, passions and interests. Another obstacle is that some students do not have subject background knowledge to understand as well as others.

Story Listening

Story Listening is a new term recently coined by Japanese second language acquisition researcher, Beniko Mason for a technique that has existed in homes and schools for years. In recent times, her focus has been on a teacher selected model storytelling which involves telling rich stories from history or folklore or popular literature in a way that students are able to comprehend. Mason would argue that teachers don’t have such a narrow bank of words provided they define unknown words by pictures or written translation or a quick time out to say the word in L1. This model is similar to how one might “read” a picture book to very young children. If there are words they do not know, the storyteller would simplify the language or just talk about the picture. Mason (2014) encourages instructors to tell the story or talk about a picture in words that the listener can understand. She suggests that Story Listening should go hand in hand with Free Voluntary Reading. Mason believes in the student’s choice to read from a wide array of materials written at the student’s level of comprehension.

In Story Listening, the teacher directs the story experience. The teacher’s goal is to word the story in such a way that she can stay in the second language much of the time, yet the students are able to comprehend the message of the story.

M. Lee, S. Lee and Krashen (2014) suggest that “There is good reason to hypothesize that stories (read-alouds) will be more efficient for vocabulary acquisition than traditional instruction. Read-alouds are a rich source of vocabulary”. They tell of a case study of a high-achieving eight-year-old girl in Taiwan who despite scoring high on vocabulary and grammar knowledge, had a low proficiency in English after two years of intense study about the language. The girl, Penny, had previously studied English for approximately 256 hours and scored 111 known words in the pretest. After the treatment of ten hours of Story Listening over eight weeks, Penny acquired an additional 52 words. They propose that Story Listening is much more efficient for vocabulary acquisition than traditional textbook instruction (Lee, Lee, & Krashen, 2014).

Jesus himself used stories as a means of instructing both his followers during his time walking bodily on the Earth and now through His Word. Good stories are instructive and captivating. World Language practitioners of these methods would argue that storytelling is a way to immerse students in a captivating message that causes them to focus on meaning, thus improving proficiency in the language.

Whole-Class Novels

Another approach to stories commonly used in the L2 classroom is a whole class experience reading the same novel. Generally, with the shared experience of reading the same text, some sort of debriefing ensues: class discussion, projects, test, report, etc. Sometimes the selection is based on a sense of class interests, sometimes due to a set curriculum.

While I have personally seen the classroom community building that can take place around a shared novel, I was unable to find research conducted on the benefits of an L2 classroom reading the same novel or graded reader.

Free Voluntary Reading

FVR is used in the classroom not only to improve student proficiency, but also to encourage a love for L2 reading that will extend beyond the classroom allowing students to continue to improve fluency outside of the classroom now and in the future. “Three obvious conditions need to be met in order to help students develop a reading habit. First, they need access to interesting reading material, second, they need to develop some enthusiasm for reading, and third, they need to develop enough competence to start reading: As they read, reading itself will supply the necessary competence for more reading (Wang & Lee, 2007).

Free voluntary reading is generally done in the classroom for 15 - 20 minutes a few times a week. Students are able to choose from books, magazines, comics, newspapers, collections of short stories, etc. Students are encouraged to change materials if they find that what they chose is either
too difficult to comprehend or not interesting. Many teachers do not require the students to do anything more than enjoy reading. Other teachers encourage the FVR, but in order to provide accountability, ask the students to give evidence of their reading.

What constitutes appropriate reading material in an L2 classroom? Most practitioners and researchers advocate the use of graded readers created for L2 learners. Webb and Macalister (2013) explored the use of Children’s Literature for L2 Extensive reading by comparing the lexical demands of text written for children, for older readers, and for L2 learners to determine the vocabulary size necessary to comprehend each type of text. Rather than participants (people), the subjects of their research were texts that were analyzed to determine how many word families need to be known for readers to be able to comprehend. They suggest that for a book to be suitable for extended reading, the reader must understand 98 percent of the words. Based upon this measure of comprehensibility they suggested that children’s literature is too taxing on L2 readers but their findings provide strong evidence that graded readers should be used in extensive reading” (Webb & Macalister, 2013).

Iwahori (2008) set out to answer “Do high school students’ general language proficiencies improve through ER (extensive reading), and if so, to what degree?” He conducted his study using Japanese students who were learning English. He set a goal for 33 students to each read 28 English graded readers in seven weeks. He states that “ER improves one aspect of reading fluency and general language proficiency of Japanese high school students with a few books and short treatment period. Based on these results, it is recommended that ER as fluency instruction be incorporated into English class curricula. ER provides a possible way for students to become fluent readers by being exposed to English, to increase their vocabulary size, syntactic knowledge, and knowledge of the world” (Iwahori, 2008, p. 83).

In most of the studies of high school L2 readers that I found, English was the second language. Liburd and Rodrigo (2012) examined American university students learning Spanish and found that students who were asked to read five Spanish books in five weeks along with the normal curriculum “showed positive gains in attitude towards reading and more confidence in their reading abilities” (Liburd & Rodrigo, 2012).

A confounding factor for some of these studies may be that they do not take into account the level of student proficiency, their starting point. Pichette (2005), in his study found that there were “non-significant correlations between time spent on reading English and English reading comprehension for low-proficiency learners, while correlations for high-proficiency learners were moderate and significant. The results suggest that if L2 reading is to enhance L2 reading development, it may not serve that purpose effectively for low-proficiency learners, whose working memory is still taxed by word decoding processes.” Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001) similarly found a correlation between student proficiency and the amount of work required to increase proficiency. “Learners who know fewer words need to meet a new word several times before they learn it… learners who know more words seem able to accomplish the same amount of learning in few occurrences.”

Beglar and Hunt (2014) found their hypothesis to be true that “Participants who make greater reading rate gains read a greater number of lower level simplified books.” In their study, they provided many graded readers for their participants. They found that the participants who chose the lower-leveled books were able to read for understanding much faster and were able to read a larger volume of text.

Brantmeier (2005) found a positive correlation between students’ enjoyment of their reading and their self-assessment. Krashen’s Flow theory could explain this, “Flow theory suggests that flow experiences (characterized by a balance between challenge and skills and by a person’s interests, control, and focused attention during a task) can lead to optimal learning (Egbert, 2003).

Many researchers came to the conclusion that reading alone does not yield a large vocabulary in L2. Laufer (2003) did a series of experiments to test her belief. In one experiment, she divided 90 high school L2 learners into three groups with a vocabulary task each. Group one read a text and looked up unknown words, group two wrote sentences with the target words and group three completed a cloze activity using the target words. Her findings were that the students in group one, the reading group, retained less words than the ones who performed tasks with each word. This experiment does not prove reading as a practice to be an inferior method of language acquisition as the reading was only a 211-word text. Proponents of L2 reading programs encourage extensive reading, not learning and retaining language through reading a couple of paragraphs.

While Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001) believe in the power of story in an L2 class, they also suggest that reading is not enough. “Direct instruction has often been viewed as taboo in the communicative era,” but go on to say, “It is entirely reasonable to argue that some form of explicit instruction will be needed to get many students over the 3,000-word threshold where they have some chance of reading texts independently and are beginning to acquire any significant amount of vocabulary on their own.”

“The goal of second language education is to create autonomous language acquirers, students who can continue to improve in the second language after the course ends. There is growing evidence that an excellent way to achieve autonomy is to be involved in free voluntary or ‘recreational’ reading” (Wang & Lee, 2007).
Conclusions

In recent years, National and State standards have shifted to fall more in line with Comprehension Based Methods. Standards are now based on what students can do with the language, not what they know about it. Occasionally, teachers tend to teach the way that they were taught. I learned in a skills-based program. We followed a textbook and learned grammar very formulaically as if it were math. After five years of study in high school, I struggled to produce language. Although I received “A’s” in all of my classes and even won a Spanish competition in my county, my proficiency was low. I knew all about the language, but did not know the language itself. It was not until I began to travel and communicate in real life situations that I grew in fluency. At the same time, I began reading in Spanish. I began to get a feel for what “sounded right” so that I could stop applying rules to every utterance and just speak. Reading was a key to my personal growth, I wanted to explore how it was being used in the context of an L2 classroom to help students grow in their proficiency. At the same time, I had been raised in a teacher-led model. I felt guilty allowing the students to spend class time “teaching themselves.” I needed to read the research to know that allowing them to read was not being lazy, rather applying best practices. I have found that the research supports a reading program in the L2 classroom. It supports extended amounts of time allowing students to read a text of their choosing, but it is also enhanced by whole class experiences with stories. In the few short weeks of school that we have had this year, I have already seen the impact that shared stories have for building a classroom community. It is time to implement a story-rich program in my classroom and see how this works in my own context.

Wang and Lee (2007) propose a formula. “Their prediction is that read-alouds of series books can lead to a home-run book experience. When time and opportunity of read is made available, this in turn will lead to the establishment of a reading habit and autonomy.” I hope to accomplish this in my classroom.

There is an abundance of research in EFL, ESL, TESOL, etc. There is also an abundance of research coming out of Canada, New Zealand and Japan. There is a lack of specific research that I was able to find about American students learning Spanish. There was a lot of research about Extensive reading also known as Silent Sustained reading that I will explore in my Action Research using the descriptor FVR: Free Voluntary Reading. Almost everything that I read was about the benefits for those learning English. What is the benefit to English speakers learning Spanish? This is where I plan to focus my research.

I also had difficulty in finding research on other ways of reading in an L2 class. There was much to be found about reading strategies in English in an American classroom, but not about American students learning a second language. More research is also needed in this area.

References


ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS
ELEMENTARY VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION: A LOOK AT TWO EXTENDED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Amanda M. Ferris

This action research paper evaluates the implementation of two extended vocabulary instructional strategies in an international school second grade classroom with high numbers of English Language Learners (ELL). Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used to analyze student knowledge of Tier 2 vocabulary words instructed over a six-week period. Results show that students made small gains in word knowledge through the use of oral and written sentence frames and example/non-example teaching strategies, but still struggled to fully be able to use the words appropriately in context or to derive their meanings within context. The goal of instruction was for students to gain meaning of the words and the ability to use them contextually. One measure for word knowledge included both these goals through a researcher created assessment based upon previous work of Kearns and Biemiller (2010/2011). Furthermore, students displayed positive engagement and attitudes towards word learning, along with a developing word consciousness. The researcher discusses practical use of the research and areas of future research with additional extended vocabulary teaching strategies and activities.

Vocabulary knowledge is critical to all areas of life, but more specifically in the academic realm of primary-aged children. Thus, the instruction of vocabulary is a key component identified by research for effective reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000; Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Typically, English Language Arts curricula includes vocabulary development as a part of text comprehension as research has observed the reciprocal nature of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Stanovich, 1986). Despite this inclusion of vocabulary in instruction, fourth and eighth grade scores on vocabulary knowledge have only increased by one point from 2011 to 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015-2016). Additionally, the NCES (2013) reported fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade students with higher vocabulary levels score higher in reading comprehension, further showing the need for a focus on vocabulary instruction.

Factors of socioeconomic status and home language negatively impact oral and written vocabulary development (Beck & McKeown, 2007; McKeown & Beck, 2014; Carlo, et al., 2004) thus creating gaps in vocabulary knowledge between different populations of students. It is widely recognized that vocabulary instruction is essential for all students, but it is critical for special populations, such as English Language Learners (ELL) and those in poverty that enter school with vocabulary deficits (Carlo, et al., 2004; Beck & McKeown, 2007) to have explicit vocabulary instruction as it is a challenge to close these gaps.

