

USING POETRY TO TEACH READING COMPREHENSION
STRATEGIES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of reading comprehension abounds, and while educators and authors seek to explore meaningful ways to teach reading comprehension, one fact remains: English language learners continue to fall behind in this important skill which helps them to access academic language. According to McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus, “The importance of reading comprehension cannot be downplayed—it is the very essence of reading, its ultimate goal. It is why individuals read. It is also where people most often fail in reading” (2008). In the last decade or so, a great deal of concentration has been placed on the direct teaching of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to help students increase their overall reading comprehension. Students who are able to apply these strategies to monitor their own reading processes significantly increase their ability to understand text. By increasing students’ own awareness of reading comprehension strategies, and by implementing creative ways to teach these strategies, students can begin to develop deeper understanding of text. Poetry can be a creative way of exposing English language learners to quality literature while teaching reading strategies at the same time. Students can use these short, fun, non-threatening pieces of text to begin to learn how to apply reading strategies to increase their comprehension.

The impetus for this study is low comprehension scores for English language learners in my district. In the spring of 2010, fifth and sixth graders from one of my ESL classes at a suburban middle school scored overwhelmingly low on their Northwest

Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) reading assessment. In fact, while 64 percent met their own growth targets for the reading test, 58.3 percent still scored in the low category for reading, and the majority scored in the low category for the strand of narrative comprehension. Poems might be a valuable tool in helping to increase not only students' RIT (Rasch Unit) scores, but also their narrative comprehension scores. With explicit teaching of five reading comprehension strategies applied to poems, students' awareness of reading strategy use may increase, along with their overall reading comprehension.

Research from the field of reading comprehension indicates that readers possess a vast array of reading strategies that they apply with each text they read (Philippot & Graves, 2009; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005; Hedge, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). My students need to learn how to employ these strategies to increase their reading comprehension and, in turn, begin to close the achievement gap between them and their native English-speaking peers. It is essential that English language learners increase their reading comprehension in order to be successful in school. As their content area classes become increasingly difficult, my students need to utilize reading comprehension strategies across the curriculum.

The Role of Poetry in Reading Comprehension

Poetry is a powerful genre which research indicates can benefit English language learners in many ways. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted to show the advantages of this forgotten genre. Many benefits are obvious: poems are typically shorter pieces of text, which are more manageable for struggling readers; the rhyming

patterns provide sound qualities helpful for predicting words and phrases; and, when introducing new content, poetry can be a tremendous tool. While many teachers and students may believe that poetry is not accessible because of metaphorical language or culturally-specific content, my students and I have enjoyed using it in language learning for years.

According to Vardell, Hadaway, & Young (2002), not only can poetry be a powerful vehicle for developing students' oral language ability, but when read aloud, it can also promote oral fluency and lay a strong foundation for reading in a new language. The authors explain that choral reading is a wonderful way for students to practice word recognition and pronunciation; it is also a fun, supportive, and appealing way for them to experience their new language. Furthermore, a rich variety of multicultural poetry is available that reflects the diverse experiences and backgrounds of English language learners. These authors also suggest that English language learners should have opportunities to respond to poetry. While I agree that poetry can benefit these students in the ways listed above, one category is missing from the research: how to use it to increase reading comprehension. Poetry might be a very powerful tool to begin with in helping English language learners gain access to text. It can be implemented across the curriculum to explore a wide range of topics and to build background for new concepts. Because it is so accessible to students, it is a genre that can easily be used to help students begin to increase their awareness of reading comprehension strategies (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001). Many of my students systematically abandon a text based on length alone. They simply do not believe that they are capable of reading long passages

and never even attempt to read a novel. Poems might be an avenue to reading comprehension because they are non-threatening, shorter pieces of text. Once students are capable of applying reading comprehension strategies to poems, my hope is that those skills will transfer to longer pieces of text.

Role of the Researcher

I have been teaching middle school ESL for three years in a suburban school in the upper Midwest. The majority of my student population is Latino, and all participants in this study speak Spanish as their native language. Over the course of my tenure at this suburban middle school, I have worked with ELLs in grades 5-8. Their abilities range from newcomer to advanced, but the common thread among them is that they all struggle to read in English. One of the biggest problems is that most cannot read in their native language, therefore limiting any transfer of reading skills from native language to second language. ESL professionals know what the research says: skills in students' native languages are transferred to their second language (Cummins, 1984).

My goal as a teacher has always been to make what they read comprehensible for them and to help them increase their reading scores on standardized tests. In the past, I have introduced them to important reading strategies while modeling how to use them. My students have been exposed to quality literature through daily read-alouds where strategies are modeled, and they have always been encouraged to respond to literature through daily writing in dialogue journals. The participants in this study are sixth grade ELLs who receive two class periods of reading and writing instruction in my classroom

daily. During the course of this study, my goal will remain the same: to teach students to use strategies to help them increase their reading comprehension in English.

Background of the Researcher

Reading comprehension, in my view, is one of the most important skills an English language learner can attain. Without it, they will have limited success in school because they will not have the academic language they need to keep up with their peers. I have watched firsthand at my school as ELLs fall further and further behind in mainstream classes because they cannot understand what they read. Without explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies, they may continue to fall behind, not only in content classes, but also on high stakes tests such as the MCA reading test. It is imperative that ELL and mainstream teachers alike explore new and creative ways to help ELLs comprehend what they read. Using poetry to teach reading comprehension strategies is one of those creative ways, and it can be implemented readily and easily.

Last year, during my poetry unit, I decided to implement a new way for students to apply reading strategies to text. For their warm-up, students were introduced to a new poem each day. We read the poems together as a class, and then students responded to each poem in their writing journals. Similar to a question of the day, used by many teachers to encourage students to journal write, I implemented a poem of the day for the same reasons. The difference was that not only were students responding in writing to meaningful literature each day, in the form of poetry, but they were also reading literature and applying reading strategies to it. Students chose one of five reading strategies for their response: visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, or

evaluating. Each day, students chose one strategy and used it to write a response to the poem. Students then were able to share what they had written with the class if they chose to do so. Sharing what they had written led to many rich conversations because not all students responded to the poem with the same strategy. For example, one student may have shared a connection, while another shared all the questions he/she had about the poem.

Not only were students exposed to many varieties of poetry, but they were also explicitly taught each of the five strategies and how to apply them. In the current study, some of these same students will participate in a poem-of-the-day warm-up to help increase their metacognition of the previously mentioned strategies. I want to take the knowledge I gleaned implementing this warm-up last year so that I can explore and study their use of the strategies and their ability to use them in a written response about each poem.

During this study, students will be exposed to a poem-of-the-day featuring a variety of poets and themes. Each poem will be utilized as their daily warm-up. Students will read the poem from a worksheet and will be asked to respond to it on the back of the page. After being introduced to the five strategies of visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, or evaluating, students will respond to each poem first by choosing one of these strategies. All strategies will be listed on the back of the page called the Poetry Response Sheet. Next, students will be asked to write why they chose the particular strategy for the poem. Then, students will write their actual response to the poem. For example, if students have a strong text-to-self connection to the poem, they

will write about that connection. These particular students would choose the strategy of “making connections” for that poem. By explicitly teaching these strategies and how to apply them, students may begin to have an increased awareness of their thinking while they read.

The primary focus of this study is to highlight the benefits of poetry in the ESL classroom and to explore how applying reading strategies to a poem-of-the-day can lead to increased reading comprehension. I also want to examine how explicit instruction of the strategies, and why they chose them, can impact their written response to the poems. For example, I will be teaching the language students use to explain why they chose a particular strategy, and I think it will be interesting to note how they respond to their own metacognition. In other words, if they chose visualizing, were they able to describe why they chose it and then describe in writing the picture they saw in their head. I want to find out if increasing students’ metacognition of reading strategies will help them in applying the strategies to longer pieces of text.

Guiding Questions

Although considerable research has been devoted to the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, less attention has been given to the types of text used to help increase those strategies. Vardell, Hadaway, & Young explain that poetry offers many benefits for ESL students and that through the listening to, reading, and re-reading of poetry, students can increase their exposure to language (2002). Gasparro & Falleta assert that the reading and re-reading poetry through read-aloud and choral reading activities also promotes reading fluency (1994).

Specifically, through this study, I would like to find out the answers to the following questions:

- Did the student choose a strategy?
- Which strategy did the student choose most often when given a choice?
- How do they describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly?
- Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy appropriately?

My goal is to explore more creative ways of teaching reading comprehension strategies and to share my results with other ESL or mainstream teachers. By increasing students' metacognition of the strategies, students may begin to apply them to longer pieces of text, which could eventually lead to greater reading comprehension.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One included important information regarding reading comprehension and the role of poetry in the ESL classroom. Further, it outlined the role and background of the researcher. The goal of Chapter One was to provide background on the role of reading comprehension strategies and poetry in the ESL classroom, and how the two combined can help to increase reading comprehension skills for English language learners. In Chapter Two, I will focus on relevant literature in the field of reading comprehension, explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, the benefits of poetry in the ESL classroom, and the importance of journal writing for English language

learners. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative, classroom-based research conducted during my study. In Chapter Four, the results are discussed along with a summary of how my data was collected. The results showed that students did an excellent job of identifying reading strategies both prior to and after the study. They also wrote meaningful responses to the poems each day of the study. When students were given a choice in strategy use, they chose evaluating and questioning most often. Students' reading scores yielded mixed results: two students saw increases in overall grade-level reading scores, two saw decreased scores, and one remained the same. Narrative comprehension scores were equally mixed, with three students' scores increasing and two decreasing. In the final chapter, major findings, limitations, implications, and questions for further research will be covered.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the importance of explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies to struggling readers, particularly English language learners. The strategies discussed for the purposes of this study are as follows: visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, and evaluating. In particular, the literature discussed in this chapter will pertain to the importance of metacognition in learning to read, explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, the benefits of using poetry in the ESL classroom, and the importance of journal writing for English language learners. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of metacognition in teaching reading comprehension skills.

