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Free Voluntary Reading: Enhancing The Reading Component Of Teaching Proficiency Through Reading And Storytelling In An Elementary Spanish Classroom

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FREE VOLUNTARY READING: ENHANCING THE READING COMPONENT OF
TEACHING PROFICIENCY THROUGH READING AND STORYTELLING IN AN
ELEMENTARY SPANISH CLASSROOM

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education.

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To my dear roommates who have endured the extra messes and stress during the writing process. And to my fiancé who has spent numerous hours quietly next to me while I studied and typed, done my neglected chores, made me meals and snacks for study breaks, and encouraged me to work when I did not want to. Thank you.

“I know from personal experience that readers lead richer lives, more lives, than those who don’t read.”

— Donalyn Miller, *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*

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A special thanks to my colleagues who have taught me nearly all that I know about teaching and who daily encourage me and challenge me to be a better teacher. And thank you to my students who go along with all of my crazy stories, make me laugh, cry, grow, and learn, and ensure that I have one of the most exciting and rewarding jobs to go to every day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	7
My Foundations in Teaching.....	8
Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling.....	9
Making TPRS Work in Elementary.....	10
Free Voluntary Reading.....	12
A Culture of Literacy.....	12
Experiencing Benefits and Struggles with FVR.....	13
Building a Classroom Library.....	14
The Need for Elementary Spanish Literature.....	15
Groundwork of a Capstone Project.....	17
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	19
Stories and Learning.....	20
Comprehensible and Compelling Input.....	24
Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling.....	26
What is TPRS.....	27
TPRS and Classroom Climate.....	28
TPRS and Language Proficiency.....	30
Reading in TPRS.....	33
Free Voluntary Reading.....	35
FVR and L1.....	36
FVR and L2.....	38

FVR and Literacy Habits.....	39
A Classroom Library for FVR.....	40
Conclusion.....	41
CHAPTER THREE: Project Description.....	43
Rationale.....	43
Audience.....	46
Methods.....	47
Project Evaluation.....	50
Conclusion.....	52
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion.....	53
Important Literature.....	53
Writing Books.....	56
Implications.....	58
Communicating and Sharing my Project.....	59
Limitations.....	61
Future Work and Research.....	63
Personal Growth.....	64
Conclusion.....	66
REFERENCES.....	68
Appendix A: List of Target Vocabulary.....	75
Appendix B: Brainstorming of Characters.....	78
Appendix C: Plot Diagrams.....	80
Appendix D: Student Survey for Evaluation of Books.....	82

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“In the last few decades, evidence from several areas continues to show that those who do more recreational reading show better development in reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. These results hold for first and second language acquisition, and for children and adults” (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1).

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?*

A friend of mine has set out to read the entire Harry Potter series in Spanish. I have had 15 years of formal language instruction and spent many months in Spanish speaking countries, but reading in Spanish has not long been a habit of mine. It has been several years since my friend's last language course, and he has never spent extended time in a Spanish speaking country. But as he finishes the fifth book, he is able to read through pages more quickly than I am and recognize vocabulary words that I do not.

There are words such as ‘también,’ Spanish for ‘also’, or ‘y,’ Spanish for ‘and,’ that I have never explicitly taught my students. Yet these words repeatedly come up in texts and my students without question comprehend this vocabulary. These are words that would be difficult for me to structure a formal lesson to teach, but by simply providing them with texts that contain those words, this language is acquired naturally.

My journey as an educator has led me to recognize the value of stories and ultimately of reading in my classroom. The process of including Spanish reading time in my classroom has been time consuming and has not come without obstacles. There have been great successes and improvements through reading, but my students have still not seen all of the growth that I believe is possible for them. I continue to struggle to build a library of Spanish books that match my students' levels and interests. This leads me to pursue a project that focuses on creating comprehensible and compelling stories for my elementary Spanish students.

My Foundations in Teaching

The methods class that I took during my senior year of college was the first time that I read research about language acquisition. This was my introduction to the idea of comprehensible input, which has been a foundational concept in my instructional design throughout my career. Comprehensible input is a term used by Krashen in connection with his input hypothesis, which asserts that people learn a language through hearing and reading it at a level that they are able to understand (Faltis, 2008). The term $i+1$ has also been used to refer to input that is just one step harder than what a learner can independently comprehend, which leads to growth in their language acquisition (Faltis, 2008).

My first job after graduating from college was as a long term substitute in a bilingual second grade classroom. Half of my students spoke Spanish as their native language and half spoke English. Daily instruction in the classroom included an hour of literacy instruction in each language, Spanish and English. I was impressed that a large percentage of my students had reached a second grade reading level in both languages.

The following school year, I was hired as an elementary Spanish teacher in three buildings for the district where I work now. The primary school that I worked at had a high population of English Language Learners (ELL), several of whom were native Spanish speakers. I was hired at the same time as the ELL instructor and she and I became good friends. We had many discussions of how to improve literacy for our Spanish speaking students. It was a goal of mine to support and foster their first language literacy with the hope that skills would transfer to their second language and improve their English literacy. This was a frequent thought and discussion point for me. However, I quickly found that there were several challenges. Obstacles included building a library of Spanish books, finding students' Spanish reading levels, lack of time to conference with students and difficulty holding them accountable for their reading. Because of the many challenges and expectations of a first year teacher, this work was quickly moved to a back burner to focus on other aspects of my instruction that seemed more immediately necessary.

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling

Upon being hired in my current school district, I attended a Blaine Ray workshop on Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). This is a method for teaching languages that uses comprehensible input in the form of stories to increase fluency in a language (Ray, 2015). The method includes student actors, stories that are partially student constructed and numerous repetitions to build fluency. I had been briefly introduced to the method during college courses, but this was the first formal training I attended. As a part of the training, Ray did a lesson in German so we could experience what it was like to be a language learner in a storytelling classroom. After three hours of

instruction, I was able to write and tell an entire story in German and I was convinced of the value of this method of instruction. With encouragement from my colleagues, who also wanted to build a TPRS program, I began using almost exclusively TPRS methods in my classroom.

As evidenced by the title of the method, an important aspect of TPRS instruction is reading (Ray & Seely, 2012). In his workshop, Ray discussed the use of embedded readings, extended readings and reading homework to supplement oral instruction in providing input for students (Ray, 2015). I was successful in the implementation of embedded and extended readings to go with each story that was used in class. However, Ray's reading plan, which he has used in high school classrooms, included novels and homework that seemed inappropriate for my elementary program. I made the decision to skip the independent reading portion of TPRS.

I struggled with early implementation of TPRS. My students were not used to that method of instruction, and it was difficult to find a balance in which students were excited about the stories without the classroom becoming chaotic in energy level. My students also struggled to pick up on some cues and prompts I was giving due to the fact that they were younger and less literate than high school students. I continued to push through with TPRS because my personal experience had told me it was effective. After a few months, my students and I were in a good rhythm and I began to see great improvement in their Spanish fluency.

Making TPRS Work in Elementary

While TPRS brought energy, positivity and Spanish fluency in my classroom, there were continued struggles with trying to implement this in an elementary classroom

where I only have 40 hours of contact time with students per year. Elementary students, even with engaging stories, are not able to maintain attention for entire class periods of group instruction. I needed to be continually prepared with visual picture clues, since word clues (such as Spanish to English word banks) were difficult for my students to quickly decipher due to their developing literacy levels. There was also the issue of teacher energy level. I was having a hard time being an animated storyteller for seven sections a day. Additionally, I felt that I was missing a large aspect of TPRS - the reading.

In 2014, I received a grant to attend the National TPRS conference. I was able to spend the week in an elementary teacher workshop. Among the many topics we discussed that influenced and improved my teaching was incorporating reading in an elementary classroom. The presenter, Davison, helped us to plan and scaffold instruction to prepare students for a text, song, article, story or even novel (Davison, 2014). I learned that many elementary Spanish teachers pick a Spanish novel (usually one that has been published by the TPRS community) and spend an entire year of instruction preparing students to be able to read the novel.

Upon returning from the workshop, my colleagues and I wrote curriculum to include a novel in our fourth grade instruction. We also added some news articles and fictional readings throughout our curriculum. This was beneficial in multiple ways. For the sanity of us as teachers, it provided a few reading activities that still gave students comprehensible input without requiring us to maintain energy for oral instruction all day. For the program and community, there was excitement that students were able to read

passages and books in Spanish as elementary students. And for the students, there was increased fluency and confidence in their abilities in the language.

Free Voluntary Reading

In 2015, my colleagues and I were able to attend the International Forum on Language Teaching. The keynote speaker of the conference was Krashen, who has conducted and written a significant amount of the research and literature on language acquisition. His primary message was the necessity of students having Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) (Krashen, 2015). FVR is reading that occurs when students have complete choice over the books they read with minimum censorship and accountability (Krashen, 2011, pp.9-10).

Additionally at the conference, a group of teachers gave a short workshop on building a classroom library. They explained the difficulty of finding Spanish books that were comprehensible as well as compelling for elementary and middle school students. They suggested writing short stories, having students illustrate them and then laminating them for use in a classroom library. Additionally, they took English picture books, taped over the words and replaced them with simplified Spanish vocabulary. I returned from the conference excited about implementing FVR in my classroom and got to work right away developing a Spanish library for my students.

A Culture of Literacy

In the fall of 2016, I participated with my colleagues in a book study of Miller's *The Book Whisperer* (2009). It is an inspiring tale about a teacher's journey through literacy instruction and how she has become effective in developing a love of reading in her students. One of her primary pieces of advice is to ensure students have extended

time every day to read the books that they want to read (Miller, 2009). As a group, we discussed different ways that we could incorporate Miller's ideas to promote a culture of literacy throughout our school. This further encouraged my desire to implement FVR in my classroom.

At the same time as I was reading Miller's book, I was experiencing a lot of struggles in the classroom. A large influx of new students with different traumatic situations was making group instruction nearly impossible. The energy level of the storytelling was resulting in kids yelling and moving all around the room, creating chaos. I was unable to make it through fifteen seconds of storytelling without a student interruption distracting the entire class. For the first time since I started, I knew I had to set TPRS aside, for only a period of time, and rethink how my instruction was structured.

In January of 2017, after a year and a half of work, I had a Spanish library with enough selection and organization to begin FVR in my classroom. Since the first day of school in January, all of my third, fourth and fifth grade students have begun class with silent reading time in which they have complete choice on what Spanish book they choose to read.

