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Using A Functional Language Approach To Modify Guided Reading For English Language Learners

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USING A FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE APPROACH
TO MODIFY GUIDED READING
FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

Kristen A. Young

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

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
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To my family and especially my partner in adventure and life, Thomas King. Thank you for your encouragement and for supporting me through this process. Thank you to my mother and father for your encouragement and keeping me moving forward. Special thanks to my Capstone Committee and especially Ann Mabbott. I couldn’t have done this without all your support!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a young English Second Language (ESL) teacher, I was sent out into schools to teach and found I was being asked to teach reading in many situations. I went to professional development and I decided to get an additional reading license. In one of my classes, another teacher much like myself, shared with the class an article he found on modifying guided reading (Avalos, Plascencia, Chavez & Rascon, 2007) for English learners (ELs). It outlined a few new methods to teach ELs to read by supporting vocabulary and changing how text is introduced to the reader.

ELs do not always know how a language should sound because they are just learning it. A lesson with a modified guided reading (MGR) approach begins with the teacher reading the text aloud to the students first so they can hear what it should sound like when read by a native speaker. I took merely this piece of the approach and began trying this with my kindergartners. They loved it! I had one student in particular who was so excited she pretty much did a happy dance each time we had a reading group together. I was able to share more advanced texts with them going above the typical instructional level and the growth and motivation I saw was amazing. I knew there was something to this and so, I wanted to know more.

Since 1996, the population of ELs in Minnesota has more than doubled (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2008). With our schools being held to federally mandated
standardized tests (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001 and Every Child Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2016) and more schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress (improving standardized test scores from year to year), attention has turned to the populations of students who are struggling, including many ELs. Of the populations of students that consistently have scores which are ranked as not making adequate yearly progress, the limited English proficient population is one of the populations that has consistently not made the progress according to No Child Left Behind (Minnesota Department of Education report card, 2010). These students need help to learn to read and to learn English. The current balanced literacy model (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) of teaching reading is just not good enough for ELs; they need a combination of reading instruction and English language instruction in order to catch up to their peers and fully acquire the ability to fluently read in English (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez & Rascon, 2007). This chapter talks about the issues surrounding teaching reading and language to ELs in guided reading groups.

**ELs and Guided Reading**

The current model for teaching literacy that my district is using is the balanced literacy model (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). This model includes teaching reading strategies, phonics, read-alouds, word work and guided reading. Guided reading is weekly small group instruction of groups of 3-6 students who are heterogeneously grouped according to need. The students meet with their teacher to read books that are at their instructional reading level and when they are not with the teacher they are working in different stations in the room doing other literacy related activities. It is a fantastic opportunity for teachers to differentiate their teaching to the specific needs of the diverse
learners in their classes. Station time has also doubled as a time for specialists to come work with their students at a time when they will not be missing other instruction from the classroom teacher. As the ESL teacher, I work with ELs in guided reading groups just as the classroom teacher does during this time, but the current model for teaching guided reading needs to be crafted for ELs.

A typical guided reading lesson includes a pre-reading, guided reading and post-reading activities. The pre-reading usually includes looking at the title, cover and pictures on the pages of the book and a discussion of what the book might be about. Then the teacher hands the books to the students and they read them quietly as the teacher coaches them in decoding words and fluency, and this is called guided reading. At the end, the teacher might ask some follow up questions to check for comprehension, and they might do some other phonics or word work activities if there is time (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

ELs have language needs that native speakers do not have. When native speakers read their text, they will indirectly learn new words and language structures that remain inaccessible to ELs (Avalos, Plascencia, Chavez & Rascon, 2007). A pilot study done by Avalos, et al. on a modified approach to guided reading lesson for ELs is what sparked my investigation into the effectiveness of current strategies in teaching guided reading to ELs. In my experience, ELs need more language instruction and direct teaching of vocabulary in order to comprehend the text and internalize the structures they are being exposed to. Without more support than the current model provides, they will continue to struggle.
**Functional Language Approach**

I first learned about the functional language approach to language while I was attending a professional development session on academic language functions presented by Sarah Clyne (2006). She presented her work on academic language functions and their alignment to thinking maps. As I listened, it made complete sense to me. A functional language approach is one that focuses on the use of language and this can add more meaning and context to language instruction (Derewianka, 1990). In my opinion, the best way to teach academic English. The functional language approach is concerned with how real language is used for real purposes. The functional language approach brings out the academic English that is used in the Cognitive Academic Learning Language Approach (CALLA) with the real-world applications (Derewianka, 1990) that my districts seeks to bring to all of its students. I know I am using the functional language approach when I start language lesson planning with the question, “What do I want my students to be able to do with the language?”

