

Apr 28th, 12:00 AM - 12:00 AM

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Cuddy, Erin M., "The Role of Teacher Capacity and Instructional Practices in English Learners' Literacy Development" (2020). *Senior Scholars Day*. 53.

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The Role of Teacher Capacity and Instructional Practice in English

Learners' Literacy Development

Erin M. Cuddy

Abstract

The self-study examined the impact of teaching strategies and methods used regarding students who are bilingual and biliterate (ELLs). Preliminary research was conducted in order to isolate several notable teaching strategies and methods. The isolated teaching strategies and methods were peer-reviewed. The peer-review indicated the implementation of said strategies would support the language and literacy development of ELLs while also allowing students to participate more fully in classroom activities and lessons. Upon isolating a minimum of 15 teaching strategies and methods, lesson plans were created and evaluated in order to determine how such strategies and methods impact teaching practices.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, general education classrooms have changed drastically. No longer do students in the general education classroom lack diversity, but rather consist of students of many different backgrounds. A contributing factor to this change is the rise of the representation of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the general education classroom. "Between 1994 and 2004, for example, the number of ELLs nearly doubled, and has continued to increase in subsequent years" (Perogoy & Boyle, 2013). At least one out of every 10 students in general education classrooms today is an ELL.

With this rapid and constant growth, general educators are often unsure how to support the ELLs placed into their classrooms. When ELLs enter the classroom, they bring with them traditions and family values that differ from mainstream American culture. It becomes the responsibility of the general education teacher to support these students. However, this poses a challenge to teachers who have had limited interactions with ELLs and/or no formal training. With the responsibility of ensuring all students are provided with high-quality education, teachers can become overwhelmed and may be unsure of where they can find resources. Teachers must be given "strong, consistent support in the best strategies and methods to reach, inspire, and teach English language learner students" (Van Roekel, 2011). However, such support is in short supply.

Methods

A developmental portfolio was used in order to collect information on observational classroom behaviors (e.g. student performance) that allowed the researcher to evaluate his or her own beliefs and practices regarding ELLs. Daily observations and reflections were recorded in the portfolio as a means of collecting data on students' levels of performance in relation to the implementation of teaching strategies and methods. In concurrence with the written observations made by the researcher, students' work was collected to make direct comparisons of the quality of the work prior to and after the implementation of a strategy or method.

Additionally, the researcher took part in living educational theory research, a practice in which the researcher actively reflects on a teaching practice or method being implemented. Data was collected in the form of video recordings that depict the implementation of a teaching strategy or method. The video recordings were then reviewed after the initial implementation of a strategy or method and required the researcher to make direct observations during the viewing of the video. The observational notes recorded were evaluated by the researcher in order to answer the question, "How can the observed teaching practices be improved?" This systematic reflection on such a process provided the researcher with insight into the nature of the development of his or her educational practices.

The materials collected in the developmental portfolio and living educational theory research were used to draw the outcomes of the self-study research. Outcomes of the self-study research focused on, "...the personal, in terms of improving self-understanding and enhanced understanding of teaching and learning process, and the public, in terms of the production and advancement of formal, collective knowledge about teaching and teacher educational practices, programs, and contents" (Berry & Hamilton, 2013).

Conclusion

As noted, specific research findings are not available. However, the researcher presumed that through observation the test subjects were positively responding to the intervention. It was noted that the test subjects had an increase in engagement through the following actions; (1) paying attention (were alert and tracking the teacher with their eyes), (2) asking content-related questions, (3) responding to questions, (4) following directions given, and (5) reacting to teacher and/or student responses (laughing, crying, shouting, etc.). Therefore, the researcher would have continued the same interventions for the duration of the self-study.

References

- Berry, A., & Hamilton, M. L. (2019, November 18). Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices. Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0089.xml>.
- Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. (2013). Reading, Writing, and Learning in ESL: A Resource Book for Teaching K-12 English Learners. Boston: Pearson.
- Van Roekel, D. (2011). Professional Development for General Education Teachers of English Language Learners. Retrieved December 7, 2019, from <http://www.nea.org/home/42549.htm>.

Findings

Prior to the implementation of the self-study, the researcher collected and reviewed two kindergarten ELL students' graded work (e.g. monthly skills check reports) in order to determine their current level of performance. It was noted that both students were considered "struggling learners" as they were significantly behind their peers in terms of academic performance. As a result, both students were receiving additional supports via pull-out sessions with a variety of specialists (e.g. ESL teacher, reading specialist).

During the implementation of the self-study, the researcher collected and reviewed two kindergarten ELL students' graded work (e.g. monthly skills check reports) in order to determine their current level of performance. Additionally, anecdotal records of engagement were recorded. The researcher maintained the preliminary data from the two periods; pre-intervention and during-intervention, for analysis at the end of the trial period. In response to COVID-19, an emergency evacuation of the elementary school in which this study was conducted occurred. Therefore, the researchers aforementioned documentation is inaccessible and is omitted from the self-study findings.

Due to the closure of Pennsylvania public schools and the inability to interact with the research subjects, the researcher was unable to complete the self-study as designed.

Implications for Practice

In order for ELLs to become successful students, they need to learn grade-level content as well as the English language skills needed to access that content. However, general education teachers often lack the knowledge and resources to provide a high-quality education to these students. To support the researcher's future teaching practices and to support general educators, notable practices were consolidated into an easy-to-read guide. The content of the guide includes; (1) who are English language learners, (2) what are the general education teachers responsibilities to ELLs, and (3) what practices and methods can easily be implemented into the classroom to support ELLs. The teaching strategies and practices provided in the guide will not only be useful for general education teachers with ELLs in their classrooms, but with other diverse students as well (e.g. students of minority).