My concerns with vocabulary knowledge among students in my school stemmed from the review of our annual TerraNova 3 standardized test scores. Year after year vocabulary knowledge was low when compared to other tests results. The attitude of the administration and teachers was that the low scores were a result of the high percentage of ELL students. Even with this acknowledgement, there was no focused effort as to what could be done to improve vocabulary scores of students. The elementary reading curriculum included weekly vocabulary words to learn in context of the text, yet with minimal teaching strategies or resources for students to learn the words. In my own classroom, I have found that students struggle to know word meanings and to develop in vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, as an educator I felt that I lacked the professional knowledge necessary to effectively instruct my students in vocabulary learning. These factors caused me to begin researching vocabulary knowledge, effective instructional strategies, and assessment of word knowledge.

Vocabulary knowledge and development is an essential component to literacy with its direct correlations to reading comprehension. However, the importance of vocabulary development goes beyond merely academics. The lack of word knowledge creates barriers between people which can lead to misunderstanding and thus the breakdown of relationships. God created us to be in relationship with one another for encouragement and mutual edification. The primary method for this is the written and spoken word, therefore it is important for us to be able to clearly communicate and be understood by the other person. Words matter to God as they can bring life and death.

Review of Literature

Research on vocabulary instructional methods and classroom practices can be grouped into two primary types: explicit and implicit. Explicit instruction happens when teachers directly teach word meanings to students. Implicit instruction happens when students develop vocabulary knowledge through meaningful contextual exposure. The focus of this literature review is on explicit instruction. Explicit vocabulary instruction is rooted in the cognitive processing theory (McKeown & Beck, 2014). The “active processing–active or attentive mental manipulation of ideas” (McKeown & Beck, 2014, p. 521) and seeing and manipulating the target words in the initial context and mul-
tiple other contexts helps students mediate the new information and make connections to prior learning, thus enabling them to know the target words at a deeper level.

Researchers have identified extended vocabulary instruction as a subcategory of explicit instruction that is worth exploring deeper. It is teacher-directed instruction of vocabulary words with extensive follow-up by multiple exposures, interactions, and practice with the target words to deepen understanding. The goal of extended vocabulary instruction is deep meaning of the targeted vocabulary words with the purpose of students being able to use the words effectively in everyday speech and writing in addition to improvement of reading comprehension. This goes beyond the traditional view of explicit vocabulary learning as knowing the definition for a targeted word.

**Extended Vocabulary Instruction.** Multiple studies show that extended vocabulary instruction is an effective method for developing vocabulary of preschool and primary students (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli Jr., & Kapp, 2009; Girioir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015; McKeown & Beck, 2014). A study with preschool children yielded large effect sizes of 1.06 to 1.24 when extended instruction was compared to incidental exposure (Lotus-Rattan, Mitchell, & Coyne, 2016). Three activities using both pictures and other contexts were used to reinforce the target words. The week-long study assessed word knowledge with expressive and receptive measures. However, the focus remained on definitions of the word; therefore, it is unknown the depth of knowledge that students gained through the extended instruction. McKeown and Beck (2014) sought to measure not only definitional word knowledge of Kindergarteners but “higher-order language processing… of context integration, listening comprehension, and production” (p. 522); when instructed in the rich manner they found that the context integration and production measure showed minor gains, while the listening comprehension task did not show gains over the other instructional methods. A longer study with similar measures may indicate differently the effects of extended vocabulary instruction on listening comprehension as this study was just one week in duration (McKeown & Beck, 2014). Likewise, Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli Jr, and Kapp (2009) sought to measure depth of learning with extended instruction. The results suggest that depth of knowledge, as measured by assessments that included higher-level contextual knowledge in novel contexts, is stronger with the use of extended instruction. However, depth of knowledge of words may take reinforcement over time to ensure that these word meanings remain strong (Coyne, et al., 2009).

Carlo, et al. (2004) built upon the previous research in vocabulary instruction by confirming that the same strategies found effective with Native English speaking (NE) students are effective with ELL students. The results of the study showed gains for both the ELL and NE fourth and fifth grade students in word knowledge and reading comprehension. Additionally, the authors confirmed that word knowledge did positively affect reading comprehension. Although this study is more than 10 years old, it is significant as it was the first to focus on instructional strategies and effectiveness with ELL students. More recently, August, Artzi, and Barr (2016) conducted a study comparing embedded versus extended instructional strategies with third and fourth grade ELL students. Students in both groups made gains in vocabulary knowledge; however, the extended instructional group made greater gains showing the strength of extended instruction for developing depth of knowledge with Tier 2 and Tier 3 words.

One study focused on the effectiveness of extended instruction for Spanish-speaking ELL students when instruction was provided in Spanish (Cena, et al., 2013). The four-week long study on Spanish-speaking ELL first-graders found explicit extended instruction in Spanish was more effective for developing a deeper vocabulary knowledge than non-extended instruction. This study adds to the effectiveness of extended instruction regardless of the language of instruction. While there was no significant effect on English language proficiency, vocabulary instruction in the home language is a possible way to strengthen ELL students’ English vocabulary development and reading ability (Cena, et al., 2013). Furthermore, continuing to develop vocabulary and literacy skills in another language does not appear to hinder English literacy learning (Uchikoshi, 2014).

One unique study of extended vocabulary instruction did not use a common text from which targeted words were chosen to study, rather this study relied upon classroom content for the selection of words (St. John & Vance, 2014). Students successfully gained knowledge of the Tier 2 targeted words through small group intervention using extended methods based on the work of Beck, McKeown, and Kearns (2013). The design and methodology of the study was weak, yet this study may indicate that extended vocabulary instruction can be effective without a text.

**Instructional Practices and Activities.** It is important for classroom teachers to know what kind of instructional strategies and activities support explicit extended instruction. Research shows that a best practice is to present student-friendly definitions and pre-teach for ELL students (August, Artzi, & Barret, 2016; Beck, McKeown & Kearns, 2013; Silverman & Hines, 2009). Additionally, specific classroom activities that allow for students to manipulate words and word meanings include interactive word walls, graphic organizers and concept maps, written and oral sentence frames, use of cognates for ELL students, morphological analysis, word associations, word example/non-examples, and cloze sentences (August, et al., 2016; Beck, et al., 2013; Carlo, et al., 2004; Donnelly & Roe, 2010; Manyak, 2010). Other instructional strategies are found in
vocabulary books such as 101 Strategies to Make Academic Vocabulary Stick (Sprenger, 2017). However, teachers need to evaluate activities in such books against the purposes for extended instruction.

Summary

There is research-based evidence that implementing explicit extended vocabulary instruction increases knowledge of word meanings and depth of meaning. These strategies have been effective with ELL, NE speakers, and students in poverty (Beck & McKeown, 2007, Carlo, et al., 2004).

Research Problem and Question

The goal of this action research project was to evaluate the use of extended vocabulary instructional strategies on the vocabulary knowledge of second grade students. Based on the research evidence, my hypothesis was that these instructional strategies would help my students in learning new vocabulary words. However, I anticipated that these strategies might not be beneficial to all my students. The specific questions of my study are:

Does the use of the instructional strategies of example/non-example and sentence frames support students in acquiring vocabulary knowledge of new words?

Does implementing research-based explicit vocabulary instructional strategies improve student learning and engagement among elementary students?

Methodology

Participants

The participants were a second grade class at an international school in Central Europe. The class was comprised of 16 children age seven and eight. Eight students had multiple language backgrounds (Hungarian, Romanian, South Korean, Greek, German). English is the first language of five students in the class. Three ELL students receive additional English language support outside the classroom. Furthermore, two students have had limited academic instruction in English, even though English is their first language. One student was absent multiple times; thus the quantitative data is only reported on 15 students.

Instruments

Pre-test/post-test. I created five vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests to assess 23 targeted Tier 2 words taught during the six-week instructional period. The tests were based upon the recommendations for vocabulary assessment of young learners by Kearns and Biemiller (2010/2011) and Beck et al. (2013). Each targeted word had four questions; two questions focused on the word meaning, and two questions focused on the use of the word in context. The assessment was read orally to students to ensure that reading ability was not a factor. Students responded by selecting “yes” or “no” to indicate if the sentence was true for the word. Four of the tests had five words while one test only had three words. The pre- and post-assessments used the same questions but the order of the post test was changed.

Likert Scale. To measure student engagement, I created a three question Likert Scale survey that was given to the students at the end of the research time frame. The rating scale had four choices: yes (four), a little (three), not really (two), and no (one). The survey was given as a whole-group and was read aloud to students. Students gave written responses by circling the choice that best fit their opinion.

Student interviews. I conducted four individual student interviews post-instruction using open-ended questions and follow-up questions to gather more information about what instructional strategies were helpful to students and to ascertain retention of vocabulary words taught.

Field Notes and Work Samples. Finally, I took notes and kept student work samples from the vocabulary lessons. These notes recorded which words were taught with which strategy, lesson reflections, and student responses.

These multiple data sources allow for triangulation of the data. However, the internal reliability of the five post-tests ranged from .30 to .82 using KR20 test of internal reliability. Furthermore, only three of the five pre-tests are valid due to my errors in administration. Test 2 only had two words on the pre-test but the post-test had all five words. The pre-test data for test 3 was lost making the post-test results not valuable. Therefore, in discussing the results, I will only include the results from Test 1, 4 and 5, as they had a reliability greater than .75 and these were the only valid tests.

Procedures

Word selection. The first step was to select the vocabulary words to instruct. I reviewed the teacher edition and the supplementary guide of the Core Knowledge English Language Arts (CKLA) Curriculum for Early Asian Civilizations (Core Knowledge Foundation (b), 2013) to identify words to teach for the upcoming unit on Ancient China. The seven lessons had identified vocabulary words according to the Three Tier system (Beck et al., 2013) with multiple words per lesson. Additionally, I selected five Tier 2 words from our Basel reader, The Cat Bandit (Core Knowledge Foundation (a), 2013), to also instruct. I chose a total of 36 Tier 2 and Tier 3 words from those identified in the curriculum. Each word was key for comprehending the fiction or non-fiction text where they were found. Each lesson was taught over a two-day period with the teaching of three to five vocabulary words. In all, six weeks of instruction was spent on the 36 words.

Pre-Test. Before explicit instruction or the reading containing the targeted words, I administered the pre-test to determine any prior knowledge.

Explicit instruction. Next, I identified explicit strategies to teach the words and created the resources needed to
carry out the instruction. The following explicit strategies were used to teach the vocabulary words either pre-reading or post-reading: use of a student friendly definition, a contextual example sentence, supporting visual, and oral production of the word in insolation by students. I created these resources with the guidance of the CKLA teacher editions along with additional web related resources such as online dictionaries and images.

Explicit word instruction took place during the lesson time when the reading was presented. Twenty-three words were taught before the reading and nine words were taught after the reading aloud but within the same lesson timeframe. Each word was presented using a PowerPoint slide containing the written word, a student friendly definition, one or two sentences using the word, and one or two images to support meaning. The slide was read and discussed with the whole class. Student oral production of the targeted word was solicited during this time as well. Additional strategies of related words (synonym and antonyms), morphological variations and physical gestures were taught at the same time.

Extended instruction. I chose 12 words to reinforce through extended vocabulary strategies of example/non-example and sentences frames for speaking or writing. The two strategies used were identifying example/non-examples of the target word and the use of sentence frames containing the target word in oral or written English. The resources for these activities came from the teacher editions (Core Knowledge Foundation (b), 2013), from supplemental teacher-created materials (Flagor, 2015), or were created myself. Table 1 shows the strategies used for each word.

