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GROWING READING SKILLS THROUGH ORAL LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES:
READING INTERVENTION/ENGLISH LEARNER CURRICULUM

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

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Thank you to my family for so much love and grace. Thank you to my husband, Bjorn, for encouraging me and believing in me and giving me time to complete this project. Thank you to each of my children, Gabe, Caleb, Kristiana, and MaryKate, for enthusiastically stepping up in their responsibilities while their mom worked on her master's project. I am all done staying behind for weekend family hikes--let's go. Thank you to my dear friend, colleague, and content expert, Melissa, for her encouragement and helpful comments throughout this program. Thank you to my capstone advisor, Patty Born Selly for her continual support, patience, and guidance throughout this project. Thank you to my peer reviewers, Addy and Kristal for your thorough editing and encouraging comments. Thank you to my teaching colleagues for sharing resources, enthusiasm and ideas for tailoring our instruction specific to the needs of each student. Thank you to my amazing students who I miss greatly as we all stay at home due to COVID-19 for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. You are my inspiration for creating this project. I hope that together we can keep growing in our reading and language and in our understanding of the world. I know you will each help make it a better place.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

From the beginning of my career as an elementary teacher, my English Learner (EL) students have pulled at my heartstrings the most. I see their creativity, their perseverance, their desire to learn and grow, their compassion and their brilliance all firsthand. These EL students are all learning and growing in their second, third or even fourth language, which can set them back in their language development when they are only assessed in English (Fenner & Segota, 2014). Their most beautiful qualities are so often overshadowed and overlooked because of gaps in their English language skills (Fenner & Segota, 2014). Teaching at the elementary level as a small group reading intervention teacher, as a classroom teacher in a dual language Spanish immersion setting, and as a literacy grade-level specialist teacher, I have been privileged to know some amazing EL students. In each of these settings, I have aspired to provide excellent instruction to scaffold greater literacy growth for each of my students.

After completing both my K-12 Reading and K-12 EL licenses and working closely with students in literacy, I have used literacy strategies in small group and whole group settings with EL and native English-speaking students together. During my EL practicum experience, I valued the opportunity to work

exclusively with EL students and to experiment with facilitating Routine Integrated Structured Academic (RISA) Oral Interactions. This was the type of focused oral language practice I had been seeking to facilitate with my EL students in any setting. Through using these oral language activities, I observed my students' positive engagement in academic content. Now in my role as a reading intervention teacher, my small groups of students are composed of both EL learners and native English-speaking students with similar needs for growth in academic language and reading skills. I meet with students individually and in small groups, and I continually seek instructional methods to engage students in reading texts and in having conversations about texts.

As I continue using and facilitating oral language interactions with students, I look forward to connecting engagement in these activities to growth in reading comprehension through my capstone project. My desire for this resource is that it could be adapted for use with one-on-one student instruction, small groups or whole mainstream classroom groups. Because of the paired nature of oral interactions, teachers may play a student role in a one-on-one setting, or group students into pairs according to the size of each group. The question guiding this research and resource creation is: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?* My goal in creating this resource for my EL and mainstream students is that through engaging in these oral language activities they

will make great gains in their reading comprehension and be encouraged in their English language and academic language journey.

Why Routine Integrated Structured Academic (RISA) Oral Interactions for reading instruction?

For this capstone project I created fifteen lessons for 1st and 2nd grade EL and reading intervention students using Routine Integrated Structured Academic (RISA) Oral Interactions for reading instruction. RISA Oral Interactions is a scripted two-part interview oral language and reading strategy activity created by Jill Watson, that can cover any content material through interview questions and answers. Questions are predetermined and read aloud first by a student with lower English language proficiency (ELP) (Watson, 2015). Responses can be completely scripted or scaffolded for open-ended responses and read or answered aloud by a student with higher English Language proficiency.

Studies show that scaffolded guided language practice increases EL students' language scope and reading fluency (Nutta, Mokhtari & Strebel, 2012). Studies also show that EL students need specific prompts, sentence frames, and scaffolded guided oral language practice in order to become proficient in the English language (Gibbons, 2015). By combining these two strategies, in consecutive lessons, I am hoping students will reap the benefits of oral language practice including oral language confidence, which will in turn increase their reading comprehension. In my capstone project, I will explore: *How do RISA Oral*

Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?