Metacognition

Metacognition is one of the most important components of reading comprehension. According to Peregoy & Boyle (2005), metacognition is the process of analyzing our own comprehension processes, or thinking about thinking. Specifically, good readers use metacognition to recognize and repair understanding when something they read does not make sense. Further, Philippot & Graves (2009) have pointed out that readers can employ metacognitive strategies prior to reading a text, during reading, and after reading. They assert that active awareness of one's comprehension while reading, and the ability to use effective fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down, are essential to becoming an effective reader, and lack of such metacognitive skills is viewed

as a particularly debilitating characteristic of poor readers. Good readers bring background knowledge and their own schemata to each text, and it is important to teach them about metacognitive awareness as they read. They need to be able to recognize when they do not understand what they are reading, and employ strategies to help them become actively involved in understanding the text.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand written language at several levels. The National Reading Panel (2000) has defined reading comprehension as a highly complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between the reader and text to extract or construct meaning. Whether reading alone or listening to text read aloud, comprehension should be viewed as an active conversation between the reader or the listener and the text. This conversation between reader and text should include many components, such as previewing or predicting before reading, and asking questions during and after reading (Taylor & Ysseldyke, 2007). The conversation actively and continuously monitors understanding, but most important, the comprehension conversation is intentional, purposeful, and interactive. According to McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus (2008), the importance of reading comprehension cannot be downplayed—it is the very essence of reading and its ultimate goal. They assert that comprehension is the reason why individuals read and that it is also where people most often fail in reading.

Reading-as-Thinking Skills

Mainstream researchers agree on the following reading-as-thinking skills that all skillful readers employ: visualizing, connecting, questioning, inferring, evaluating, analyzing, recalling, and monitoring (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005; Hedge, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Hedge (2000) asserts that the reason for pre-, during-, and post-reading tasks is to ensure that reading is taught in the sense of helping readers to increase their ability to tackle and comprehend more complex texts. During the pre-reading phase, English language learners can benefit from a range of activities that teachers can employ. Activities include talking about pictures that accompany the text, making predictions from the title, and asking questions about the text. During-reading activities can also be used to construct meaning from text, and they encourage readers to be active while they read. Activities include following the order of ideas in a text, reacting to opinions expressed, monitoring understanding of information presented, asking questions, taking notes, confirming predictions, and making predictions about what is to come in the text. Finally, Hedge (2000) has highlighted activities that can be used to increase comprehension with post-reading activities. Some of these activities include confirming the purpose set for reading, discussing their responses to the writer's opinion, using notes for a writing activity, and asking follow-up questions.

While struggling readers read texts passively, waiting for information to present and organize itself for them, proficient readers know what they are looking for and engage their background knowledge while reading. They also monitor their own comprehension based on the purpose they set for reading. In other words, proficient

readers are thoughtful about reading, using metacognitive processes every step of the way (Peregoy & Boyle (2005). During the pre-reading phase, they assert that a purpose for reading is established and background knowledge is developed to enhance comprehension; during reading, readers monitor their own comprehension and ask questions of the text; and, finally, in the post-reading phase, students boost their memory through writing activities and by organizing information (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Vacca and Vacca (2005) explain that readers engage in the conversation so they can comprehend and perhaps even question and challenge the author's ideas. They have indicated that good readers are "active, purposeful, evaluative, thoughtful, strategic, persistent, and productive" (p. 12). Reading comprehension, as noted in the research above, must be an active process between author and reader. In the next section, the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies is discussed along with the five strategies included in this research project.

Explicit Instruction of Reading Comprehension Strategies

Research on reading comprehension over the past decades strongly suggests that teaching elementary, middle school, and high school students to use a repertoire of comprehension strategies increases their comprehension of text (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Scharlach, 2008; Pressley, 2006). Teachers should model and explain comprehension strategies, have their students practice using such strategies with teacher support, and let students know they are expected to continue using the strategies when reading on their own. Such teaching should occur across every school day, for as long as required to get all readers using the strategies independently (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy,

2009). Furthermore, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), asserts that students who are not explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies are unlikely to develop them spontaneously.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, research in reading comprehension and comprehension instruction validated the importance of a number of strategies, and these strategies were endorsed in expert literature review, panel reports, and multiple-strategy instructional routines, such as reciprocal teaching and transactional-strategies instruction (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). These authors go on to say that core reading programs now include such comprehension strategies as predicting, self-questioning, comprehension monitoring, summarizing, evaluating, and narrative structure. Further, the authors mention three lines of research that provide support for instruction in comprehension skills and strategies: 1) protocol analysis synthesizes evidence that skilled readers do engage in strategic processing; 2) integrative literature reviews and meta-analyses, summarizing instructional research, supports the fact that instruction in reading strategies contributes to increased reading comprehension; and, 3) correlational studies provide support that the ability to engage in strategic processing contributes to overall reading comprehension (2009).

According to Scharlach, the improvement of comprehension instruction is an urgent priority (2008). To address this need, she designed a study which implemented easy, effective, and manageable ways for teachers to improve classroom reading instruction through scaffolding and modeling. Scharlach asserts that good readers are active and use a variety of strategies as they read and argues that direct instruction in

comprehension strategies includes teacher modeling and explaining when and how to use the strategies, repeated opportunities for guided practice, and extended independent reading.

Scharlach's research project was conducted in five third-grade classrooms with teachers randomly assigned to one of three groups: the control group conducted reading instruction as usual, with no changes; in the strategy-only (ST) and START (Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text) classrooms, teachers modeled and scaffolded the use of the eight metacognitive comprehension strategies during read-alouds and prior to independent reading time with self-selected texts. Students in the START classroom also were taught to complete ART (Actively Reading Text) comprehension self-monitoring recording sheets during independent reading time to assist them with metacognitive comprehension strategies. Classes began with teachers explicitly modeling and explaining one of eight reading comprehension strategies. Strategies were 1) predicting/infering, 2) visualizing, 3) making connections 4) questioning, 5) determining main idea, 6) summarizing, 7) checking predictions, and 8) making judgments (evaluating). The teachers then provided guided practice with scaffolding so the students could practice using the strategies with teacher support. The results of the study found that the implementation of strategy instruction improved reading comprehension for all students, including struggling readers, average readers, and advanced readers.

Not only is it important to expose students to reading comprehension strategies, but teachers should name and teach reading strategies directly (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005). Research reports that proficient readers actively visualize, question,

connect, predict, evaluate, and more. Teachers should not keep these strategies a secret, even from the youngest children, but should model and explicitly teach them. They go on to say that teachers should, in a developmentally appropriate way, explicitly describe each strategy, model the strategy, study it collaboratively with students, allow guided practice time, and then allow students independent practice to try it on their own.

The level of explicitness required may be greater, and the planning for teaching cognitive strategies to struggling readers may be greater, but these aspects of reading instruction are crucially important for struggling readers (McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus, 2008).

In another study, authors Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, & Madden (2010) examined the impact of the Learning Strategies Curriculum (LSC), an adolescent reading intervention program, on sixth- and ninth-grade students' reading comprehension and strategy use. Using a randomized treatment-control group design, the study compared student outcomes for 365 students who received daily instruction in six LSC strategies, and 290 students who did not receive intervention instruction. The study found that after one school year, students in the sixth grade significantly outperformed students in the control group on a standardized measure of reading comprehension, and also reported using problem-solving strategies in reading to a greater extent than students in the control group. There were no significant differences between ninth grade intervention and control groups in reading comprehension or strategy use.

The study took place in the fall of 2006 in a southeastern state and focused on the cognitive reading development of struggling adolescents who participated in the LSC, a supplemental reading intervention program that emphasizes comprehension strategy

acquisition (Deshler & Schumaker, 2005 as cited in Cantrell et al., 2010). The authors explain that they separately investigated the extent to which the intervention program affected sixth- and ninth-grade students because developmental theories of reading suggest that younger and older adolescent students are different in terms of their reading development and abilities (Alexander, 2005-2006; Jacobs, 2008 as cited in Cantrell et al., 2010). The authors argue that in facilitating reading comprehension, it is imperative that instruction focus on preparing readers not only to use strategies, but to become strategic. Becoming strategic readers involves teaching them how to be responsive to the changing demands of the reading context and to continually monitor and evaluate one's own progress toward constructing meaning from a text. Strategies used in this study included decoding word parts and vocabulary retrieval to construct the textbase, visualization, questioning, and paraphrasing to support the construction of the situation model.

The LSC in this study was created specifically for struggling adolescent readers. One of the notions framing this study was that if struggling readers could learn to use a set of reading strategies flexibly, then they could also develop a set of strategies for constructing a textbase and improving comprehension. The impact of the study revealed that sixth-grade students in the targeted intervention significantly outperformed sixth-grade students in the control group. Furthermore, students in the LSC intervention group were more likely to report using strategies such as visualizing, rereading, adjusting speed, and guessing meaning of unknown words when they encountered problems when reading a text. Conversely, intervention students were *not* more likely than control-group students to use strategies such as questioning, paraphrasing, summarizing, or note-taking.

And, while strategy instruction made a difference for sixth-grade readers and gave them tools for constructing meaning, it did not appear to work as well for ninth-grade readers. There was no difference in performance between the intervention group and the control group for the struggling readers in the ninth grade. The authors argue that the dissimilarity in impacts for sixth- and ninth-grade students raises questions about the point at which strategy-based interventions are most beneficial to struggling readers.

The results of this study indicate that considerations need to be made with regard to the difference in developmental needs of younger and older adolescents. With younger students, metacognitive awareness and use of strategies improves over time. Students become more aware of and able to use reading strategies by early adolescence (Cantrell et al., 2010). The authors of this LSC study assert that by ninth grade, some students have experienced extended failure in reading and are often significantly behind their peers, and the texts they encounter in school are increasingly complex. This extended failure with reading comprehension can contribute to apathy and lack of motivation which can stifle their progress and prevent any movement toward increased competence (Cantrell et al., 2010). It is helpful to give adolescents strategy instruction early in their adolescent development. While the LSC had a significant impact on sixth-grade struggling readers' awareness of strategies for overcoming and at least compensating for their reading difficulties, the difference in impact between sixth- and ninth-grade students points to the need to further examine for whom strategy-based interventions work best.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

This section will present the specific strategies that are implemented in the current study: visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, and evaluating. Researchers have shown how readers can explore and improve reading comprehension using a range of strategies. As evidenced by Mills (2009), research with students in the lower and middle elementary grades showed that learners benefited from instruction in metacognitive strategies, assisting them to become effective readers early in their schooling. As highlighted in previous sections, many strategies can be employed by readers to assist them in comprehending text. For the purposes of this study, the five following reading comprehension strategies will be utilized: visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, and evaluating. All are research-based strategies that have been proven to help readers increase their reading comprehension.

