Writing and Reading Partnership: A Focused First Grade Writing Curriculum That Benefits ELL Readers

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WRITING AND READING PARTNERSHIP: A FOCUSED FIRST GRADE WRITING CURRICULUM THAT BENEFITS ELL READERS

by

Margaret Gorrilla

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Chapter Overview

As I have thought about different topics for my capstone project, I have reflected on what academic issues my first grade ELL students face, and how I can improve these adversities. One issue I have been particularly drawn to is the lack of writing curriculum provided to my students. I have continually asked myself questions such as: What is something that is missing from my school’s approach to writing? Are my ELL students being exposed to a developed writing curriculum? Are they ready to go to second grade based on the writing they produced in first grade? Why is reading held as a higher priority than writing at my school? How do reading and writing relate to one another? I have thought about these questions because I have seen my school place a higher emphasis on reading than writing, and I have noticed that my ELL students have difficulties when it comes to writing sentences and paragraphs. All of these questions have led me to my final question: How might a first grade writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners’ (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?

In Chapter One, I explain my interest in why I am choosing to pursue the idea of creating an ELL writing curriculum plan, as well as share about my own teaching experience. Afterward, I share personal experiences I have had in the classroom related to reading and writing with my first grade students.
Current Climate of ELL Writing Curriculum

Currently, my students do not have access to a formal writing curriculum within their classrooms. The most exposure my students have to academic writing is when they are in small groups with me. As their ELL teacher, I use a thematic-based curriculum, with a Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessment (CEPA) at the end of each unit. Rather than taking a multiple choice test after learning about a new topic, a CEPA can be thought of as an authentic assessment that allows students to show what they do know about a topic. For example, students can do an oral presentation, participate in a debate, or create a written piece of work. Darling-Hammond (1994) went on to say “Authentic assessment strategies can provide teachers with much more useful classroom information as they engage teachers in evaluating how and what students know and can do in real-life performance situations” (p.6). In the curriculum I use, the CEPA is always a written task, which assigns students to use academic unit vocabulary in their sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, each CEPA incorporates a key use language function: recount, argue, or explain. This formal writing instruction and practice happens for 15 to 20 minutes a day with me, and not the classroom teacher. With a lack of formal writing instruction and practice during the student’s writing block with their classroom teacher in the morning, they are not getting the opportunity to practice and use the writing skills that they may possess. With a developed first grade ELL writing unit plan, this gap during whole group classroom instruction could be filled.
**First Grade ELL Writing Unit Plan**

The intended outcome of my capstone project is to create an ELL writing curriculum that will be aligned with Minnesota State Standards. Furthermore, I hope to discover how this curriculum can help my first grade students’ reading comprehension skills. Overall, creating this curriculum is important to me because my colleagues and students do not have access and are not using any writing curriculum this year, and I feel as though this is a huge disservice to all students, but especially ELL students.

In regards to reading comprehension skills, I will be focusing on three main areas: summarizing, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and sequencing. All three of these reading comprehension skills relate to key functional academic language skills for ELLs. When students summarize a text, they are practicing the language skill of recounting. When students are differentiating facts and opinions, they are working on the language skills of arguing. Lastly, when students are sequencing events in a story, they are working on the language skill of explaining.

**Teaching Experience**

After earning my undergraduate degree in Speech-Language and Hearing Sciences, I thought that I was going to be a Speech Pathologist. After being rejected by multiple graduate school programs, I began working in a school. I was placed in the ESL (English as a Second Language) department, and I had no idea what I was doing. Luckily, I had a helpful and supportive mentor who guided me through my first year of teaching.
ELL students. I taught ELL students in Kindergarten through 4th grade, with many differing language abilities. The curriculum I used with my students held a heavy emphasis on writing, which I particularly enjoyed because I knew they were not getting personalized writing instruction in any of their other classes at school. After one year of teaching, I decided that this was a career that I wanted to pursue. I worked as an ELL teacher for two more years under a Minnesota Tier 2 license, and just earned my Tier 3 license this Winter. I feel very lucky to wake up and be able to go to a job that I love every day! I adore my students and really love teaching them.

Throughout the last couple of years, I have often found it difficult to find my place on the first grade team as an ELL teacher. From my experiences, I often feel that my voice is not heard when providing feedback about curriculum choices, quizzes, and tests, and end up feeling frustrated because I want the best for my ELL students. This year, the first grade teachers have students do writing activities for about 15-20 minutes each morning. There is not a set curriculum, but the teachers are doing their best to come up with writing activities with the resources they have. Although the teachers are trying, my students are not getting the opportunity to showcase their writing skills, such as writing personal stories or writing about academic topics. My hopes in creating a writing curriculum would be for me to lead writing instruction daily for a 20-30 minute block of time to the whole class, following state standards, while also supporting ELL students.

**Personal Connection**

In addition to a lack of writing curriculum, our school has implemented a new reading program this year, Fountas and Pinnell (2012). This guided reading program was
revolutionized in 1996 and is centered around using fluency and comprehension to measure a student’s reading level. For fluency, students are scored based on the number of words they read correctly in a text and how many errors they made while reading a text. The comprehension questions are then asked after the student reads a text, and scored based on how accurate the student answered the questions on a scale from 0-3. With this new reading plan heavily implemented and focused on this school year, writing has been an afterthought. Keeping the new reading curriculum in mind, I see that there is a need to fill a connection between writing and reading overall. While testing my own students’ fluency and comprehension with texts this past fall, a common trend I had noticed was that students' fluency skills were stronger than their reading comprehension skills. This led me to my interest to see if implementing a writing curriculum could aid in increasing my students’ reading comprehension skills, and essentially having a higher reading level than they would without an intentional writing curriculum. 

**Conclusion**

Within Chapter One, there are three major components that have been presented. First, I introduced the idea of creating a first grade writing curriculum plan. My hope is that through the implementation of this writing curriculum, students will be able to increase their reading comprehension skills. Along with my introduction to my curriculum plans, I discussed my teaching experience, and a personal connection currently happening within my classroom. After four years of teaching ELLs, I have seen a high need to fill the gap of direct writing instruction for my students. I am looking forward to better supporting my students and watching both their writing and reading
skills excel. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature related to how a writing curriculum can benefit students’ reading skills. Chapter two will also include information on the research of Minnesota State Writing Standards for first grade, the relationship between reading and writing, and effective elements of writing instruction and curriculum. Chapter three will describe the methods I will use to create this curriculum, as well as background information about my school. The curriculum will be a 3-week unit using thematic-based lessons, which will incorporate ELL literacy skills and essential writing curriculum components—all which were thoroughly researched and discussed in chapter two. In Chapter Four, the main research question will be answered: 

*How might a writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?* I will reflect on the outcomes of my project, the challenges that I encountered, and implications for the future.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

In this literature review, the research will revolve around the following question: *How might a first grade writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners’ (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?* The purpose of this work is to create a first grade writing curriculum that is based on research-forward practices, along with providing my students structured time and resources to simply write while they are at school; something they currently do not have access to.