Context of students for whom the resource is written

I am creating this resource specifically for teachers in similar intervention roles who teach small groups of both EL and native English-speaking students identified for support in language skills and reading fluency. This resource can best be used with small groups of 3rd and 4th grade reading intervention students who are reading below grade level, and ideally in mixed groups with native English speakers and EL learners. In my own role as an intervention teacher on a team of five other reading specialist teachers, we form flexible groups based on students who qualify for reading intervention. I will use this resource with 3rd and 4th grade students either in a one-on-one setting or in small groups of students performing below grade level in reading. In my teaching role, intervention small groups are fluid and change throughout the school year based on student needs.

Within my school district we measure students reading and language progress through both a leveled system of guided reading created by Fountas & Pinnell (2012), as well as WIDA levels, a leveled system specifically for EL students assessing language proficiency in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (English Language Development Standards, 2012). Students in a north metro suburban school in the Twin Cities area entering 3rd grade and reading at a Fountas & Pinnell level K or lower and entering 4th grade reading at a level N or lower are identified for an intervention class (See

Appendix A). These reading levels are designed to help teachers plan instruction at students' individual reading levels for the purpose of successful growth in literacy (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Folktale texts used within this resource are at the guided reading levels K and L.

This resource will focus on the WIDA domain of speaking corresponding with language standards at the second grade level. Students will cover this standard specifically through orally recounting crucial elements of a folktale including their own responses to interview questions ranging from literal, inferential and critical commentary on the required text.

Demographics of my school in a north metro suburban district in the Twin Cities include a diverse range with 38% students of color, 44% students receiving free and reduced lunch, and 12% EL students.

Background of the author

From a young age, I have always felt most rewarded when I am in a nurturing role. I am the oldest of three siblings in my family, and I often had the honor of showing my younger brother and sister the things that were important to me. We glued together pieces of wooden dollhouses, we built LEGO creations, we made up stories about our cats, and we baked treats. Because I was the oldest, I was always the leader and the nurturer. I treasured the respect of my siblings, and took great pride when I felt I had taught them a new task. Throughout my middle school and high school years, I volunteered with younger children in a church setting and also cared for children in my community as part-time paid

positions arose. During college I soon realized that a career in education would allow me to do what I love with greater capacity for helping students. Through volunteer and practicum opportunities mostly in suburban areas, I quickly noticed students in need of more attention and differentiation than their peers, and my heart longed to help them.

My first teaching experiences after graduation were in elementary dual language and Spanish immersion settings. I taught K-5 small group reading at an elementary school in the Chicago area that housed a dual language Spanish immersion program for native Spanish speaking students within the school. My reading groups included both native English speaking and EL students. After moving to Minnesota, I taught 2nd grade in Minneapolis at a bilingual Spanish immersion elementary charter school for native Spanish-speaking students. In each of these roles, I taught students in both Spanish and English with the goal of English proficiency for all students. In between each of these teaching experiences, I also spent a year living in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, Mexico, where I worked for an organization supporting children and families through after-school educational activities. In each of these diverse settings with the resources available, I knew my students needed more specialized instruction to bridge the language gap. I became acutely aware of the difference between their English language proficiency as EL students and that of native English-speaking students.

Throughout my teaching career, I have become increasingly aware of the inequity of EL students often not receiving the instruction they need and deserve

(Fenner & Segota, 2014). Equity and social justice have always been at the forefront of my passions, and my greatest hope is to give my students language tools to support them in sharing their voice and increasing their confidence in achieving their own dreams. Creating a resource that utilizes oral language activities with students can help bridge this gap and encourage EL students in their language journey.

In the past several years, I have taught in a Twin Cities area suburban school district as a primary elementary reading/literacy teacher in both whole group and small group settings. In my current role as an elementary reading intervention teacher, I serve small groups of 1st-5th grade students who are reading below grade level, many of whom are EL students. Through teaching heterogeneous small groups with both EL students and native-English speaking (mainstream) students performing below grade level in reading, I am aware of similarities in academic language needs of all students. Research suggests that instruction that is beneficial for EL students is beneficial to all students, especially students who are performing below grade level in reading and language (Nutta, Mokhtari & Strebel, 2012). My goal is to help my students--both EL and mainstream--to grow in their oral language proficiency and their reading comprehension through focusing instruction on oral language activities. Throughout the resource I created in this capstone project, I combine research demonstrating advantages of facilitating oral language activities and

demonstrating that instructional language strategies that benefit EL students benefit all students.