**Role of the Researcher**

During this study, I was an ESL teacher working with third graders in a suburban school in the Midwest. I teach guided reading in the mainstream classroom during the balanced literacy time and I work with ELs in guided reading groups of (hopefully) 3-6 students at least 3 or more times a week. As their teacher, I was an active participant in the study and conducted action research.

**Background of the Researcher**

I have been teaching ESL at the elementary level for the last five years. Because of the economy and the mobility of the population, I have also had three teaching
assignments in three different districts. Because of the federal mandates in reading and the consequential standardized testing, most of my job assignments as an ESL teacher have centered around teaching ELs how to read.

As a new teacher, I felt I knew how to teach language but very little of my studies in college focused on how to teach a child to read. Most of my training in this area had been on the job. As I began to teach ELs in guided reading groups either in or out of the classroom, I was reminded more and more that I needed to teach more than just reading to meet the students’ needs. They were not just learning to read; they were learning a new language as well. Therefore, my question has been and continues to be, what is the best way to teach ELs to read.

Guiding Questions

Through my reflections on my experiences teaching ELs to read, I have come upon the following unanswered questions:

- How can I modify the standard methods of teaching guided reading to better meet the language needs of non-native speakers?
- What adjustments need to be made to include the teaching of academic language functions with guided reading instruction?

Summary

This study is focused on effective modifications for ELs during guided reading. I want to find out how to adapt guided reading instruction so the ELs are taught the language and vocabulary they need to make meaning from the text. I will see whether there will be an increase in comprehension and growth in reading level. More effective teaching is important since ELs need to show more than a year’s growth in a school year
in order to catch up to their peers (Collier and Thomas, 1999) and reading is key to academic success in all content areas. Teaching guided reading is also required as part of my instructional responsibilities and the current methods for teaching it do not effectively address the needs of English language learners. I want to know how I can increase and encourage my students’ reading skills.

**Chapter Overviews**

In Chapter One, I introduced my research by establishing the purpose, significance and need for the study. There is a brief introduction of the context of the study as well an introduction of the role, assumptions and biases of the researcher. The background of the researcher was provided. In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the literature relevant to the modifications of guided reading for ELs and how the current guided reading model can be adapted to better meet the needs of ELs. Chapter Three includes a description of the research design and methodology that guides this study. In Chapter Four, there is a presentation of the results of this study. In Chapter Five, I reflect on the data collected. I also discuss the limitations of the study, implications for further research and recommendations for teaching guided reading to ELs.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of guided reading instruction that includes specific modifications for English learners (ELs). In the elementary school where I taught this year, I taught guided reading groups with third-grade ELs who are struggling and below grade level readers. These students are also not likely to score proficient on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment tests for reading to be given in the spring. Throughout this study, I provided modified guided reading instruction with a functional language approach in the context of a reading program to a group of beginning and intermediate level ELs, and measured the effects on overall reading performance. Therefore, my ultimate goal is to determine if the modifications made to guided reading instruction can help elementary ELs achieve the gains they need to make to be competitive with their native-speaking peers.

This chapter presents an overview of how and why we need to modify guided reading and use a functional language approach and its components for ELs. There is a short definition of oral, social language skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). A functional language approach is defined and its relation to the development of CALP. Finally, the research on modified guided reading and its effect on overall reading proficiency, and the need for research in the effectiveness of the approach described is shown.
Teaching Reading in a Second Language: How Should It Be Done?

There are disagreements about when reading instruction should begin for ELs. Some researchers say that ELs are generally not ready to begin reading instruction in English until they are at the intermediate stage of language acquisition (Knox & Amador-Watson, 2002). Most advocate that reading and a second language are best acquired simultaneously (Anderson & Roit, 1998; Barrera, 1983).

Collier and Thomas (1999) find that ELs who receive support in their first language can take from four to seven years to achieve 50th normal curve equivalents in English reading and seven to ten years if support in the native language is not provided. Slavin and Cheung (2005) conducted a review of studies comparing bilingual and English-only programs. Only 17 studies met the criteria for their study, but of those studies the majority of them say that a bilingual approach to reading instruction for ELs is better. However, it also finds that paired bilingual strategies for teaching reading simultaneously in the first and second languages appear the most successful approach. They conclude that more longitudinal studies with randomized designs are needed to find out how to approach reading instruction for ELs.

More recently, a longitudinal study is being conducted in North Carolina Public schools by Thomas, Collier and Collier (2010). A report of this study in its second year, finds that for ELs, students of color and students of low socio-economic status (SES) have higher end-of-year test scores in both reading and math. While an achievement gap still exists for African American native English speaking students and for students of low
SES, the findings show that this gap is smaller when the students participate in a dual-language education (Collier et al, 2010).