Visualizing

According to Mills (2009), Cunningham & Shagoury, (2005); and Trinkle (2009), research demonstrates that competent readers create mental images before, during, and after reading to aid their comprehension. The strategy of visualizing uses the mind's capacity to imagine what is being communicated by the words, gestures, and sounds within a text. Mental images anchor new ideas in a reader's mind by linking abstract ideas to concrete experiences. Students need to be taught to recall ideas in a visual way in appropriate reading contexts (Mills, 2009). Creating mental images or mind pictures helps readers enter the text visually in their mind's eye (Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005). Good readers visualize, or make pictures in their brains as they are reading, and when

they realize they are no longer making these visual images, they understand that they are no longer really reading (Trinkle, 2009).

Questioning

Teaching students to generate their own questions about material to be read is an important instructional goal. Whenever readers are involved in asking questions, they are engaged in active comprehension. Questioning is a reading strategy that can be used before, during, and after reading. Readers who use this strategy actively ask questions of the text as they read (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Mills (2009) explains that research with students in third through fifth grade demonstrates that elaborative questioning improves comprehension of texts during instructional and independent reading contexts. All students need to be told that they should ask questions throughout their reading and that all questions are valid (Trinkle, 2009). When using the questioning strategy, readers ask questions both prior to and during the reading of a selection. The reader then attempts to answer the questions as he/she moves through the text. Good reading must be an active process, and asking and answering questions about a text, if done properly, virtually ensures it. A reader will be far more attentive to the information that will help answer his/her questions simply by asking a series of questions related to a text (Phillipot & Graves, 2009).

Making Connections

Making connections to text is another important reading comprehension strategy that assists in comprehension. Best practices in reading instruction indicate that connections are made to text, self, and to the world (Trinkle, 2009). When students

connect to a text, they explain how the text reminds them of their own lives, another text they have read, or something they have seen in the real world. Cunningham & Shagoury (2005) emphasize the importance of schema when making connections to text. They explain that as students make text-to-self connections in books they are reading, they learn about schema, which is what they bring to a text in terms of their background knowledge and life experiences. As students tap into their knowledge of the world and make connections to text, they are more prepared to go on to other important reading skills.

Summarizing

The process of summarization involves relating the smaller ideas in a text to build and articulate a general understanding of the text (Marzano, 2010; McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus, 2008). Summarizing has been shown to have beneficial effects on reading comprehension. When students are instructed in summarization, they learn to identify the main ideas in text and how to leave out extraneous details. They also learn to generalize, to include ideas related to the main idea, and to eliminate redundancy. In addition, students are more likely to remember what was read if they write a summary of it (McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus, 2008).

Even though the process of comprehension is complex, at its core, comprehension is based on summarizing—restating content in a succinct manner that highlights the most crucial information. In a series of studies with teachers, Marzano (2010) determined that summarizing strategies have a significant average effect on student understanding of academic content. Across seventeen experimental/control studies conducted by teachers,

it was found that using summarizing strategies, on average, increased students' understanding of content by nineteen percentile points. Some summarizing strategies are more effective than others, and the following five are highlighted: clarifying what is important; familiarizing students with multiple text structures; helping students recognize layers within text structures; encouraging graphic representations; and, reviewing essential vocabulary.

Evaluating

When students evaluate text, they determine its importance, make judgments about it, and weigh its value (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005). When good readers finish reading, they reflect on the strategies they used to determine whether their plan worked or whether they should try something else next time. Because this evaluative component of the metacognitive process is so valuable, teachers should model it on a regular basis.

Poetry in the ESL Classroom

English language learners need to be exposed to a variety of genres in the language classroom (Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006). When considering poetry for students, many teachers may assume that students learning English are not ready for it because of its metaphorical language and often culturally-specific content. As a genre, poetry offers many benefits for English language learners. Because of the rhyming patterns, the repetition, the rhythm, and the manageable chunks of text, poetry is an ideal genre for teaching ELLs how to read. And, not only is it a powerful tool in the language

classroom, but it also can be used to introduce content in science, math, and social studies classrooms (Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006).

Many definitions of poetry have been offered, but Gill (2007) describes poetry as something people do, meaning that poetry is a type of writing that real people do for real purposes. For example, people write poems to share their experiences. Students can read about these experiences, relate to them, share them with others, and write about them. Williams (2004) defines poetry as a genre that enriches lives and supports literacy skills. She argues that poems contain short lines and descriptive language that promote fluency, inferential thinking, and discussion. Furthermore, not only is rhyming verse easy to read, but it is often short, and usually contains familiar word patterns. Students become familiar with rhyming patterns and read smoother and more expressively as they read and reread poems.

Vardell, Hadaway, & Young (2001; 2002; 2006) have written three compelling articles on the benefits of reading poetry in the ESL classroom. They point out that it is important for teachers to select poems that have relevance to students' lives and experiences. Topics such as school, weather, animals, and seasons are familiar to students and easy for them to understand. Students can also be encouraged to share poems that have a personal meaning for them. Making these connections through poetry helps students understand the concepts, vocabulary, and meaning of the poems, as well as enjoy the use of language.

According to these authors, ESL students also enjoy the sound of poetry—the rhyme, rhythm, and the musical quality of the English language. These authors also

suggest that as teachers share poems with students, they should begin with poems that rhyme and have a strong rhythm. Doing so enable students to use their developing language skills to predict how words and phrases should sound. It is also important that teachers read poetry aloud and invite students to read aloud with them. Poetry needs to be heard and spoken. Choral reading is a wonderful, unthreatening way to practice English and improve oral fluency for all students.

Poetry is an ideal entry into language learning for English language learners because of its rhythm, repetition, and rhyme (Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2001). Through listening to, reading, and rereading poetry, students can begin to increase their exposure to language. They also highlight the fact that poems are usually brief, making them less intimidating and more manageable pieces of text for ELLs to read. Additionally, choral reading of poetry allows students to practice word recognition and pronunciation of English in a fun, supportive, and appealing way. Poetry also promotes oral fluency and lays a strong foundation for reading in a new language (Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006). Poetry is especially appropriate and amazingly effective for language learning and they advocate that poetry is an ideal entry point for language learning. They list even more benefits of using poetry in the ESL classroom:

- Beginning readers are more able to understand the meaning of poetry because of its rhyme, rhythm, and repetition, and because the accent falls on meaningful words.
- Poetry can serve as a brief introduction to other literature as well as introduce content and concepts across the curriculum.

- Poetry can encourage students to write longer narratives from its brief introduction of characters, scenes, and stories.
- Poetry is written in a variety of formats which offer wonderful beginning writing opportunities.

In addition to the benefits listed above, Vardell, Hadaway, & Young also offer strategies for sharing poetry in the ESL classroom (2006). They indicate the importance of reading poems aloud to the class because it helps English language learners attend to the sounds of the words and lines as well as to their meaning. Reading aloud also sets the stage for student participation in the read-aloud process and it invites students to follow the teacher's lead in enjoying poetry. This step is particularly important for middle school students, who may be self-conscious about reading poetry aloud. Less attention is called to them when they participate in a choral reading of poetry (Vardell, Hadaway, & Young, 2002).

Responding to poetry is also an effective way to help English language learners develop both oral and written communication skills in English (Vardell, Hadaway, & Young, 2001). These authors also list some questions for facilitating conversations about poems including: What did you think about the poem? What did you like about the poem? What did this poem remind you of? What is the poet saying here? For students who are not comfortable contributing to class discussions because of limited language skills, talking with a partner may be more beneficial, as some ELLs are often more comfortable sharing with one person, rather than the entire class. Teachers can also use poetry circles, similar to literature circles, to encourage students to share and read about

poetry. Also highlighted in this article was one middle school teacher's use of art projects in small groups to help students explore multicultural poetry. Each group read and performed a poem for the class. They then created murals to illustrate their poems and explained them to the class (Vardell, Hadaway, & Young, 2006). "This kind of response activity helped students think deeply about a poem, talk critically with classmates about the words and ideas, and express themselves creatively about their own interpretations of the poem's meaning to them" (p. 804).

Other literature suggests using illustrations to respond to poetry. Peregoy & Boyle (2005) recommend that teachers encourage students to illustrate poems they have read to provide another way of developing English language learners' response to literature. They suggest that students can also make published books of poems and create illustrations to go along with them. The illustrations involve all learners, even beginners, and assist the students in expressing and defining their individual responses to the literature.

Writing in the ESL Classroom

In educational research, there is a broad consensus on the relationship between reading and writing. Most experts agree that reading and writing are similar and mutually supportive language processes and that the reading and writing processes function similarly for both first- and second-language learners (Farnan, Flood, & Lapp, as cited in Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994). In her review of research on reading and writing relationships, Stotsky (1983) concluded that good writers tend to be better readers than less proficient writers; good writers tend to read more frequently and

extensively to produce more grammatically complex writings; writing itself does not tend to influence reading comprehension, but when writing is taught for the purpose of enhancing reading, there are significant gains in comprehension; and, reading experiences have just as great an effect on writing as direct instruction in grammar and mechanics (as cited in Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994).

Others have documented the relationship between reading and writing as well. According to McCardle, Chhabra, & Kapinus (2008), using reading and writing together can enhance engagement and reasoning. They explain that writing can help students gain a deeper understanding of what they have read, since summarizing what has been read requires being able to explain the key facts and events that were part of the story. In fact, these authors assert that reading and writing can reinforce one another and are skills that go hand in hand.