Guiding Question

The question guiding my research and capstone project is: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?*

Summary

In this chapter, I have shared my experience as a reading teacher in a number of diverse contexts with mixed groups of both EL and mainstream students. I have shared how I appreciated the opportunity to work exclusively with EL students and meeting their needs in oral language and reading instruction. I have explained the purpose and importance of oral language activities, specifically RISA Oral Interactions. This resource is specifically created for working with individual students or small groups of two to four EL and mainstream students, with a goal of increasing oral language proficiency and reading comprehension. I have shared my background as an educator and why I am passionate about teaching both EL and mainstream students. This information is crucial in the application of my research as I have created a resource to aid teachers in EL and mainstream students' growth in reading and language proficiency. The question guiding this research and resource creation is: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?*

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter 1, I shared my purpose for creating this resource for students in need of oral language proficiency along with my own background and educational journey. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature covering effects of oral language practices on EL students, benefits of using reader's theater and RISA for language proficiency and reading fluency, and language needs of EL students. In Chapter 3, I will outline my use of academic literature in creating a resource using reader's theater and RISA for 1st and 2nd grade EL students. Through each of these chapters, I will address responses to my capstone question: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?*

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

With so many choices in language pedagogy approaches for teachers of English Language (EL) students, finding resources for students to promote growth in language and reading proficiency can be a daunting task. The question I have explored in my research is: *Can engaging in oral language exercises increase both EL and mainstream student growth in both oral language and reading comprehension?* My goal is to demonstrate the benefit of oral language exercises for all students. A number of researchers have found that facilitated oral language practice can be crucial for both second language learners' and native English speaker's language growth (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011; Segalowitz, 2010). Zwiers, O'Hara & Pritchard explain that the more the brain is given opportunities to connect words together in context into sentences and then to convey meaning and ideas with those sentences, the greater the language ability increases (Zwiers, O'Hara & Pritchard, 2014).

An emerging instructional strategy is the use of peer interviews called Routine Integrated Structured Academic Oral Interactions (Watson, 2015). Further validating oral language activities is the research showing that reading

prosody is a high indicator of reading comprehension (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010). Research also shows that oral language activities not only benefit EL students but all mainstream students as well (Gibbons, 2015). When students engage in these activities effectively, their opportunities for growth in language proficiency as well as reading comprehension increase (Zwiers and Crawford, 2011).

In this chapter I will review the research on four main subtopics: 1) the value of reading prosody in language acquisition, 2) the value of Routine Integrated Sustained Academic Oral Interactions in language acquisition, 3) how practice of oral interactions with EL students affects their reading comprehension, and 4) how practice of oral interactions with mixed groups of mainstream and EL students affects reading comprehension of all students.

The Value of Reading Prosody

According to Veenendall, Groen & Verhoeven (2014), “prosody is the melodic speech pattern that modifies the meaning of utterances; prosody is not *what* is said but *how* it is said.” Dowhower (1991) refers to prosodic reading as “the ability to read in expressive rhythmic and melodic patterns,” also identified by educators as reading with expression. Because educational research studies show a parallel relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension, educators have renewed interest in teaching and facilitating oral reading fluency (Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2008). Some research shows that young children’s beginning speech formations mimic prosodic formations and

that infants hear and link prosody and intonation to syntactic linguistic structure (Veenendal, Groen & Verhoven, 2014). Prosody indicates a speaker's or reader's understanding of their own communication such as raising one's voice at the end of a sentence to indicate a question, or lowering one's voice at the end of a sentence to indicate a statement (Veenendal, Groen & Verhoven 2014). Likewise a speaker or reader uses prosody to indicate emphasis of important words (ex: I asked for *orange juice*, not milk.) or to indicate boundaries between words (ex: chocolate, milk, and eggs vs. chocolate-milk and eggs) (Veenendal, Groen & Verhoven 2014). Miller and Schwanenflugel (2008) show that children's comprehension of oral language is connected to their use of prosodic features, meaning a child's use of speaking or reading expression indicated how well he or she understands what is being said by another person (Veenendal, Groen & Verhoven, 2014). Thus a students' level of reading prosody is also strongly connected with his or her reading fluency and reading comprehension (Cutler, A., & Swinney, D. A., 1987; Schwanenflugel, P. J., Hamilton, A. M., Kuhn, M. R., Wisenbaker, J. M., & Stahl, S. A., 2004). This research sets the background for understanding how engagement in oral language exercises can increase student growth in both oral language and reading comprehension.