The specific topics that will be discussed include ELL literacy skills, essential writing curriculum components, and thematic-based learning. English language learners (ELLs) are some of the most resilient students in schools today. Through rigorous testing and learning an additional language, ELLs are faced with many adversities, yet they are still expected to perform just as well as their monolingual peers. The first section of this chapter will discuss ELL literacy skills, including common reading and writing difficulties and how to best meet the needs of ELL students’ literacy needs. Early writing skills are important for students to develop in elementary grades in school as students progress in their education each year. The second section of the literature review will focus on writing and the development of a writing curriculum. Writing will be discussed
as a tool that can be used to aid in reading skills and reading comprehension. The effects of direct writing instruction on students’ academic performance within classroom environments will be explored as well. As ELL students’ writing skills are developed, their reading comprehension skills can develop simultaneously. Oftentimes, writing instruction is overlooked, while reading is favored within classrooms. The last section will focus on teaching using thematic-based learning.

**ELL Literacy**

Essentially, an English Language Learner (ELL) is a person who is acquiring and learning English as an additional language. Under Minnesota State Statute, Section 124D.59, Subdivision 2, an ELL is a “pupil declared by a parent or guardian that has first learned a language other than English, [that] comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or usually speaks a language other than English” (Minnesota Department of Education Student Support Division, 2017, p. 7). In some situations, students not only speak two languages (one being the home language and the other being the second language), but they know two or three additional languages. It is critical to point out that these students bring many assets to school with their multilingual experiences. Furthermore, Minnesota follows guidelines that “the pupil is determined [for language services] by a valid assessment measuring the pupil’s English language proficiency and by developmentally appropriate measures” (Minnesota Department of Education Student Support Division. (July, 2017, p. 7). In Minnesota, schools use the WIDA Model and WIDA Screener assessments to initially identify students who qualify for ELL services.
**ELLs in Minnesota**

According to the Minnesota Department of Education Student Support Division (2017), “The English learner (EL) population in Minnesota has increased more than 300 percent in the last 20 years” (p. 3). More specifically, during fall enrollment in the 2017-2018 school year, 8,098 first grade students were identified as ELLs, which is the third highest number of ELLs in the state in grade Kindergarten through 12th grades (Fall 2018 English Learner Education in Minnesota Report, 2018, p.14). With that said, it is very likely that there are ELL students in classrooms throughout the state of Minnesota. It is essential that all teachers be prepared to instruct students who speak languages other than English, which is a heavy task to take on. This is where English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are able to step in.

**Teaching ELLs**

While ESL teachers can aid in supporting content material within the general education classroom, they have their own guidelines to adhere to which are specific to English language development. English language learners’ English proficiency is measured in four domains: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. In addition to these four domains of language, there are four key uses of English academic language that students are expected to produce in the school setting. The English language key uses are: recount, explain, argue, discuss. Of the four key uses:

Three of the Key Uses—Recount, Explain, and Argue—are critical genres tied to success in school that have roots in systemic functional linguistics. The fourth Key Use, Discuss, is directly tied to challenging state college and career readiness
standards and language practices that recognize the importance of academic conversations and student interaction as integral to the process of language learning. (WIDA Consortium, 2020, p. 1)

Keeping content and language objectives in mind, ELLs are tasked with learning content material and language functions simultaneously, putting a lot of pressure on both students and teachers. Another barrier in teaching ELLs is the lack of clarity of service minutes. Minnesota does not have a specific expectation of how many minutes ELL students are to receive ELL services in a given school day. Schools, such as the one that I work at, decide service minutes based on blocks of time in which we are allowed to instruct using push-in or pull-out methods and how many ESL teachers we have. This can be challenging and cause issues between ESL teachers, general education teachers, and administration. The goal is for every ELL student to get serviced every day, but sometimes this is extremely difficult, especially when administration makes executive decisions regarding classroom schedules.

Reading Performance

After discussing the background of ELLs in Minnesota, it is important to highlight how these students are performing in reading. According to the Fall 2018 English Learner Education Minnesota Report, 1.1% of ELLs exceeded, 13.8% met academic standards, while 21.7% partially met, and 63.4% did not meet academic standards on statewide achievement tests in reading (p. 23). This compares to all other students who were 19.9% exceeding, 40.5% meeting, 18.3% partially meeting, and 21.2% not meeting academic standards (p. 23). It is important to note that these exams
are administered to third through eighth grade students, and tenth grade students. Although first grade students are not taking these exams, first grade teachers have the task to prepare their students for these exams by laying a strong foundation in reading skills. The reading data shows that ELLs are drastically not meeting academic state standards compared to all other students, which is a problem.

**Policy Support**

One way that Minnesota has worked to address gaps between ELLs and their peers is by passing the Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act in 2014. The purpose of the LEAPS Act was to ensure that there is more English learner support in schools in Minnesota. Alongside the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and World’s Best Workforce (WBWF), LEAPS ensures that:

1. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are positioned as educational and economic assets.

2. Teachers and administrators receive appropriate preparation and continued professional development to support multilingual learners.

3. Instruction is differentiated for the diversity of multilingual learners.

4. Multicultural family voices are engaged and included in the educational process. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019, p. 1)

The LEAPS act may sound familiar to ELL educators in Minnesota, but all educators should be aware of the implications this has in schools across Minnesota. It is critical that all educators evaluate their teaching practices and ask themselves: Do I consider my students’ multilingualism as an asset in my classroom? Am I receiving appropriate
training and professional development to best support my ELL students? Do I differentiate my instruction to meet the needs of ELLs? Have I built a relationship with my students’ families? Are families included in their child’s educational process? Reflecting on these aspects can help teachers provide effective services to ELLs in Minnesota. Another important aspect that educators should consider when working with ELLs is literacy and literacy instruction.