In working with ELs at all grade levels, Avalos et al (2007) finds that the key to determining readiness appears to be the student's reading level in their first language, indicating the importance of L1 literacy assessment to guide L2 instruction. Usually if a student is a proficient reader in the L1, then the process of reading is something ELs already know how to do (Heath, 1983; Krashen, 1985). With proper support and scaffolding, students in the early L2 acquisition stages can be successful L2 readers (Anderson & Roit, 1998; Barrera 1983.) My experience is that the more proficient a student is in their L1, the easier time the student will have with the transition to their L2. However, according to Avalos et al (2007), the students who were struggling in the L1 also made gains using the Modified Guided Reading (MGR) approach. MGR is the approach is described in more detail in chapter 3.

Although the literature indicates that bilingual education would be valuable for my students, they come from too many language backgrounds to make it a practical option. Therefore, I will try the Modified Guided Reading (MGR) approach which Avalos eta al. (2007) claims will help students who are struggling in the L1 to make gains in reading in their L2.

**Combining Language Instruction with Literacy**

There are two pragmatic levels of language that ELs learn. The language used to socially communicate is often referred to as basic interpersonal conversation skills (BICS). The other kind of language has been defined as academic language or the language of texts and schooling (Zwiers, 2006), and this is referred to as cognitive
academic language proficiency (CALP). While BICS can be acquired by ELs during guided reading and other interactive activities, CALP will be acquired more quickly when language needs are considered for instruction as well. In a study by Collier & Thomas (1999), BICS takes two to three years to develop and CALP can take five to seven. A student with a high amount of BICS and low CALP is generally at what some would say the intermediate level, and still requires academic language support from the teacher.

**A Functional Language Approach.** In order to support CALP, teachers need to focus on the literacy *and* language needs when planning guided reading instruction. Learning must first be meaningful. There are times when ELs, who have learned to decode text very well are still challenged with their fluency and comprehension because decoding skills do not require making any sense of the words being called out. A way of focusing on both literacy and language is a functional one. A functional language approach to language includes a focus on the use of real language for real purposes (Derewianka, 1990). There should be definite emphasis on meaning and how language is used to make meaning (Derewianka, 1990). The basic definition of a language function is what a person does with the language. The emphasis is on the “do”. What are you asking students to do with the language? According to Derewianka (1990), language enables us to share information, enquire, express attitudes, entertain, argue, get our needs met, reflect, construct ideas, order our experiences and make sense of the world. More specifically according to Chamot and O’Malley (1994), there are eleven basic academic language functions which students use to help them comprehend text and content at an academic level. These functions can vary but can enable students to explain information,
narrate a story and analyze facts or information. Each function has vocabulary, common questions, and tasks associated with it. A teacher should recognize when a function is being used and incorporate activities or a response to the reading using that specific language and vocabulary. Recognizing these functions helps to identify which language to teach or scaffold so the students can be successful and use the language with confidence and purpose.

**Language Development.** WIDA is an assessment company based out of the University of Wisconsin, Madison that has developed a comprehensive and standardized assessment to measure the language development of ELs. My study is aligned with the WIDA standards and theoretical framework because it is primarily informed by the functional view of language just as the standards and assessments of WIDA (WIDA Consortium, 2016). Using the context of a guided reading story to develop language skills for ELs corresponds with WIDA’s philosophy that language learning needs context. The standards and assessments developed by WIDA focus on the use of language in school and the expansion of ELs’ communication skills in making meaning from that language. It is from this language development framework that I plan to see whether my study is following best practice in developing the language of ELs.

**Vocabulary.** In order for students to understand what they are reading; they need to be familiar with most of the words in a text. Vocabulary knowledge is so important for beginning readers because they use their oral vocabulary to figure out and make sense of the printed words. EL readers need even more support, as they may be completely unfamiliar with the vocabulary, but also the associated words and concepts, (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Cappellini, 2006; and Roit, 2006). Within the functional
language approach, the emphasis on creating meaning implies that the use of decodable texts and books designed to build upon sight word memorization are not good choices for ELs because there are less opportunities to expand on the vocabulary due to the lack of meaning in the texts. According to Black (2005), the American Education Association recommends that having ELs rely on the memorization of new words has minimal effect. The recommendation is that the teaching of new vocabulary words then needs to be done in the context through conversations, stories, and other vocabulary building activities. Any EL reading program should allow for teachers to plan lessons with a functional language approach and can provide meaningful literary experiences.