Experiencing Benefits and Struggles with FVR

Implementing silent reading at the beginning of my class has had a remarkable calming effect on my classroom. Since I have zero minutes of transition time between classes, a calm start to class has been invaluable. While students are silent reading, I have a moment to ensure my materials are set for instruction that day. I can check in with students to make sure I am doing what I can to foster positive relationships with students and I can sit down and read with students to exemplify for them that I also value literacy.

I have found that students are effectively able to transition to group instruction with a more reasonable energy level. Additionally, some of my students have been so excited about reading in Spanish that they have asked to take books home and continue reading Spanish at home.

While I have witnessed a large number of benefits in implementation of FVR in my classroom, there are several struggles I continue to face. I have many students complaining that the books are either too easy or too difficult for them. There are not enough books of medium difficulty for my students. While some students have exhibited a lot of excitement about reading, other students are reluctant to read and complain about FVR time. There are some students who remain off task during reading time. Due to the volume of students that I have and the limited contact time I have with them, I have very few opportunities to confer with individual students and ensure they are reading and comprehending.

Building a Classroom Library

The greatest barrier to my original implementation of FVR was building a classroom library. This continues to be a barrier to the success of my FVR program as well. In my search for Spanish books for my classroom, I found three main categories of books. The first is children's literature written for native speakers of Spanish. While these books are designed for children, they still have too much vocabulary for my students who only have 40 hours of Spanish class in a year. The second kind of book is for native Spanish speaking children just learning to read in Spanish. These are books that have only two or three words on each page. These books are comprehensible for my students,

but they lack compelling storylines. My students do not want to read these because they are boring and can be finished in just a minute.

The third set of books are books published by other teachers in the TPRS community. These are ideal because they are compelling storylines and they use a limited amount of vocabulary. They are designed to be comprehensible for Spanish learners. The issue with this set of books is that most of them are written by middle and high school Spanish teachers who have far more contact time with their students and whose students are older and more literate than my students. Most of my students are able to read portions of these novels, but the complete novel is too complicated with too much vocabulary for my students.

I have reached out to online communities of elementary TPRS teachers to ask them about their experiences with FVR and building a classroom library. Most teachers report that they print out stories that have been used during their group instruction for their students to read. Several teachers also write basic stories and have students illustrate. I have done the same thing to further develop the middle range of my library. This is effective for creating compelling and comprehensible stories for students. However, it is extremely time consuming for a teacher to create all of his or her books for a classroom library. And in the end, these stories tend to be short and fail to encourage much investment in reading a Spanish story.

The Need for Elementary Spanish Literature

My communication with other elementary Spanish teachers, primarily through online communities, has led me to three novels that have been published with the intention of use in an elementary classroom. These are great additions to my library, but

it is not enough. There is a lack of compelling Spanish stories that are comprehensible to students in an exploratory elementary Spanish program.

The effectiveness of FVR in my classroom is valuable to me. I need a few down moments in my day and students benefit from a calm start to their class period. In order to grow in their Spanish, learners need comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003). Reading is an important form of that input (Krashen, 2004a). I believe the effectiveness of my FVR program relies on there being more books that students are able to independently read and that contain interesting story lines. I believe this would increase student interest, ability and confidence in reading Spanish, which would in turn increase fluency. As student vocabulary and fluency grows through reading, I am able to accomplish more with students during other instructional times. Additionally, a growing and interesting library helps to promote the school wide culture of literacy.

The other Spanish teachers in my district would also benefit from having access to comprehensible and compelling books for their students. They would be able to expand their reading time to promote literacy and Spanish fluency. These books can save them time and energy as teachers as well. And from an equity perspective, the greater development we see in our libraries, the more we are encouraging first language literacy for our native Spanish speakers.

In the greater TPRS community, making more elementary novels available helps other teachers to implement FVR in their classrooms. Right now, developing a classroom library for an elementary Spanish teacher is an incredibly time consuming process that requires a teacher to create and put together many books on his or her own. Making sets of appropriate books available would save a large amount of time for teachers wanting to

incorporate more reading in their classroom as well as encourage more teachers to incorporate reading.

Groundwork of a Capstone Project

My development as a teacher has been influenced primarily by the method of TPRS and the research that supports it. From the beginning, I have been interested in developing a practice of reading Spanish in my classroom. The age of my students and their limited vocabulary due to limited instructional time has been a barrier to implementation of reading. Encouragement from professionals in my field, a desire to cultivate a culture of literacy and a need for a calm start to my class led me to begin a practice of FVR in my classroom.

While I have seen numerous benefits to this addition to my classroom, I have continued to experience a few setbacks. The most notable obstacle is the building of a classroom library, which is difficult due to the lack of comprehensive and compelling literature available in Spanish for my students. Expanding the number of Spanish books available for elementary students is important not only for the growth of students in my classroom, but also for classrooms in my district and in the greater TPRS community.

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* My capstone project is creating and seeking to publish two Spanish books designed to be read independently by students in elementary classrooms. My hope is that they would be available not only to my students, but also to other teachers who desire to implement reading in their classroom but are struggling to create all of their own books.

In chapter two, I use literature and research to demonstrate the value of comprehensible books and FVR for students and the impact it has on their Spanish fluency. I explore the literature about the use of stories for child literacy and educational growth. I discuss the evidence in support of exposing students to comprehensible and compelling input. I explain the TPRS method, research about its effectiveness, and its reading components. Finally, I discuss FVR and research about its value in the classroom.

In chapter three, I explain the nature of my project and the details of the books I am writing. I discuss the methods used in their creation, the rationale for the project, and how it will be evaluated. Chapter four is a reflection of my project as a whole and its implications, impact, and limitations. In chapter four I suggest future research as well as acknowledge how I have grown through the process of completing this capstone.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My experience as a teacher up to this point has led me to believe that it is valuable for my students to have Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) time in Spanish. “Free voluntary reading is a system for encouraging silent, self-selected reading of enjoyable books written at students’ independent levels” (Herrel & Jordan, 2016, p. 258). In this literature review, I explore the current research and literature around this topic to further inform this idea. My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* In order to answer this question, there are a number of related ideas that need exploration.

In my literature review, I review the impact of stories on learning and on language. Stories hold a lot of value in my classroom and are the basis of any books that students would read during FVR time, so it is valuable to explore the research on stories. I also discuss theories of language development and how they lead us to the ideas of comprehensible and compelling input. Understanding how our brains acquire a language is essential not only for structuring my classroom, but for structuring my library for successful reading. Additionally, I discuss TPRS, a method of teaching that emphasizes the importance of stories, comprehensible and compelling input, and reading. I explore research about its effectiveness and explain some of the procedure of TPRS, especially

with regards to reading. And finally, I review research on FVR and its value both for promoting someone's first language (L1) as well as a second language (L2).

Stories and Learning

Stories have been part of the human experience throughout all generations and cultures even before communication occurred through written mediums. Storytelling has been a way of communicating information, making sense of the world around us, and gathering community wisdom (Cather, 1926, pp. 1-6; Leicester, 2006, p. 1). In language instruction, connecting new vocabulary and grammar structures to storylines has been shown to increase recall of new vocabulary (Prince, 2012, p. 103). In this section, I outline the importance of stories to human experience as well as language learning and lay a foundation for the value of providing opportunities for students to interact with stories.

The literature I have found discussing the value of storytelling for children in education and beyond spans nearly a century in publication dates. Cather (1926, p. 7) discussed the long lasting nature of stories in our minds. Cather explained that often the stories we are told as a child stay with us into adulthood and are passed on to others. Cather went on to explain that while the main purpose of storytelling had often been seen as entertainment, there is no greater way to aid children's mental, emotional, social and spiritual development than through stories (1926, p. 10). Stories can play an integral role in a child's social and emotional health. The feelings generated from stories and during story time grow to be associated with the people who are present for the storytelling experience, which helps to build meaningful and positive relationships (Almaguer & Wilson, 2009, p. 25). This can occur in relationships with parents, caregivers, teachers

and other children. This is valuable in the classroom as we consider the desire of teachers to build positive relationships with students. Storytelling provides an opportunity to teach content while building relationships.

The value of stories can increase as children have more ownership of the stories (Isbell, 2002, p. 27). As children play a part in anything from creating the story to having opportunity to ask questions about the story, they are able to build their relationship to the story and better create connections between the story and the world around them (Akin, 2009, p. 160). Sometimes, scripted curriculums create fragmented experiences with stories, which do not provide the same benefits as a more completely integrated story (Akin, 2009, pp. 152-153). It is beneficial for student growth when they are given an opportunity for interaction with the story (Isbell, 2002, p. 27). This can take place through discussion groups, conferring with a teacher, an extended project and even a short simple conversation. In the "Book after a Book Project" students rewrite their own version of a story with changed details. This project has had positive effects on student motivation, confidence and literacy (Deeb & Jakar, 2009, p. 97).

In one preschool classroom, a teacher observed students during playtime and saw their tendency to create and act out stories as a group (Sullivan, 2009, pp. 39-40). The teacher found that students were drawn to the idea of superheroes. The teacher chose to enter in the students' story by asking them a number of questions. A play time story about superheroes turned into a deeper conversation about the characteristics and motivations of superheroes (Sullivan, 2009, pp. 41-43). The teacher found that the context of a story made it possible to foster greater critical thinking in his students. Eventually, the superhero project in conjunction with discussion about a local election led

to students connecting superhero powers to personal powers and the power of a vote (Sullivan, 2009, pp. 47-48).

In addition to growth in critical thinking, fostering positive relationships, and teaching moral lessons, stories hold an integral role in language development of children (Almaguer & Wilson, 2009, p. 25). Isbell (2002) explained that storytelling models language in an “expressive, responsive, and enjoyable” manner and “presents new vocabulary and complex language in a powerful form that inspires children” (p. 26). Isbell (2002) listed among the many benefits of storytelling, that children grow in their ability to comprehend, begin to recognize language structures and patterns, learn empathy and “experience the power of the spoken word” (p. 30).

Language development through stories occurs in the second language (L2) as well as the first (L1). According to Ray and Seeley (2012), one of keys to fluency in a language is that “aural input must continually maintain the interest of students” (p. 8). Additionally, Ray and Seely explain the importance of the L2 exposure being in a low stress environment. Storytelling is an effective way to maintain the interest of students while minimizing the stress of learning L2. Ghoorchaei and Parvareshbar (2016) found that Iranian English as a foreign language students that were taught using short stories outperformed their cohorts who were not taught with the use of stories.