Students should be encouraged to write about what they read, using a log or a journal in which to respond to what they find interesting or informative. Dialogue journals, in particular, have been found to be highly effective with second-language students. Studies that have examined the use of dialogue journals report significant improvement in students' writing, fluency, elaboration of topics, and use of appropriate grammar. Through these transactions between writer and reader, students learn that both reading and writing are purposeful and interconnected activities (Farnan, Flood, & Lapp, as cited in Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994).

Peregoy & Boyle (2005) suggest that writing is a learning tool that can be used across the curriculum and is a powerful strategy that promotes discovery, comprehension,

and retention of information. Writing helps students clarify their thoughts and remember what they have learned. Furthermore, they explain that recent research has supported the use of writing in content areas by showing that students who write tend to understand more and remember more. These authors recommend that English language learners write in logs, journals, or notebooks to summarize and comment on their own learning.

Peregoy & Boyle (2005) have also found that journals provide excellent opportunities for students to write daily, to develop fluency, to clarify ideas, and to monitor their own learning and to become more aware of their learning strategies. Furthermore, writing down information helps students to remember what they have learned. They explain that the purpose of the journal is to encourage dynamic, experiential, and authentic involvement with literature. Therefore, journal writing should be encouraged in the ESL classroom as a means of responding to and interacting with literature.

Gap in Research

Literature discussed in this chapter has highlighted the importance of increasing reading comprehension and the explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies for English language learners. Poetry was also discussed as an extremely beneficial genre for assisting English language learners not only with reading, but with oral and written expression as well. Finally, the role of writing in the ESL classroom cannot be understated, as reading and writing go hand in hand. It is extremely important that students be given opportunities to express in writing what they have read. Doing so helps them to remember and retain what they have read (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).

My research will attempt to fill the gap in current literature surrounding the benefits of using poetry to teach reading comprehension strategies. My concern for my students' lack of reading comprehension ability, and their low comprehension scores on the NWEA MAP reading test, led me to design and implement this study. By applying reading comprehension strategies to analyze and comprehend poems, students may eventually be able to use those same skills and strategies when reading longer pieces of text.

During this study, students will be required to employ higher-order thinking skills to study and analyze what they are reading. Each day, they will have to decide how to respond to poetry by considering which reading strategy will be most helpful to them to understand the poem. While research on reading comprehension, strategy instruction, and poetry was plentiful, I found very little research that combined the three to increase overall reading comprehension. In conducting this study, my goal is to provide insight into the following questions:

- Did the student choose a strategy?
- Which strategy did the student choose most often when given a choice?
- How do they describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly?
- Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy appropriately?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I have highlighted research that underscores the importance of active reading in order to construct meaning from text. Researchers agree on several reading-as-thinking skills that all skillful readers employ, such as visualizing, connecting, questioning, inferring, evaluating, analyzing, recalling, and monitoring. Current research highlights that teaching reading comprehension is a highly complex cognitive process, involving the intentional interaction between the reader and text to extract or construct meaning. Explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies focused on teachers modeling and explaining comprehension strategies, having their students practice using such strategies with teacher support, and letting students know they are expected to continue using the strategies when reading on their own. Such teaching should occur across every school day, for as long as required to get all readers using the strategies independently. Strategies highlighted for the purposes of this study include: making connections; visualizing; questioning; summarizing; and evaluating.

Finally, the benefits of poetry in the ESL classroom and the importance of writing in the ESL classroom have been presented. Poetry can be an ideal entry into language learning for English language learners for many reasons, but especially because of its rhythm, repetition, and rhyme. Through listening to, reading, and rereading poetry, students can begin to increase their exposure to language, and the fact that poems are usually brief, makes them less intimidating and more manageable pieces of text for ELLs to read. Writing is especially important in the ESL classroom and students should be encouraged to write about what they read. It is extremely important that students be

given opportunities to express in writing what they have read because doing so helps them to remember and retain what they have read. In Chapter Three, the methods used for this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to explore the role of poetry in teaching reading comprehension skills in the ESL classroom. My goal was to use a poem-of-the-day warm-up to discover the following:

- Did the student choose a strategy?
- Which strategy did the student choose most often when given a choice?
- How do they describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly?
- Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy appropriately?

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study. First, the rationale and description of the research design are discussed, along with a description of the qualitative paradigm. Second, the data collection tools and analysis of the data are presented.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Classroom-based Research

Classroom-based research was chosen for this study because the goal was to provide a detailed description of specific learners within their learning setting.

According to Mackey & Gass (2005), one advantage of classroom-based research is that

it allows the researcher to focus on individuals in a way that is rarely possible in group research. Classroom-based research also provides insights into the complexities of particular students in particular contexts. Furthermore, classroom-based research can be conducted with more than one individual learner or more than one existing group of learners for the purpose of comparing and contrasting their behaviors within their particular context. Classroom-based research has enhanced our understanding of second language learning in a variety of contexts and contributes in important ways to our understanding of both second language learning and second language teaching. Finally, classroom-based research can enhance our understanding of how to implement effective ways of improving students' second language skills.

An important caveat with regard to qualitative studies involves the use of generalizations drawn from the study; they are limited to the specific participants. Employing classroom-based research is the best methodology for my research because of the evidence referenced above. During my study, language learning (reading and writing in a second language) will be studied within a specific population of students. And while my study does not focus on an individual student, it will focus on a handful of students in an individual class. My hope is that this research will provide valuable insight into the reading comprehension strategy use of English language learners and their ability to respond in writing to poetry using those strategies.

Participants

The participants in this study are five sixth-grade, intermediate English language learners from a suburban middle school. Each of the participants is a native Spanish

speaker. Two of the five were born in the United States; the other three were born in Mexico. Based on spring (2010) NWEA MAP reading scores, three of the students were one grade level below, and two of the students were two grade levels below the fifth grade reading level. With regard to narrative comprehension, 80% of these participants scored in the low range for narrative comprehension. Each of these participants has been studying English for a minimum of three years, and none reads in his/her native language. All participants receive two fifty-minute class periods of reading and writing instruction in their ESL classroom per day. All students in this suburban school are tested three times per year in reading and math using the NWEA standardized test. Students are tested in the fall, winter, and spring each year to measure their annual growth.

The RIT Scale is a curriculum scale that uses individual item difficulty values to estimate student achievement. An advantage of the RIT scale is that it can relate the numbers on the scale directly to the difficulty of items on the tests. In addition, the RIT scale is an equal interval scale. Equal interval means that the difference between scores is the same regardless of whether a student is at the top, bottom, or middle of the RIT scale, and it has the same meaning regardless of grade level. Teachers use the RIT scale to determine the grade level achievement of a student in reading or math. One of the strands on the NWEA MAP reading test measures narrative comprehension, which is the measure I was interested in exploring for the purposes of this study.

Setting

The district where the study took place has approximately 4,400 students in grades K-12 and is in a suburban area outside a metropolitan city. The school is a grade

5-8 middle school which employs the house model for learning, meaning that each grade is contained in its own wing, or “house.” During the 2009-2010 school year, approximately 180 fifth graders attended this middle school. The majority of the immigrant population at this school is Latino, with 11% of the total population being of Latino heritage.

Data Collection Tools

Pilot Study of Poem-of-the-Day Warm-up

Last year during my spring poetry unit, I created a plan for exposing students to a variety of quality poetry. I implemented a poem-of-the-day warm-up, during which students and I read a poem together and they responded to it in writing. It began as a simple evaluative exercise for them, as I sought to find out whether or not they enjoyed the poem I had chosen for the day. Students were asked to write a response about each poem explaining whether or not they like it, and why they did or did not like it. Their goal was to write five sentences each day about the poem in their dialogue journals. Students were given ten minutes to write their response and they then had the option to share what they had written with the class.

From this exercise, I grew more curious about whether or not the students were connecting with the poems. I decided to ask the students to respond with particular reading strategies, but at the time, we focused only on making connections, questioning, or visualizing. Students were familiar with these strategies and knew how to write about them. From their journal writing, wonderful conversations unfolded during their sharing time, as each student had a different reaction to the poem. It was exciting for them to

hear about how one student may have had a text-to-self connection, while another may have explained a picture he saw in his mind.

All of these activities led to me to this current research project because I wanted to explore deeper the metacognition that takes place when students are reading, and their ability to apply reading comprehension strategies to text. Because my students were familiar with poetry and had positive reactions to it in the past, it was the ideal vehicle for launching this project. Students perceived poetry to be easy to read because they had already been exposed to it and had enjoyed success reading and writing about it. Their written responses and rich conversations led me to want to further examine whether or not this daily exercise could potentially have an impact on both their grade-level RIT and narrative comprehension RIT scores on their NWEA MAP reading test. I also wanted to examine more closely their metacognitive awareness during the poem-of-the-day warm-up.

NWEA MAP Reading Scores

The first tool employed in this study was data collected from the NWEA MAP reading scores of the participants for the spring and fall of 2010 and for winter of 2011. Scores were examined to determine their grade level (RIT score) and their narrative comprehension level and RIT score (HI, AV, LO). After examining the baseline data from the spring, scores were analyzed on the fall 2010 and winter 2011 test as well (See Tables 1, 2, and 3 in chapter four). The purpose was to examine whether or not students' scores increased after they received explicit reading strategy instruction applied to shorter pieces of text, or, the poem of the day.

Pre- and Post-Assessment

Pretest/ Posttest designs compare students' performance before the treatment with their performance following the treatment. In a pretest/posttest design, research can determine the immediate effect of the treatment. The goal, however, is to determine to what extent the treatment resulted in learning (Mackey & Gass, 2005). One important question to consider with pretest/posttest designs is the comparability of difficulty between the two tests. I have eliminated this concern by giving my participants the exact same poem for both the pre- and posttest. The goal was to discover whether or not their metacognition had changed with regard to a particular poem that I knew had been difficult for them in the past. By administering this poem at the beginning and at the end of the study, I hoped to ascertain their level of thinking about this poem and whether or not they applied the same reading strategy at the beginning and at the end of the study to understand it.