RISA

RISA Oral Interactions is a scaffolded oral language strategy developed by Jill Watson for English Language students (Watson, 2015). RISA stands for Routine, Integrated, Structured, Academic. RISA Oral Interactions are routine

because the language exercises must be practiced regularly and consistently in the classroom (Watson, 2015). RISA Oral Interactions are integrated, because the content of the exercise comes from the lesson objectives, thus extending the subject at hand (Watson, 2015). RISA Oral Interactions are structured, meaning the exercise has specific guidelines for discussion and is scaffolded for optimal student learning (Watson, 2015). RISA Oral Interactions are academic because students communicate using academic language for the purpose of learning and gaining language proficiency (Watson, 2015).

Watson decries instructional techniques that only involve students reading and writing and a teacher orally delivering information with no opportunities for students to repeat words and sounds or to create original utterances (Watson, 2015). Research supports that students solidify their learning more thoroughly when they are given opportunities to process information orally through speaking and aurally through listening, in addition to reading and writing (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). When teachers promote the value of conversing as a tool for learning, students will more readily engage in conversation as a means for growth in reading, in comprehension, and in language development (Zwiers, O'Hara & Pritchard, 2014).

Students also show greater growth when given opportunities for practicing speech segments repetitively (Segalowitz, 2010). Because many EL students come from cultures based in oral tradition, RISA is designed to engage these learners in a method that resonates with their own cultural and family history

(Watson, 2015). These partially scripted interviews encourage and scaffold students in oral language practice in a non-threatening and low-risk environment (Noel, 2018). A teacher pairs students intentionally: student A with lower language proficiency is the interviewer reading initial scripted questions, and student B with higher language proficiency and is the interviewee, first reading responses and then later with scaffolded teacher support, to generate his/her own responses according to the subject (Watson, 2015). Once this first interaction is completed, both students switch roles. Student B is now the student with lower language skills being challenged after listening to generated responses modeled first by his/her interview partner. Teachers create RISA oral interactions to give students who tend toward reserved silence a gentle nudge towards trying out English as their new language in a comfortable and encouraging environment (Bordewick, 2018).

Watson formulated RISA rubrics to aid teachers in creating their own RISA Oral Interactions covering specific content areas that help target specific language standards, identify important content vocabulary, and encourage teachers to evaluate the process of oral interactions with students (Watson, 2015). These rubrics provide a framework for creating RISA oral interactions covering a wide array of content and grade level areas (Watson, 2015). Research thus shows that engaging in RISA Oral Interactions increases EL students' growth in both oral language and reading comprehension.

Oral Language Activities and Reading Comprehension

Oral language activities that invite students to converse and integrate ideas from texts with their own ideas in a scaffolded manner help students construct meaningful academic language within content areas. The role of the teacher is crucial in these activities as their scaffolded guidance helps students gradually take responsibility to lead their own conversations (Zwiers, O'Hara & Pritchard, 2014). Firmender, J., Reis, S., & Sweeny, S. (2013) point out the crucial need for differentiated reading instruction for ensuring reading comprehension growth in students with a wide range of abilities. RISA Oral Interactions with focus on scripted conversation on an integrated topic provides an excellent scaffold for EL student growth in reading fluency. Zwiers & Hamela also point out that when a student has an opportunity to share and read from another character's perspective, they feel less at risk for embarrassment and are thus able to produce more language (2018).