The Contextualized Storytelling Approach (CSA) uses visual and audio aids along with teaching to tell oral stories in L2 that are comprehensible to students. Cary (1998) found CSA to have a significant effect on both L2 comprehension and speaking. The study also found that those with the lowest fluency at the beginning saw the greatest gains through the storytelling approach. In another teacher’s experience, wordless books

were effective in creating context for stories in which students with limited L2 proficiency were able to give input to and in some ways create their own stories (Weber, 2009, pp. 78-79). Lessons with the wordless books led to greater connection to the stories and confidence in L2.

Prince (2012) found that students performed better on a test requiring them to recall new French vocabulary when the words had been taught within the framework of a story rather than as independent vocabulary (p. 103). Uddin (2009) set out to implement the counseling techniques of storytelling and role playing in a language classroom. The study found that both storytelling and role playing were effective in improving intermediate and advanced proficiency adult English language learners' vocabulary and communicative skills (Uddin, 2009).

In conclusion, storytelling has been a valuable part of the human experience for a very long time. It has been used to entertain, to teach morals, to build relationships and to develop language and literacy. The presence of stories is beneficial for literacy and language development in L1 and in L2. A variety of studies have found the value of providing the context of stories for growth in L2 vocabulary and proficiency. In upcoming sections, I take a more in depth look at one method of storytelling in the L2 classroom.

The impact of stories is valuable to me because it informs the instruction that I do in my classroom. I instruct L2 using stories because I believe it is a compelling method for students to learn a language. Research supports that the use of stories is beneficial for students in a variety of settings. In my research about student access to and interaction with Spanish literature at their level, it is necessary to consider the purpose of using

stories and books as a medium for language learning. The research on the benefits of stories suggests that introducing more stories in written form and providing more opportunities for my students to interact with those stories through reading will have a positive impact on student learning. In the next section, I explore two essential characteristics of stories in a language classroom: their ability to be understood and their capacity to maintain student interest.

Comprehensible and Compelling Input

“We acquire language in only one way: when we understand messages; that is, when we obtain ‘comprehensible input.’ We acquire language, in other words, when we understand what we hear or what we read, when we understand the message” (Krashen, 2003, p. 4). In this section, I discuss the research behind comprehensible and compelling input, its importance in my classroom, and how to integrate the concepts of comprehensible and compelling input in an FVR program.

Strategies for learning vocabulary can be taught and practiced until they become second nature (Pavičić Takač, 2008). However, these kinds of strategies often involve a lot of conscious thinking. Krashen (2003) explained that explicit grammar instruction can help someone learn the language in a conscious and deductive manner, while comprehensible input promotes the subconscious and inductive process of language acquisition. “Language acquisition occurs most efficiently when we are so involved in the message that we forget it is in another language” (Krashen, 2011, p. 81). The greatest language learning happens when students are interested and when they are capable of comprehending the language being used (Ray & Seely, 2012).

There are a few principles that can be followed to ensure input is comprehensible

to students. In most languages, there is a set of high frequency vocabulary that makes up about 80% of the language used on a daily basis (Nation, 2001). This vocabulary is the vocabulary teachers want to focus on when creating input for students that is comprehensible.

The most effective method for growing in language proficiency is using the principle of $i+1$ (Nation, 2001). $i+1$ refers to input that is almost entirely comprehensible to language learners, but contains just one level beyond what students already know in the language (Faltis, 2008). For listening, an appropriate $i+1$ level is an activity in which students know at least 95% of the words; 98% will produce even better results in student ability to connect meaning of new words using context clues (Hu & Nation, as cited by Nation, 2002).

When new vocabulary given to students is not comprehensible, and they are not able to figure it out through context clues, it is necessary to establish meaning (Nation, 2002). This can be done through a definition in the target language, which tends to be time consuming and confusing for students, a quick translation, as is done with a footnote or a dictionary embedded in target language books, or with a visual representation, such as an action for oral instruction or a drawing in a picture book (Nation, 2002).

Nation (2012) wrote that valuable techniques for learning vocabulary are repetition, reusing vocabulary in a variety of contexts, and a positive classroom environment. This is a similar list as Ray and Seely's (2012) list of key components for language learning. Ray and Seely explained that a language classroom must include lots of comprehensible input, constant interest, lots of target language, low stress, and high teacher expectations (p. 8).

Gross (2011) wrote about brain research in connection with comprehensible and compelling language input. The brain finds it compelling when something surprising and unexpected happens (Gross, 2011). The brain is better able to comprehend when focus time is limited, important information is repeated many times, connections are made, the body is involved and processing time is provided by slowing down instruction (Gross, 2007). Additionally, a positive environment and personalizing instruction to connect with students has a positive impact on the brain's ability to learn (Gross, 2011).

The concepts of compelling and comprehensible input are valuable not only because of their impact on oral instruction in my classroom, but because of the impact on reading activities as well. It is important that any input students receive, whether via listening or via reading, is interesting and able to be understood. My research question deals with the implementation of Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) in an elementary Spanish classroom. For success in language learning, it is important that an FVR program provides access to books that are comprehensible and compelling. When this is done correctly, language acquisition occurs without effort (Krashen, 2003). In the following section, I discuss a method of language instruction that focuses on continually providing input that students find interesting and are able to understand.

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

TPRS is a method of instruction that combines the value of stories with comprehensible and compelling input to promote language proficiency. In the TPRS method, interactive stories are created to provide comprehensible input (Ray, 2015, p. 1). There are numerous advantages to the TPRS method, including long term memory of language, improved fluency, a fun classroom environment, improved grades,

encouragement of creativity, and building language confidence (Ray & Seely, 2012, pp. 279-281). In this section, I explain the method of TPRS and discuss some of the existing research around this method.

What is TPRS? TPRS has foundations in the method of Total Physical Response (TPR) (Ray & Seely, 2012, pp. 1-4). TPR is an approach to language teaching in which the instructor gives and models different instructions or commands and the students respond by physically moving to follow those commands. It is a highly interactive approach which tends to lead to long term memory of vocabulary due to the kinesthetic nature of the instruction (Ray, 2016). The use of movement improves engagement for many students (Ray, 2016). There are, however, limitations to TPR. TPR tends to teach primarily the command forms of verbs, and commands are not the primary way in which we communicate (Ray, 2016). Additionally, many of the high frequency vocabulary words that make up the majority of communication cannot be represented in a simple motion or movement (Ray, 2016).

TPRS takes the repetition and movement of TPR and adds in a story element, increasing the compelling nature of instruction (Krashen, 2015, p. 25). TPRS aims to create a classroom in which the target language is continually used in a manner that is comprehensible and compelling to students (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 8). In order to ensure comprehension, TPRS requires continual repetition, slower speaking, instruction shaped to include vocabulary that students know, and quick translation of new vocabulary (Ray, 2015). It is important to limit vocabulary to the high frequency words that are most used in communication to ensure sufficient repetition for acquisition of this vocabulary (Ray, 2015). Repetition occurs through continual circling of questions about the story being

dramatized and introduction of new characters and story elements that allow target vocabulary to be recycled (Ray, 2015).

In order to provide sufficient repetition of targeted grammatical features while simultaneously maintaining interest, we have all students respond appropriately to varying and repetitive questions about a developing story...Keeping everything comprehensible is most essential, since students who are not following what the teacher is saying cannot be interested (they are likely to be confused or lost), nor can they acquire language that they don't understand. (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 10)

In order to make the language compelling to students, a variety of techniques are used, including humor, information relevant to and even about students, partial student creation of stories, student actors, props, theatrical elements, and story plots that require solving a problem (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 10). It is also valuable to include surprises and emotions in story dramatizations, because our brains connect well with emotions and novelty (Ray, 2015). The setup of the class encourages teachers as well as students to focus on the details of a story instead of the language being used, which encourages a more subconscious and natural acquisition of language (Ray, 2015).

There are many research studies that have been done on the TPRS method of instruction. The research that has been done explores both data on language proficiency as well as data on student engagement. The majority of research that I reviewed supports the idea that TPRS has a positive impact both on language fluency as well as student attitudes, motivation and confidence.

TPRS and classroom climate. The positive climate created from TPRS instruction is a frequent theme of the research that I reviewed. Out of all of the studies

that I found, there were only two that did not find TPRS to create better attitudes and feelings about learning than other methods of language instruction. Perna (2007) conducted a study that included a survey to gather information about attitudes toward language learning in Italian language classrooms. The study found that TPRS students had more positive attitudes than students taught using traditional methods, but not as positive as students taught according to their learning styles. Spangler (2009) compared Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to TPRS and found no significant difference in anxiety levels related to the teaching strategy (p. 127).

In the remaining studies that included a component about student attitudes, motivation and confidence, TPRS was found to have a greater positive affect than other methods that were researched. Blanton's 2015 study found that TPRS led to higher motivation than CLT (Blanton, 2015). Murray (2014) conducted a study in French I classes that included a survey to measure motivation and confidence in the language. The study found that the introduction of TPR and TPRS increased motivation and confidence and that students instructed through TPR and TPRS had higher motivation and confidence than a control group (Murray, 2014). Bustamante (2009) found that most students were happy with the TPRS methods that were used in class and that it was helping them to learn Spanish. "Out of the total class of 19 students, 12 had taken a Spanish class before, and all 12 felt like they were learning Spanish better with the TPRS method" (Bustamante, 2009, abstract).

There have also been several studies with findings that support the idea that TPRS has a positive impact on classroom climate, but do not compare that data to another teaching method. Merinnage de Costa (2015) concluded that it is not possible to identify

a single correct method for a language classroom, however, TPRS benefitted students by creating a comfortable environment and engaging students (p. 47). Additionally, Beyer (2008) found that students responded positively when asked about the impact of story reenactment on their learning (pp. 15-16).

TPRS and language proficiency. In the research that explores the impact of TPRS on language learning, the findings show a little more variance than the research on student attitudes. All of the literature that I reviewed supported the idea that TPRS has a positive impact on language learning and nearly all studies have found that TPRS students outperform traditionally taught students in most of the components of language fluency. In research comparing TPRS to teaching methods such as CLT, some studies show TPRS to create better results and others support a different teaching approach.