**Literacy**

Literacy is “the quality or state of being literate, especially the ability to read and write” (Collins English Dictionary, 2012, p. 1). When thinking about reading and writing, it is important to note that there is a connection between the two domains. Wright (2015) mentioned that “Correlation studies show that students who read more are faster and better readers, as well as better writers…” (p. 185). Research suggests that the more students read, the better writers they become. For ELLs, they “often learn how to decode words but have trouble comprehending what they read” (Wright, 2015, p. 186). When thinking about assessing my ELL students in reading, their fluency skills are far better than their comprehension skills. Wright (2015) suggested that this is due to the “lack of attention to the ELLs’ oral English language development” (p. 186). Another important aspect of ELL literacy is how students’ use of their first language skills can transfer to their learning of a second language. This phenomenon can be referred to as translanguaging. “Translanguaging refers to the language practices of bilingual people” (Celic & Seltzer, 2013, p. 1). Second language literacy and literacy in a first language are closely related. Bialystok (2002) noted that students’ oral proficiency,
representational concepts of writing, metacognitive processes and strategies for reading in their first language can be transferred to their second language literacy (p.167). Wright (2015) went on to say that “Oral proficiency and literacy in the first language is an advantage for literacy development in English” (p. 186). Overall, when students have opportunities and experiences to speak, read, and write successfully in their first language, there can be a positive impact on their literacy development in English.

**Literacy Instruction**

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find an ELL’s reading level because of varied situations, such as literacy in their home language and knowledge of the English language (Wright, 2015). In addition, most frameworks that are used to identify reading levels are designed for students who already speak English, such as the Fountas and Pinnell (F & P) assessment system. Since this adverse situation is common to ELLs, teachers need to take advantage of the opportunity to use the Model Performance Indicators (MPIs) to get an idea of what each ELL student is able to do at each grade level in reading and writing (WIDA, 2012). MPIs are especially helpful because they “illustrate differentiated language expectations related to content-area instruction within one language domain” (WIDA, 2012, p. 10). MPIs can be especially useful when discussing ELL students with general education teachers. While the general education teacher may focus on content mastery, MPIs emphasize language mastery. Teachers can also use the four levels of English literacy development to guide their ELL literacy instruction. Table 1, which was adapted from Wright (2015), lists the four levels of English literacy development which are: emergent, early, early fluency, and fluency.
### Table 1

*Levels of English Literacy Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of English Literacy Development</th>
<th>Emergent</th>
<th>Early</th>
<th>Early Fluency</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Emergent**                            | ● Understands that print carries meaningful messages.  
                            ● Begins to learn basic concepts about books, print, letters, sounds, writing.  
                            ● Reads books that are highly supportive, short, simple, and with direct picture-text match.  
                            ● Begins to realize that she can be an author who writes texts others can read. | ● Understands that books have exact and unchanging meanings.  
                            ● Understands that print is governed by conventions.  
                            ● Reads and writes simple stories and informational passages.  
                            ● Knows reading is a meaning-making process that uses problem-solving skills.  
                            ● Reads word by word and often uses a finger to point as well. | ● Begins to use multiple clues to make meaning.  
                            ● Relies less on illustrations as a clue to text meaning.  
                            ● Uses an array of problem-solving skills in reading.  
                            ● Grasps books’ main ideas and their emotional impact.  
                            ● Knows and uses a variety of strategies for unlocking unknown words. | ● Establishes the behaviors of mature readers.  
                            ● Makes sense of books that are longer and more complex.  
                            ● Adopts strategies flexibly to fulfill a range of reading purposes.  
                            ● Orchestrates all the clues available to make meaning.  
                            ● Self-corrects flexibly and efficiently |
Table 1 is not only a useful resource for ESL teachers, but also for general education teachers. It is critical that general education teachers learn and understand that all ELLs are different and come to school with a variety of literacy experiences. Research shows that “there is a strong relationship between ELLs’ reading and writing abilities” (Wright, 2015, p. 226). This is why it is critical to identify the correct reading levels for ELL students. Wright (2015) stated that “The more students read at appropriate levels, the more vocabulary and language structures they will acquire. This knowledge, in turn, can be used in their writing” (p. 226). Sometimes ELL students are not placed in appropriate reading level groups because they display strong fluency skills. Educators need to remember that although ELL students can read a text with appropriate fluency skills, it does not mean that the student comprehended what they just read.

There are many ways in which reading can be used to support ELL writing. Wright (2015) suggested three ideas:

- Readings can be used as a springboard for a topic to write about.
- Readings can provide background information and source material for students to write about a specific topic.
- Readings can be used as a model of a particular writing feature for students to imitate. (p. 227)
Keeping these suggestions in mind, it is also vital to think about how reading comprehension skills are incorporated into literacy instruction.

**Reading Comprehension Skills**

When thinking about reading comprehension, it is important to understand the components that are embedded in this topic. Lipka and Siegel (2012) noted that “Reading comprehension consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading” (p. 1874). Reading comprehension is multi-dimensional; it is about understanding the purpose and process of reading as much as it is about the content of what is read (Robb, personal communication, 2018). Texts are made up of paragraphs (discourse), sentences, and words and students’ word reading ability can be affected by their ability to process sounds in words. Research shows that “The most robust predictor of word reading ability is that of phonological processing.” (Lipka & Siegel, 2012, p. 1874). Phonological processing is the use of the sounds of one's language (i.e., phonemes) to process spoken and written language (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). With phonological processing at the core of word reading abilities, many ELLs can encounter issues with reading if they express deficiencies in basic level processing. On the other hand, some ELLs have good word recognition skills but have poor comprehension skills. Lipka and Siegel (2012) noted that “ESL learners may be at a disadvantage when they are required to comprehend a text because they lack background knowledge and/or have deficits in basic cognitive processes because of vocabulary and/or language difficulties”
It is the teacher’s responsibility to work to tap into students’ background knowledge in order to get a better understanding of what students know and don’t know about specific material within a text. Also, teachers need to consider pre-teaching vocabulary that may be troublesome for ELL students. Vocabulary words which are considered to be Tier 2 and Tier 3 words (words with multiple meanings or technical language) could potentially inhibit students from understanding a text.

Teaching Reading Comprehension

Students who are struggling readers need explicit instruction in comprehension strategies. They may have a hard time extracting meaning on their own. Explicit comprehension instruction helps dependent readers become independent readers. There are many reading comprehension strategies such as summarizing, clarifying, and recognizing the author’s purpose. Incorporating pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities can also be a way to reinforce comprehension skills. Robb (2018) recommended 8 steps for explicitly teaching reading comprehension skills (see Table 2).