Poetry Response Sheet

Student responses to each poem were recorded on a poetry response sheet each day. Students were given instructions on how to respond to the poem of the day. For the first week, one strategy was explicitly taught each day. For example, on Monday, students learned how to apply the reading strategy of visualizing. On Tuesday, they were explicitly taught how to apply the questioning strategy, and so on. After the five strategies were explicitly taught the first week, students were instructed to choose a strategy to respond to each poem the following weeks. They chose visualizing, questioning, making connections, summarizing, or evaluating. Students were also asked

to write *why* they chose this particular strategy for the poem that day. Students were given a poetry response sheet with the poem of the day on one side, and a place to respond on the back. Included on the response portion on the back side of the response sheet was the following sentence starter: The strategy I chose today was _____ because _____. Students then wrote their actual response to the poem below the sentence starter.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires allow researchers to collect information that students report about themselves, such as their beliefs about learning or their reactions to instruction or particular activities (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Specialized questionnaires have also been developed to address specific research questions, as in this current study. The questionnaire employed in this study asks students specifically about the reading strategies they used during the study. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the study to determine whether students found the poem-of-the-day warm-up to be a useful exercise in helping them to become better readers. Mackey & Gass assert that “one of the primary advantages of using questionnaires is that, in addition to being more economical and practical than individual interviews, questionnaires can in many cases elicit longitudinal information from learners in a short period of time” (p. 94). Questionnaires can be administered in many different forms and can elicit comparable information from a variety of respondents.

For the purpose of this study, the questionnaire will provide the information sought in a quick and efficient manner; it is a snapshot into how the participants feel

about the usefulness of the poem-of-the-day warm-up and their ability to use reading strategies going forward. There are, of course, disadvantages to using questionnaires as well. For example, if the questionnaire is answered in the participant's second language, the responses may be compromised because of lack of understanding. Furthermore, questionnaires simply cannot provide a complete picture of the participants' thought processes elicited during their response.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants

Participants were chosen for a variety of reasons, but most importantly because they were a minimum of two grades below reading level and because they scored low in narrative comprehension on their MAP reading test. Each participant also had at least one year of ESL instruction in my classroom last year as fifth graders, and had studied poetry in my class during that time. These students, currently in sixth grade, attend two periods of reading and writing instruction in my classroom on a daily basis, so this research was conducted as part of their daily instruction in English. Participants were given explicit instructions about what would be expected of them with regard to the poem-of-the-day warm-up.

Reading Selections

Students were exposed to a new poem each day as part of their daily warm-up upon entering class. For the first week of instruction, the poems were chosen based on their appropriateness for each strategy taught. For example, I chose poems that I thought would lend themselves to teaching each strategy. Some of the poems chosen were

familiar to the students, and some were not. Poems studied came from a variety of authors including William Carlos Williams, Sandra Cisneros, Mattie Stepanek, Jack Prelutsky, and Shel Silverstein.

Each day of the first week of instruction, students were explicitly taught a new strategy and they were required to use it to respond to the poem. After the first week of instruction, students were able to choose the strategy of their choice to respond to the poem of the day. Each day, I reviewed the strategies making sure that students knew how and why to use each one appropriately. For example, they were reminded that if they saw a picture in their head while reading the poem, they should choose visualizing, and so forth. On the first and last days of the study, students were given the same poem by William Carlos Williams called *The Red Wheelbarrow*. My goal was to see if their metacognition had changed and whether or not they had used the same strategy at the beginning and the end of the study to analyze it.

NWEA MAP Reading Scores

I analyzed results from participants' spring 2010 NWEA MAP reading test and then compared them to their fall 2010, and winter 2011 scores. Specifically, I was looking for growth in the area of RIT scores and narrative comprehension scores. The RIT score determines the grade level at which a student is currently reading. The goal of this research was to move the students from below grade-level reading to at least grade-level reading. It was also important to analyze whether or not students moved from low narrative comprehension ability to at least average narrative comprehension ability.

Pre- and Post-Assessment

On day one of the study, students were given a copy of the poem *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams. This poem was chosen because the students were familiar with it and they had demonstrated difficulty understanding it in the past. I explained the directions for applying the reading strategies to the poem to aid in understanding it. Students read the poem, selected the reading strategy that initially came to mind, wrote why they chose that strategy, and then wrote their response to the poem. On the last day of the study, students were given the same poem and were asked to follow the same directions for responding to it as they had all other poems throughout the study. I explained that they were given this particular poem again because I wanted to determine whether or not they had used the same reading strategy to understand it at the end of the unit as they did at the beginning of the unit.

Poetry Response Sheets

Students read a poem each day for their warm-up when they entered ESL class. Each day for one week, a new strategy was explicitly taught. At the start of the second week, students were encouraged to choose one of the five strategies to apply to a new poem each day. Students were charged with choosing a strategy, applying it to the poem, writing why they chose that strategy, and then writing a meaningful response to the poem. For example, if students read a poem about a pet, they may have had a strong text-to-self connection to the poem because it may have reminded them about a pet of their own. These students would identify *making connections* as the reading strategy they

chose. Then, students would write why they chose this strategy. Finally, the student would write a meaningful response explaining his/her connection to the poem.

Poetry response sheets were collected each day analyzed at the end of the study. I was looking for evidence of strategy use, students' ability to articulate why they chose a particular strategy, and whether or not they could write a meaningful response with the strategy to the poem.

Data Analysis

NWEA MAP Reading Scores

Prior to the study, I analyzed the results of the participants' NWEA MAP Reading scores. I looked at results from spring and fall of 2010 and studied both their RIT and narrative comprehension scores. I then documented the percentage of students who were at or below grade level for reading and the percentage of students who scored low in the narrative comprehension category. After the research was conducted, the participants took the MAP reading test again in the winter. Those results were analyzed again to determine student RIT scores and narrative comprehension scores to see if any gains were realized. It was important for me to use quantification in this research because it is a straightforward way to report my findings. According to Mackey & Gass, many qualitative researchers use quantification and see its value because "numerical descriptions can make it readily apparent both why researchers have drawn particular inferences and how well their theories reflect the data" (p. 182).

Pre- and Post-Assessment

Because I wanted to determine the effect of the treatment, I analyzed the results of the pretest/posttest poem by comparing students' responses to "The Red Wheelbarrow" from day one of the study, to the last day of the study. According to Mackey & Gass, learning is a process that begins with a particular treatment, but it is not always clear that the effects of that learning are long-lasting (2005). By using the same poem for my pre- and post-assessment, I simply wanted to analyze whether or not the students used the same reading strategy to help them understand the poem. It was interesting to study their metacognition with regard to a particular poem at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Poetry Response Sheet

Introspective methods, which are data-elicitation techniques that encourage learners to communicate their internal processing about language learning, can afford researchers access to information unavailable from other observational approaches (Mackey & Gass, 2005). And, while participants in this study didn't keep a diary, per se, they did participate in a what Mackey & Gass refer to as a "first person account of a language learning experience, documented through regular candid entries" on a poetry response sheet (p. 203). Participants in this study have been exposed to many forms of writing in previous years in their ESL classroom. They have also responded to poetry as part of past poetry units.

Participants were given a new poetry response sheet at the beginning of the each day. Instructions were given for how the students would record their responses to each

poem of the day. Students were familiar with the instructions because they had used journals during the pilot study to record past reviews and of and responses to poems. For this study, students were told that they would be exploring poetry from a variety of authors incorporating a variety of themes. Each day, students read a new poem by one of the poets chosen, and constructed a written response using a reading strategy they had applied to the poem. They were instructed to pay close attention to their own thinking, or metacognition, and to respond using the strategy that first came to mind.

In order to analyze the results of their written responses, poetry response sheets were collected at the end of each day. At the end of the study, participants' responses were color coded and analyzed against the following questions:

- Did the student choose a strategy?
- Which strategy did the student choose most often when given a choice?
- How do they describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly?
- Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy appropriately?

Questionnaire

Participants were given a questionnaire at the end of the unit. The questionnaire was administered to determine how students felt about the usefulness of the poem-of-the-day warm-up. They were asked the following three questions to reflect on their experience with the poem of the day project: How will the five reading strategies help

you with your reading in the future? Why do you think it is important to pay attention to what is happening in your mind when you read? Do you believe the poem-of-the-day warm-up helped you to become a better reader? Why or why not? The results of the questionnaire were analyzed to determine how many students felt this daily activity helped them to become both a better reader and a more active reader. In order to maximize the effectiveness of my questionnaire, I made certain it was simple, uncluttered, user-friendly, and designed with unambiguous questions. This questionnaire was also triangulated with data from other sources to establish the credibility of the results.

Verification of Data

In qualitative research, the goal is not to verify or prove theories, but rather to attempt to observe without bias or narrow perspectives. The researcher takes into account the relevant theories regarding the topic under study, and remains aware of her own assumptions throughout. Qualitative studies do not seek causal explanations, but a better understanding of a phenomenon. Furthermore, the use of triangulation in qualitative research can aid in credibility, transferability, dependability. Triangulation entails the use of multiple, independent methods of gathering data in a single investigation in order to arrive at the same research findings (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The following sources of data were employed during my study to ensure that I saw student progress from multiple sources: NWEA MAP reading scores for narrative comprehension, pre- and post-test data about a particular poem, poetry response sheets, and a final questionnaire. Objectivity was ensured by encouraging small-group

discussions among the students about the strategy use for each day, and by sharing the information regarding this study with my peers.