The first body of research shows positive impacts of TPRS in language learning without comparing it to a different method. Beyer (2008) found that students taught using TPR strategies with an integrated story reenactment performed well on a preterit test (p. 15). In another study without a comparison group, TPRS instruction was shown to improve performance for college students on reading and writing assessments (Bustamante, 2009). Espinoza (2015) performed qualitative research through three case studies of teachers implementing TPRS methods in their classroom. From the teacher perspective in these case studies, adopting components of TPRS, namely Personalized Question-Answer (PQA), TPR and comprehensible input, have had a positive impact on student language acquisition (Espinoza, 2015, pp. 59-60).

Studies comparing TPRS to another method generally found that TPRS students outperformed in some categories while underperforming in others. There was only one

study that found another method that outperformed TPRS in all categories. Perna (2007) found that TPRS students outperformed students taught using traditional methods on vocabulary and grammar tests. However, students who were taught according to their learning styles outperformed both the TPRS group and the traditional group in all categories (Perna, 2007).

Several studies compared CLT methods to TPRS with mixed results. Spangler (2009) did a study comparing the impacts of CLT and TPRS instruction on language fluency and anxiety in middle school and high school students. The study found that there was no statistical difference in reading or writing fluency (Spangler, 2009, pp. 107, 114). However, students in the TPRS group outperformed CLT students in speaking fluency (Spangler, 2009, p. 122). In a study of Spanish III classes in a high school setting using standards based proficiency assessments with a motivation scale, CLT yielded better results in language proficiency, but not in motivation (Blanton, 2015).

An extended literature review exploring various studies comparing TPRS to CLT and other instructional methods found that in nearly all cases, TPRS instruction equaled or exceeded other methods (Zukanoff, 2015). This literature review also made the case that there are several components of TPRS that can be implemented with relative ease into any classroom to improve language instruction (Zukanoff, 2015). A few of these components are student choice of reading, role play, planned writing, retelling of stories, slowing the pace, and personalization (Zukanoff, 2015, pp. 44-45).

When compared to traditional methods, TPRS generally outperformed in most categories. Murray (2014) found a benefit to the combined use of TPR and TPRS strategies. Murray's study in French I classes used a pre and posttest to measure language

growth (Murray, 2014). The study found that the introduction of TPR and TPRS increased test scores and that students instructed through TPR and TPRS had higher scores in fluency than a control group (Murray, 2014). Foster (2011) and Perna (2007) both found that TPRS students outperformed students taught with traditional methods in all measures taken.

In another study comparing traditional methods to TPRS methods, the traditional group outperformed the TPRS group in grammar and writing, while the TPRS group outperformed the traditional group in vocabulary and culture, although it was less statistically significant for vocabulary and culture (Merinnage de Costa, 2015, pp. 41-43). Both TPRS and traditional methods were effective for listening (p. 45).

There were two other studies that showed positive results for TPRS in several components of language acquisition when compared to another method. In a six week study comparing TPRS to the audio lingual approach, TPRS students performed slightly higher on a posttest and their growth from pretest to posttest was significantly greater. (Garczynski, 2003, pp. 32-33). Foster (2011) conducted a study for high school students comparing Processing Instruction, a method that incorporates explicit grammar instruction, to TPRS. The study found that in terms of grammatical accuracy, TPRS students significantly outperformed students in the control group, and the students instructed through Processing Instruction significantly outperformed the TPRS group (Foster, 2011, p. 30). The TPRS students, however, were the only group to improve from the posttest to the delayed posttest (Foster, 2011, p. 31). In written fluency, the TPRS group significantly outperformed both the control group and the Processing Instruction group, but the results did not hold for a delayed posttest (Foster, 2011, p. 35). In reading

comprehension, there was no significant difference between any of the groups (Foster, 2011, p. 37).

Research supports the positive impact of TPRS in the classroom. Research that studies language teaching methods' influence on student attitudes, motivation and confidence overwhelmingly supports the use of TPRS. In language proficiency studies, TPRS has been shown to have a positive impact on students and to outperform traditional methods of language instruction. There are also studies that support that TPRS yields better results than other instructional methods in some but not all components of language learning, especially in those that look more at fluency scores than traditional grammar and vocabulary tests (Foster, 2011; Murray, 2014).

The research as well as my personal experience tells me that the use of TPRS in my classroom has a positive impact not only on the language learning, but also on the climate of my classroom. TPRS provides a way in which students can interact with stories in a second language to increase their fluency. Research supports the value of TPRS and has provided a structure for storytelling in my classroom. In this section, I have discussed primarily the oral interaction with stories in a language classroom. However, the key components of and rationale behind TPRS are also important when students interact with stories in written form. In the following section, I discuss how interaction with stories through reading is valuable in the classroom.

Reading in TPRS. Reading is an integral part of TPRS and takes place in a variety of forms within a TPRS classroom. An essential aspect of reading, along with all other forms of input in TPRS, is comprehension. If students are simply pronouncing words that they see on a paper without any understanding, it is not reading (Gross, 2009,

p. 1). Gross (2009) explained that reading occurs when “students see a movie in their heads while looking at dark squiggles on paper” (p. 1). New language learning occurs when reading is comprehensible to students and they are able to retrieve meaning from what they are reading (Gross, 2009, p. 1). The ways in which reading is built in to TPRS instruction provide additional comprehensible and compelling input to students.

TPRS instructors have found the greatest success in having a student or students translate the entire passage into the native language one sentence at a time (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 187). Generally the instructor or an advanced student reads the target language, so as to model the correct pronunciation (Ray & Seely, 2012, pp. 185-186). By translating the entire passage into the native language, complete comprehension is ensured (Gross, 2009, p. 2). Reading and translating out loud gives teachers the chance to find errors, gauge student fluency and give quick explanations of grammar (Gross, 2009, p. 2).

Generally, TPRS instruction is structured such that an oral story includes two reading passages that contain the same target vocabulary as the oral activities (Gross, 2009, p. 1). Combining oral instruction, dramatization and reading can have the added benefit of teaching students the reading skill of visualization (Gross, 2009, p. 6). Additionally, a class novel designed for language learners can be introduced using the same translation methods (Gross, 2009, p. 3). Larger readers and novels tend to be more compelling to students because they have longer and more developed story lines (Gross, 2009, p. 3).

Eventually, guided reading activities grow student fluency and get them into the “flow of reading” (Gross, 2009, p. 3). Then students are able to read class novels

independently or even self-select literature on their own. Integration of whole class reading activities helps students to create habits of reading for pleasure or to gain knowledge (Gross, 2009, p. 1).

Embedding reading activities is an integral component of TPRS instruction. Reading activities take the form of short passages that match oral class activities, whole class novels, and eventually, self-selected reading. For language learning to take place, it is necessary that the reading is comprehensible and compelling to students. In this section, I have discussed the embedded reading activities that are already in place in my TPRS classroom. These activities provide an introduction to literacy in a second language and provide a base of fluency and reading skills that eventually lead students to be able to read independently. In the upcoming section, I discuss the importance of free voluntary reading.

Free Voluntary Reading

There are a variety of terms used to refer to classroom time in which students have time to read texts of their choice. Literature refers to this as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), Silent Sustained Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Free Choice Reading, Recreational Reading and Independent Reading. Although there are slight differences between some of these terms, they all refer to time that students are given to read a text that they have chosen to read. For the remainder of this paper, I refer to this reading time as FVR. The 'free' part of FVR is essential. Students are free to read whatever text they would like and they do not have to finish a book they do not like (Peto, 2017). Texts are self-selected by students, and teachers ensure that students have access to books at their reading level (Herrell & Jordan, 2016, p. 258). There is minimal assessment or

accountability and students simply have time to choose and read a book of their choice (Peto, 2017).

FVR and L1. Miller (2009) told the story of her journey from traditional reading instruction to a classroom built primarily around FVR. Miller found that devoting time, energy and money into a library and a classroom that supports students having time and space to read not only improved student reading skills and performance on standardized reading tests, but created lifelong readers out of her students.

No matter what intervention strategies you employ to support developing readers or what enrichment projects you provide to your most gifted ones, none of it is going to affect the reading achievement of all of the students in your classroom the way hours and hours of time spent reading will. (Miller, 2009, p. 167).

Evidence from numerous studies continues to show that FVR increases performance in all components of literacy for all languages and all ages (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1). Krashen (as cited in Krashen, 2004a, p. 2) reviewed a large number of studies regarding the effects of FVR. With only a few exceptions, Krashen found that FVR led to at least equal reading growth and often greater reading growth than other reading instructional methods (Krashen, 2004a, p. 2). Research that studied FVR programs over at least a year period experienced even greater results than short-term studies (Krashen, 2004a, p. 2). More explicit instruction can be useful in teaching decoding skills, but these do not necessarily build comprehension, and comprehension is essential for language acquisition to take place (Krashen, 2011, p. 61).

Benefits of FVR can be seen in adults as well as children. Krashen, McQuillan, and Rodrigo (1996) surveyed 19 adults with a native language of Spanish on their reading

practices (p. 648). Those that reported more free reading outperformed the others on a test of vocabulary knowledge (Krashen et al., 1996, p. 648). In another type of study, subjects are given reading material and are told to read it without being told what they will be tested on. After reading the text, subjects perform very well on vocabulary and spelling tests involving words that were unknown to them prior to reading the text (Krashen, 1989, pp. 445-446). These tests show that even in L1, we learn new words simply by reading them. Meister, Nation and Saragi (as cited by Krashen, 1989, p. 446) conducted one similar study around the novel *A Clockwork Orange*. The study found that people who had read the novel had gained a vocabulary of about 45 words just from the reading (Krashen, 1989, p. 446).

Similar research has been found for bilingual students working to maintain their L1. Availability of reading materials in L1 leads to greater L1 fluency (Tse, as cited by Krashen, 2011, p. 3). McQuillan (1996) performed a study of heritage learners, students who enroll in foreign language courses of their native language. The experimental group included FVR as an essential component, along with literature circles and an inquiry project. The FVR group outperformed the control group in word knowledge, reading fluency and positive attitudes toward language learning (p. 56).

In our bilingual students, reinforcing L1 literacy has the added benefit of improving L2 literacy. Cohen and Horowitz (2002) found that students who have cultivated reading skills in L1 are able to apply those same skills to L2 (p. 39). Additionally, Cohen and Horowitz discovered that there are positive results when L1 literacy is developed and improved at the same time as L2 literacy (p. 39). English Language Learners' comprehension and literacy in both L1 and L2 contribute to their

ability to read in English (Cohen & Horowitz, 2002, p. 40). L2 literacy is improved when L1 literacy is developed as well, and L1 literacy improves through FVR.