Connections Between EL Instruction and Mainstream Instruction

Language instruction directed towards EL learners is continually proven beneficial for mainstream learners as well. Zwiers & Crawford state: "Oral language is a cornerstone on which we build literacy and learning throughout life", yet rarely do students engage in meaningful academic conversations, and rarely do teachers spend instructional time focused on conversational skills (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). This need for conversational skills deepens in our culture as students continually lean on technology for communication and have far fewer opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Zwiers & Crawford (2011)

explain that conversational practice builds academic language, vocabulary, literacy skills, communication skills and encourages creativity, empathy, and equity. Guiding paired conversations during class time gives half of students the opportunity to talk at one time and creates a comfortable and less vulnerable space for students to share their thoughts through language, a goal for all teachers of literacy. Five core skills that Zwiers & Crawford (2011) focus on in their instructional strategies for encouraging high academic conversations are: elaborate and clarify, support ideas with examples, build on or challenge a partner's idea, paraphrase, and summarize. Practicing each of these conversational skills is beneficial to both EL and mainstream students in their journey of literacy as well as their emotional development. Nutta, Mokhtari & Strebel (2012) give numerous strategy suggestions for incorporating EL instruction into mainstream classrooms for the benefit of all students. Scaffolding students in conversation skills through modeling, sentence starters, and scripted questions for partners and whole group conversations proves beneficial for all students (Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). Paired reading activities and partner conversations with pairs created by a teacher connecting EL learners with native English speakers also provide excellent fluency practice for all students (Nutta, Mokhtari & Strebel, 2012).

Summary

Intentional focus on academic conversations, oral interactions and scripted readings for scaffolded learning fosters growth in literacy for all students.

Throughout this project I explored the question: *How do RISA Oral Interactions*

increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students? Research on the specific language strategies of RISA-Oral Interactions points to a positive answer to this question. Students' comprehension and academic and social engagement increases as they participate in oral language activities. Further study of effects of oral language activities on students' reading fluency and comprehension as well as reading prosody also prove positive. Lastly, connections between literacy growth in both EL and mainstream students engaged in activities focusing on conversation skills and reading prosody prove strong. Considering the need for literacy instruction with a focus on conversation and prosody, specific resources for teachers in RISA oral interactions are crucial.

Chapter Three explains the methods I use in creating sixteen lessons for teachers of both mainstream and/or EL students with the goal of promoting reading fluency and comprehension through oral academic interactions and practice with readers' theater. Each lesson engages students in RISA Oral Interactions and scaffolds student learning through vocabulary exposure, opportunities for practicing excellent reading prosody and academic conversations.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Since the beginning of my teaching career, I have been aware of the lack of resources very specific to teaching English Language (EL) students. I have wished for the time and direction to create a scripted and scaffolded guide that could support EL students in vocalizing and creating conversation in a thematic unit. The question I seek to answer in my capstone project is: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?* Through my capstone project I have created a resource for small group teachers of combined EL and native English-speaking students. This project focuses on reading comprehension growth through the use of Routine Integrated Structured Academic (RISA) Oral Interactions.

Project Details

Overview.

The resource I created is focused at a guided reading level K, which could be used with both 3rd and 4th grade reading intervention students in daily thirty-minute lessons. These sixteen lessons provide a unit of scaffolded language

and vocabulary instruction around a fictional folktale and follow the structure outlined in *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2011). In creating this resource, I targeted a couple of different small groups of 3rd and 4th grade students, both EL and mainstream that I believe would benefit from this type of oral language practice. With these two targeted small groups in mind, I created these lessons to fit their needs and interests. However, my desire is that these lessons could be adapted to any grade level according to the needs of the students. Teachers could adapt for students at higher or lower guided reading levels through finding texts at their levels, but the format of the lessons would be similar. Students read a designated section of the text, then respond orally using the RISA interview questions created by the teacher. The oral interactions provide scaffolded comprehension questions from basic explicit details within the text to implicit high-order thinking questions in which students are given opportunities to create original utterances in their responses. Teachers group students into pairs by WIDA and/or guided reading levels with each pair including one student with higher language proficiency and one student with lower language proficiency. WIDA is a leveled system used by teachers along with ACCESS testing, both used to assess English language (EL) students in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (English Language Development Standards, 2012; ACCESS, 2012). Each pair will begin with the student of lower language proficiency reading the part of Student A and the student of higher language proficiency reading the part of student B. At the end of each interview

segment, students will switch roles. Teachers will direct groups to complete the interview twice with each student having a turn as Student A and as Student B. Oral interactions can also work with one-on-one instruction with the student beginning as Student A, in the first interview, then switching to Student B the second time around, thus allowing for scaffolded opportunities for oral interactions. Teachers using this resource will be able to use students' oral practice as informal assessment which can aid in planning for further instruction for each student.