### Table 1 Use of Extended Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Example/Non Example</th>
<th>Example/Non Example</th>
<th>Sentence Frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>durable</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sorrow</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praise</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emerged</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defense</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prosperous</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fertile</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivating</td>
<td>Non-Example</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remarkable</td>
<td>Non-Example</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scowl</td>
<td>Non-Example</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barrier</td>
<td>Non-Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eager</td>
<td>Non-Example</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total count</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example/non example.** Two instructional activities used the example/non-example strategy. First, an interactive whole group activity was utilized where I provided a sentence of either a correct or incorrect use or definition of the target word. Collectively, we identified if it was an example or non-example of the word or word usage and discussed why or why not. These examples/non-examples were displayed with a T-chart and posted in the classroom for future reference (Figure 1). Second, students were given independent practice on another day. Students received a worksheet with different example/non-example sentences for the same word and marked the sentence as example or not example.

Figure 1: Sample T-Chart of example/non-example strategy.
**Sentence frames.** The use of sentence frames was focused on correct oral and written use of the targeted word to demonstrate understanding. During a follow-up lesson to the explicit teaching, students were given a sentence frame that allowed them to practice using the word correctly in context. Table 2 provides examples of sentence frames. For oral responses, students were given think time, asked to raise their hand when they had a sentence ready, and then they paired with a classmate to share their sentence. Finally, I called on random students to share their sentence with the whole group to hold them accountable and to correct any misunderstandings. This structure allowed for ELL students to have extra time to process and organize the sentence in their head before being required to speak. Sharing first with a partner offered a lower threat level for failure and practice before being asked to share with the whole group. For written responses, students were given the sentence frame, and it was read aloud to indicate what part they needed to finish. Then students were given think time and allowed to write. Some students needed additional support by allowing them to orally process their sentence idea before writing. After writing, students shared their completed sentence with classmates or the whole class.

**Post-Test.** The post-test was administered after two read-aloud lessons containing five words and after the explicit and extended instruction. Test number five only contained three words because it was only on one lesson.

**Results**

- **Pre-test/post-test.** Overall, the majority of students gained from the pre-test to post-test. However, the gain was on average small when compared to the number of questions per word. Table 3 shows the results. In looking at individual student scores, one had a 10-point gain on Test 4, while two students showed a loss. On Test 5, the most students, five, showed a loss ranging between -1 and -7 on a 10-point test.

**Likert Scale.** An analysis of student responses reveal that students felt example/non-examples strategy helped them understand the words, while students showed more variance in knowing how learning words helps them with oral and reading comprehension and the attitude of learning new words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: I like learning what words mean.</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: Learning what words mean helps me understand them when I hear them or read them later.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: Examples and non-examples of words helps me to understand the word better.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussions

The student interviews helped me better understand that the students, even after instruction, are still developing in their knowledge and usage of the targeted words. They also provided insight into which instructional strategies were helpful in learning new words. Three of the students (two ELL and one NE) mentioned that using words in a sentence helped them, while one student said that was not helpful. Only one ELL student mentioned that the example/non-example strategy was helpful. All of them mentioned that a picture was helpful in understanding the word. I found this interesting as this was not one of the extended vocabulary strategies. Two ELL students mentioned talking about a word was helpful. Additionally, all four of the students were asked to tell about a word; three of them provided a definition in their own words, while one used the word in a sentence. The sentence used the word but was not morphologically correct. A NE student gave insight that, while she had heard some of the targeted words, she did not know the meaning of them and after the instruction she did.

Field Notes and Work Samples. My field notes showed that students were engaged in the learning and were developing word consciousness through explicit instruction. On two occasions, different students heard or read one of the vocabulary words in a different context. The one ELL student who found it in a book recognized it but did not know the meaning. The other student (NE) heard the word used by another teacher in a different context, recognized it, and knew the meaning. These two occurrences indicated that while students became more aware of the words they were taught, it did not ensure they knew the meanings.

Conclusions

Discussion

My research leads me to conclude the explicit and extended vocabulary strategies I used were valuable to students in helping them gain knowledge of new words both in meaning and contextual usage. Furthermore, the students were engaged in the learning process and generally found learning new words enjoyable. However, the quantitative and qualitative results showed that students did not yet fully understand the words and how to use them well. This leads me to wonder why and how I can better instruct students to further develop and maintain vocabulary development? One possible reason is that only two extended strategies were used for instruction and both of them were not used for each word. Further, as Beck et al. (2013) indicated, students need to continue to practice the use of previously learned words to solidify them as known words for students.

Action Plan

While this study has concluded, I plan to continue to use the knowledge I gained throughout the remainder of the school year and continue to use examples/non-examples and sentence frames. I also desire to expand my instructional strategies to include other research as suggested by Beck et al. (2013), Graves (2016) and other researchers. Additionally, I would like to include the usage of the growing word wall in my classroom in vocabulary development with activities suggested by Jackson & Durham (2016) and Manyak et al. (2014).

The pre-test and post-tests I used in this study were valuable and based upon solid research of young children (Kearns & Biemiller, 2010/2011); however, I found that the time and effort needed to create these tests is not sustainable for a full-time classroom teacher when needing to assess weekly. While I will not continue to use it weekly, it would be a good tool for a summative assessment for a unit. I would like to further research other assessment tools that can be used for both prior knowledge, formative, and summative.

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UNDERSTANDING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ WRITING SKILLS

Caroline Ann Kimball

This qualitative study examines the past writing instruction, abilities, and attitudes of all students in a junior English class within a small, private, K-12 Christian school. The American History teacher assigned each student a person to research in order to deliver a five-minute presentation for their American History Day in April. Over the course of 45 days, the researcher instructed and directed the students through the steps of the writing process for a three-draft research paper project. The researcher conducted individual interviews with six students and their seventh, eighth, and tenth-grade teachers, respectively. These six students responded to a pre-writing survey, a second draft survey, and an Exit Survey. Eight of the 26 faculty members also responded to a survey that reviewed their use of writing and writing instruction in their classrooms. Results indicate that students realize the importance of being able to write well, and that the practice will help improve writing skills. The results also imply that the ninth-grade year, in which students had four teachers with inconsistent instruction in their writing education, is part of the reason for little confidence and insufficiencies in writing skills. Finally, the use of technology is comprehended by students to be a positive and helpful tool as they progressed through the process of writing a paper to develop their own writing style and technique.

At the beginning of my English III course, my students and I read John 1:1-5, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (English Standard Version). We discuss the meaning of logos which in the Greek conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech and has a rich theological background. Through the Word, Jesus, God redeems and restores the creational structure as He completes and perfects the Greek concept of logos which is an impersonal principle of reason that the Greeks said ordered the universe. God speaks personally to His people, so we study English to communicate with the One who first communicated with us (Kimball, 2014). We are also to communicate with others, specifically the Gospel of Jesus, and that communication may be in the form of speech or writing. As an educator, I want my students to excel in their language arts’ skills and abilities so that they can, first, grow in their relationship with God and His Word, and second, communicate well to others. This skill is imperative in light of recent statistics:

- Fifty percent of high school graduates not prepared for college-level writing (Achieve, 2005, p. 8);
- Writing remediation costs businesses $3.1 billion a year (National Commission, 2004, pp. 4, 18);
- It’s the fuzzy, terrible writing we slog through every day at work. And it’s costing American businesses nearly $400 billion every year (Bernoff, 2016, p. 2).

Writing is a necessary skill for success in higher education and future careers. Those who do not learn to write well are at a disadvantage as their grades suffer and they are not sufficiently prepared for the working world. Up to two-thirds of workers in large companies will have writing responsibilities, but if they do not have the training they need, doing so on the job will cost estimated billions every year (Addison and McGee, 2010, p. 151). Opportunities for advancement within many careers are also limited as writing is a key to advancement (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 3). For years, then, there has been a call for improvement of students’ writing skills and instruction in high school and college.

We need to help diversify the types of writing taught through a vertical curriculum that begins in high school, continues through college, and specifically fosters transfer across contexts. Promoting a balanced emphasis on literary analysis alongside rhetorical analysis in high school could lead to students who are better prepared for the writing required of them in college and the workplace. Here we imagine an interdisciplinary curriculum in high school and college English departments that does not displace literary studies but rather re-establishes the importance of English studies broadly conceived at all levels and within all disciplines. (Addison & McGee, 2010, p. 170)

Over the last four years, in my junior English III classes, my students’ writing skills have shown a lack of basic understanding in content and form, grammar, and punctuation. Students should have a basic understanding of writing, but my classes are clearly a part of the growing trend of students who lack fundamental writing skills (Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016). My students have talent and received instruction in the past, but they have not retained it or progressed in their skills as writers. By working through a variety of writing assignments, then, my goal as an educator of junior...
English students is to help them synthesize all that they have learned. Yearning to see these unique and valued students succeed, I am attempting to unravel the curious conundrum they present. It has become imperative to know what writing instruction my students had received. The first five-paragraph essay assignment of the year reveals strengths and weaknesses, and the need for a plan of attack to train and strengthen these writers.

Research Questions

With a responsibility to teach my students well in all aspects of the language arts, desiring to help them in their understanding and writing ability, I conducted a qualitative research study that sought to answer these questions: What writing skills do my students have? What techniques or strategies do they use when writing? How does my students’ use of technology influence their writing process/procedures and skills?

Review of Literature

Writing instruction is necessary as learning to write is not a naturally absorbed skill. It requires diligence to achieve competency. Even though the history of writing education began in the Greek empire, it became essential to American education during the nineteenth century when public education was established in the United States. The emphasis of writing instruction has changed greatly over the years, however, shifting from mechanics to content and creativity. During the 1960s and 1970s, writing instruction became process-oriented rather than product-oriented as research suggested that grammar and other detailed instruction in mechanics did not improve students’ writing ability (Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh, Couzijn, Braaksma, Tillema, Van Steendam, & Raedts, 2012). Various pedagogical approaches have emerged since then in order to teach writing more effectively. Process Writing Approach/Process Genre Approach and Grammar Instruction are currently the major emphases in writing instruction. Overlapping these are questions related to technology/digital tools.

Writing Instruction Practices

Process Writing Approach and Process Genre Approach. The Process Writing Approach (PWA) had been developed for twenty years before it became recognized as one of the most popular for classroom writing instruction (Lucas, 1993; Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). In understanding the early stages of the process approach, Williams (2014) highlights the work by Emig, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, based on research during the 1960s that applied empirical designs and methodologies to address pedagogical questions regarding the subject of writing. Thus, Williams (2014) asserts that writing is a process with many stages (p. 56-57). Even though there is no universally accepted definition for the method (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham & Sandmel, 2011), PWA generally describes the kind of writing instruction that guides students through stages/cycles/steps of learning: “planning (setting goals, generating ideas, organizing ideas), translating (putting a writing plan into action), and reviewing (evaluating, editing, revising)” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396; Williams, 2014; Lucas, 1993; Van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & van Steendam, 2016).

PWA shifts from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. Instead of giving long lectures about how to write, the teacher lectures for ten minutes before having students write and work through part of the writing cycle (Williams, 2014). These parts include revision and planning (Torrance, 2016; Langford & Brown, 2015) because PWA requires time for students to write in class, choosing their own topics, developing purpose statements, drafting and reflecting, and then redrafting their pieces. Small groups of students work together to discuss and critique their writing with the goal of student-led improvement. The teacher becomes a coach directing the process.