FVR and L2. Research in FVR has found it to be valuable for development of L1 and L2 (Krashen, 2011, pp. 23-29). It is possible to learn a second language without formal instruction, as is evidenced by people who move to a new country and do not take classes (Krashen, 1989, p. 443). This is because language acquisition takes place not through formal instruction, but through access to comprehensible and compelling input (Krashen, 2003). One of the most efficient ways of providing this input is through reading (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1).

Many reading studies have been conducted to research vocabulary growth through reading (Krashen, 1989, pp. 446-447). This research has shown that vocabulary and spelling in L2 improves through reading in L2. According to Stokes, Krashen and Kartchner (as cited in Krashen, 2011, p. 27), FVR for students studying Spanish as a second language at the university level was a greater predictor of their grasp of the subjunctive verb tense in Spanish than was amount of study, direct grammar instruction or even time spent in a Spanish speaking country.

In university students studying Japanese as a second language, classrooms who read children's books for ten weeks outperformed traditionally instructed students on reading comprehension and performed equally on other measures (Day & Hitosugi, as cited in Krashen, 2011, p, 27). Students learning German as a second language who engaged in seven sessions of FVR reported improvement in vocabulary as well as their reading (Arnold, as cited in Krashen, 2011, p. 27). Additionally, FVR in English is a strong predictor of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score for students

learning English as a second language (Cho, Constantino, Krashen, & Lee, 1997).

Research in L2 literacy has found FVR to be a strong predictor of language proficiency similarly to FVR in L1. Free reading is the most researched and most effective method of reading and yet is often neglected (Gross, 2009, p. 4). FVR is effective in promoting language growth and fluency as well as developing lifelong readers.

FVR and literacy habits. Sometimes it is scary to consider handing complete control of reading choice to students. In my classroom, during FVR, students have the tendency to go for comic books, books with few words, and picture books that catch their eyes. While these books would not necessarily be my first choice in what my students read, ‘junk reading’ often serves as a gateway to higher level reading (Krashen, 2005a, p. 5; Krashen & Ujije, 2005).

There are three levels of reading and literacy that most readers go through (Krashen, 2015, p. 25). The first stage includes storytelling and read aloud books with a significant amount of teacher or adult support (Krashen, 2015, p. 25). The next stage is FVR. Students independently read books that they choose and find compelling. In the third stage, readers begin to seek academic texts that are focused and of great interest to them. At this point, readers are searching for and finding their own knowledge rather than waiting for someone to teach them (Krashen, 2015, p. 25).

FVR is effective in developing long term habits of reading (Krashen, 2011, p. 3). Braxton (2006) created a mystery for students to solve relating to a television series and a set of mystery novels. While the mystery set up by Braxton is what originally sparked student interest in reading these novels, once students had started reading these novels,

they did not want to stop. Students that previously had not visited the library were frequent borrowers of many books after the world of pleasure reading was opened to them (Braxton, 2006). Students enjoy FVR more than other methods of reading instruction (McQuillan; Dupuy; Lao and Krashen, as cited in Krashen, 2011, p. 3). Additionally, there are fewer disciplinary issues in a classroom that utilizes FVR (Petre; Takase, as cited in Krashen, 2011, p. 3).

An important aspect of FVR is little to no assessment or accountability for reading (Peto, 2017). Students are not reading to accomplish a task or assignment, they are reading for pleasure and to gain knowledge. Research of FVR time has found that the majority of students are reading during FVR (Krashen, 2004a, p. 3). Choosing activities to accompany reading must be done carefully, as several activities hold no benefit for the reader and can even take away some of the pleasure (Krashen, 2004a, pp. 5-6). However, conferring with a teacher about what is being read has been shown to increase reading interest (Krashen, 2004a, p. 6).

A classroom library for FVR. As has been discussed, we learn when input is compelling and comprehensible. Therefore, the benefits of reading in L2 are limited if there is no access to comprehensible and compelling L2 literature. Creating an FVR library and allowing FVR time in the classroom can have a positive impact on students' L2 fluency. An FVR program provides more compelling input simply because students are given choice in what they want to read.

An FVR library should include texts ranging from one word per page picture books through graphic novels, chapter books and novels (Gross, 2009, p. 4). Finding sufficient literature that is comprehensible for language learners with limited fluency and

is also interesting can be difficult. Peto (2017) suggested that the greatest source of comprehensible and compelling literature for language learners is TPRS teacher authors. There is a limited number of these novels available, and therefore there is need for more TPRS teachers to consider writing and adding to the collection (Peto, 2017). There is also a benefit to using student created and class created texts for reading time. These texts are especially compelling because students had input in their writing and comprehensible because they were written in class using vocabulary that students know (Peto, 2017). Free voluntary web-surfing also has the possibility to provide reading material (Krashen, 2011, p. 67).

FVR has been researched in a variety of languages and scenarios with positive results in nearly every study. FVR is effective in promoting literacy in L1, in L2, and for heritage learners. Creating a classroom library that contains comprehensible and compelling Spanish stories and providing time for my students to read them promotes their literacy, vocabulary growth, spelling and language fluency. For my heritage learners who speak Spanish as a native language, creating an environment that promotes their Spanish literacy will improve their English literacy as well. The greatest barrier to implementing a successful FVR program is finding a supply of interesting stories that students are able to understand. There is a need for teachers to write their own stories and add to the limited collection.

Conclusion

FVR is an essential part of a language classroom. If we desire to promote literacy and fluency, students need to be exposed to as much comprehensible and compelling input as possible. We acquire language through understanding messages and reading is a

valuable medium for those messages. Stories, both in book form and in oral form, are compelling and meaningful expressions of language. TPRS uses the power of stories to engage and communicate and the understanding of comprehensible input to teach languages. However, oral storytelling is not complete TPRS. If we do not delve into the reading portion of TPRS, we are failing to unlock its complete potential for our elementary students' language development.

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* My literature review supports the idea that providing comprehensible and compelling input in the form of FVR effectively promotes student language development. Stories, in oral or written form, are valuable to children's emotional and language development. Additionally, in order for students to acquire language, it must be presented in a manner in which they are able to understand it and find it compelling. TPRS is a primarily oral strategy of teaching that incorporates the value of stories with the necessity of comprehensible and compelling input to promote language learning. FVR is an often underutilized strategy that provides students with opportunities to independently read language that they are interested in and can learn from. This can only happen if books that students are interested in and capable of understanding are available.

In the next chapter, I discuss the current availability of comprehensible and compelling Spanish stories and the need for teachers to create more. I explain my project of creating literature for an FVR library, the process and methods used to do this and who will benefit from the project. I also explore options for evaluating the project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) is dedicated time in which students are allowed to read the text of their choice with minimal assessment or accountability (Peto, 2017). While experience and research have informed me of the value of implementing FVR in my classroom, I have struggled to develop a library that promotes language learning for my students. It has been difficult to provide access to reading materials that are comprehensible and compelling to students. There is limited availability of books created with language learners in mind, and the list of books becomes even shorter for an elementary classroom.

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* My project seeks to improve access to Spanish books by creating two short chapter books based in my district's third and fourth grade curriculum. In this chapter, I discuss the reason access to these books is important, who will benefit from the creation of these books, the methods used for creating the stories, and potential project evaluation tools.

Rationale

Language acquisition takes place through receiving input that is comprehensible and compelling (Krashen, 2003). Reading is one of the most efficient ways of providing

this input (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1). Numerous studies have found that FVR has a positive impact on language proficiency (Krashen, 1989, pp. 446-447; Cho, Constantino, Krashen, & Lee, 1997).

The benefits of reading, however, are limited if there is no access to comprehensible and compelling literature. Creating a FVR library with books that students enjoy and understand and allowing FVR time in the classroom can increase student fluency (Krashen, 2011). My project was to create additional books with the hope of increasing access to comprehensible and compelling reading materials for my students and for other elementary Spanish classrooms.

In the implementation of FVR in my classroom, I have spent numerous hours searching for books to purchase for my classroom library. I have found that very few books have been published with elementary age language learners in mind. There are baby books that are comprehensible to my students, but not compelling. There are Spanish children's books that are interesting because of the visual appeal, but contain too much vocabulary for students who receive limited contact time in Spanish. There are a number of limited vocabulary chapter books that have been created with Spanish language learners and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) methods in mind. However, the majority of these are aimed for high school students. Few are written for middle school classrooms, and I have only found success with about four different published books for my elementary students. Four books does not allow for much reading diversity or growth for my students.

Peto (2017) explained the value of creating reading materials for or with your class that can be used during FVR. Peto suggested that this is the best way to ensure

reading input is comprehensible and compelling to students. Right now my classroom library is made primarily of books that I have written or at least put together myself. I take TPRS stories that I have created or obtained from the district curriculum or other TPRS teachers and create a document that has the text of these stories with a few illustrations or images. I then print them out and place the pages in plastic sheet protectors in my library.

My students are interested in these books. However, they are short and my students read through them faster than I can create them. It is time consuming to put them together, and at this point they are not providing sufficient challenge for my students in their reading. Peto (2017) discussed the importance of teacher authors contributing books and reading materials to the TPRS community so there is greater availability. By creating two comprehensible and compelling elementary focused books, I hope to help other teachers implementing reading in their Spanish classes. They will not fill out an entire library, but they at least provide a few more options for student reading materials that save teachers the incredibly time consuming process of creating their own texts.

Reading in a second language (L2) is valuable for growth in language proficiency, provided that the reading materials are comprehensible and compelling (Krashen, 2004a). There is a growing movement of teacher authors in TPRS that are sharing and/or publishing reading materials for language classrooms. However, the availability of appropriate reading materials for an elementary school classroom is limited. My project created two books that will help not only improve my classroom library and reading program, but other elementary and middle school classrooms as well. In the following section I discuss in greater detail the audiences that are impacted through my project.

Audience

My project has the potential to impact many teachers and students in a large number of Spanish classrooms. It was created with the immediate audience of my third and fourth grade students in mind. However, I am also sharing this project with other teachers in my district with the intended impact of promoting FVR in other Spanish classrooms. Additionally, I sent my work to publishers with the intention to impact the broader language learning community.