Table 2

Steps for Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps for Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Determine the strategy to be taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Make sure your text (book) facilitates the practice of that strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Tell your students exactly what strategy they will be learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Model the strategy for students outloud (think aloud).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Give students multiple ways to practice the strategy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After explicit reading comprehension instruction comes the implementation of reading assessment.

**Assessing Reading**

A formative assessment is based on standards and learning targets. A formative assessment is “an ongoing assessment process that provides students and teachers with feedback on progress toward instructional goals. Ongoing assessments could involve observation, student self-assessment, or projects rated using a rubric” (WIDA Focus on Formative Assessment, 2009, p. 2).

For ELLs of any age at the emergent level of literacy, it is important to assess their development of concepts of print, which include understanding the differences between letters and words and words and spaces, knowing where to start reading and how to do a return sweep to continue reading the next line, and understanding the basic features of a book, such as a title and front and back cover, and even how to hold it properly. (Wright, 2015, p. 212)

Students who live in households with parents who read to them typically develop these concepts before kindergarten. Unfortunately, students who do not have exposure to reading and books may have to develop these concepts at school, and may be behind.
One way to get an idea of a student’s reading performance is to use a running record. When teachers use a running record, they usually have a copy of the text in front of them while the student reads. The teacher follows along, word by word, listening and marking errors (if they are made). Using a running record “enables a teacher to identify the reading strategies the student may or may not be using and the types of errors the student makes while reading” (Wright, 2015, p. 213). Once the student is done reading and the running record is complete, “the teacher asks the student comprehension questions or asks the student to retell the story. This is a crucial component, because it reveals whether the student understood what he or she read” (Wright, 2015, p. 213). Overall, using a running record can be an effective tool that teachers can use to get an idea of where their students are at with their reading skills.

Something that is specific to ELLs is how they progress through reading levels. “ELLs’ progress through reading levels is affected by age, English proficiency, and home language literacy skills” (Wright, 2015, p. 219). It is essential that these three factors be investigated by both ESL and general education teachers. Two possible ways to find out this information is by conducting interviews with the student and by administering English language proficiency assessments such as the WIDA Model, WIDA Screener, and WIDA ACCESS for ELLs.

**Challenges**

Although there are current practices in place that can support ELL literacy, the education system in the United States has a way to go. One of the main issues is that “Literacy instruction approaches for mainstream students are not sufficient for ELLs”
In addition, most literacy assessments are not developed with ELLs in mind. These assessments struggle to gauge ELL literacy strengths and weaknesses. Finally, many teachers are not trained or equipped to teach ELLs literacy. For example, curriculum is designed for English speaking students, without translation options, or helpful ELL resources. Sometimes the curriculum has a small section in each unit mentioning ELL resources, but many of these resources are not appropriate or rigorous.

**Summary**

Beginning with background information about ELLs in Minnesota, this section included a thorough review of the literature that is related to ELL literacy. The elements within this section revolved around teaching ELLs, literacy, and assessing reading performance. As my capstone work is focused on writing instruction, this section provides information about the importance of the relationship between reading and writing for ELL students. Specifically, information about ELL literacy level development and explicitly teaching reading comprehension skills will come in hand when creating my capstone project.

**First Grade Writing Curriculum Plan**

Before discussing the components of a writing curriculum, it is important to know and understand the end goal which is the standards that students need to meet in order to be proficient first grade writers. The English Language Arts K-12 standards are a part of the Minnesota Academic Standards. The English Language Arts K-12 standards were revised in 2010 and were put in effect on November 29, 2011 (Minnesota
Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). In general, the standards are “(1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p. 4). There are 7 first grade Minnesota writing standards (see Table 3).

Table 3

Minnesota 1st Grade Writing Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minnesota 1st Grade Writing Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.1.1: Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.2.2: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.3.3: Write narratives and other creative texts in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event closure, and provide some sense of closure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.5.5: With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from adults and peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.6.6: With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.7.7: Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of “how-to” books on a given topic and use them to write a sequence of instructions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.1.6.8.8: With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keeping the standards in mind, Wright (2015) suggested instructional tasks that can be implemented in a writing curriculum.
**Instructional Tasks**

First, Wright (2015) mentioned directly teaching a set of academic vocabulary words multiple days in a row using different activities. Next, “Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching” (Wright, 2015, p. 188). Third, it is integral to provide students opportunities to practice their written language skills. Lastly, small-group instructional interventions in literacy and English language development are encouraged as well.

While providing the learning opportunities above, it is also important to foster the relationship between reading and writing. Supporting the Functional view of reading and writing, Graham and Hebert (2011) suggested writing about texts that students read. This can facilitate reading comprehension in five ways:

1) It fosters explicitness, as the writer must select which information in text is most important.

2) It is integrative, as it encourages the writer to organize ideas from text into a coherent whole, establishing explicit relationships among the ideas.

3) It facilitates reflection, as the permanence of writing makes it easier to review, reexamine, connect, critique, and construct new understandings of text ideas.

4) It can foster a personal involvement with text, as it requires active decision making about what will be written and how it will be treated.

5) It involves transforming or manipulating the language of text so that writers put ideas into their own words, making them think about what the ideas mean.

(Graham & Hebert, 2011, p. 712)
When students are writing about texts that they read, teachers are able to implement two domains of language simultaneously.

Research shows that “When students write about material that they read, their comprehension about it enhances” (Graham & Hebert, 2011, p. 733). Furthermore, directly teaching writing has a positive effect on improving reading (Graham & Hebert, 2011). Lastly, the frequency of writing is another important element when discussing writing curriculum. When teachers increase opportunities for students to write, “there is a positive carryover effect on how well typically developing students in grades 1-6 read” (Graham & Hebert, 2011, p. 735). With this information, one would think that schools would place a higher emphasis on the importance of writing within the classroom, yet classrooms, such as the ones that I work in, do not have structured writing curriculum and instruction subjects.

In addition to the instructional suggestions above, Horwitz (2008) created a list of guidelines for teaching writing. Horwitz (2008) notes that teachers should follow these specific guidelines (see Table 4).

Table 4

Guidelines for Teaching Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines for Teaching Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create realistic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be clear about your instructional focus and purpose for writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The type of writing assignment should determine your grading criteria and the focus of correction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help your students develop realistic expectations about their own writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Help students consider and organize their thoughts before writing.

Point out specific conventions of the writing genre.

Coordinate writing assignments with materials students are reading and learning in content area classrooms.