One way to provide students with meaningful contexts is through bilingual methods of teaching help ELs learn vocabulary. Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) looked at the impact of reading aloud on second language acquisition using two methodologies: concurrent translation and preview-review. In the concurrent translation methodology, a story was read aloud in English while simultaneously translated into the students’ primary language. In the preview-review methodology, the key vocabulary words were previewed, with support from the students’ primary language, and then they were reviewed after the story was read aloud. They found that the children retained significantly more vocabulary using the preview-review method than the concurrent translation method. Pucci further explained that teachers can help students acquire vocabulary by helping them make meaning of the text in the target language. I am not using bilingual methods of teaching vocabulary because I do not want kids translating the language because that method is less efficient than others (Krashen, 1985). I will instead test whether guided reading modified to teach language can be used.
Collocations and phrases. A rather entertaining student I have worked with was victorious in a math game and he proudly stated, “I beat you up, Ms. Young!” This is an example of an error made with a collocation. The phrases “to beat up” and “to beat (in a game)” have entirely different meanings. ELs need explicit instruction in these areas. Celce-Murcia (1991) defines collocation as a co-occurrence of lexical items in combinations which can differ in frequency or acceptability. Words that appear more frequently with each other are called ‘habitual’, e.g. *tell a story, whereas those which cannot co-occur are called ‘unacceptable’, e.g. *powerful tea instead of strong tea.

Support for vocabulary in these areas can greatly support reading comprehension for ELs as well as avoid confusion.

Other phrases need to be explicitly taught as well. Derewianka also refers to linking words in the functional language approach to teaching the language of text or writing. I recognized these immediately as transition words as my school teaches them in the Write From the Beginning curriculum (Buckner, J. & S. Ed, 2000). There are certain words and phrases in text that ELs need to learn to extend and provide connectivity throughout their writing.

ELs also need to be able to recognize and interpret passive voice in non-fiction texts. A text in the Reading A to Z (Reading A – Z, n.d.) my district subscribes to has a lesson that is embedded into a guided reading lesson specifically for ELs. This lesson explicitly taught the forms of the verb “be” and the past participle constructions that learners need to understand in order to identify the passive voice in a text. These are verb phrases where the subject of the sentence is the not the doer of the action in the sentence. The teacher reference guide says that the passive voice occurs with the action of the
sentence is more important than the doer and the construction can be identified with the verb “be” plus the past participle e.g. *The land mines were found by HEROrats.*

**Text structure.** Students need to be familiar with the vocabulary they encounter in the different genres or text structures in order to comprehend it. Text structure refers to the manner in which the author has chosen to organize his or her text. Expository and narrative texts follow predictable patterns and it is well documented that a student’s familiarity with text structure can increase an EL’s comprehension, appreciation and recall of a text, when they are given explicit instruction on English text structures (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Derewianka, 1990; Williams, 2005).

A student’s knowledge of text structure improves reading skills. Derewianka (1990) and Williams (2005) both did studies that showed students made gains in reading comprehension when students were explicitly instructed about the structure of the text they were reading. Derewianka’s functional language approach to teaching was derived from the text structures across the genres that she teaches including recounts, instructions, narratives, information reports, explanations and arguments. She found an increase in the student comprehension of texts when they were familiar with the functional vocabulary and structures of English texts. Williams also showed that along with the gain in reading comprehension, they were able to transfer the skills to other texts with the same structure. Another study conducted by Williams et al. (2005) investigated the effectiveness of teaching second graders text structures with clue words, questions, and graphic organizers. The results indicated improved comprehension as well as the ability to transfer the skills to new texts.
In summary, the combination of explicit pre-teaching of vocabulary and text structures within a functional language approach to language has been shown to increase the comprehension of texts and the students’ overall ability to connect meaning to what they have read. The opportunities to extend the use of the language beyond the text will also help the students make gains in comprehension and transfer of knowledge to other contexts and academic areas.