The primary audience for my project are the third and fourth grade students at the school where I teach. This school is a kindergarten through fifth grade building with approximately 400 students in a second ring suburb of a metropolitan area in the Midwest. There is a diverse demographic of learners. Sixty five percent of students are of low socioeconomic status (Minnesota Report Card). Fifty nine percent of students are non-white. And nearly 17 percent of students are receiving services as English Language Learners. Many students within the building speak another language in their homes, such as Spanish, Hmong, Somali, or another African or Asian language.

All students receive Spanish instruction once every three school days for 45 minutes. Due to the overwhelming research in support of FVR, I have implemented ten minutes of FVR time at the beginning of every class period for my third, fourth and fifth grade students. The books that I created through this capstone will be added to my classroom library and accessible during this portion of the class for students to read. These books specifically target third and fourth grade students because they are written based on my district's third and fourth grade Spanish learning targets.

A secondary audience for my project are third and fourth grade students across the district. Of the district's nine elementary schools, seven teach Spanish. I am in regular communication with the other Spanish teachers through participation in a Professional Learning Community. All of the language teachers have some amount of reading time in their classrooms. The books that I created for this project are being shared with other teachers in the district to improve their classroom library and aid them in further implementation of FVR.

There is also a potential third level of audience for my project. I am seeking publication for the books that I created. Fluency Matters is a company that works to provide training, materials and support to teachers using the TPRS method of instruction. One of their primary functions is working with teacher authors to publish comprehensible and compelling books that are then available for sale. If I do achieve publication of my books, there is a possibility they could be used in elementary and middle school Spanish classrooms across the country and even in other parts of the world.

The books that I created are intended to improve my classroom library and support my third and fourth grade curriculum by providing materials that students are able to read independently to encourage their language growth. I hope they have a similar impact on other students in my district. In seeking publication, there is a possibility of reaching a much larger audience. In the following section, I explain more specific details about the books as well as the methods used to create the books.

Methods

My capstone project was creating two easy reader chapter books in Spanish that are comprehensible and compelling for my third and fourth grade students. Characters

and plot were mapped out in advance to create a story that would be interesting to students. A series of revisions ensured that the books contained a limited amount of vocabulary based on my district's curriculum goals with regular repetitions.

According to Krashen (2004, p. 4), we acquire language when we listen to or read messages and are able to make meaning of them. In order to make meaning from input, we must be able to understand the words we are reading or hearing. Language learning is most effective when input is comprehensible and interesting to students (Ray & Seely, 2012). In order to make these books beneficial, they need to be comprehensible and compelling to students.

The books I created are about ten chapters long and about 20 pages in length with a few visuals and illustrations scattered throughout the book. The first book is about a monster and a dragon and is based on vocabulary from the district's third grade world language curriculum. The second is about a sloth and is based on vocabulary from the fourth grade curriculum. These characters were chosen based on my experience of what types of characters my students find entertaining in the classroom. According to Melrose (2004), it is characters, rather than plot, that maintain a reader's interest.

In the process of creating these books, I used ideas and methods laid out in *Writing for Children* by Andrew Melrose. My first step in creating these books was to make a list of characters and character descriptors for my stories (see Appendix B). After this, I began to map out plots for the two stories. Stories often are a way of expressing our own life experiences (Melrose, 2004, p. 21). In creating my stories, I considered emotions and struggles that I had experienced and how I could communicate them in story form. Stories consist of "six elements: balance, disharmony, inciting incident, problem,

resolution and consequence” (Melrose, 2004, p. 16). Melrose (2004) demonstrated how a pyramid plot diagram can be used to map out all these elements of a story. I planned plots for both of my stories using this pyramid plot diagram (see Appendix C). In my first draft of the stories, my main focus was communication of a compelling plot.

There were several steps taken in order to ensure comprehensibility of the stories that I wrote. During the brainstorming process, I compiled a list of target vocabulary for kindergarten through fourth grade from my district’s elementary Spanish curriculum (see Appendix A). This enabled me to see words that should already be familiar to students as well as words that should be introduced in the stories to increase exposure to new vocabulary. After my first draft that focused on communicating a compelling plot, I went through a series of revisions to make the books more comprehensible. My revision process included not only proofreading and editing, but also simplifying sentences and replacing new vocabulary with familiar vocabulary and cognates (words that look and sound similar in English and Spanish) where possible.

The books contain primarily familiar vocabulary, cognates, and regular repetitions. Any new vocabulary that was introduced in the books has a footnote with a translation or definition to ensure understanding. A final step taken to ensure that the books were comprehensible and compelling was to embed images in the stories that helped communicate the storyline while increasing the visual appeal.

My project was to create two brief chapter books that are intended for third and fourth grade students. The vocabulary and language utilized is built from my district’s Spanish curriculum. The primary focus in writing was to make the books comprehensible and compelling to students. To ensure the books were interesting to students, I planned

characters and plots in advance. To ensure students were able to understand the books, I went through a series of revisions to simplify the language. In the following section I discuss methods for evaluating the effectiveness of my project in meeting the goals of being comprehensible and compelling.

Project Evaluation

The purpose of creating Spanish books as my capstone project was to increase availability of comprehensible and compelling Spanish literature for my students, for other students in the district and for elementary students studying Spanish beyond my district as well. There are a variety of methods that I will use in evaluating if I have met these goals. These evaluations will take place during the school years following submission of this capstone.

The first measure of success, and perhaps the most evident measure, is if Fluency Matters chooses to publish the books. My hope is to reach an audience beyond my own district and that is achieved most effectively if my book is published and made accessible to other elementary Spanish teachers. Fluency Matters has published a number of Spanish novels for language learners, and so their approval of my work through publication offers me at least in part confirmation that my texts are something that could be comprehensible and compelling to language learners. If Fluency Matters does not choose to publish the manuscripts I have sent them, there are other avenues I can pursue including other publication companies as well as posting or selling the manuscripts online.

There are a number of informal evaluation methods that will take place over the course of the following school years. I will observe student habits during FVR time to see if they choose to read the books that I create and stick with them. I will also ask other

teachers in my district and teachers outside the district (if the book is published) to share their observations of student responses to the books. Another professional goal of mine in the upcoming school year is to begin a habit of conferring or checking in with students during FVR time. By conferring with students who are reading my books, I will be able to ascertain more information about their interest in and ability to understand the texts.

Additionally, I will perform an evaluation in written form. I have created an optional short survey for students to fill out after reading the books that I create (see Appendix D). The survey asks students to rate the books and provide some information about what made the texts likeable or not. The survey also asks students about their comprehension of the text. Another measure of the success of my FVR program is in student performance on district Spanish assessments. There are many factors at play in assessment scores, but I should be able to see a general correlation between increased focus on FVR, increased access to comprehensible and compelling literature, and student assessment scores.

My success in achieving publication is the primary measure of evaluation I have set up during the capstone process. However, even after submittal of this capstone, I will implement a variety of methods to evaluate the effectiveness of my capstone project. I will observe student reaction to the texts as well as ask other teachers for their observations. I also plan to begin a process of conferring with students which will give me an opportunity to check in with students who are reading my books. Additionally, I will implement a short survey for students to provide input in a more formal manner as well as looking at student assessment scores. Most of these evaluations will take place

beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, while the project itself was created during the summer of 2017.

Conclusion

Research supports the value of reading for development of language fluency, yet it is not common practice for language classrooms to dedicate time to FVR (Gross, 2009, p. 4). One of the greatest hurdles in my implementation of FVR has been finding and developing reading materials appropriate for my students. My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?*

My project created two books and seeks publication of them with the goal of improving access to comprehensible and compelling literature for elementary students learning Spanish. These books will improve FVR in my classroom, promote FVR throughout the district, and have the potential to improve FVR programs in the greater community of TPRS teachers. Through the response of the publishing company, informal observations, and formal evaluations from my students, I will be able to assess the effectiveness of my project.

In chapter 4, I revisit the literature review and discuss what was most influential in informing my project. I discuss the process that was used to create the books and what the final project looked like. I discuss potential implications of the project to the profession of language education as well as limitations and barriers. I recommend future work and research expanding the information that was compiled in this project. And finally, I explore the personal growth that occurred during the work of this capstone.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Experience as a language teacher as well as research has convinced me of the value of stories and the necessity of comprehensible and compelling input for student language development. Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) is the practice of allowing students to read books of their choice in the classroom with little or no assessment or teacher direction (Peto, 2017). FVR provides students input in the compelling form of books that they choose and with effective teacher implementation allows for a large amount of comprehensible input.

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* In an effort to increase access to comprehensible and compelling literature, I wrote two books designed for elementary students learning Spanish to read during FVR time. In this chapter, I review the information from this project. I revisit important literature that motivated and shaped my project. I discuss the process that was used and implications of this research for the education profession. I explore the limitations of this project and the need for future work and research. I also discuss my personal and professional growth from the process of writing this capstone.

Important Literature

A literature review was foundational in providing the background necessary to

implement this project. The research that I read led me to a deeper understanding of the fundamental issues in literacy and language development. In this section, I give a quick overview of the most influential literature from chapter two and discuss how this literature inspired and informed my project.

My review of literature found that stories are an important part of child development, especially with regard to language. Isbell (2002) explained that storytelling helps children understand more language, recognize language patterns, learn empathy, and experience the power of language. Storytelling has always held a prominent role in my classroom, but an expansion of my FVR library and program provides students with a new way to interact with stories that aid their development.

Some of the most fundamental research both to this project as well as to the profession of language instruction is about the idea of comprehensible and compelling input. “We acquire language in only one way: when we understand messages; that is, when we obtain ‘comprehensible input.’ We acquire language, in other words, when we understand what we hear or what we read, when we understand the message” (Krashen, 2003, p. 4). Krashen’s writings on comprehensible input have been largely influential in my professional growth as well as this project. The driving force behind this project was a need to give my students more exposure to comprehensible input.

Another influential resource has been Ray and Seely’s *Fluency through TPR Storytelling*, which provides numerous strategies for structuring a classroom to provide comprehensible and compelling input through the method Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). According to Ray and Seely (2012), the greatest language learning happens when students are interested and when they are capable of

comprehending the language being used.

TPRS combines the value of stories with the use of comprehensible and compelling input to promote language proficiency. The advantages of TPRS include long term memory of language, improved fluency, a fun classroom environment, improved grades, encouragement of creativity, and building language confidence (Ray & Seely, 2012, pp. 279-281). Through TPRS, the target language is used consistently in a manner that is comprehensible and compelling to students (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 8). A primary goal of both TPRS and the books that were created through this project is to ensure that everything is comprehensible and compelling because students acquire language when they are able to understand it and find it interesting (Ray & Seely, 2012).