Provide guiding questions to facilitate the initial writing process.

Teach the process of writing, making sure students understand the role of revision.

Teach effective dictionary and thesaurus strategies.

Writing can be a heavy task for teachers to implement into their daily instruction, but with effective tools and a growth mindset, it is possible for ELLs to be on grade level with their writing skills.

Within the curriculum that I am creating for my capstone project, writing is a critical component that I am choosing to focus on. Within this section, the Minnesota first grade writing standards were discussed, as well as the importance of writing about what you read. Lastly, instructional guidelines about teaching writing were listed. This section is particularly relevant to my capstone project because I am incorporating the Minnesota first grade writing standards into my curriculum. In addition, each unit will be centered around one text, so students will be writing about what they are reading. Lastly, I plan to use the writing guidelines within my instructional tasks in my curriculum.

**Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessments**

A Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessment (CEPA) relies “heavily on teacher judgment. They are defined as integrated parts of the learning experience that differ from on-demand assessments, which are often external to the classroom” (Meisels
et al., 2001, p. 75). For example, students may have the task of writing a paragraph at the end of a unit in response to a prompt, and must follow a rubric or checklist as they write. When thinking about ELLs, “Instruction and assessment of ELLs should be crafted with two goals in mind: the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the development of academic language” (WIDA Focus on Formative Assessment, 2009, p. 1). One way to incorporate CEPA and ELLs is to use formative assessments. A formative assessment is based on standards and learning targets. A formative assessment is “an ongoing assessment process that provides students and teachers with feedback on progress toward instructional goals. Ongoing assessments could involve observation, student self-assessment, or projects rated using a rubric” (WIDA Focus on Formative Assessment, 2009, p. 2). It is relevant to note that there is a difference between assessing for content goals and assessing for language. Content assessments center “around students’ declarative (facts) and procedural (skills) knowledge in a content area, [while] language assessments concentrate on the discourse used to make meaning of the declarative and procedural knowledge” (WIDA Focus on Formative Assessment, 2009, p. 2). For example, when I grade writing discourse assignments as an ESL teacher, I am looking for students to use specific language while they are discussing content, such as sequence words (first, next, last) when retelling a story.

**Conclusion**

Within classrooms across Minnesota, there are bound to be English Language Learners (ELLs). The ELL population continues to grow year after year, yet ELLs are still faced with lingering challenges. ELLs are faced with many adversities in school, and
educators are responsible for ensuring that these students have opportunities to display their strengths and assets in school. One way to do this is to discuss the research and strategies that are proven to help ELLs in school. Within this chapter, ELL literacy skills, essential writing curriculum components, and thematic-based learning were discussed. The reality is that ELLs come to school with varying literacy levels, and teachers have to work to investigate how to best meet the needs of these students. Two ways to help combat the adversities that ELLs face is through direct reading comprehension and writing instruction through thematic-based learning. Through these topics that were discussed, the research question that is being focused on is: How might a writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?

Keeping research in mind, I plan to create an ELL Writing Curriculum plan for first grade students. Chapter Three describes the methods I will use to create this curriculum, as well as background information about my school. The curriculum will be a 3-week unit using thematic-based lessons, which will incorporate ELL literacy skills and essential writing curriculum components—all which were thoroughly researched and discussed in chapter two.

**Thematic-based Learning**

**Background**

Thematic-based curriculum is centered around one theme or topic. In this type of curriculum, teachers are able to incorporate multiple content areas centered around the same theme or topic, rather than teaching concepts individually in each subject area. Students are then able to get in-depth exposure to concepts, materials, and learning
throughout the entire unit (Cunningham, 2010). Putwain (2011) referenced six characteristics of thematic-based curriculum which include: “combining different subjects, emphasising project work, using sources that go beyond textbooks, emphasising holistic relationships among concepts, organising the curriculum around themes and flexibility in schedules and/or student grouping” (p. 389). Thematic-based curriculum does not follow traditional organization of classroom subjects and content as separate entities, but rather works to create a forged concept of learning for students.

**Benefits**

When thinking about thematic-based learning, it is important to highlight its benefits. Cunningham (2010) noted that students are able to make real-world connections, and build their schema (p. 35). Furthermore, this learning promotes their higher order thinking skills and students are able to transfer their knowledge from one content area to another (Cunningham, 2010, p. 35). A positive aspect of this learning is that students have the opportunity to highlight what they know about a concept, and carry that knowledge through multiple courses.

**Integration with Writing**

Murray (1973) placed an important emphasis on writing, claiming it to be the most disciplined form of thinking. “Murray recommended language arts curricula centered on writing instead of reading because, in such a curriculum, the students used the skills of listening, speaking, and reading in a focused manner” (as cited by Cunningham, 2010, p. 26). With thematic-based learning, students have the opportunity to express their understanding of the theme or topic through their writing.
Challenges to Teachers

With thematic-based learning comes careful and effective planning. Unfortunately, many teachers do not have sufficient planning time during the school day, and often end up taking work home, or staying late once school has been dismissed. In relation to lack of planning time, Barney and Deutsch (2017) mentioned the theory of intensification, a phenomenon defined by Larson (1980). Intensification is defined as “the most tangible ways in which the work privileges of educated workers are eroded” (Larson, 1980, p. 133). Barney and Deutsch (2017) went on to say that intensification “compels the reduction of time within the working day when no surplus is produced” (p. 368). For teachers, there is simply not enough time in a given school day to get all of their work done without time to plan. The lack of planning time for teachers is a prime example of intensification. Another challenge to teachers is the lack of resources for purposeful planning. Teachers all across the state of Minnesota purchase supplemental learning materials every year out of their own pockets. Lastly, teachers face the challenge of lack of training in understanding and implementing curriculum effectively. When there is a lack of professional development in the area of curriculum and administration, teachers may not feel prepared to instruct.

Conclusion

Within classrooms across Minnesota, there are bound to be English Language Learners (ELLs). The ELL population continues to grow year after year, yet ELLs are still faced with lingering challenges. ELLs are faced with many adversities in school, and educators are responsible for ensuring that these students have opportunities to display
their strengths and assets in school. One way to do this is to discuss the research and strategies that are proven to help ELLs in school. Within this chapter, ELL literacy skills, essential writing curriculum components, and thematic-based learning were discussed. The reality is that ELLs come to school with varying literacy levels, and teachers have to work to investigate how to best meet the needs of these students. Two ways to help combat the adversities that ELLs face is through direct reading comprehension and writing instruction through thematic-based learning. Through these topics that were discussed, the research question that is being focused on is: How might a writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?