Concerns regarding PWA are that peer workshops do not seem workable in a public-school classroom and that there is not enough time in an English class to work through the process (Williams, 2014, p. 59). Indeed, “the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008), [stated] only 33% of eighth-grade and 24% of 12th-grade students perform at or above the proficient level in writing” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). Therefore, teachers and administration have called for reform in writing instruction. Yet, the Writer’s Workshop (another name for PWA) continues to be used exclusively or in combination with more traditional skills instruction. The National Writing Project also “provides professional development in how to use the process writing approach to more than 100,000 teachers a year” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

How effective is PWA? Graham and Sandmel (2011) investigated this writing approach and conclude that it helped students learn to write in general education classes, but only moderately. However, students classified as struggling writers did not experience improvement in writing skills nor were they motivated to write. While the Process Approach provides tools for writing instruction, it is not sufficient on its own (Tudor, 2016; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). The Process Genre Writing Approach, therefore, adapts PWA to combine traditional writing approaches while providing students with genre knowledge (Tudor, 2016). In this method, “learners identify why, to whom, what and how they will produce a text…[They] are guided
Many educators do not have the grammar knowledge or faded from the academic world in the 1970s, however, considered experts in grammar. Since grammar instruction waned and waned (Hudson, 2016; Jones, Myhill, & Bailey, 2013; Locke, 2009; Robinson & Feng, 2016; Williams, 2014). Herman Muller (cited in Locke, 2009) said studies, from the 1960s, show “grammatical knowledge did little to improve speaking and writing and that “the teaching of grammar has been chiefly a waste of time” (p. 183). Most Anglophone countries, thereafter, abandoned grammar instruction. However, in the last twenty years, researchers have revisited the previous conclusions and decided they missed the mark (Jones et al., 2013; Locke 2009, Hudson, 2016, Williams, 2014).

Because of gaps in grammar pedagogy, as well as the need for clear terms, new research has developed. One main area for teachers to consider is the context in which they teach grammar. Do they teach grammar terms and ideas in a vacuum or in an applied way, like when students are writing about other topics? Teaching grammar without engaging in the process of writing will not improve a student’s writing (Hudson, 2016), but providing explicit instruction grammar while applying that grammar to the writing task does improve writing (Hudson, 2016, p. 296). Constance Weaver (as cited in Locke, 2009) summarizes:

Drawing on theory and practice… rather than trying to ‘cover’ all grammatical skills, something traditionally done in many classrooms, teachers can more successfully teach less grammar with better results by focusing on key grammatical options and skills in the context of actual writing, through the writing process and over time. (p. 188)

Another area to be considered as to whether grammar instruction is helpful in the writing process is the teacher’s own competence and confidence. In education and research through the 1970s, teachers were considered experts in grammar. Since grammar instruction faded from the academic world in the 1970s, however, many educators do not have the grammar knowledge or experience to teach grammar with confidence, so it is not difficult to believe that few students have learned the basics of grammar. Teachers are a key variable in educating students, so we must understand their own grammar skills in order to understand what student results reveal (Hudson, 2016; Jones, et al., 2013). Effective instruction in grammar requires a teacher proficient in grammar.

Writing Instruction in the Twenty-first Century

Technology/Digital Tools. Teachers have a wide range of media available to them in the classroom, from films to smartboards. The question arises, do teachers use such technology well (Williams, 2014)? In most cases, teachers employ classroom technologies for presentations in support of traditional teaching methods (Applebee and Langer, 2011). As technology is an ever-present part of the twenty-first-century world, educators are exploring how to balance its use in the classroom. Applebee’s 1979-1980 study, Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas only mentioned computers and word processors, but 37 years later when Applebee and Langer (2011) published a review and update, they addressed how students used computers and cell phones to communicate, write, and be entertained (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, p. 189).

Blankenship and Margarella (2014) found that when technology is used appropriately and effectively, student writing can improve. Specifically, when students use technology to gain immediate access to primary sources, their writing improves. Next, they discovered that technology motivated and inspired students to learn more. In other words, students who are not learning tend to reengage through the use of technology as demonstrated in improved test scores. Finally, Blankenship and Margarella (2014) reveal that interacting with the technologies available in the classroom may develop stronger grasps of writing concepts. For example, when the teacher provides primary sources within a PowerPoint presentation and students immediately interact with those sources, deeper learning occurs. The traditional classroom lecture format about the primary sources changes with the use of technologies that bring the primary sources directly to the classroom (pp. 150-153).

For writing instruction, “technology changes the concept of text” (italics in original text; Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, p. 190). The word text, therefore, envelops more than the words on a page, including images and video. The definition of a literate person has also changed into someone who is not only a critical thinker, but also a consumer of information. Thus, teachers must enlarge their instruction to include how to read and use new technologies (Rijlaarsdam, et al., 2012, 190).

Teachers of writing must especially think about what is permitted and taught. High school students use “text speak” or “net talk” when texting, Snapchatting, or emailing. This is abbreviated language or slang for the teen population, and some educators have suggested that this should be acceptable for classroom writing. Williams (2014) explains one reason why it is
not prudent to permit this type of language in formal writing as he clarifies that slang is the method of communication of a closed group (in this case, high school students) that helps members identify with the group. Another reason is that educators’ aim is to improve student writing, helping them write with language associated with different disciplines/subjects and careers, but slang is not generally acceptable in academic or professional writing (p. 245). As mentioned earlier the cost to re-teach employees to write, is too high, so we must teach writing well in primary and secondary schools (Graham, 2008).

Technology presents more than a medium for writing in the classroom. Teachers can use it to assist the whole writing process, to motivate students, and to help students retain material. Examples of exploring classroom uses of technology is demonstrated in special population classrooms (Blankenship & Margarella, 2014; Saulsburry, Kilpatrick, Wolbers, & Dostal, 2015), where “…students with emotional, physical, or behavioral disabilities, minority students and English language learners” (Blankenship & Margarella, 2014, p. 153) tend to use technology to even greater extent than those in other classrooms. Technology fills the gaps for special population students while connecting them to the world outside the classroom. Specifically, Saulsburry, Kilpatrick, Wolbers, and Dostal (2015) demonstrated the capacities in which technology helped such students to create a writing project. Every aspect of the project from topic to “publication” was linked to a specific technology: Skype, wireless keyboard, Word document, and tablets. For students with hearing and behavior difficulties, digital tools were integrated into the instruction to meet the needs of each student. “We are living in a technology-infused world where most of our students live digitally connected lives. Integrating technology and finding the right digital tools motivates our students and fits their lives. It also fits into effective instructional patterns” (p. 34). These examples provide the possibilities for technology to be developed in all writing classrooms.

In summary, recent literature suggests that combining the Process/Genre Writing Approach, Grammar Instruction, and technology help students learn how to write. How might I then use these tools together to develop a plan that serves my students well? My study attempts to discover their emergent attitudes and abilities to uncover their process of writing development. As their instructor, I do not want my students to join the growing trend of students lacking fundamental writing skills, but I anticipate that my research will shed light on ways in which I may design future writing projects to best instruct them, building on their past writing instruction history and helping our school continue to improve writing instruction.

Methodology

Participants

I conducted my study in a small, private K-12 Christian academy in northwest Louisiana, which includes suburban and rural areas with middle-to-upper income families. The 40 students in my eleventh-grade English III course are 16-17, with 15 girls and 25 boys, and representing three ethnicities (1 Hispanic, 6 African-American, and 33 Caucasian). Eight of the 26 faculty members completed my faculty survey to analyze. I also conducted individual conferences with three of my students’ former English teachers and six of my students. The English teachers provided information as to what writing instruction my students received in seventh, eighth, and tenth grades. The six students, interviewed before they submitted the final draft of their project, offered insight as to how the writing process affected their products.

Instruments

I crafted four surveys: 1) a pre-writing survey on Nearpod to have students answer Likert-scale questions, open-ended questions, and polls; 2) a faculty survey about writing instruction, implementing a Likert scale and open-ended questions; 3) a student survey about their draft projects with Likert-scale and open-ended questions; and 4) a student survey about their final drafts with Likert-scale and open-ended questions. I also conducted individual student interviews with open-ended, guided questions about their writing process during the project. I interviewed three of my students’ former English teachers to ascertain what they taught and emphasized regarding writing. Finally, I assessed my observations and comments on student drafts to track their development. My instruments provided valid measurements of my students’ writing skills as well as valid assessment of how technology influenced my students’ writing processes. I used multiple data collection methods in order to provide triangulation. When analyzing my data, patterns emerged to indicate reliability.

Procedures

From the first week of September until the final draft was submitted on November 15, my students worked through specific research project steps. The assignment was to write a first-person biography to be presented on American History Day in April 2018 for their American History class. My students received the schedule for the due dates during the first week of school with two web articles and two books required in class by September 18. As this project is in conjunction
with the students’ American History class, due dates then changed to accommodate the American History teacher. At this time, students received the “Writing Packet for MLA 8th Edition” for our school, as well as instruction in source cards and note cards. Students responded to a survey, administered on Nearpod.com/app in class, reflecting their attitudes and thoughts on their English and writing education. During class time on September 20, I taught students about the MLA format required for their four source cards. Then, because a school pep rally postponed instruction time, the due date for the 20 note-cards changed to September 27.

Students received information and instruction for organizing an outline with details on using Google Docs and turnitin.com. On September 29 students shared their Google Doc with me and submitted their outlines in class.

The first-draft rubric which each student received, had a due date of October 16. After each of the three drafts, I graded and commented on each student’s Google Doc to help with writing style, technique, and grammar. As part of the next draft’s grade, they corrected and worked on those issues. The second check-point/draft was due November 3. When I gave my students the final-draft rubric, I took time to explain and answer any questions they had. On November 13, students answered a survey regarding their experience of the process before the final draft’s due date of 15 November. On that same day, I emailed a survey to the current faculty of grades 7-12 and put paper copies of the same survey in their mailboxes. Because of end-of-semester responsibilities, students responded to the Exit Survey for the project on their first day in class after the Christmas break.

After the second draft was due and before the final draft was due, I conducted six individual interviews with chosen students and recorded their responses. Also during this time, I conducted three individual interviews with those who taught my students English in the seventh, eighth, and tenth grades and recorded their responses to three questions.

Results

The first survey, administered through the Nearpod.com/app in my classroom and Tables 1-3 represent, reveals my students’ beliefs about their overall English and writing education.

Table 1: From which English class did you learn the most in middle and high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Responses</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 demonstrates the years which students believe they learned the most in English. Other results from the first survey are written responses which reveal the teacher is the reason those classes were set apart: 49% (20/41). In response to the statement: “Writing, for me, is a chore,” the Likert-Scale Mean is 3.23 with half of the students responding “neutral.” Table 2 reveals that students state that they like to write, but it depends on the subject.

Table 2: Do you like to write?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Depends on the subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: What do you suggest you could do to strengthen your English skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Pay Attention/Focus</th>
<th>Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Responses</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 reveals, students’ responses to the question, “What do you suggest you could do to strengthen your English skills?” disclose their understanding of how important practice is. The Student Survey, which Tables 4 and 5 represent, before the final draft reveals another picture of the...
students’ views of the courses in which they received writing assignments:

Table 4: What courses (please list all) did you receive writing assignments (paragraphs/essays/papers)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (English)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fair</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses (Table 4) provide a picture of how students perceive the courses in which they learned how to write. English classes from seventh, eighth, tenth, and eleventh grades dominate the chart. In this survey as Table 5 reveals, the numbers one through five represent these responses: one – “not important at all” or “No way, José (not at all)” or “negatively” or “absolutely not,” two – “not important” or “not confident” or “somewhat negative” or “no,” three – “neutral” or “neither” or “neither yes or no,” four – “somewhat important” or sort of confident” or “somewhat positive” or “yes,” five – “very important” or “very confident” or “positively” or “absolutely yes.”