Ethics

Second language researchers must ensure that safeguards are put in place to protect participants during research studies. This study employed the following safeguards to protect participants' rights:

- Research objectives were shared with the participants.
- Written permission was obtained from the building principal.
- Written permission was obtained from parents in participants' native language.
- Anonymity of participants was maintained by using pseudonyms as identifiers instead of actual names.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I have highlighted my research questions along with my classroom-based research qualitative design. Data collection tools used in this study included a pilot study, a pre- and post-test poem response, participants' NWEA MAP reading scores (both grade level and narrative comprehension), a poetry response sheet, and a final questionnaire. Furthermore, I discussed the procedures used to collect the data for the study. When analyzing the data, I compared reading scores from the spring and fall of 2010 to their winter 2011 scores to look for growth in the area of narrative comprehension and overall RIT score growth. Poetry response sheets were analyzed to see if participants' were able to answer the research questions presented above. Finally,

participants were administered a questionnaire at the end of the study to determine the usefulness of the poem-of-the-day warm-up, and to determine whether or not they felt it could potentially help them to become better readers in the future. The next chapter presents the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place in an ESL pull-out classroom at a middle school in an inner-ring suburb of a metropolitan city in the upper Midwest. Data were gathered using a variety of methods and sources including NWEA MAP reading scores, pre- and post assessment, a poetry response sheet, and a questionnaire. Through the collection of these data, I sought to discover the impact of explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, with poetry as the vehicle, on both grade-level reading scores and narrative comprehension scores of students' NWEA MAP reading tests from fall to winter. A focus on metacognition throughout the study helped to facilitate the understanding of the reading strategies and the poems.

NWEA MAP Reading Scores

Participants were chosen based on their spring (2010) NWEA MAP reading scores. As fifth graders, three of the students were one grade level below, and two of the students were two grade levels below the fifth grade reading level. With regard to narrative comprehension, 80% of these participants scored in the low range for narrative comprehension. See Table 1 for results.

Table 1

Results of Spring 2010 NWEA MAP Reading Assessment

Spring 2010	RIT Score	Reading Grade Level	Narrative Comprehension RIT Score	Narrative Comprehension Score
Barbara	203	4	201	LOW
Julia	203	4	211	AV
Jose	193	3	185	LOW
Adolfo	194	3	198	LOW
Carlos	203	4	197	LOW

*Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of students

In the fall of 2010 the participants, now sixth graders, took the NWEA MAP reading test again. See table 2 for results.

Table 2

Results of Fall 2010 NWEA MAP Reading Assessment

Fall 2010	RIT Score	Reading Grade Level	Narrative Comprehension RIT Score	Narrative Comprehension Score
Barbara	191	3	176	LOW
Julia	206	4	206	LOW
Jose	201	4	203	LOW
Adolfo	194	3	199	LOW
Carlos	205	4	198	LOW

The results from the NWEA MAP reading test in the fall show that three of the five participants were one grade level below and two were two grade levels below grade-

level reading. What is interesting to note, is that one of the participants, Jose, who had been two grade levels below in the spring had improved, while Barbara fell behind and dropped a grade level in the fall. Adolfo remained two grade levels below both in the spring and in the fall. All participants' scores remained low in the area of narrative comprehension. Students were required to take the reading test again in the winter of 2011. See Table 3 for results.

Table 3

Results of Winter 2011 NWEA MAP Reading Assessment

Winter 2011	RIT Score	Reading Grade Level	Narrative Comprehension RIT Score	Narrative Comprehension Score
Barbara	195	4	196	LOW
Julia	202	4	198	LOW
Jose	196	3	197	LOW
Adolfo	204	4	200	LOW
Carlos	205	4	202	LOW

Grade Level Reading RIT Score Results

The results from the winter NWEA MAP reading test show mixed results with regard to the study. One of the goals of the study was to determine whether or not participants' grade level RIT scores and narrative comprehension RIT scores would be impacted as a result of the poem-of-the-day warm-up. As evidenced in Table 2 and Table 3, two of the participants saw grade-level RIT scores increase, two saw a decrease, and one stayed the same. Barbara's grade-level RIT score increased by four points from fall

to winter, but she remained at a third grade reading level. Adolfo also saw an increase of ten points on his grade-level RIT score, and his grade-level RIT score increased one full grade, from third to fourth grade. Carlos' grade-level RIT score remained the same, and he remains at a fourth grade reading level. Both Julia and Jose saw decreases in their grade-level RIT scores. Julia's score decreased by four points, which keeps her at a fourth grade reading level, and Jose's score dropped five points, which dropped him from a fourth grade reading level in the fall, to a third grade level in the winter.

Narrative Comprehension RIT Score Results

Narrative comprehension scores were also mixed, with scores of three participants increasing and scores of the two others decreasing. Even though three of the participants saw an increase in their narrative comprehension RIT scores, all remained at the LOW level of narrative comprehension. Gains were realized, but the results remained the same. Barbara saw the greatest increase in the area of narrative comprehension, with a 20-point gain from fall to winter. Adolfo saw a one-point increase, and Carlos' score increased by four points. The two participants with decreased narrative comprehension RIT scores were Julia and Jose. Julia's score decreased by eight points, while Jose's decreased by six points.

Pre- and Post Assessment Results

Students were given the same poem both at the beginning and end of the study. The purpose of the assessment was to determine whether or not students would be able to identify a reading strategy, explain why they chose that strategy, and then write an appropriate response to the poem using that strategy. Furthermore, it was interesting to

note whether or not students used the same strategy to understand and analyze this poem both at the beginning and at the end of the study. The title of the poem used for the pre- and post assessment was *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams.

Barbara

For both the pre- and post-assessment, Barbara was able to identify a strategy, explain why she used the particular strategy, and write a meaningful response for the pre-assessment poem. She used the evaluating strategy to help her understand the poem during both the pre- and post-assessment. She decided early on that she hated the poem, explained why, and wrote a meaningful response about it. By the end of the study, she had not changed her mind about the poem, and used the evaluating strategy again to explain why she did not like it.

Julia

From the information gathered from Julia, her pre- and post-assessment revealed that she, too, was able to identify the key components of the poem of the day. She identified a strategy, she explained why she chose the strategy, and she wrote meaningful responses to *The Red Wheelbarrow*. She also used the same reading comprehension strategy for both assessments, which is interesting to note. She chose the questioning strategy to help her understand the poem, and she used a variety of questions on both response sheets. She did not repeat any of her questions from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. All questions on the post-assessment were new thoughts that she still had about this particular poem. This insight into her metacognition reveals that she still

had many questions about the poem, and that questioning was the strategy that she felt may help her to understand it better.

Jose

Jose was able to identify a strategy in the pre- and post-assessment, explain why he chose a particular strategy, and write a meaningful response. He used the strategy of visualizing for the pre-assessment and questioning for the post-assessment. Jose still had many questions about the poem after writing about a visualization the first time he read it.

Adolfo

Adolfo's results are similar to Julia's in that they both were able to identify a reading strategy, explain why they chose it, and write a meaningful response. They both also chose questioning as the strategy to help them understand the poem better. Unlike Julia, who asked different questions with each assessment, Adolfo did ask two of the same questions both pre- and post-assessment. He wanted to know each time where the poem was taking place and to whom the red wheelbarrow belonged. It is interesting to note that he would ask those same questions both times, as if having the answer to those questions would aid in his understanding of the poem.

Carlos

The results for Carlos reveal that on his pre-assessment, he was not able to explain why he chose the evaluating strategy. In fact, instead of explaining why he chose it, he asked a question about it, which is another strategy, but not an explanation of why he chose evaluating. He was able to write a meaningful response each time, however, explaining why he hated this poem. One fascinating piece of information regarding

Carlos was that he made a text-to-text connection to another one of William Carlos Williams' poems during his evaluation on the post-assessment. During the study, students read a different poem by the same author about plums, and Carlos' metacognition revealed on the post-assessment that he had made that text-to-text connection, without identifying it as such. He wrote "Just go back to writing about plums." Carlos did not enjoy *The Red Wheelbarrow* and was able to articulate that the author should continue to write about other topics such as plums.

Poetry Response Sheets

Poetry response sheets were analyzed to determine whether or not students were able to answer the following questions each day they read a new poem: Did the student identify a strategy? Did the students describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly? Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy appropriately? Which strategy did the student use most often when given a choice?

Each participant was able to identify a reading strategy every day of the study. Not only were the five strategies listed on the participants' response sheets, but they were also posted on the wall in the classroom. Students had been exposed to these reading strategies in the past, and found them easy to identify. Furthermore, four of the five participants were able to explain why they chose a particular reading strategy each day of the study. Only one participant, Carlos, was not able to correctly explain why he chose a strategy, but he made that mistake only one day out of the twenty three days of the study. Participants were instructed in the kind of language to use when explaining why they

chose a particular strategy. For example, if they chose visualizing, they were to write that the reason they chose it was because they got a picture in their mind. If they chose making connections, they were to explain that it was because the poem reminded them of something. To explain why they chose questioning, they were instructed to write that they still had many questions after reading the poem. If they chose summarizing, they were to explain that they wanted to retell the poem in their own words. Finally, if they chose evaluating, they were to explain that they liked or did not like the poem.

Many of the participants also succeeded in writing a meaningful response to each poem. Three of the five participants wrote a meaningful response every day of the study. Two participants, Carlos and Jose, didn't write a meaningful response, but each of them made this mistake on only one of the twenty-three days of the study. On day five, the strategy of evaluating was explicitly taught. All students were to choose evaluating and then write a meaningful response using that strategy. Carlos chose evaluating, but he wrote that he both liked *and* disliked the poem. The participants were instructed to choose evaluating if they had a strong feeling either way about the poem, and Carlos' response was vague and unclear. Jose was unable to write a meaningful response on day seven, during which time participants were able to choose their own strategy. Jose chose evaluating, but in his response he asked questions instead, and therefore, his strategy did not match his response.

Participants chose a variety of strategies throughout the study to respond to the poems. It was interesting to note which strategies they chose most of the time, and

whether or not they used the same one over and over. Some patterns did emerge from the analysis of this data. See Table 4 for the results of this question.