Keeping research in mind, I plan to create an ELL Writing Curriculum plan for first grade students. Chapter Three describes the methods I will use to create this curriculum, as well as background information about my school. The curriculum will be a 3-week unit using thematic-based lessons, which will incorporate ELL literacy skills and essential writing curriculum components-all which were thoroughly researched and discussed in chapter two.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter Overview

In Chapter Two, the research that was explored revolved around the following question: *How might a first grade writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners’ (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?* Chapter Three outlines the plans for the execution of my capstone project, which has the goal of finding out answers to this research question. I will be creating a first grade ELL writing curriculum unit plan that incorporates first grade Minnesota state writing standards and WIDA standards. The creation of this writing curriculum is extremely relevant within my classroom because currently, my students do not have access to a formal writing curriculum, along with time to explore and practice their writing abilities. With a heavy emphasis on the subject of reading, writing is sadly lost within the classroom. The larger issue here is not to dispose of reading instruction, but to ensure that writing instruction is happening within the classroom daily. The good news is that reading and writing can both be incorporated into daily instruction, even simultaneously.
My curriculum unit plan will follow a thematic-based curriculum model that will allow students to perform both reading and writing skills, along with listening and speaking language skills. The goal of this project is to create a successful curriculum that will demonstrate how the purposeful teaching of writing and performance can aid in students’ reading comprehension abilities. Research shows that “When students write about material that they read, their comprehension about it enhances” (Graham & Hebert, 2011, p. 733). Furthermore, directly teaching writing has a positive effect on improving reading (Graham & Hebert, 2011). With a thorough unit plan provided, teachers can implement this curriculum into their daily schedules, allowing students the access they deserve to direct writing instruction and practice.

First, this chapter will discuss the intended school and participants in which this curriculum will be implemented. Topics such as the demographics and assessment information of the participants will be explored. Next, the curriculum structure and execution will be explained. The structure of the curriculum is based on backward design, and the way in which I plan to instruct and evaluate my students will be mentioned as well. Lastly, the design models of the curriculum will be discussed. The first model is the Sheltered English Immersion Model, and the second is Thematic-Based Instruction.

**The Setting and the Students**

I will be implementing this curriculum within the charter school in north Minneapolis at which I currently work. Our school serves over 600 students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. Over 20% of the student population are English Language Learners with 89% of the total student population qualifying for free and
reduced lunch. Almost all of our English Language Learners’ first language is Somali. Based on demographic trends from the 2018-2019 school year, our school served 270 ELLs. During the 2019-2020 school year, I serviced 26 ELLs. Twelve of these students had an English reading proficiency level of 1 (English language proficiency is measured on a scale from 1-6 with 1 being the lowest level of proficiency and 6 being the highest), one student was at a reading level 2, four students were at a reading level 3, and the remaining students were at a reading level of 4 or above. With that said, almost half of my students were at the lowest English proficiency reading level, which is troubling.

The intended setting of instruction will be in two different first grade classrooms. Each classroom will have 20-30 students, with a majority of students being ELL students (~90%). I will be leading a 20-30 minute block of time that is strictly dedicated to my writing curriculum implementation every day. I will lead this as a whole group. My unit will cover a two-week time span in all.

The participants in my project will be my first grade ELL students. I will be directly teaching, evaluating, and assessing them. I will also include the classroom teacher(s). I will introduce my plans, ask them to support in certain areas as needed, and encourage input.

**Curriculum Structure and Execution**

The first grade writing curriculum will be planned during the summer of 2020. This curriculum will be aligned with Minnesota state writing standards and WIDA standards. I am designing this curriculum because my students currently do not have
access to writing curriculum or direct writing instruction during the school day. I also 
want to investigate how this curriculum can benefit ELLs’ reading comprehension skills.

I will implement the curriculum during the 2020-2021 academic school year. I 
will lead the implementation of the curriculum and the classroom teacher will support my 
instruction as needed. Since I am creating the curriculum and am an ELL teacher, I would 
like to lead this project.

In order to evaluate my students’ written work, I will have writing checklists that 
both my students and I will use each unit. The purpose of using checklists is to ensure 
that my students are capturing both content and language objectives in their writing. 
Since I am also focusing on reading comprehension skills, I will be incorporating reading 
comprehension checklists as well. Within the curriculum, I will be using the first grade 
Minnesota state writing standards (see Table 3) and WIDA Standards 1,2,4, and 5. 
The WIDA Standards are:

- Standard 1: Social and Instructional Language
- Standard 2: Language of Language Arts
- Standard 3: Language of Mathematics
- Standard 4: Language of Science
- Standard 5: Language of Social Studies

Curriculum Design Model

Along with using the Minnesota state writing and WIDA standards, I will be 
following two models of curriculum instruction that are favorable to ELLs. The first 
model is the Sheltered English Immersion Model, and the second is Thematic-Based
Instruction. Instruction to the students will be in the least restrictive area (their classroom) and will cover multiple content areas.

First, a Sheltered English Immersion Model accompanies the idea that both direct English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and content instruction are used simultaneously. Sheltered instruction (SI) is “an approach for teaching content to English learners (ELLs) in strategic ways that make the subject matter concepts comprehensible while promoting the students’ language development” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 10). Krashen introduced this concept of teaching in the 1980s, calling it “subject matter teaching” (as cited in Rodriguez, 2010). The overall idea is to develop and implement content-area material while keeping ELLs and their language development at the forefront throughout the entire process. This model is directed at general education teachers, however, I will be using Thematic-Based Instruction.

Second, Thematic-Based Instruction will be used throughout my unit plans. The central idea for this model is to use units of instruction that are based on themes or topics that are not isolated to one area of content. For example, I plan to teach both reading and writing domains using the same topic as the central theme. Cunningham (2010) noted that students are able to make real-world connections, and build their schema (p. 35). Furthermore, this learning promotes their higher order thinking skills and students are able to transfer their knowledge from one content area to another (Cunningham, 2010, p. 35).

On the first day of instruction, I will tap into the students’ background knowledge on the lesson theme/topic. I will ask questions such as: Have you heard of this [topic]
before? When did you hear of it? I will incorporate multiple other speaking activities
during this first lesson to allow for students to engage with each other and the new topic.
There will always be a text that goes along with each topic that I will refer to often, and
that the students will eventually read. The second day of the unit will consist of
pre-teaching vocabulary words (the words will be from the focus text) and the reading
comprehension strategy that the students will be using when they read the text on day
three. Both components (vocabulary and reading comprehension strategy) will help
students when it comes time to do their written assessment on day five. Again, I will
facilitate multiple activities that focus on new vocabulary and the focused reading
comprehension strategy.