Table 5: Students’ opinions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number of Positive Responses (4-5)</th>
<th>Number of Negative Responses (1-3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How important is writing in courses?</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How is your confidence in writing and techniques?</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When given a writing assignment, I respond…</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would like to have help in all of my courses…</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ responses, upon analysis, reveal a negative response to writing assignments while also indicating an understanding that writing is important, they need help doing it and feeling confident about it.

Table 6: Student Exit Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number of Positive Responses (4-5)</th>
<th>Number of Negative Responses (1-3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. The use of technology helped the writing process</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My writing style and technique improved</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. By using Google Docs, I found the draft process easier</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of the students’ responses reveals that they found the process of writing helpful, and they liked using technology to facilitate that process. In the same survey, when asked “On what device did you compose your paper?” the choices were “cell phone,” “laptop/computer,” “wrote on paper,” “A, B, & C,” “A & B,” and “B & C.” 85% (34/40) of the students composed exclusively on a cell phone or laptop/computer while the other 15% composed on a combination of paper and cell phone or laptop/computer. Students responded that 59% (94/161) of their sources were online.

### Conclusions

#### Hypothesis Produced

My research leads me to conclude that my students believe that writing is important, and they realize that they must practice the skills to improve. The difficult ninth-grade year, with many teachers and a lack of consistency leading to gaps in their education, reveal reasons for their lack of confidence and skill. Finally, the use of technology, like Google Docs and computers, enhances the ease of the writing process for my students, and my instruction through Google Docs helps as well.

#### Discussion

First, my research, reveals throughout that students know they must work through these processes if they will learn to write. Three of the six interviewed students said that they like and enjoy writing and are excited when given a writing project. The other three are more concerned with the topic, their time, and their grades. Interestingly, every student had a different response to the first step they take when organizing their papers: some brainstorm, some outline, some come up with a thesis statement. The process/genre writing approach is one with a specific order to the events, but my students start at different parts of the approach. Also, my students’ goals for the final draft emphasize their differences in understanding: two students had goals of ensuring the citations were correct, two students decided to concentrate upon making their corrections/changes in response to my Google Docs comments, and two students had the goal of making the paper interesting. Most of my students complained about the draft process, but those who worked through the process of editing and responded to my comments regarding grammar, technique, and other necessary changes improved.

The American History biography project provided three opportunities for students to work through their paper. Each draft was graded by me, and scored according to the rubric provided for each draft. The majority of comments for the first two drafts brought to the students’ attention the need for commas, the need to change “boring” verbs and adjectives to action/descriptive words, and to watch the use of forbidden words from the Writing Packet’s list. Thesis and paragraph support were the other main corrections. On Google Docs, I highlighted the concerning words and informed the students of what issues they should address. Those students who addressed the comments improved their papers with each draft.

Second, after interviewing the seventh, eighth, and tenth-grade teachers, a picture materialized as to why my students think what they think about writing. In seventh grade, the one-paragraph to three-paragraph essay was emphasized. Developing a solid topic sentence and three supporting details of evidence were the goals. The teacher assigned creative writing, reading responses, and journaling to develop their writing skills. This continued through eighth grade they moved toward developing clear five-paragraph essays. How to develop a good “hook” with a strong emphasis on grammar dominated this year. The students learned to quote properly in MLA format, but they did not craft Works Cited pages yet. During ninth grade, my students had four teachers in one year. During that time, as told by the students, they did not write, nor did they have consistency. The tenth-grade teacher then realized that her students genuinely did not remember how to write, so writing instruction felt to her like a firehose into a tiny cup. She emphasized developing good thesis statements with the proper support. “Express and prove” sum up her main emphasis. She reviewed the five-paragraph essay, introducing two sources, and solid textual evidence.

The lack of continuity during the ninth-grade year explains some of the difficulties my students experienced. The lack of writing across the curriculum also is a factor. The responses in Table 4 reveal and the experience of my students’ ninth-grade year demonstrates, the “no” response is the most, with Science being the

### Table 6: Student Exit Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Mrs. Kimball’s comments on Google Docs were not helpful</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. After this American History writing project, I am more confident and equipped to write</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
only other writing. The reason for the writing instruction in science is that Honors’ Science students are required to participate in the annual school Science Fair and a five-paragraph essay is required.

Finally, the use of technology enhanced the writing process and created an easier process. Of the students interviewed, four of them stated the helpful and best part of the process was my Google Docs’ comments. The process of having to correct or change a word or sentence or paragraph provided the opportunity to rethink the writing process; as one student comments, she “saw how different verbs, comments that were or were not necessary, and I saw myself thinking that way” (KC – interviewee). I heard from other teachers that students talked about how much they liked Google Docs. Another interviewee declares that “once finished – you can go back to it anytime and do not need to worry about saving” (MW – interviewee). The majority of students composed their papers on a cell phone or laptop/computer, with only six writing on paper in combination with the technology.

For me, as an instructor, being able to highlight and type comments and corrections saves time. Oversight of students’ work is easier as well. Google Docs has a “version history” which permits me to “see” the last time a student is on the doc and changes made. The comments are saved to track the progress of student changes. Also, I may “check on” progress of my students and offer help or advice for their writing.

Recommendations

While some of my students may not have earned the grade they wanted, those students who worked through the process improved and grew in their writing technique. Realizing the benefit of using technology for my students, I plan to continue to develop their writing projects with the use of Google Docs and turnitin.com. A few students had problems working between Google Docs and turnitin.com; however, after consulting with me, we usually found the glitch. As our school administration had the faculty trained on Chrome and Chrome Books, with the goal of using Google Classrooms, training students on these academic helps is necessary. The school has progressed with the addition of smart boards, a functioning and up-to-date computer lab, and a plan to have Chrome Books for teachers to use in the classroom.

The writing process for my students is a long road of work and practice. From the first five-paragraph essay written during this year through this writing project, those students who have chosen to work and try have succeeded. Part of the problem is that students choose to not work on a draft. Many did nothing and earned 0/35 points on second draft, missing the chance to develop their papers and improve after my comments. Another issue to be addressed in future projects is how to ensure that students work through every step of the research paper project. Many in this project never wrote an outline.

Of course, the English department should not be the only source of writing instruction. As the practice and opportunity is needed, writing should be emphasized in every course at our school. The experience of my students during their ninth-grade year is a beacon to our school when we must be pushing our students to develop thoughts and support those thoughts in every aspect of creation. Diligence and practice should be the foundation of future writing projects to provide opportunities to grow in writing as well as their communication with God and others. These image bearers of the Creator of the universe have much to work on in the realm of composition, however, with perseverance, the entire faculty at our school will be able to instruct and encourage so that they grow more and more into the image of Jesus, the Word incarnate and communicate to the world about Him. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (English Standard Version).

References


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THE EFFECT OF DUOLINGO ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ L2 SPANISH VOCABULARY AND ATTITUDES

Andrew R. Sharpe

This study examined the effect of the digital application Duolingo on high school students in a level two Spanish course. As a mixed-methods action research project, the study sought to measure students’ L2 Spanish vocabulary development after the use of Duolingo, as well as its effect on learner attitudes towards the application and their learning of Spanish. The study employed quantitative analysis of pre-test and post-test scores on a vocabulary assessment and qualitative analysis of data from interviews, student reflections, and instructor field notes. The results of the study revealed slight improvements in student vocabulary knowledge after six weeks of using Duolingo. The data also suggested high levels of student enjoyment of Duolingo, with some noted criticisms of the application evident. Overall, student responses indicated that while Duolingo was enjoyable, it was not significant enough to motivate them to continue to use the program without class requirement. While the project’s findings are not generalizable to other settings and more research on the topic is needed, the study implies that Duolingo is a worthwhile resource for second year Spanish courses in high schools.

The development of a second language (L2) is a complex process involving knowledge of multiple linguistic components. One of the primary factors is knowledge of vocabulary. The role of vocabulary in second language acquisition (SLA) has experienced increased interest among researchers in recent years (Tan, 2016). In fact, beginning in the late 20th century, a “renaissance” of interest in vocabulary’s impact on language and literacy commenced (Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2007). As a result of this recent prioritization of vocabulary in language study, the focus of research has shifted increasingly to understanding how learners most effectively acquire it. This shift has led scholars to now place substantial emphasis on vocabulary’s function in the language acquisition process (Tan, 2016).

As a high school Spanish language instructor, I have also become increasingly interested in the role of vocabulary in my own students’ L2 development. My interest arose out of observing the performance of level two students in recent years, especially upon their entry into my class every fall semester. Despite deficiencies in other aspects of language, one of the major problems that seems most debilitating to students when entering my second year course is lack of vocabulary. That is, many students do not master level one vocabulary well enough to use that vocabulary either receptively or actively the following year in level two. This lack of vocabulary puts students at a disadvantage in the course as they are less able to comprehend the target language, leading to additional problems such as apathy and low academic performance. Thus, my students’ lack of vocabulary prompted me to question ways to improve their vocabulary development so that they may experience success in Spanish II and a desire to study the language at higher levels.

Further, observing student attitudes towards learning a second language over recent years caused me to consider additional ways to motivate students to continue L2 learning formally, as well as extend their learning outside the classroom. As my school and the state of Tennessee only require two years of a world language for graduation, I discovered that it is critical to motivate my second year students to continue with their language studies and for them to find enjoyment in the process. Those that lack motivation and enjoyment can easily discontinue learning Spanish in high school, and possibly for the rest of their lives. Yet, to be able to reach higher levels of language proficiency, students must continue their learning beyond a second year in high school.

Given the importance of vocabulary and positive outlooks in language learning, I was eager to implement the use of Duolingo in my classroom. Duolingo is a digital application for computers and mobile devices that promotes the study of various modern languages, including Spanish. While Duolingo has been freely available for a few years, this was the first year I required my students to utilize the application.

Research Questions

Considering my concerns about second year students’ vocabularies and their overall attitude toward learning Spanish, I carried out a mixed-methods study to answer the following questions: To what extent does the digital application Duolingo support Spanish L2 vocabulary development among high school students in Spanish II? What are students’ attitudes toward using Duolingo in Spanish II?

Review of Literature

A major vocabulary development approach is what Nation and Chung (2009) call “language-focused learning.” This method involves “deliberate learning and the deliberate study of vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies” (Nation & Chung, 2009). A variety of vocabulary-learning tools support this method, from flashcards and dictionaries to increasingly prevalent computer programs (Nation & Chung, 2009).

One of the most effective language-focused learning methods is through the study of bilingual flashcards (Nation & Chung, 2009). Two recent studies involving L2 learners of
English demonstrated further support for the effectiveness of flashcards in vocabulary learning. Dizon (2016) found Quizlet, the online flashcard service, to be effective in teaching academic vocabulary to Japanese university students. While the sample size of the study was extremely small, Dizon’s (2016) students demonstrated vocabulary growth on a vocabulary levels test after use of Quizlet flashcards. The study’s findings also demonstrated positive student perceptions toward Quizlet’s platform for vocabulary study, with a majority of the students in the study using the mobile-phone application instead of the computer-based website. Students noted that they enjoyed using the Quizlet flashcards out of class for their ease of use and their accessibility anywhere on their mobile phones.