Instruction for each folktale is divided into two lessons, with the sixteen lessons covering eight folktales. The following is a list of each lesson and folktale:

Lessons 1-2: "The Emperor and the Nightingale" retold by Brenda Parkes

Lessons 3-4: "The Empty Pot: a Chinese Folktale" retold by Charlotte Guillain

Lessons 5-6: "Why the Spider Has Long Legs" retold by Charlotte Guillain

Lessons 7-8: "The Tree of Life" retold by Charlotte Guillain

Lessons 9-10: "The Unhappy Stonecutter" retold by Charlotte Guillain

Lessons 11-12: "The Foolish, Timid Rabbit" retold by Charlotte Guillain

Lessons 13-14: "The Blind Men and the Elephant" retold by Karen Backstein

Lessons 15-16: "Why Dog and Cat are Enemies" retold by Ruth Mattison

Minnesota K-12 Literacy Standards target identification of folktale story elements including the lesson or moral of the story, thus the choice of folktales for oral language and reading comprehension practice with these groups of students.

Format for each lesson begins with the teacher highlighting specific content vocabulary within the section of the text for that lesson. The teacher then directs students to read a portion of the designated text. Next, the teacher models and facilitates the RISA Oral Interactions interview questions between two students or between student and teacher. Each student is given an opportunity to read the part of Student A and Student B by reading and responding to the interview questions twice. The teacher then directs students to read the final portion of the text for the given time period. Finally, students are directed once again to read and respond to RISA Oral Interactions interview questions.

In a classroom setting I would project slides with written definitions and photographs corresponding with each vocabulary word, exemplifying research that demonstrates how use of visual materials in instruction directly increases student learning (Gibbons, 2015). In this project, I do not share those slides because of copyright law for the images. However, providing visuals including photographs, charts, and graphs that enhance the information for both EL and mainstream students in a reading setting is vital, and I encourage any teacher using this project to create vocabulary slides to share with students.

It is important to note that the value of these oral interactions for students is in giving them opportunities to both practice reading prosody and create original utterances that connect to the text, thus developing their reading comprehension. No answer keys were created for these interviews because any answer spoken by a student is valuable practice. A teacher may prompt for

further understanding when necessary, but the practice of reading and responding is the goal and the value of this project.

Rationale and Supporting Research.

Research supports that students grow in reading comprehension when they are given time to practice reading prosody through oral language exercises (Clementi, 2010; Miller, J., & Schwanenflugel, P. J., 2008). Also supported by research is that students also become more readily engaged in language growth through RISA-Oral Interactions created by Jill Watson (2015) when given scaffolded opportunities to create original utterances while connecting their speech to a text (Segalowitz 2010). More research supports that EL instruction in mainstream classrooms, specifically oral interactions, proves beneficial for all students (Gibbons, 2002; Nutta, Mokhtari & Strebel 2012). Given these main premises, I am confident that my capstone project of 16 lessons involving scaffolded oral interactions with comprehension questions ranging from literal to inferential to critical, is a much needed contribution to the field of EL instruction.

Setting.

The setting of my project is an elementary school in a north suburban district of the Twin Cities Metro area. This school's demographics are 62% White, 11% Black, 11% two or more races, 10% Asian, 6% Hispanic, 0.2% American Indian, and 0.2% Pacific Islander. Of the school's students, 44% are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school is racially and culturally diverse and rich in opportunities to grow in valuing all people. I come to my students of

all colors as a white female who speaks English as my home language and Spanish as my second language. I learn from my students about acceptance and showing value as much as they learn from me. My job is rewarding because of my students' desire to grow both in their literacy journey and in their journey of understanding and showing compassion.

I will use this resource with my 3rd and 4th grade reading intervention students when they begin reading at a guided reading level L. Currently my role with students at these grade levels is a one to one teacher to student ratio because of a greater need for growth for each student. I look forward to using this resource in the coming school year with small groups of 2-4 students so there is a greater opportunity for students to interact with and learn from each other in their oral interactions.

Participants.