Table 4

<i>Students' Choice of Strategy</i>						
	Barbara	Julia	Jose	Adolfo	Carlos	Frequency
Making Connections	2	6	0	0	0	8
Visualizing	3	4	4	0	4	15
Questioning	2	5	9	14	3	33
Summarizing	1	0	0	0	0	1
Evaluating	10	3	5	4	11	34

The results indicate that the reading strategies of evaluating and questioning were used by participants to analyze poems most often in this study. Evaluating was used 34 times, while questioning was used 33 times. Visualizing was used 15 times by participants and making connections was used eight times. Summarizing was used only one time throughout the study. It is interesting to note the patterns that emerged from analyzing the participants' choices of strategy use. For example, Carlos and Barbara overwhelmingly chose evaluating to analyze their poems. Carlos, in particular, often chose that strategy to explain why he hated every poem. Barbara on the other hand, chose evaluating more often, not to complain, but to explain in better detail why she did or did not like a particular poem. Adolfo's use of questioning is also noteworthy. Many days he wrote thoughtful questions probing into the meaning of each poem, whereas Jose,

while also choosing questioning most often, repeated the same, very simple questions over and over each day. Julia had the most varied responses to the poems, using the strategy of making connections most often. It was interesting that she was able to relate most of the poems to her own experience and write meaningful responses about those connections.

Questionnaire

Participants were asked the following three questions at the end of the study to reflect on their experience with the poem of the day warm-up: How will the five reading strategies help you with your reading in the future? Why do you think it is important to pay attention to what is happening in your mind when you read? Do you believe the poem-of-the-day warm-up helped you to become a better reader? Why or why not? The results of the questionnaire were analyzed to determine how students felt about using the reading strategies. In response to the question of how the reading strategies would help students in the future, four out of five participants responded positively. Barbara responded that the reading strategies would help her by telling her what is in her mind, which helped her to think more about what she was reading. Julia wrote that the strategies would help her to see pictures in her mind and to ask questions. She felt that the reading strategies would help her to understand books. Jose responded that the strategies would help him in the event that he needed to read something important, and Adolfo wrote that when he reads, the strategies will help him to understand the text better. Carlos responded that the strategies would not help him in the future and that he just chose a strategy because he was asked to do so.

Two of the participants, Barbara and Adolfo, answered the second question similarly. Both responded that it is important to pay attention to what is happening in their minds when reading because it can help them to understand the text better. Julia felt it would help her to answer questions, while Jose responded that it is important to pay attention because it helps him to get a picture of what he is reading. Finally, Carlos responded that he thinks it is important to pay attention to what is happening in his mind so that he would know what to write for a response.

The third and final question asked students if they believed the poem-of-the-day warm-up helped them to become better readers. Responses varied with four of the five participants believing that it was helpful to them. Barbara believed it was helpful because it made her think of questions and other things that were going on in her mind. Jose responded positively because “each strategy helps you with stuff.” Adolfo wrote that he felt the warm-up helped because one needs each of the strategies to help figure out the answers to questions. Carlos wrote that he felt the warm-up helped “a little bit” because it made him think about how he should construct his responses to the poems. Finally, Julia wrote that the warm-up did not help her to become a better reader because the teacher read the poems and she “had to write about them, and not really read.”

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that, overwhelmingly, the participants in this study were able to identify reading strategies both prior to and after the study. Four out of five were also able to explain why they chose a particular strategy both prior to and after the study, and all five participants were able to write a meaningful response to the

poem used in the pre- and post-assessment. Furthermore, during the choice part of the study, where students were able to choose which reading strategy they used, all were able to identify a reading strategy each day. Four of the five participants were able to explain why they chose a particular strategy every day of the study, and four of the five were able to write a meaningful response to the poems every day as well. The results also showed that the strategy used most often when students were given a choice was evaluating. Questioning was the second most popular strategy used when participants were given a choice. A questionnaire was also given to examine how students felt about the poem-of-the-day warm-up and whether or not they felt it helped them with their reading. Most of the students felt positively about the warm-up and believed that it did help them. Finally, the participants' NWEA MAP reading scores yielded mixed results. In the area of overall grade-level reading, two of the participants saw increased scores, two saw decreased scores, and one remained unchanged from fall to winter. With regard to narrative comprehension, the results were similarly mixed. Three of the students' narrative comprehension scores increased, while two decreased. In Chapter Five, I will discuss my major finding, their implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this study I attempted to answer the question of how explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies, through poems, could help to improve students' narrative comprehension scores on their NWEA MAP reading test. In implementing a poem-of-the-day warm-up to teach reading comprehension strategies, I also wanted to determine the answers to the following questions: Did the students choose a reading strategy each day? Which strategy did the students choose most often when given a choice? How did students describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly? And, finally, did students construct a meaningful response to each poem using the chosen reading strategy appropriately? In this chapter, I will discuss my major findings, limitations of the study, implications for ESL and mainstream teachers, and suggestions for further research.

Findings

Major findings for the study are listed as follows: 1) Students were able to identify and apply a reading strategy each day; 2) students wrote a meaningful response to each poem; 3) The strategies chosen most often when students were given a choice were evaluating and questioning, while the strategy chosen the least was summarizing; and 4) Two students had increases in their grade-level NWEA MAP reading scores, while three had increases in their narrative comprehension scores from fall to winter.

Strategy Use and Written Responses

Each participant was able to identify reading strategies and apply them to the poems they read each day. Many of the participants also succeeded in writing a meaningful response to each poem on a daily basis. Students were familiar with most of the strategies taught, as they had used them in the past to respond to text. The two strategies that were not as familiar to students were summarizing and visualizing. Students quickly picked up on how to use visualizing and recognized it as a strategy they had used in the past without even thinking about it. Summarizing proved to be the strategy students felt most uncomfortable using and is one that requires more practice not only in my classroom, but in other classes as well.

Strategies Used When Given a Choice

The reading strategies of evaluating and questioning were used most often by participants to analyze poems in this study. Summarizing was used only one time throughout the study. It is interesting to note the patterns that emerged from analyzing the participants' choices of strategy use. The reason I believe evaluating was chosen most often has to do with the age of the students. For example, these participants are in middle school, and most students in this age group enjoy voicing their opinion. The fact that they were given the option each day to write about whether they liked or disliked one of the poems gave them a great deal of power. Students this age need to have a voice and to be heard, and this option gave them that opportunity. One of the participants chose evaluating the majority of the time, and was thrilled each day as he wrote about why he hated all of the poems. Furthermore, questioning can be a very powerful strategy for

understanding not only text but the world around us. As these students are maturing, they are questioning everything from the curriculum they are studying to the rules of school and how and why they apply to them. Questioning, I believe, was a wonderful way for the students to clarify what they might not have understood about a particular topic, but in a non-threatening way through written response. Students were able to write their questions on their response sheets and then shared them voluntarily. Given the age of these students, it is not surprising that these two strategies emerged as the ones used most often.

Summarizing was the strategy chosen the least, with only one participant using it one time throughout the study. It is possible that summarizing was viewed as the most difficult strategy to use and the one with which students felt the least comfortable. Students are not always confident when they have to identify the main idea of a text. Many others cannot put into their own words what happened because they do not have access to the vocabulary needed to summarize a particular piece of text. Furthermore, to summarize in writing what they had read may have been perceived as just too difficult because summarizing is not something they have had a great deal of experience doing. Perhaps teachers should focus on teaching this strategy more often so that students feel more comfortable using it.

Another interesting note is that I suspected more students would choose making connections throughout the study. It is a strategy that I have taught and one that we talk about constantly in my classroom. I believed that students' ability to make strong connections to the poems would benefit their comprehension, but they rarely chose this

strategy. It is surprising, because even though students did not choose to write about connections they had to the poems, I know they enjoyed them and felt connected to them because of the discussions we had. Each day, all of the students in the class, including the participants, laughed and shared their feelings about what they had read. All of the students looked forward to hearing what the others had written about the poems each day.

Because research indicates that explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies is important for all readers, I strongly encourage teachers to continue to model and explain comprehension strategies, to have their students practice using such strategies with teacher support, and to let students know they are expected to continue using the strategies when reading on their own.

NWEA MAP Grade Level Reading Scores

As reported in Chapter Four, the results for the winter NWEA MAP reading did not increase as much as I had anticipated. Fall scores are expected to decrease because students have been on summer vacation and may not have attended summer school. In the winter, after three months of instruction, teachers expect scores to rise. In the case of these five participants, only two of them saw an increase in their grade-level RIT scores. What is disheartening is that both of these participants still remain two grade levels below the sixth grade reading level.

Standardized testing conditions do play a role in how students perform each time they take the test. Students take the NWEA MAP test three times each year. Frankly, they get tired of taking the tests so often and do not always take them seriously. Teachers explain to the students that the tests are for them and that we want to see them continue to

grow as students, but not all students are invested. They simply take too many tests to be invested in all of them. Of course there are other concerns with standardized testing as well. Standardized tests, particularly the NWEA MAP test, are a mere snapshot of a student's learning, and not a reliable assessment of a student's progress. This test loses its reliability because of the frequency with which it is given.

NWEA MAP Narrative Comprehension Reading Scores

The results for the narrative comprehension scores were slightly more encouraging than the grade level scores. Three of the participants saw an increase in their narrative comprehension scores, with Barbara realizing the greatest gain.

An important factor to mention with regard to testing is the lack of literacy these participants have in their native language. As mentioned previously, all participants are native speakers of Spanish, but none reads in Spanish. Due to this lack of foundation in their native language, these participants will require instruction in English for a longer period of time to meet grade level expectations in reading. The ramifications of not being literate readers in their native language may impact them for years to come as they continue to try to catch up to their native-speaking peers and meet the demands of the mainstream classroom.

Limitations

The greatest limitation of my study was time. The study spanned roughly six weeks of the school year during second quarter, and ended before winter break. My goal was to end it before break because I did not want students to continue the study after a two-week break. Middle school students get bored very easily when presented repeatedly

with the same material. Toward the end of the study, they were beginning to complain about the daily warm-up and I knew they would not want to continue with it after they returned from their break. I would have liked to continue the study for a longer period of time to determine if it would have had a more positive impact on reading scores. In the end, I collected data for 23 days, which is not long enough, in my opinion, to have a major impact on reading scores.