In a different context with adult Iranian EFL learners, Naeimi and Foo (2015) also reported use of language-focused learning methods like flashcards to be effective. In this experimental study, the researchers compared the use of indirect methods of vocabulary learning, like group discussion, with direct learning methods, such as the study of flashcards with terms and definitions. The pre-test and post-test differences suggested that the language-focused approach of flashcard study led to higher scores. Like the Dizon (2016) study, Naeimi and Foo (2015) also reported student enjoyment of the simplicity of flash cards as a manner to review their vocabulary.

Another current trend in language-focused vocabulary learning is in the area of computer programs. Technology continues to change the way teachers prepare instruction, while also opening up increasing opportunities for students to engage in language learning independently. The rise of internet-connected mobile phones has even made language learning feasible on portable hand-held devices. With such mobile technology, a variety of vocabulary learning tasks previously restricted to classroom settings are now available on demand from any location (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017).

One prominent internet-based application for language learning is Duolingo. Duolingo is a web-based program for mobile phones that allows learners to study a variety of languages for free. The application provides opportunities for learners to practice language through a variety of tasks from matching exercises to translation. It also includes listening and speaking exercises to simulate authentic language use. Duolingo takes advantage of a gaming interface to motivate learners. For example, users that pass to a new level experience celebratory sounds and images (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017). Overall, Duolingo includes mostly elements of language-focused learning like direct pairing tasks of vocabulary from first language to the second language. However, it also includes elements of what Nation and Chung (2009) call meaning-focused output, as well as meaning-focused input, through reading and listening to statements. Studies of the latter have suggested that learners can indeed grow their L2 vocabulary through modest amounts of input via incidental acquisition (Rott, 2004; Reynolds, 2014; Barcroft, 2015). In short, Krashen (2014) argues “It [Duolingo] is clearly aimed at conscious learning, although some subconscious acquisition of language is inevitable, as students hear and read samples of the language” (p. 13).

Studies have shown that students largely have positive attitudes towards the use of Duolingo as a language learning tool (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012; Botero & Questier, 2016). According to Botero and Questier (2016), surveys of university-aged Colombian users of Duolingo demonstrated their satisfaction with the application as a language learning program in general, and specifically as a way to improve vocabulary. Vesselinov and Grego (2012) also found high satisfaction with Duolingo among participants in their study, with more than 90 percent planning to continue their use of the program beyond the conclusion of the experiment. Yet interestingly, despite the seemingly high popularity of Duolingo, Botero and Questier (2016) found in their surveys that students used the application much less than expected. Student usage was so low that the Botero and Questier (2016) ultimately recommend teacher scaffolding and support for Duolingo to be effective.

Nevertheless, the findings of Vesselinov and Grego (2012) on Duolingo found the application to be an effective language learning method for those users that remained in the study by following the minimum usage guidelines. With a participant sample consisting of American English-speaking adults learning Spanish, the researchers found that highest improvements in language ability were for those learners that began with the lowest levels. The more Spanish language knowledge a user had, the lower the improvement level after using Duolingo. Lastly, while the findings of Vesselinov and Grego (2012) were suggestive of a high effectiveness of the application, it should be noted that their independent investigation was in fact funded by Duolingo.

Like other approaches to vocabulary development, language-focused learning presents several advantages. The approach recognizes the rational nature of learners to detect patterns, make word associations, and employ strategies to better learn vocabulary. As demonstrated by Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2009), such strategies have been shown to provide support for vocabulary development. Another advantage to such language-focused learning is the way in which it supports independent learning and learner autonomy. Whether flashcards are digital or physical, learners enjoy the ability to easily use them as a way to review vocabulary (Dizon, 2016; Naeimi & Foo, 2015). Students do not have to be in a classroom or with a teacher to amplify their vocabulary. Lastly, as evidenced by Duolingo, learners increasingly perceive language-focused learning as an enjoyable experience (Botero & Questier, 2016).

Language-focused learning presents a couple of disadvantages as well. For one, the independent learning available through flashcards or Duolingo is only as effective as the
learner is disciplined. As Botero and Questier (2016) suggested about Duolingo, learners may indicate enjoyment of the platform, while also failing to consistently make use of it. Further, language-focused learning contains little to develop the social and communicative aspect of language learning. A lack of human interaction inherent with resources like Duolingo may lead to merely a passive knowledge of vocabulary and one that is not equipped for engaging in native-speaker human interactions (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017).

Despite the recent research in L2 vocabulary development, there is further need for research directly focused on L2 vocabulary development among students in formal secondary school classrooms. Most vocabulary-based research has focused on university and adult learners of language, and no studies have specifically explored Duolingo use among high school students. As a result of this gap in the literature, I was eager to conduct a study in my classroom with high school students learning Spanish as a second language.

Methodology

Participants

I administered my study at a large suburban Christian high school in Tennessee. Most participants are white, of high socioeconomic status, and have Christian church affiliations. The 48 students invited to participate in the study are from three sections of a high school Spanish II course. All students are between the ages of 15 and 18, and take Spanish in a mixed-grade level class composed of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. English is the native language of all students, and none of the students speak other languages at home. Of the 48 students invited to take part in the study, only 29 students actually used Duolingo for the minimum amount required of participants. Of the 29 students that participated in the study, 12 were boys and 17 were girls, all ranging from 9th grade to 12th grade.

Instruments

Students used the Spanish language version of Duolingo for their smart phones or the Duolingo website on their laptop computers. I also utilized identical teacher-made pre-test and post-tests of vocabulary from Duolingo to assess recognition or receptive knowledge of 20 words in Spanish from before and after Duolingo use. The pre-test and post-test provided students with a Spanish word and asked them to demonstrate comprehension by writing the English translation. All words on the recognition assessment were from levels one through nine of the Spanish version of Duolingo to measure their initial comprehension of select words. During the pre-test, students read a list of 20 words in Spanish and had space to write the appropriate English equivalent. I specifically chose vocabulary items for the pre-test that I did not teach in the first quarter of Spanish II. I also chose words that are not direct cognates with English so that students would not know the words unless they had received prior exposure to them. Lastly, I did not reveal the purpose of the pre-test to students or its connection to Duolingo, but simply asked them to complete the assessment honestly and explained that it was not for a grade.

The next day I explained to my level two classes that they would be working with Duolingo over the next six weeks of the semester. As many students were unfamiliar with Duolingo, I explained the program’s premise and told students that they would have a goal of practicing their Spanish for 10 minutes a day, five days a week, for six weeks. To incentivize students to participate, I also made it clear that the weekly Duolingo assignment would count as a homework completion grade. I then instructed students to log-in to the program and join the Duolingo classroom that I created.

Creating the Duolingo classroom was a straightforward process. To set up the virtual classroom, I searched “Duolingo for Schools” in an internet browser. Once at the “Duolingo for Schools” website, I walked through a series of user-friendly steps to initiate my classroom. I then entered my students’ email addresses which Duolingo used to invite them to register. Once students joined my classroom, I was able to create assignments in the program and monitor my students’ progress for task completion. Duolingo allowed me as the instructor to create due dates, and also choose the topic or length of the assignment. Wanting to grant students an element of choice, the only stipulation I placed on their
use was that they spend what Duolingo considered to be an average of 10 minutes a day for five days each week using the program. Unfortunately, Duolingo classroom did not allow me to monitor the exact amount of time each student spent using the program. Instead, I set a weekly goal of 100 points for my students, a goal which Duolingo estimated as taking approximately 50 minutes.

As planned, students completed their weekly Duolingo assignments almost entirely outside of the physical classroom environment. However, there were some instances in which students used Duolingo under my direct supervision. For example, when students finished a test or completed a lesson earlier than expected, they had the opportunity to work on Duolingo. During such times of students working on Duolingo in class, I recorded field notes of their behavior and comments. Otherwise, the majority of student use of Duolingo occurred without my direct supervision.

After six weeks of using Duolingo, students completed a post-test with the same 20 vocabulary items as their pre-test in order to measure any difference in their receptive knowledge of vocabulary. At the same time, students also completed an open-ended reflection questionnaire regarding their experience with Duolingo. The questionnaire sought to measure student perception of how Duolingo affected their vocabulary and also their attitudes about learning Spanish and using Duolingo. During the same week as the post-test and questionnaire, I also invited six students for interviews to discuss their perspectives on Duolingo. Three boys and three girls attended interviews, representing high, average, and low achievers. Interviews were short, with each lasting between two and five minutes.

After administering all post-tests at the end of six weeks, I used the quantitative data in the form of the pre-test and post-test scores to calculate the mean scores from before and after the use of Duolingo. I analyzed the qualitative data from my field notes, transcribed interview conversations, and student reflections by coding data along prominent themes and trends. The use of multiple data sources allowed for data triangulation.

As a final procedural note, I excluded from my study students that did not complete the minimum target usage of 50 minutes of Duolingo each week. Of the original 48 students invited to participate, 19 students did not factor into my analysis for failure to complete the minimum requirements. Such students still used Duolingo occasionally, but they did not meet the threshold of 50 minutes per week over 6 weeks. Therefore, I excluded them from the study.

Results

The pre-test scores administered prior to students using Duolingo revealed that students had little receptive knowledge of the selected vocabulary. Of the students that participated in the study, the mean score on the pre-test was 0.04/20. The post-test scores revealed a very small increase in the overall mean score of 1.24/20. Overall, the difference in average score from before and after use of Duolingo was only 1.2 points.

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Qualitative data from across the student questionnaires revealed that students generally felt like Duolingo was helpful to their Spanish vocabulary knowledge, while a majority of students also expressed enjoyment of using the program. For example, Hermana wrote, “Yes, it [Duolingo] has helped my Spanish vocab a lot. It is also a more fun way to learn Spanish” (student reflection). At the same time, students indicated that they would be much less eager to continue their use of Duolingo outside of the class requirements. In that line of thought, another student, Ana, responded “I enjoy using Duolingo, but I would not continue on my own if it weren’t a class requirement” (student reflection). It seems that overall students enjoyed much of Duolingo, but their commitment to using it without any course or grade incentives was quite low.

Qualitative data from field notes echoed student attitudes about enjoyment of Duolingo. One student, Nico, exclaimed “I am a big fan” on the second day of using the program (field notes). While the novelty of Duolingo may have been the cause of such remarks, students’ behavior over the course of several weeks indicated enjoyment as well. My recorded observations of students revealed that they were eager to use Duolingo when they finished a task early, and also remained on task with Duolingo despite having opportunities to look at other websites or study for other classes.

Responses from the recorded interviews provided more detailed understanding of student perceptions about Duolingo. Like the data from the reflection questionnaire, students interviewed indicated that Duolingo was helpful to their vocabulary in various degrees. In one interview, Clara said, “I feel like Duolingo is a good way to kind of get more vocabulary that you don’t necessarily learn in class, and it’s a better way to learn the vocabulary than just like doing worksheets out of a book” (interview). Yet students interviewed also expressed downsides to Duolingo, namely that it could become repetitive and that it lacked realistic communicative scenarios. Like the student reflections, the interviewees overwhelmingly indicated that they would not continue to use Duolingo on their own, without the requirements of the course (interview coding).

Conclusions

Hypotheses Generated

Based on the results of my research, I propose that Duolingo is a valuable high school Spanish class resource for the way in which students seem to enjoy using it. On the
other hand, I also conclude that Duolingo is not an especially effective manner for secondary students to learn vocabulary, particularly vocabulary that is not simultaneously reinforced in the regular classroom.