The intended participants for this project are small groups of intervention students reading at a guided reading level L. Groups will be formed based on needs of students within my building and will range in number from one to four. Demographics of intervention students in my building are 52% White, 22% Black, 11% two or more races, 11% Asian, and 4% Hispanic. Seventy-one percent of intervention students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Audience.

The intended audience for my project is K-5 elementary teachers teaching in English-speaking settings with any combination of native English-speaking and

EL students. Teachers who are seeking alternative strategies for teaching both oral language skills and reading comprehension will be interested in this resource.

Timeline.

The timeline of this project is designed as creating a sixteen-lesson unit serving a resource to teachers of EL and native English-speaking students who are reading below grade level. Ideally in my small reading groups, I will use this oral language resource twice a week for eight weeks. My timeline for completion of this project is Spring 2020. Throughout Spring 2020, I revised my chapters one through four and completed writing the sixteen lessons of my project. By June 2020, I revised my sixteen-lesson unit along with the four chapters of my capstone project. I met with my capstone advisor and content expert and incorporated their feedback until my capstone was completed.

Summary

In this chapter I shared my rationale for creating this project as a resource for teachers of EL and mainstream students. I gave an overview of the sixteen lessons and format for each RISA-Oral Interaction. I also share a rationale including research that shows benefits of giving students opportunities to practice their reading prosody, RISA-Oral Interactions, and how this can benefit students' reading comprehension. I share how EL instruction is also beneficial for mainstream students, especially those who perform below grade level in literacy skills. Throughout my creation of this resource, I explore the question: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension*

in elementary EL and mainstream students? Because there is research proving the validity of oral language activities, my resource utilizes these oral language activities in scaffolded oral interactions that will engage both EL and mainstream students and support their growth in reading comprehension.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout this capstone project I have explored the question: *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?* This exploration has been valuable to me as I teach reading and literacy to both EL and mainstream students, and I hope to bring a better understanding of oral language strategies to my students in the future. In this chapter, I will explain my learnings from creating this resource, the limitations of the resource, and future plans of how I will implement, adapt, and share this resource with my colleagues. This coming fall, I intend to facilitate each of these sixteen lessons with my reading intervention students at the guided reading level L. The research all points to growth in language and comprehension. However, having not yet implemented this project, I look forward to seeing which parts are most engaging to my students and which parts might need tweaking. Most importantly, I look forward to watching my students grow in their language and reading comprehension skills and moving them up to the next guided reading level, closer to their grade level.

Explanation

Learnings.

Throughout creating this resource for students, I became increasingly aware of how much comprehension could be compacted into an interview question, and the quantity of different types of questions I should include in each interview section: literal, inferential, and critical. In conjunction with these types of questions, I found myself calculating the shortest types of responses possible for each question, understanding that this may be the response many students choose. My goal was to provide different length requirements for responses to keep students engaged in their learning.

In Chapter 2, grounded in research I described how allowing students opportunities to grow in their reading prosody positively affects their growth in engagement, oral language, and reading comprehension. I also outlined how use of RISA Oral Interactions in the classroom invitingly pulls especially EL students into oral engagement. Furthermore, I recounted with findings how oral language activities around a text topic encourage stronger reading comprehension in students. Finally, using research and commentary from experts, I relayed how connecting EL and mainstream instruction greatly benefits all students, signifying that all students who struggle to achieve grade-level literacy need oral language activities.

Limitations.

The main limitation of this resource is that it is meant to be used specifically with students at the guided reading level L. New texts at higher or

lower levels will need to be selected and text-specific RISA Oral Interactions interview questions will need to be created to adapt these lessons for students at different guided reading levels. Another limitation is that this resource uses only fictional folktale texts. RISA Oral Interactions are also valuable in conjunction with nonfiction texts, which cover a wide array of state standards. However, adaptations could be made for nonfiction texts in the future.

Future plans.

This coming 2020-2021 school year as I continue in my role of 1st-5th grade reading intervention teacher, I plan on using these sixteen folktale lessons with my 3rd and/or 4th grade intervention students. Depending on the groupings of students I serve in the fall, I will implement these lessons with groups reading at a guided reading level L. As explained in Chapter 3, I will create vocabulary slides with corresponding visuals and definitions from each lesson. Through data from the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) used by my school district, I will assess student growth after using the RISA Oral Interactions.