Poetry was the vehicle used in this study to deliver explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies. I chose poetry because my students had a history of reading and enjoying it and because they perceived it to be easier than other types of text. I also wanted to expose them to a variety of quality children's literature. As a genre, poetry offers many benefits for English language learners. Because of the rhyming patterns, the repetition, the rhythm, and the manageable chunks of text, I believed that poetry was an ideal genre for teaching ELLs how to read. The participants in this study enjoyed poetry because I chose poems that related to their own lives with themes I believed they would find humorous, or that forced them to think about things in a different way. While I will continue to use poetry in my classroom, it will likely be part of a broader poetry unit as I have done in the past. My students have a history of reading and enjoying books written in verse, such as *Love That Dog* and *Hate That Cat* by Sharon Creech. They have studied poetry within the context of these books and have learned to love poetry as a genre because of these books. It is possible that I chose poetry for this study because I have strong connections to it because of past positive experiences teaching it. I had never used it to teach reading strategies and thought it would be the ideal vehicle. However, students

were used to learning about poetry within the context of a broader, more comprehensive poetry unit. Perhaps several of the participants became restless with the poem-of-the-day warm-up because it was out of context for them, but most of the students enjoyed it and had a great deal of fun reading the variety of poems over the course of the study.

Implications

While this study cannot show that explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies through poetry can increase reading scores, it can, at the very least, be a starting point for getting students to focus on their own metacognition, which could lead to greater understanding of text. And while reading scores did not increase as much as I had anticipated, the frequency of times students take the NWEA MAP tests has to be taken into consideration as I believe it lowers students' level of investment in the test each time they take it. The participants' lack of literacy in their native language may also play a role in their performance on standardized tests, as they have no L1 literacy foundation.

One of the most positive outcomes of this study was the students' ability to choose reading strategies every day and to write meaningful response about the poems. I cannot overstate the importance of this reading and writing connection. Students also were allowed to share their written responses which led to wonderfully rich conversations about the poems. Furthermore, while students felt extremely confident using the strategies of evaluating and questioning, only one student voluntarily used summarizing one time throughout the study. The implications as a result of this study suggest that teachers need to be more purposeful in teaching the summarizing strategy to English language learners across the curriculum.

Native Language Literacy

One of the biggest factors with regard to lack of reading comprehension has to do with my students' inability to read in their native language. Cummins states that students who are literate in their native language generally require five to seven years to develop the academic language needed to be on the same level with their English-speaking counterparts in the classroom (2000). The participants in this study speak fluent Spanish, but none of them is able to read or write in Spanish. ESL teachers understand the impact of this lack of foundation in native language, and must continue to educate mainstream teachers on the importance of teaching students how to read in all content classes. Mainstream teachers can also emphasize to students the importance of reading in their native language and allow it in their classrooms when students have a choice in what they read. When available, teachers should be encouraged to provide materials in the students' native languages, as many textbooks are available in languages other than English. These students will continue to fall behind their mainstream peers if they do not receive instruction in reading outside of their ESL or reading class.

The importance of native language literacy cannot be overstated. For example, one of my current students who has been in the country for about two years saw an increase of 30 points on her grade-level MAP reading score. One of the reasons for her significant gain is that she is a dedicated, hard-working student who continues to read diligently in Spanish on a daily basis. I have no doubt that her score will continue to increase over time because of her native language literacy. The participants in this study

are at a huge disadvantage, simply because they do not have a strong foundation in their native language.

Written and Oral Responses

Written and oral responses to text were important elements in this study. Many positive outcomes resulted from shared dynamic conversations based on poems and students' responses to the poems. Students shared their responses with each other, engaging in clarifying, questioning, and debating the details of each others' responses. They talked about why they liked poems and why they did not like poems. These interactions created vibrant learning experiences that supported language development in addition to their comprehension of the poems.

And, while the focus of my study was not specifically the students' written responses, they did play an important role in gathering information about their metacognition. Writing helps students clarify their thoughts and remember what they have learned and should be a component of any ESL classroom. The poetry response sheets used in this study were invaluable in revealing which strategies students chose for the day, why they chose a particular strategy, and then how they responded to each poem. Peregoy & Boyle (2005) suggest that writing is a learning tool that can be used across the curriculum and is a powerful strategy that promotes discovery, comprehension, and retention of information. Furthermore, they explain that recent research has supported the use of writing in content areas by showing that students who write tend to understand more and remember more. Teachers should be encouraged to continue to promote reading and writing together in all content area classes.

Explicit Instruction of Summarizing

Based on the fact that summarizing was used voluntarily only one time throughout the study, I will be rethinking how to teach this strategy. I strongly encourage mainstream teachers to do the same, as this skill is an important component of reading comprehension. Teachers can find many opportunities to encourage students to summarize across the curriculum. The more students practice using this skill, the more comfortable they will become with it and it will help to increase reading comprehension. As mentioned previously, when students are instructed in summarization, they learn to identify the main ideas in text and how to leave out extraneous details. They also learn to generalize and to include ideas related to the main idea. Summarizing is a challenging skill, and given a choice, students may be inclined to choose other strategies they feel more comfortable and confident using.

Standardized Testing

Students are required to take numerous tests each year. Not only do they participate in the NWEA MAP reading and math tests three times each per year, but they also participate in the MCA reading and math test, the MCA science test in fifth and eighth grade, and the Test of Emerging Academic English. Many factors can determine how a student will perform on a standardized test and the results do not accurately reflect student learning. For example, Jose suffers from a medical condition that has gone untreated for some time. He was not engaged during the test and has a history of not doing well in school. Jose simply does not have the tools he needs to be a good learner right now, but I am hoping he will get the medical attention he needs in the near future so

that he can be more successful in school. Moreover, another participant, Julia, was very much engaged in the test, as she always is, but her results did not demonstrate growth. She has a learning disability but remains one of the hardest-working students I have ever met. Julia spends hours doing homework each night and earns good grades in school. Her test results simply do not match the kind of learner that she is. And while these particular participants did not demonstrate growth on the test, there were positive outcomes for the majority of students. It is possible that vulnerable learners are not able to make the jump from the classroom to the test.

Finally, the testing time frame not only is extremely unfair to students, but it also is an unrealistic expectation that simply cannot be met. Furthermore, the learning backgrounds of students should always be taken into consideration along with their scores on standardized tests.

Further Research

Several questions have arisen since I analyzed the results of my study. The most significant question is whether or not students could have benefitted from participating in a longer study. Was 23 days of explicit instruction enough for students to realize significant gains on their NWEA MAP reading test? I think not. Perhaps if I had done a more in-depth, longer study, scores would have increased to a greater degree. I continue to wonder what I could have done differently to impact participants' winter MAP scores.

Another question that arose has to do with the skill of summarizing. Why did only one student voluntarily choose summarizing one time throughout the study? Perhaps a study could be conducted on how best to teach summarizing to English

language learners. I know that I will look for other opportunities to teach this important skill because students in my school will have to rely heavily on it in future classes such as science and social studies. Summarizing may need to be taught differently, with more scaffolding, so that students can practice over and over until they truly know how to summarize text.

Conclusion

I chose to conduct this study because I am committed to helping my English learners become better readers. After analyzing scores from the spring NWEA MAP reading test, I chose five participants who were significantly below grade level and who scored in the low range on their narrative comprehension scores. A pilot was conducted using poetry as a daily warm-up, and from that my study came to fruition. I wondered if explicitly teaching five key reading comprehension strategies, using poems, could help students to see gains on both their grade level MAP scores and their narrative comprehension scores.

After explicitly teaching the five strategies for one week, students were given the opportunity to choose the strategy that helped them to understand each poem of the day. They were given a pre- and post-assessment using the same poem, *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams. In exploring the role of metacognition, I sought to answer the following questions: Did the student choose a strategy each day? Which strategy did the student choose most often when given a choice? How do they describe why they chose a particular reading strategy and did they explain the strategy properly? Did they construct a meaningful response to each poem, using the chosen reading strategy

appropriately? The results of the study showed that overwhelmingly, students excelled at the written response portion of the warm-up. The most interesting result revealed that students chose evaluating and questioning the majority of the time to respond to the poems, and that summarizing was used the least; it was chosen only one time throughout the study.

At the end of the study, students took the NWEA MAP reading test again. The results were mixed. For overall grade-level RIT scores, two students saw increases, two saw decreases, and one remained unchanged. For narrative comprehension RIT scores, three students saw increases and two saw decreases. The results of this study suggest that ESL teachers should continue to look for creative ways to teach reading comprehension to English learners, with a focus on summarizing. The fact that participants in this study so clearly avoided summarizing throughout indicates that they would benefit from more explicit instruction using this strategy. Finally, poetry is just one creative vehicle for making text more accessible to students. I would encourage educators to continue to seek fun and creative ways to help English learners access text.

APPENDIX A

Bibliography of Poems

Bibliography of Poems

- Cisneros, S. *Hairs*
- Prelutsky, J. *A Triangular Tale*
- Prelutsky, J. *I Do Not Like November*
- Prelutsky, J. *I Do Not Wish to Go to School*
- Prelutsky, J. *If You Want to Marry Me*
- Prelutsky, J. *Milk!*
- Prelutsky, J. *Paula Prue, I'm Mad at You*
- Silverstein, S. *How Not to Have to Dry the Dishes*
- Silverstein, S. *Kidnapped!*
- Silverstein, S. *Merry*
- Silverstein, S. *Nobody*
- Silverstein, S. *Sick*
- Silverstein, S. *Smart*
- Silverstein, S. *Someone Ate the Baby*
- Silverstein, S. *The Loser*
- Silverstein, S. *Whatif*
- Silverstein, S. *With His Mouth Full of Food*
- Stepanek, M. *On Growing Up (Part V)*
- Stepanek, M. *The Left-Over Child*
- Williams, W. *The Red Wheelbarrow*

Williams, W. *This is Just to Say*

Williams, W. *To a Poor Old Woman*

APPENDIX B

Poetry Response Sheet

Poetry Response Sheet

Poetry Response

Name _____

Strategies

Making Connections

Visualizing

Questioning

Summarizing

Evaluating

The strategy I chose today is _____ because _____

Response:

APPENDIX C

Poem-of-the-Day Questionnaire

APPENDIX D

Pre- and Post-Assessment

Pre- and Post-Assessment

The Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

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