Discussion

My first research question sought to gauge to what extent Duolingo affects high school students’ L2 vocabulary development in Spanish. Both quantitative and qualitative data from the study suggest that indeed the use of Duolingo for the study’s time frame helped make an improvement in students’ vocabularies, albeit a very small one. Of the 29 students in the study, the mean improvement in score was only 1.2 points from a low original mean of 0.04 points. While students knew hardly any of the targeted vocabulary before the study, they knew very little after either. Qualitative data seem to echo this finding as well, though indicating that students were still mainly affirmative of Duolingo as being beneficial. Fabio and Tomás, two of the students interviewed from different achievement levels, both expressed that Duolingo improved their vocabulary “a little bit” (interviews). Responses from the student questionnaires also indicated students felt that Duolingo helped their vocabulary, with 27 out of 29 students responding in this way. These data parallel the findings of Botero and Questier’s (2016) study with Colombian college students in which they reported that “Duolingo is perceived to be a useful tool for language learning” (p. 153).

Yet students’ ideas of how the program helped their vocabulary varied, with many students indicating that Duolingo helped them review, but not necessarily grow their Spanish vocabularies. In response to the reflective questionnaire, Sofia wrote “It [Duolingo] has helped expand a few more words in my Spanish vocabulary. It has helped me by letting me review a topic if I need to refresh my memory on a certain group of words” (student reflection). And while Vesselinov and Grego (2012) found that their adult learners all made L2 progress with Duolingo, interestingly the students that made the least linguistic growth were participants who “studied for personal interest and school” (p. 16). Rather, adults using Duolingo for travel and work made much higher improvement (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012). Such findings suggest that Duolingo can be helpful, yet Duolingo may make a larger difference in actual achievement depending on an individual’s motivation for using it.

My second research question sought to gauge students’ enjoyment of using Duolingo and its effect on their enjoyment of Spanish learning. Here, the qualitative data from the study suggest that students overwhelmingly enjoyed working with Duolingo. In fact, only one of 29 students indicated that he did not enjoy using Duolingo in the reflection questionnaire. Various rationales for such widespread enjoyment appeared in the qualitative data. Thirteen students indicated in the questionnaire that Duolingo was fun. Another three students commented that they liked the novelty of Duolingo as opposed to routine Spanish assignments. Student interviews revealed that at least one student enjoyed the autonomy in learning that Duolingo affords, while another student emphasized enjoyment of the challenge of reaching goals within the program. In their review of Duolingo, Nushi and Eqbali (2017) also noted how “Duolingo helps learners feel they have accomplished something, a feeling that keeps them motivated” (p. 95). My field note observations also add additional support for the high levels of student enjoyment with Duolingo. When given opportunities in class to work on Duolingo, I observed students consistently remain on task with Duolingo, and even vocalized unsolicited affinity for the program, a rare behavior among high school-aged adolescents. Yet, it remains unclear from the data whether Duolingo really affected student enjoyment of Spanish learning more broadly, with six students even stating directly that it did not affect their overall enjoyment of learning Spanish (student reflections).

While the majority of students expressed enjoyment of using Duolingo, there were also several themes of criticism that emerged from the qualitative data. For one, some students interviewed felt that Duolingo could be too repetitive. In an interview, Kilo described moments of Duolingo as “…just going through the motions, typing it out” (student interview). Other students asserted that the vocabulary in Duolingo could be frustratingly obscure. Emilia, an interviewed student, said “It only gives me a short variety…of words…I mean it matters, but it’s not like as important as if I were to like see someone or go up to someone and talk to them in Spanish. I wouldn’t start talking about like an animal or something” (student interview). Nushi and Eqbali (2017) also argued Duolingo’s lack of natural communicative scenarios as a weakness of the program.

As a final measure of attitude, the students also indicated whether they would continue using Duolingo without class requirements. To this, students overwhelmingly responded that they would not keep using Duolingo in a consistent way on their own. Eleven students responded clearly that they would not use Duolingo independently of class, while another 10 indicated they might engage in occasional usage (student reflections). Such a finding is surprising when contrasted with Vesselinov and Grego’s (2012) report that over 90% of participants in their study planned to keep using Duolingo on an independent basis. Overall, it would seem that high school students in my study liked Duolingo as an assignment for school, but did not develop enhanced motivation towards language learning from using the application.

Recommendations

While the findings of my study are helpful to me as I continue to work with students in a school setting, there are many limitations to the study. As a work of non-scientific action research without random sampling, the findings are
not generalizable to other settings. Further, the sample size involved in the study was small and homogeneous. Therefore, the limitations of this study coupled with the lack of research on Duolingo in general, and specifically on high school students, merit a recommendation for further research on the effect of Duolingo in high school world language classrooms.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study have shown me much about my particular students and their interaction with Duolingo. Based on these findings, I plan to continue to use Duolingo as part of my second year Spanish course, and make recommendations for others in my department to do the same. Also, from hearing the perspectives of my students, I plan to continue to require Duolingo as an assignment in order to ensure consistent student engagement. However, I also plan to increase students’ perception of Duolingo as relevant by assigning a variety of lessons pertaining more directly to the regular class curriculum, while still allowing choice in activities. In fact, from a biblical perspective, one of the more recommendable features of the program is the way in which it allows students choice and differentiates learning for unique individuals.

In conclusion, Duolingo is an additional resource to enhance vocabulary learning in the high school Spanish classroom. Findings from the study suggest, however, that Duolingo is not a highly effective solution for weak L2 vocabularies nor a replacement for strong instructor guidance. While the study found high student enjoyment of Duolingo, its ability to commit students to learning Spanish without added course incentives was limited. Ultimately, Duolingo is recommendable as an additional learning resource, and instructors would do well to consider implementing it as a component of their courses.

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USING STORY LISTENING AND FREE VOLUNTARY READING TO STRENGTHEN FLUENCY IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Ruth Stimart

In recent years, many world language teachers have abandoned the traditional grammar translation model of instruction which emphasizes the study of the structure of the language, and opted for a comprehension-based approach which emphasizes the message of the communication. Rather than rote memorization of thematic vocabulary lists, and instruction of grammar rules, many teachers are employing comprehensible input through storytelling and reading to help students naturally comprehend messages. In order to build the foundation for students to be able to understand and produce the language, they need an abundance of rich, interesting comprehensible input. Researchers among this camp suggest that story is the best way to give input, as good stories are compelling and of high interest to students. Many studies have examined how the use of storytelling paired with student reading affects language acquisition of adult language learners or students of English as a Foreign Language. This study investigates if a combination of storytelling and Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) would improve enjoyment, add confidence and lead to higher acquisition of high frequency vocabulary for high school students in the context of a Spanish class in a Christian private school in the United States.

In the Comprehension-based camp, there are many ways of approaching a story. Comprehensible Input (CI) practitioners have for many years used techniques such as Total Physical Response (TPR) which comes from the work of Dr. James Asher. With TPR, students demonstrate comprehension by performing actions that correspond to verbal commands. (BYU, n.d.). Spanish teacher, Blaine Ray experienced more success with this model than with the grammar translation model that he had been using, but felt like the technique fell short. It was difficult to help students acquire all necessary vocabulary through actions. Ray expanded the method to include an “S” for storytelling. This method began as Total Physical Response and Storytelling and further evolved into Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. Ray’s storytelling involved introducing a few target words or phrases and circling them by asking many questions beginning with “yes or no” answers, advancing to “this or that?” and then asking students questions where they would produce the target vocabulary on their own. (Day, 2006, 28).

Dr. Beniko Mason from Japan approaches stories in a different way in her language classes. She teaches Japanese students German and English. Rather than focusing on particular words, she focuses on the message. She does not pre-teach or practice vocabulary ahead of time, but starts with the story and tells it using gestures, drawings, pictures, and sometimes for efficiency, L1 (the student’s native language) translation, to make the story comprehensible. She named her method of storytelling “Story Listening”. Dr. Mason teaches using Story Listening exclusively as a bridge to students reading for themselves.

The participants of her studies have been mainly adults, although she has done some individual case-studies on some Japanese students learning English (Mason, 2017, 63, pgs. 469-475). She has invited American secondary school L2 (Second language) teachers to try this combination in their own context and add to the research. Her colleague, Dr. Stephen Krashen, suggests that the purpose of the language class is not to produce mastery, but rather an intermediate level of functionality and the tools and desire to continue growing fluency on one’s one, particularly through reading. (Krashen, 2004, p. 7) In order for a person to persist in reading, he or she must have the ability to read the text without needing an overwhelming amount of support. Krashen and Mason theorize that in order for a person to be able to read successfully, they must have a base of vocabulary and structures. Listening to stories builds a foundation that can act as a bridge to provide students the foundation to be able to read on their own eventually.

“I have hypothesized that we reach the highest levels of literacy by going through three stages: Hearing stories, or being read to, which increases vocabulary, knowledge of text structure (how stories are put together) and knowledge of the world. It also creates a desire to do independent reading (Brassell, 2003; Cho and Choi, 2008; Lee, Lee, and Krashen, 2013).

I wanted to conduct a study of the combination of Story Listening and FVR in my context. How can Telling Stories and allowing student choice while providing space to read strengthen language acquisition in the Second Language Classroom? Would it allow for a more enjoyable class? Would it cause students to want to read more at home? A hurdle that I had to overcome was being willing to give up the time for stories that had previously been spent on direct instruction of specific vocabulary and structures. I have heard about the benefits of incorporating a reading program that allows stu-
students to read during the class week. While I have given FVR opportunities a few times a month, I have not launched a full program due to fear of appearing lazy and wasting time that could be spent “learning” - research seems to show that more learning could occur under a literacy model that includes listening to stories and reading. Logically, it seems to make most sense to have students read at home so that class time could be spent on giving input and student interaction. The reality is that many students will not read at home, but are more likely to read if given the space in class.

**Biblical Principles**

God reveals himself to us through the context of the Bible; several stories that are all part of the same narrative. “The Bible is the story of a loving, faithful, and just God acting to redeem His people, a story that culminated in the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. It is also the story of God interacting with His people and calling them to faith response.” (Van Brummelen, Kindle Locations 5256-5258). Jesus himself chose to teach through story. Stories are relational and capture our attention and bring us into relationship with the lessons to be learned. Jesus is the Great Teacher and His techniques are worth emulating.

**Literature Review**

As I have been reading the literature over the past several months, a seminar was planned in my hometown for the two leading researchers I had been reading: Stephen Krashen and Beniko Mason to speak on the benefits of story in the classroom, particularly Story Listening. Story Listening is a new term recently coined by Japanese second language acquisition researcher, Beniko Mason for a technique that has existed in homes and schools for years. In recent times, her focus has been on a teacher-selected model of storytelling which involves telling rich stories from history, folklore or popular literature in a way that students are able to comprehend. The gathering was small, about 40 teachers, so we were able to engage with Mason and Krashen. I was even able to discuss my project with them (and receive their approval).

In Mason’s research, she does not discount that vocabulary is learned through direct instruction and memorization, but rather emphasizes the efficiency of learning vocabulary through stories and acquiring (retaining) vocabulary through her methods. She has conducted many research projects, most recently in October of 2017 to compare the acquisition of new vocabulary through direct-instruction and memorization versus through Story Listening. In her latest study, she compared two groups. She had a list of 36 target vocabulary words. She gave a pre-test, an immediate post-test and a follow-up post-test two weeks later to determine how many of the words had been retained.