I would also like to plan and facilitate more oral interaction activities corresponding with various guided reading texts so that these language practices become common in my classroom and are expected by my students. Throughout this project I found that the preparation time for creating RISA Oral Interaction interview questions covering comprehension of an elementary level text is time consuming. I am hoping the work will be rewarded by great student progress in both oral language development and reading comprehension.

I would also like to work with my building EL teacher and compare language assessment scores for my EL students before and after they participate in this unit. This could give another piece of data exemplifying the success of oral language interactions specifically for EL students.

As another extension of this project, I plan on sharing these lessons with my team of intervention teachers, asking them how they might implement the lessons in their teaching, and how they might adapt the RISA-Oral Interactions interview questions design with other texts at different guided reading levels.

Summary

Throughout this capstone project I explored the question *How do RISA Oral Interactions increase student engagement and reading comprehension in elementary EL and mainstream students?* I have shared research explaining how allowing students opportunities to grow in their reading prosody positively affects their growth in engagement, oral language, and reading comprehension. I have shared research on how use of RISA Oral Interactions in the classroom invitingly and especially pulls EL students into oral engagement. I have shared findings showing how oral language activities around a text topic encourage stronger reading comprehension in students. I have shared research connecting the benefits of EL instructional strategies to mainstream classrooms and how oral language activities promote growth in both EL and English-speaking students.

This capstone project, *Growing Reading Skills Through Oral Language Activities* will benefit the field of EL instruction as it adds another resource for

EL teacher and reading teachers to use with students who need encouragement to share their thoughts and create original utterances among peers and in the presence of their educators. Providing students with a responsive interview experience after reading through covering comprehension of their text with literal, inferential and critical comprehension questions will encourage both EL and mainstream student growth in reading and language skills. I am honored to contribute a resource to the field of EL education and hope to continue collaborating with colleagues and contributing from our findings for greater language and reading growth in every student. My greatest rewards are my relationships with my students, and I hope that through our interactions I am able to encourage them in both their journey of literacy and life. They are worth every second of this work.

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Appendix A

Fountas & Pinnell				
INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL EXPECTATIONS FOR READING				
	Beginning of Year (Aug.–Sept.)	1st Interval of Year (Nov.–Dec.)	2nd Interval of Year (Feb.–Mar.)	End of Year (May–June)
Grade K		C	D	E
		B	C	D
		A	B	C
				Below C
Grade 1	E	G	I	K
	D	F	H	J
	C	E	G	I
	Below C	Below E	Below G	Below I
Grade 2	K	L	M	N
	J	K	L	M
	I	J	K	L
	Below I	Below J	Below K	Below L
Grade 3	N	O	P	Q
	M	N	O	P
	L	M	N	O
	Below L	Below M	Below N	Below O
Grade 4	Q	R	S	T
	P	Q	R	S
	O	P	Q	R
	Below O	Below P	Below Q	Below R
Grade 5	T	U	V	W
	S	T	U	V
	R	S	T	U
	Below R	Below S	Below T	Below U
Grade 6	W	X	Y	Z
	V	W	X	Y
	U	V	W	X
	Below U	Below V	Below W	Below X
Grades 7–8	Z	Z	Z	Z
	Y	Y	Z	Z
	X	X	Y	Y
	Below X	Below X	Below Y	Below Y

KEY


Exceeds Expectations
Meets Expectations
Approaches Expectations: Needs Short-Term Intervention
Does Not Meet Expectations: Needs Intensive Intervention

The Instructional Level Expectations for Reading chart is intended to provide general guidelines for grade level goals, which should be adjusted based on school/district requirements and professional teacher judgment.



DEDICATED TO TEACHERS

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APPENDIX B

Example of RISA Oral Interactions

Student A: Who is this story mainly about?

Student B: This story is mainly about _____.

Student A: What has happened in this story so far?

Student B: First, _____. Next, _____. Then, _____.

Student A: What do you predict the problem might be in this story?

Student B: The problem might be that _____.

Student A: How did the emperor feel when he learned the nightingale was gone?

Student B: The emperor feels _____.

Student A: What does the emperor ask the new nightingale to do?

Student B: The emperor asks the new nightingale to _____.