On the fourth day of instruction, students will read the focus text. We will first
preview the text, identify the author’s purpose for writing the text and the genre, identify
key vocabulary words, and discuss the text throughout. Students will then plan out their
writing, which helps students consider and organize their thoughts, a writing guideline
that Horwitz (2008) suggested that teachers should follow. This will prepare students to
then write their final sentences or paragraphs, which will be the CEPA on day five of the
lesson sequence. When teachers increase opportunities for students to write, “there is a
positive carryover effect on how well typically developing students in grades 1-6 read”
(Graham & Hebert, 2011, p. 735). On day five of the lesson sequence, students will
complete their CEPA, a written performance assessment. A checklist will accompany
their written work that they are encouraged to use and follow. The checklist will function
as a rubric for grading. Ultimately, the CEPA will be crafted with two goals in mind:
“...the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the development of academic language” (WIDA Focus on Formative Assessment, 2009, p. 1).

The vital components of the unit plans will be the reading and writing activities. Graham and Hebert (2011) suggested writing about texts that students read, which can facilitate reading comprehension, and that is what students will be doing. Students will then have an opportunity to read their sentences to their classmates. As an example, I have provided a 5-day lesson sequence (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

5 Day Lesson Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1 Focus: Prior Knowledge</th>
<th>Day 2 Focus: Pre-teach Vocab &amp; Reading Comprehension Strategy</th>
<th>Day 3 Focus: Read text &amp; Discussion</th>
<th>Day 4 Focus: Writing Planning</th>
<th>Day 5 Focus: Written CEPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Objective:</strong> Students will learn about who a community worker is.</td>
<td><strong>Content Objective:</strong> Students will complete a vocabulary worksheet. <strong>Language Objective:</strong> Students will discuss who a community worker is using sentence stems and target vocabulary.</td>
<td><strong>Content Objective:</strong> Students will read a text and discuss it. <strong>Language Objective:</strong> Students will recount information from a text using sentence stems and vocabulary.</td>
<td><strong>Content Objective:</strong> Students will create a plan for writing. <strong>Language Objective:</strong> Students will write sentences about community workers using sentence stems and target vocabulary.</td>
<td><strong>Content Objective:</strong> Students will write about community workers. <strong>Language Objective:</strong> Students will describe how community workers contribute to their communities using sentence stems and vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WIDA Standard:</strong></td>
<td><strong>WIDA Standard:</strong></td>
<td><strong>WIDA Standard:</strong></td>
<td><strong>WIDA Standard:</strong></td>
<td><strong>WIDA Standard:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I plan to use backward-design as I begin my curriculum. Backward-design dates back to 1948, in which Ralph Tyler advocated this approach as effective for instruction (Wiggins, 2011). This design follows three stages: “identify desired results, determine acceptable evidence, and plan learning experiences and instruction accordingly” (Wiggins, 2011, p. 8). First, I will organize the Minnesota state writing standards and WIDA standards. I will then come up with the objectives and assessments that I plan to use to measure both students’ writing and reading comprehension skills. Lastly, I will plan my lessons that will be in my unit of instruction. I have provided an example of the scope of one week of my unit plan (see Table 6).

### Table 6

#### Weekly Unit Plan Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic #</th>
<th># of Instruction days</th>
<th>Vocab Words</th>
<th>Reading Comprehension Focus</th>
<th>Writing Focus</th>
<th>Key Use Function</th>
<th>CEPA Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tier 2, 3 words</td>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Complete a plan for writing &amp; write a paragraph</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Students will describe…(this will be dependent on the topic)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Chapter Three described the outline and methodology of the writing curriculum plans that I will be implementing with my first grade students. In addition, the participants and setting in which this curriculum will be implemented were explained. In Chapter Four, the main research question will be answered: How might a writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners (ELLs) reading comprehension skills? I will reflect on the outcomes of my project, the challenges that I encountered, and implications for the future.
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Chapter Overview

With a lack of structured first grade writing curriculum present within the classrooms that I teach in, I chose to create my own curriculum for my capstone project. In creating this curriculum, I hoped to answer the following research question: How might a first grade writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners’ (ELLs) reading comprehension skills? My curriculum consists of three separate units, each unit containing 5 lessons each, for a total of three weeks of instruction. The curriculum follows both Sheltered English Immersion and Thematic-based instruction models.

Within chapter four, I reflect on my capstone experience. To begin, I write about how I plan to communicate my results. Next, I discuss my major learnings as I progressed through the different stages of creating my capstone project. After that, I revisit the literature review, naming influential research that informed my work. Lastly, I discuss further implications for my project and how it can be used to benefit the field of education.

Communicating Results
This fall, I will implement my curriculum with my first grade ELL students. The intended execution of this project was to teach this curriculum in a whole group setting within the classroom, but that might not be possible. If instruction is online because of COVID 19, I will edit my lessons to fit the virtual platform, which is something I did this spring with a couple of my units. If online, teaching these lessons require virtual synchronous meetings, and using the platform administration decides for uploading lessons and materials.

All of the lessons will be available on our ELL team’s google drive account, so any member of the team can access these lessons whenever they would like. I will also share the units and lessons with the first grade general education teachers if requested.

**Major Learnings**

After completing the capstone project, I have learned many things about myself. Some of these things include how to be a better researcher, a more precise writer, and an open-minded learner. I have always enjoyed writing, yet I usually stress out while performing research. I am appreciative of the guidance I have received from both my professors and content reviewers throughout this process, enabling me to feel more confident as a researcher and to keep an open-mind.

As a researcher, I have learned to use resources in a smarter way. For instance, when researching online, I used to type one phrase in multiple search engines, leaving me feeling frustrated and impatient as I could not find what I was looking for. Through this capstone process, I learned to use a phrase in search engines, skim through the article, and go to the reference list to see if other authors had more relevant information that I
was looking for. A lot of the resources I used online came from authors that I found from reading through reference lists. Another tool as a researcher that I learned was that I do not need to reinvent the wheel. For example, instead of spending hours researching online in different databases, I was able to use resources that I already had on hand from previous Hamline classes that I had taken. I am glad I kept all of my books and notes because they definitely came in hand when I was completing my research.