Group A listened as she spent twenty minutes delivering a story. She took the list of vocabulary that was found in the story that Group A heard and rather than tell the story, she presented Group B with the list of words. She spent 15 minutes discussing the meanings of the words and then allowed the participants to study the words in any way they wished for 20 minutes. Mason found that both groups had nearly identical results; after two weeks the average number of vocabulary words remembered was 4.5 words for Group A and 4.6 words for Group B.

It would appear that the results were slightly better for the memorization group, but Mason emphasizes the efficiency of Group A. Their retention was nearly identical after only 20 minutes as Group B with 35 minutes. Therefore, she finds that Story Listening has greater retention per minute and is more efficient than the translation/memorization model. This study was a replication of many that she had previously conducted. (Mason, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2017). In the seminar, she emphasized to a group of mainly secondary teachers that her work had been done with adults; it was our job to test this with secondary students.

M. Lee, S. Lee and Krashen (2014) suggest that “There is good reason to hypothesize that stories (read-alouds) will be more efficient for vocabulary acquisition than traditional instruction. Read-alouds are a rich source of vocabulary”. They tell of a case study of a high-achieving eight-year-old girl in Taiwan who despite scoring high on vocabulary and grammar knowledge, had a low proficiency in English after two years of intense study of the language. The girl, Penny, had previously studied English for approximately 256 hours and scored 111 known words in the pretest. After the treatment of ten hours of Story Listening over eight weeks, Penny acquired an additional 52 words. They deduce that Story Listening is much more efficient for vocabulary acquisition than traditional textbook instruction (Lee, Lee, & Krashen, 2014, pgs. 2-6).

Once a foundation of vocabulary and structures has been acquired, students are ready to begin reading appropriately leveled texts. Most practitioners and researchers advocate the use of graded readers created for L2 learners. Webb and Macalister (2013) explored the use of Children’s Literature for L2 extensive reading by comparing the lexical demands of text written for children, for older readers, and for L2 learners to determine the vocabulary size necessary to comprehend each type of text. Rather than participants (people), the subjects of their research were texts that were analyzed to determine how many word families need to be known for readers to be able to comprehend. They suggest that for a book to
be suitable for extended reading, the reader must understand 98 percent of the words. Based upon this measure of comprehensibility they suggested that children’s literature is too taxing on L2 readers but their findings “provide strong evidence that graded readers should be used in extensive reading” (Webb & Macalister, 2013).

Iwahori (2008) set out to answer “Do high school students’ general language proficiency improve through ER (extensive reading), and if so, to what degree?” He conducted his study using Japanese students who were learning English. He set a goal for 33 students to each read 28 English graded readers in seven weeks. He states that “ER improves one aspect of reading fluency and general language proficiency of Japanese high school students with a few books and short treatment period. Based on these results, it is recommended that ER as fluency instruction be incorporated into English class curricula. ER provides a possible way for students to become fluent readers by being exposed to English, to increase their vocabulary size, syntactic knowledge, and knowledge of the world” (Iwahori, 2008).

Trelease has suggested that in some cases, it takes only one very positive experience to create a reader. (Trelease took the phrase “home run book” from Fadiman (1947), who wrote, “One’s first book, kiss, home run, is always the best.”) A series of three studies supports Trelease’s Home Run Book Hypothesis: Many children, it was found, can name the book that first got them interested in reading (Von Sprecken, Kim, and Krashen, 2000; Kim and Krashen, 2000; Ujiie and Krashen, 2002). “Three obvious conditions need to be met in order to help students develop a reading habit. First, they need access to interesting reading material, second, they need to develop some enthusiasm for reading, and third, they need to develop enough competence to start reading: As they read, reading itself will supply the necessary competence for more reading” (Wang & Lee, 2007, p. 30.).

Liburd and Rodrigo (2012) examined American university students learning Spanish and found that students who were asked to read five Spanish books in five weeks along with the normal curriculum “showed positive gains in attitude towards reading and more confidence in their reading abilities” (p. 19).

Methodology

Participants
The participants were from two sections of Spanish III Honors. There are two sections, the last two hours of the school day. In sixth period there are 16 students; three boys and 13 girls- one senior boy, one junior boy, two junior girls and the rest of the students are sophomores. There is also a student doing an independent study of Spanish IV in the classroom. Seventh period consists of 14 students: four boys and 10 girls- one senior boy, one junior boy, two junior girls the rest are sophomores.

From the total 30 students, I have previously taught nine of them (two years ago in Spanish I). Ten of them came from a teacher who has been very successful using a grammar-translation model, 20 of them studied last year under a teacher who incorporated some storytelling.

Instruments

In order to test students’ attitudes and enjoyment, I conducted a survey at the end of November. To measure growth in vocabulary, I gave a pretest and posttest using Bryce Hedstrom’s “The Top 400 Spanish Words” which is a list of the highest frequency words in Spanish. To measure fluency, I collected writing samples and translation samples from the beginning and end of the semester.

Procedures

The study took place from Labor Day through Thanksgiving. Students were told one story a week using the Story Listening method. They were given a block of ten to fifteen minutes one time per week for FVR through Fall Break increasing to two times per week for the last five weeks of the study. The reason for this was that I was also doing my unit project with these classes and could not spare two blocks of time during the unit. The pretests were in the first two weeks of school. Throughout the study, I alternated observing student behavior with reading new books that I was adding to the collection. During this time, we also continued in our curriculum.

Results

Survey

Students were asked questions to reveal their level of enjoyment of listening to stories and free voluntary reading, to answer questions anonymously on how effectively they used the time, and to report on their self-assessments of comprehension and confidence. If the survey had been the only instrument used to assess the effectiveness of the program, I would have decided that the program was a success and should be continued. The survey was a Likert scale with an extreme negative response measuring 1 and an extreme positive response measuring a 5. I was surprised to learn that these students had an overall positive attitude toward reading with an average score of 3.96. Many opponents to an FVR program state that students don’t actually read during the allotted time. I asked my students: On the Likert scale, one was: I actually do other things during reading time and a score of five corresponded with I really use the time to read. The response average was 4.41. The majority of students reported that they were able to read with more ease at the end of the project, that they were able to
understand the stories that they heard, and that they were encouraged by how much they were able to understand at the end of the project. When asked if they would like to continue hearing stories next semester, the score was 4.66 out of five.

Vocabulary pre-test/post-test

Spanish teacher Bryce Hedstrom has created a list of the top 400 used words in Spanish. As with many languages, these lists are available online. He put it into worksheet form. On it he tells students “Core vocabulary is important because the top 300 words make up 65% of all reading material. Many people get by in life using only 500-800 different words a day. Four hundred splits the difference. Knowing the 400 most common words well (plus some cognates) will allow you to read and understand a LOT of Spanish.” (Hedstrom, n.d.) He instructs students to put a checkmark by every word that they know. For the purpose of this project, I asked students to actually translate the words that they know as I have found that words look familiar to students, but they are incorrect about the meaning.

In the first week of the semester, students translated as many of the high frequency words as they were able. I was able to capture the data for 25 out of the 30 students. The average starting number of vocabulary from this list that students translated correctly was 204 words. It is important to note that students knew many vocabulary words that were not on the list. The average number of additional words that students acquired over the semester from this list was 35. Again, these are mainly incidental words, not the vocabulary that students learned from units that we also studied over the semester. The average increase in high-frequency, incidental vocabulary was 17%.

I was able to compare that to a sample of data from the previous year which showed students entered Spanish III in 2016 with an average of 157 words from that list and ended the full year with an average of 63 new words, or a growth of 40 percent over the entire year. It is difficult to interpret these data as one might think that to match the gains of last year, a student should acquire at least 20 percent more words per semester. The reality is that a good portion of the first semester of Spanish III is review. More new material is learned in the second semester. We had one week less of instruction this year than last. If you look at the cumulative results, this year’s Spanish III students know an average of 239 words from this list after the first semester, while the average student knew 220 of those words at the end of a full year. The results are conflicting.

Translations and Writing Samples

While subjective, students were able to understand a slightly larger percentage of the translations from the beginning of the semester to the end. Students’ writing abilities also increased. Much of that was due to learning new grammar structures. At the beginning of the year, students struggled to use the correct form of the past tense. At the end of the semester, many students were writing with the subjunctive mood to give advice and talk about hopes and dreams. This was not due to Story Listening and reading, but rather to the targeted instruction that they also received. While students did exhibit growth in writing and translation, it does not appear to be relevant to this study.

Field Observations

Students expressed positive attitudes toward our reading plan. On a couple of occasions, students stopped by my classroom with a friend who was not in their section to show them the book that they had been reading. Students took pride in writing reviews of completed books on sticky notes and sticking them inside the front covers. Students expressed excitement on Story Day. They would come into class and say “today is story day.” There were also days where students came in and said, “Can we have a story today?” Others would correct them, “Today is not Monday.”

I also witnessed some negative behaviors; many students seemed to view FVR time as less important and many visited the bathroom for a portion of the time. Some students had a hard time settling and beginning to read their books; by the time they settled they were only able to read a small portion. For some students, it seemed a bit disjointed to read a small book over several weeks. They had to skim what they had previously read to be able to continue.

Limitations

The time dedicated to Story Listening and FVR during the semester paired with our semester being a week shorter than in previous years, with more interruptions than usual necessitated that we forgo other portions of the curriculum. Generally we finish the semester with a shared novel. Another limitation was that we had less time in the first semester than we have had in previous years. We started school a week later than we normally do and had shortened classes the first three days of school. We did not have the ability to catch up on those missed hours when dedicating about twenty percent of our time each week to this literacy project.

A limiting factor was that while I thought that I understood Story Listening from a demonstration that I experienced last spring, and by watching some YouTube videos of effective teachers, I had a simplified perception of the method. After seeing another demonstration in September by a member of my local Professional Development group, which consists of several World Language teachers mainly from an hour and a half radius of
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continue to learn long after they have left the classroom.
This is the first year that I have had parents ask me for
recommendations for books in Spanish for Christmas
presents.

Conclusions

Story Listening is an engaging model that can
increase student confidence and interest in Spanish. The
technique requires an understanding of its purpose, prac-
tice and deliberate delivery that requires the teacher to be
cognizant of the learning goals and repetition. Special
emphasis would need to be placed on choosing stories of
high-interest, with lots of repetition, that can be easily
scaffolded and that introduce culture. Part of understand-
language is understanding the culture/s from which
it comes. This method can strip the culture from the lan-
guage, so I recommend using this method to tell history,
folklore and cultural tales from the countries of study.

FVR can be a good use of time. Teachers need a large
selection of reading materials and a knowledge of their
students' abilities and interests. Teachers need to be
actively involved in scaffolded the reading experience
to a point where they can help each student find a home-
run book. This is a time-consuming venture. However, if
the goal is set beyond the purview of what can happen in
the classroom or during the year to creating students who
are interested in learning on their own, it is worth it. In
order to employ this program more effectively, the
teacher must have time to read a lot of folktales and short
stories. The teacher needs resources to be able to pur-
close books that would be appealing to the particular stu-
dents that the teacher is serving. She would also need
time to get to know the students well enough and be able
spend time with each individually to help find the
home run books. For those reasons, I would recommend
that a teacher with a small class size and not a lot of com-
peting endeavors try this experiment. Busy teachers
should not throw out reading, but would need to do it dif-
derently.

The long-term effects are still unknown; perhaps
some students are developing a love for reading that will
pay dividends later. As Krashen says, our goal as lan-
guage teachers should be to help students attain a func-
tional ability and desire to read on their own so that they
continue to learn long after they have left the classroom.
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