Reading is a component of TPRS that has gotten a lot of attention recently in the language teacher community. Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) is a topic that has become closely linked with TPRS. The most influential literature inspiring my project to promote FVR was Miller's *The Book Whisperer*. It is the story of a teacher transforming her classroom to foster a love of reading in her students. Miller (2009) replaces much of her traditional literacy instruction with time for the students to read books of their choice. It was reading Miller's book that sparked in me the passion to develop a classroom library and implement an FVR program. Peto(2017) provided a lot of information about starting an FVR library for a Spanish classroom, including strategies for finding and creating texts.

The literature surrounding my topic of developing an FVR program led me to understand four fundamental points about literacy and language. First, stories are an integral part of how we view the world around us as well as our language development.

Second, we learn language when we are capable of understanding it and when we find it interesting or valuable. Third, methods such as TPRS help us to instruct in the target language in a way that is comprehensible and compelling. Finally, a frequently underutilized strategy for language development is FVR. Evidence continues to demonstrate that FVR increases all aspects of literacy for all languages and all ages (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1). In the next section, I discuss my process of writing the books.

Writing Books

My capstone project included writing two short chapter books for elementary students studying Spanish. The goal was to create books in Spanish that my third and fourth grade students would be able to understand, that aided them in their proficiency goals for the year, and that students were interested in. I utilized district curriculum, literature about development of books, and my knowledge from the classroom to create two books for my FVR library.

In order to insure that the books were at the correct level for my students, I made a list of target vocabulary from my district's curriculum (see Appendix A). I tried to include as many of the words from that list as possible in the books. This both ensured that vocabulary was familiar to students as well as created an opportunity for students to review and practice the target vocabulary. Additional steps that were taken to ensure the books were comprehensible included replacing new vocabulary with repetitive synonyms or cognates (words that look or sound similar in English and Spanish) and including footnotes with translations of challenging or new words.

Strategies for ensuring the books were interesting to students came primarily from Melrose's *Write for Children*. Melrose (2004) encouraged developing intriguing

characters as they maintain our interest more than the actual story. Additionally, Melrose created a diagram for mapping out the plot in advance to insure inclusion of all of the essential plot elements. The planning documents for my book can be found in Appendices B and C.

One challenge that I faced during the creation of my books was that some of the character and plot elements that I had brainstormed for my books were difficult to communicate using comprehensible language for students. At times during the writing process, I was forced to leave out some of the plot details that I had originally wanted in order to keep the book comprehensible. At other times, in order to communicate a vital plot point, I utilized more complicated language and relied on footnote definitions to ensure students understood the meaning.

One of the books that I wrote, *El dragón migratorio*, tells the story of a dragon who is migratory by nature heading off to explore the world. Before he leaves, his parents give him a survival package that includes a stationary set. He travels to many new places and meets many new creatures, which he tells us about through his letters to friends and family. After a period of time, however, his hunger for adventure lessens and he begins to miss everyone. In the end he chooses to return to his parents, where he finds all of his friends from all of his travels have gathered to throw him a surprise birthday celebration.

The second book, *El perezoso perezoso*, tells the story of a lazy sloth king who refuses to do anything on his own. He requires his daughter, Polly, and her friend, Pablo, to do everything for him. Over time, he wears out Pablo's good will and Pablo refuses to help him anymore. In the end, a pack of attacking jaguars is what motivates the lazy king to finally move on his own.

The process of creating two books was informed by pertinent literature, district curriculum goals and personal knowledge of my students and classroom. Numerous steps were taken to ensure the books were comprehensible to students, including use of familiar vocabulary, cognates, and footnote definitions. Making the books compelling to students was achieved through brainstorming of plot and characters as suggested in Melrose's book, *Write for Children*. In the next section, I discuss potential implications of my project for the greater community of language education.

Implications

The literature review and information in this paper as well as the connecting project hold important implications for language instruction, especially for elementary Spanish teachers. The fundamental aspects of language and literacy development are valuable for all language instructors as we strive to build language proficiency in our students. Additionally, the books that were created have the potential to be used in other elementary Spanish classrooms to promote reading.

The synthesis of research in this capstone demonstrates that there is definitive value for language learners in the use of stories. Language and literacy classrooms will benefit from embedding more stories into their instruction and activities. These stories can be in the form of read aloud books, oral storytelling, plays, or books. All of these interactions with stories are valuable for student social, emotional and intellectual development.

In addition to the value of stories, the research demonstrates that language is best learned through exposure to comprehensible and compelling input. Language classrooms must provide students with exposure to language that they have the ability to understand

and that they find interesting. This is how language teachers can ensure growth in language proficiency of their students.

The primary implication of this capstone project is the value and necessity of reading to language development. Language classrooms need to incorporate reading activities as a form of comprehensible and compelling input. A majority of the reading should be free and voluntary, meaning that it is chosen by students and not assessed. Reading gives students responsibility for their own growth by giving them an independent activity that grows their language fluency. The introduction of FVR to language classrooms will have a positive impact on student language proficiency. It is my hope that the books created in this capstone project are used in classrooms to help teachers implement FVR.

This capstone has highlighted several essential aspects of language development that can be utilized in the greater language learning community to improve instruction and consequently, language proficiency. The use of stories, comprehensible and compelling input, and reading in the classroom will have a positive impact on language classrooms. In the following section, I discuss my plan for communicating these findings to others.

Communicating and Sharing my Project

This capstone contains information with valuable implications for language classrooms which must be communicated and shared with other teachers. There are a variety of methods I plan to use for sharing my project, including seeking publication, discussion in online communities, and providing copies of my project to colleagues in my district. Ideally, sharing the books that I have created will help other language teachers to

develop a library and FVR program of their own.

Communication of these findings to other teachers has taken and will take place in a variety of forms. The most obvious method that was used to share my project was through seeking publication of my books. If my books are published, then my project has immediately reached a larger audience of teachers seeking to incorporate reading in their Spanish classrooms. There is a possibility of classrooms around the world utilizing the books that I created through this capstone.

If Fluency Matters chooses not to publish my books, then I will seek publication with other companies to continue in my goal of expanding the repertoire of comprehensible and compelling books available for students in language classes. If I am unsuccessful in achieving publication with any of these companies, then I will look at sharing my work through an online platform such as Teachers Pay Teachers.

Regardless of what happens regarding publishing, I am active in several online and social media groups of language teachers. I will continue to be vocal regarding the research on stories, comprehensible input, and FVR in the classroom. I will share about my project and encourage other teachers to write and publish their own language books for the benefit of all teachers.

I additionally have an immediate sphere of influence in my school and district. The books that I created will be a part of my classroom library and available to all students in the school where I teach. I will observe student interest and reaction to the books, and ask students who read the books to fill out a quick survey on the books to evaluate my project's success in creating books that are both comprehensible and compelling. This will not only inform me on the success of my project in meeting my

goals, but also help inform me for future similar projects. I intend to continue creating books for my FVR library and this project goes a long way toward formalizing and improving that process. I will also make copies available for the other Spanish teachers in my district so they are able to incorporate the books into their libraries as well. Providing more access to comprehensible and compelling books will help other teachers implement FVR in their classrooms and perhaps even encourage them to create some of their own resources as well.

Communication of my project will take place through discussions in online communities and with my colleagues. I additionally intend to share the books that were created with other teachers through seeking publication. The books that were created will be introduced and evaluated in my own classroom and shared with other teachers inside my district and in the greater community of elementary Spanish teachers. In the next section, I discuss barriers and limitations of this project.

Limitations

The purpose of the project was to encourage FVR in elementary Spanish classrooms. The project resulted in creating two Spanish chapter books for elementary language learners. However, there are limitations in this project's ability to accomplish its goal. Two new books alone will not be sufficient to accomplish this task. These books do not take into account other Spanish programs with different target vocabulary or other language programs. Additionally, there are other barriers to implementation of FVR besides access to literature that this project does not address.

Two books does not create a classroom library. In order to have a successful library for FVR, hundreds of books are required. Even if my books are published, it does

not mean that teachers automatically have access to enough books to make a good classroom library. The process of building a library is time consuming and often expensive. If a teacher is able to find books that are at an appropriate level for their students, they need to collect the funds to purchase them. If they are not able to find appropriate books, then they must go through the long process of creating their own texts. We need many more teacher authors to create similar books and increase the options for FVR libraries.

The two books that I created were made with my district's program in mind. Another teacher may not find that the books align well with their curriculum or their students' fluency, especially if their students have significantly different amounts of contact time. For the most part, elementary Spanish teachers have very limited contact time with their students. Many teachers will not want to give up precious contact time to reading, especially if the books do not clearly match with their curricular objectives. Also, my project only impacts Spanish classrooms and does nothing for classrooms in which other languages are being taught.

My project does not address several other barriers to widespread use of FVR in elementary Spanish classrooms. There is no part of my project that addresses training of teachers in the importance of FVR or implementation strategies. I have not provided teachers with any information about how to set up classroom routines and climate that encourage students to read in Spanish. Another limitation to my project is that the reach of my books largely depends on the publisher's willingness to publish and promote the story. Without publication, the reach of the project would be quite limited.

While the books that were created and the research in this capstone have

potentially large implications for the language learning community, there are limitations to the impact that this single project can have. Only two books were created of the many that are needed for an FVR library. The books are based on a specific language and curriculum that not all teachers use. Additionally, the project does not provide adequate training for teachers to fully implement FVR. In the following section, I make recommendations regarding future work and research that could help to break through some of the barriers faces in this project.

Future Work and Research

The limitations of this project can be met by future work and research to expand where this capstone left off. Future research is needed specific to elementary language students. Additionally, exploring different methods to improve FVR programs already in place in language classrooms would help to promote and improve FVR and language learning. The greatest need for future work is in the development of more comprehensible and compelling literature for students of all ages studying all languages.

My literature review largely dealt with foreign language programs in middle and high school as the research performed at these levels of study are more prevalent. There is a need for research regarding implementation of FVR in elementary Spanish classrooms and the impact on students as well as implementation of FVR in other language classrooms besides Spanish.

Additionally, my research focused mainly on the presence or absence of an FVR program, but did not really consider ways to optimize an FVR program. Further research is needed regarding what an elementary Spanish classroom library should look like. What varieties and amounts of literature encourage students to read books that they enjoy and

help them learn more Spanish?