As a writer, I learned how to be more precise through this capstone process. After going through and making multiple revisions to my paper, I made sure to include quotes from researchers that I found most relevant to my project. I also had to make sure to paraphrase many of the quotes that I included. As a writer, I have always had trouble including too many quotes and not paraphrasing enough, so I really tried to refine my work as much as possible. One of my professors at Hamline taught me that if I include a quote in my paper, I need to explain it, every time. By doing this, I think that the research I included was straightforward, allowing precision to be evident. Overall, it was very important to me that I only include necessary information, and that I was thorough when explaining pieces of information.

As a learner, there was one aspect that caught my attention. The research between the close relationship between reading and writing goes back decades. Murray, one of the authors I referenced in my project, produced work in 1973 about teaching writing and its importance. As a learner, I was surprised to find work that dated back that far, yet many schools still do not implement mandated writing curriculum within the classroom. Learning about how far we have come in education, and how far we still need to go
motivates me to continue to push for direct writing instruction within the school where I am teaching. Lastly, as I created my project, I learned that there is not finality in answering my research question. I am the type of person who likes final answers, not open-ended responses. Although I found a few different ways that writing can benefit reading comprehension, there is still so much I need to learn. Specifically, I want to continue to learn about reading and reading comprehension strategies. The beauty of this project is that I can continue to make edits as needed.

Each component of my major learnings has contributed to my educational experience at Hamline, and I feel even more prepared and motivated to teach and share my learnings with other educators around me.

**Literature Review**

Within my literature review, I found specific research that had a great influence on my work. The two topics of research that proved to be most important for my work were using reading as a springboard for writing (Wright, 2015) and using explicit reading instructional practices within my lessons (Robb, 2018).

While I was researching, I intentionally looked for work that was heavily focused on reading and reading instruction. While that may seem odd as I created a writing curriculum, I wanted to have evidence that showed the impact of the relationship between reading and writing. Wright (2015) mentioned how reading could be used to support ELLs and their writing, and these suggestions were directly implemented into my writing curriculum. For example, I used this idea and incorporated it into my curriculum: “readings can provide background information and source material for students to write
about a specific topic” (Wright, 2015, p. 227). Each unit I created had a focus text that
provided my students with background information that my students can use in their
writing.

Another impactful resource I found while researching was the explicit reading
instructional practices that I learned about in one of my courses at Hamline (Robb, 2018).
Within my review, I included a table that had eight steps for explicit reading instruction
(See Table 2, p.20). In step 5, students are to be given multiple ways to practice the
reading strategy. I have never done this in my instruction before, and I thought that this
was critical. For some students, a strategy does not make sense if you only give them one
example of how to use it. Within my lessons, I made sure to include opportunities for my
students to practice each targeted strategy.

Overall, the impact of the research I completed within the literature review helped
solidify understandings I already had about the relationship between reading and writing,
but also helped push me to be more creative and intentional in my lessons. My goal was
to find literature that helped me better understand reading comprehension and strategies,
and I feel that I did just that. Before conducting research, I did not have a good grasp on
reading comprehension and strategies, but now I feel as though I have a solid foundation
that I can continue to explore in the future.

Limitations

After completing my project, I feel as though there are a few limitations that need
to be noted. I have two specific limitations in mind: not covering all of the Minnesota
first grade writing standards and teaching my lessons in a whole group setting.
As mentioned multiple times throughout my paper, I planned to incorporate all seven of the Minnesota first grade writing standards into my curriculum. I ended up using three, one in each of my three units. While I was motivated to somehow include all of the standards in three weeks of plans, I did not find that I could do it while I was in the process of creating the curriculum. I wanted to make sure that I was creating realistic expectations for both myself and my students, so I found 3 standards to be appropriate. I am sure that another educator could incorporate the remaining four standards into the lessons that I have already created. Unfortunately, I did not do so.

Another limiting factor I reflected on was the implementation of the lessons in a whole group setting. As instruction may be online this Fall, I planned for these lessons to be used in a classroom setting of 20-30 students, face to face. As I usually teach small groups of 4-6 students, many of my plans reflected some of the practices I already use. All in all, my lessons may need to be edited to fit an online platform, as well as be more whole-group friendly.

Although these limitations were both avoidable and unavoidable, I see these as learning opportunities for myself.

**Implications**

For me, I think that there are many implications of my project. One implication that I have continuously reflected on is making direct writing instruction and curriculum mandatory in every classroom in Minnesota.

As I mentioned in my literature review, it is evident that there is a positive correlation between reading and writing. Creating writing opportunities based off of
material read can help students become better writers and readers (Graham & Hebert, 2011). Yet, there is a lack of structured writing curriculum within classrooms today. Many students, including mine, do not have designated formal writing instruction during the school day. This is problematic because students are not prepared to take on daunting writing assignments as they get older and progress through the school system. Even beyond that, writing can affect a person’s career and success. If there was more emphasis placed on writing in schools, perhaps students’ assets and creativity could shine, let alone help them in their reading journeys.

In relation to my project, I would love to track how well my students are doing in reading after implementing this writing curriculum. As of right now, our school uses the Fountas and Pinnell (F & P) guided reading program to track students’ reading levels. It would be great if there was an alignment between my curriculum and the F & P fluency and comprehension tracking. Perhaps another graduate student could explore this relationship more thoroughly in the future!

Benefits

This project has many benefits to the profession. First, it provides first grade teachers a structured writing curriculum that is aligned with both the Minnesota first grade writing standards and the WIDA standards. Therefore, teachers are able to meet both state and ELL standards in one unit, rather than creating different units for different standards. Second, this project will help emphasize the importance of writing and could change the way teachers, coaches, principals, and districts think about how they can restructure curriculum to incorporate writing into every content area. Lastly, and most
importantly to me, this curriculum meets the needs of ELLs. It meets the needs of ELLs through teaching content and language simultaneously. Creating opportunities for ELLs to express their ideas through writing is critical. Building this foundation early for ELLs is essential to their success in their school experience.

**Conclusion**

Chapter four focused on my reflections throughout the capstone process. Throughout this process, I hoped to find an answer to my research question: *How might a first grade writing curriculum benefit English Language Learners’ (ELLs) reading comprehension skills?* Although there were limiting factors that occurred during the creation of this project, I feel as though the implications and benefits were notable. Through communicating my results, discussing my learnings, and revisiting the literature review, chapter four encapsulated my reflections on my process of the capstone project.
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