Another valuable area of study would be strategies to use with students to create a robust FVR program. What routines should be introduced to maximize reading time and how should they be implemented? What is the best way to ensure students are reading and comprehending? How do we assess student growth? What do we do with students who are reluctant to read? These receive a lot of attention in first language reading programs, but less research has been compiled for effective reading routines in a second language classroom.

The greatest need for future work is in creation of more books. In order to create full classroom libraries for effective FVR programs, we need more comprehensible and compelling books, especially for elementary students. While the need for elementary Spanish books is great, the need for books in other languages is even greater. Many elementary teachers are teaching Chinese, French, and other languages. Comprehensible and compelling books for other languages are even rarer than they are for Spanish.

While this capstone project provides several benefits for the language learning community, there is need for future work to expand the growth. Future research should include more elementary specific research as well as methods for optimizing already existing FVR programs. I also encourage other language teachers to develop literature to expand the repertoire of available comprehensible and compelling books for our students. In the final section, I discuss how I have grown personally and professionally as a result of this project.

Personal Growth

This project has benefitted not only the profession of language teaching but also

me personally. Completion of this project has grown my confidence, renewed my commitment to the value of reading, and improved my teaching. I have already put personal goals in place to continue the growth and learning that began through this project.

I feel that my biggest growth from this project is in recognizing my ability to take on a large research project. I did not know that I had the ability to conduct this scale of research. It was satisfying to realize I was compiling a collection of research that had not be synthesized before and creating something that did not exist prior. This built my confidence in my ability to facilitate my own professional development. When there is an aspect of my teaching that I desire to improve upon, I have the capability to delve into the research, make sense of the information, and apply it to my teaching.

The same growth in confidence occurred when I realized that I had the possibility of publishing two books. Prior to this project, I did not believe that I was the type of teacher that was able to put together something that other teachers would want to use. The idea of publishing a book was never really an idea I had. To be able to put together two books in Spanish that I believe have the possibility of being published is an accomplishment I am proud of. It reminds me that there are resources and strategies I am utilizing in my classroom that could be beneficial to other teachers and vice versa. There is so much value to the profession of teaching when we are able to share knowledge, skills and resources with one another.

Another area of growth was in my value of reading. Prior to this project, I understood that reading was important, which is why I chose to base my capstone on the importance of reading. However, months of reading articles and books explaining the

benefits of reading have helped me to realize how essential reading is to my growth and the growth of my students. Regardless of the language, FVR is the most effective strategy for improving reading proficiency, vocabulary, grammar and spelling (Krashen, 2004a, p. 1). Discovering the power of reading has challenged me personally in my reading habits in both my first language, English, and my second language, Spanish. I have been encouraged to read more books and articles for pleasure as well as more academic texts to take responsibility for my own growth and learning.

An area of professional growth for me was in a deeper understanding of the necessity of reading for my students. I have already been working on the implementation of FVR in my classroom for a few years, but this research and project have renewed my dedication to making FVR a successful experience. My goals include reading more books about classroom reading time and how to set up classroom routines and environment to promote a culture of literacy.

There are numerous ways in which this project has influenced not only my teaching but also my personal growth. I have increased confidence in my ability to take responsibility for my own learning as well as contribute to the profession of teaching. I have rediscovered the significance of reading to my personal and professional life and have set up goals to continue in the task of creating a classroom that esteems reading and literacy.

Conclusion

Literature and research about the impact of stories on learning, comprehensible and compelling input, TPRS, and FVR have motivated and informed my capstone project. I chose to develop two Spanish chapter books for my classroom library and plan

to share the project with others through online and in person discussions as well as seeking publication. The research and project have the potential to encourage the use of comprehensible and compelling input in the form of FVR in other language classrooms; however, the project is limited as only two books is not enough to develop an entire classroom library. Future research should focus more specifically on elementary classrooms and encourage the creation of similar projects to expand access to comprehensible and compelling texts.

My research question is *what impact does access to Spanish books at their level and time to read Spanish books of their choice have on elementary students' language development and fluency?* The research I have conducted in this capstone supports the idea that access to comprehensible and compelling literature will have a positive impact on student language proficiency. However, there is limited availability of texts that my students find interesting and are capable of comprehending.

In an effort to promote effective FVR programs in my school, my district, and in the greater community of language classrooms, I have developed and sought publication of two short chapter books for elementary students in Spanish classes. Based on the literature I have reviewed, I am confident that my books will have a positive influence on the implementation of FVR in my school and beyond. In the upcoming years, I will introduce the books to my classroom and others. I have evaluation procedures set up as well as goals for future projects to expand the work that began with this capstone.

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Appendix A**List of Target Vocabulary by Grade Level**

	Review	Production	Comprehension	Extra
	These words are review from previous years.	Students will be able to produce this vocabulary.	Students will be able to understand this vocabulary.	Students are exposed to these words, but not assessed.
Kinder-garten		Me llamo Bien, mal 1-10 Me gusta	¿Cómo te llamas? ¿Cómo estas? ¿Cuántos años tienes? Hay Se llama Tiene Va a	Patitos Se va ¿Dónde está? Diente Boca Se cae Fútbol Perro Colors Bebé
1st Grade	Hay Me gusta Bien, mal ¿Cuántos años tienes? Se llama	Tiene Tengo Quiere Va a Está en	Familia Mamá, Papá Hermano, Hermana Quiere Dice Le gusta Feliz, Triste, Enojado Verde, Rojo, Azul Le Da Hace Frío/Calor	Mirar Gato Ayuda Luna Transforma Traje de Baño Rosado Piratas Bote Rana
2nd Grade	Hay Tiene Quiere Gato Se llama Familia Está en	Necesita	Cómico, Inteligente, Atlético, Artístico Possessive (el gato de...) Amigos Casa Juega Vive en Abuela	Mío Choca Cuando Imaginaria Hospital Enfermo Saca Fotos Pinta, Dibuja Compra Pantalones, Vestido Rosado Pero Habla

	Review	Production	Comprehension	Extra
	These words are review from previous years.	Students will be able to produce this vocabulary.	Students will be able to understand this vocabulary.	Students are exposed to these words, but not assessed.
3rd Grade	Hay Quiere Tiene Necesita Enfermo, Enojado Feliz, Triste Juega Va a Está en Tengo Bebé	Más Que Menos Que Corre	Ayuda Aburrido, Emocionado, Nervioso Compra Come Es De Saca una Foto Quiero Soy/Estoy Quiere comer Quiere ir	Saco una Foto Bonito, Especial Perritos Helado
4th Grade	Vive Necesita Come Más Corre Se cae Pantalones Rana Abuela Possessive Quiere (ir) Tiene Le gusta Hay Tiene Cuando	Grande Mediano Pequeña Mucho Con Porque También	Va a Destruir Contento Sube, Baja, Camina, Vuela Le Dice Secreto Muerto	Llama, Zorro, Puma Perezoso, Guanaco, Cóndor, Flamenco, Llora Hace Buen Tiempo Mal Aliento Qué Asco Tampoco Ella, Él Fuerte, Débil Loco Mar, Lago Remando, Mojado Asusta Grita Socorro Chaqueta, Zapatos

(White Bear Lake Area Schools, 2017)

Appendix B

Brainstorming of Characters

List of Characters in *El dragón migratorio*

Zeb	Monsters	Unicorns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dragon - Biologically driven to migrate - Independent - Tough skin - Intelligent, resourceful, capable - Confident and likeable - Subtly lonely - Doubts friendships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happy, kind - Genuine - Scare exterior - Close families <p>Kalep - happy go lucky</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regal - Slow moving - Superior - Intelligent <p>Ruby - genius, studious</p>
Mermaids	Fairies	Leprechauns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flirty - Little time to talk - Always in groups <p>Sarai - Stunningly beautiful</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quiet - Helpful - Altruistic <p>Galena - Believes she can change the world</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athletic, sporty - Wealthy - Sneaky <p>Fado and Wally - Interrupting, tricksters, best friends always into trouble</p>

List of Characters in *El perezoso perezoso*

Paco	Pablo	Polly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The laziest sloth - Tired and sleeps a lot - Loves leaves - Doesn't move - King of the sloths - Makes others get him things - His subjects are irritated, but he does not notice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adventurer - Hates helping the king - Loves to explore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pablo's friend - Paco's daughter - Loves to read

Appendix C
Plot Diagrams

Plot Diagram for *El dragón migratorio*

						November Galena receives Zeb's letter and has a plan.	
						Sept-Oct Zeb is sick of exploring and feels lonely.	December Zeb decides to go home.
				March Letter from Mom.	May Letter from Kalep.	July Letter from Ruby.	
January Zeb's Birthday, his parents give him a survival box with a stationary kit.	February Zeb goes to Monster World and meets Kalep.	April Zeb goes to Unicorn Land and meets Ruby.	June Zeb goes to the Island of the Mermaids and meets Sarai.	August Zeb goes to the jungle and meets Galena.	January All of Zeb's friends throw him a surprise birthday party.		

Plot Diagram for *El perezoso perezoso*

					Chpt. 8 Paco is being attacked by Jaguars.		
					Chpt. 3 Pablo and Polly decide to read a book.	Chpt. 5 Pablo and Polly decide to climb a tree.	Chpt. 7 Pablo decides not to help Paco anymore.
Chpt. 1 Pablo and Polly and talking and get pulled away by Paco.	Chpt. 2 Paco needs food.	Chpt. 4 Paco needs water.	Chpt. 6 Paco needs dessert.	Chpt. 9 Paco decides he will have to move a little in order to save himself.			

Plot diagram model came from Melrose, 2004, pp. 45-62

Appendix D

Student Survey for Evaluation of Books

Book Title: _____

How would you rate the book?

More stars=Better



Did you understand the book?

Circle one of the numbers.

1

I didn't understand any of the book.

2

I understood a few things, but I was confused.

3

I know what happened in the story, but I didn't know a lot of words.

4

I didn't know a few words, but the story made sense.

5

I understood every word.

What was the best part of the story?

What was the worst part of the story?

Book Title: _____

How would you rate the book?

More stars=Better



Did you understand the book?

Circle one of the numbers.

1

I didn't understand any of the book.

2

I understood a few things, but I was confused.

3

I know what happened in the story, but I didn't know a lot of words.

4

I didn't know a few words, but the story made sense.

5

I understood every word.

What was the best part of the story?

What was the worst part of the story?