**The Modified Guided Reading Approach (MGR)**

According to a pilot study by Avalos et al (2007), Modified Guided Reading (MGR) adds to the systematic and open-ended framework that is provided by guided reading. Instead of one or two 20-30 minute lessons per text, MGR’s approach is to stretch it into three or more 20-30 minute lessons per text. In the MGR approach the teacher adds a shared reading first so language learners can hear how the text should sound, and as the teacher models fluency, the students can ask questions about vocabulary and gain some comprehension of the text. The word work in the MGR also has a focused emphasis on morphological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics which are also connected to the text. When teaching ELs, it is also important to keep in mind all four modalities of language; listening, speaking, reading and writing, all of which need to be integrated into lessons and MGR does this as well. Above all else, the MGR approach makes the text meaningful for the students. MGR’s explicit focus on text structure and vocabulary helps students make meaning as they listen to, independently read and finally apply and extend new vocabulary throughout the lessons. The application of new text at the end of the lesson either orally or in writing is an important and often overlooked part of the approach. It strikingly mirrors Krashen’s (1985) model
of planning for language teaching of into, through, and beyond which I have found most effective in newcomer or foreign language teaching contexts. The lesson model that Krashen uses for teaching language has three parts. The first part he calls into and this is the student’s initial exposure to the language where it’s use is modeled with examples that the students can receive as input. The second stage is called through, and in this stage the students practice using the target language that was modeled in the first phase. The third stage is called beyond. This stage is where a student is asked to produce the language in an activity that guides the student to apply the language they have just practiced using.

Avalos and her colleagues (2007) describe the planning and teaching of MGR and the major differences between Guided Reading and Modified Guided Reading (See Table 1). There are seven basic modifications described in the study that I have started to implement in my teaching and planning and I continue them in my action research.
To begin planning it is important to read and to analyze the text. The teacher should pick two to three receptive (CALP) and five to nine productive (BICS) vocabulary words (Avalos et al. 2007). Vocabulary words can be BICS or CALP depending on the context they are used in. One also has to note any other things that the students might find confusing or difficult such as homophones, homographs, complex grammar and figurative language. The last thing is to make sure that you use an equal amount of expository and narrative text and take note of text structure as well as function of the text.

Table 1

*Guided Reading vs. Modified Guided Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guided reading</th>
<th>Modified Guided Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional cycle varies (one to two days, 20-30 min sessions)</td>
<td>Instructional cycle of three or more days (20-30 minute sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher presents the text through guided discussion connecting the content and language structure to students' personal lives (e.g. Picture walk, predicting)</td>
<td>Teacher presents the culturally relevant text through a guided discussion connecting the content and language structure to students' personal lives (e.g. Picture walk, predicting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent and early fluent readers vocalize softly as they read the text; fluent readers read silently</td>
<td>Teacher reads guided-reading text aloud to model fluency and generate discussions regarding comprehension and vocabulary guided by the teacher and students. ELs with higher English proficiency vocalize softly aloud as they read the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher coaches students by reinforcing correct strategies and prompting to problem solve during miscues.</td>
<td>Teacher observes and coaches students by reinforcing correct strategies and using word-recognition prompts to problem solve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word work focuses on phonological and orthographical awareness</td>
<td>Word work focuses on morphological awareness, phonemic awareness, or phonics connected to the guided reading text. Vocabulary journals and writing assignments connect to guided-reading texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Avalos et al. (2007)
The next step is introducing the text and building background knowledge (Avalos et al., 2007). The content may need to be scaffolded with pictures and descriptions of concepts that may be unfamiliar to the students. Scaffolding can include showing a video, looking at pictures, realia, using graphic organizers and showing maps. Sources for these include Discovery Education (n.d.), Google images (n.d.), and YouTube (n.d.).

After building background, it is time to introduce the text. The teacher can do the picture walk and make connections like usual. But then, instead of having the students read it to themselves, in the MGR approach the teacher reads the book in a shared reading before they read it quietly to themselves with coaching as needed. This is important for ELs, so they can hear what fluent reading of the text sounds like. They have to be able to hear it before they can say it.

The teacher closes by returning to the text and asking open-ended questions and discussing connections students made to enhance comprehension and generate dialogue (Avalos et al. 2007). It isn't always possible, but responding to the text and giving the students a chance to extend their use of the language learned in the lessons can be very beneficial to ELs. Including word work that is in the context of the text is also very beneficial. Working with new morphemes and doing some phonemic awareness and phonics activities helps them with their word solving skills.

The results of the MGR study of middle school students by Avalos, Plasencia, Chaves and Rascon were very positive. In nine months, a group of thirteen students gained an average of 1.8 grade levels reading in English, and in four months a group of ten students gained an average of 1.3 grade levels reading in English. Avalos et al. (2007) also reports that student perceptions of the approach were positive. They all
enjoyed participating in the intervention, they felt they had learned more about reading, writing and speaking English during the MGR sessions and they all agreed that they liked listening to the books when read aloud by the teacher and would like to continue using the MGR approach in instruction.

**Adding to Research (The Gap) and Research Questions**

As discussed in this chapter, modifications need to be made to adapt guided reading instruction for the specific needs of ELs with the functional language approach to teaching language. The current gap that exists in the field of literacy and ELs is currently being explored. My investigation of MGR will show if it is effective in increasing the reading proficiency of ELs in the inclusive setting of the mainstream classroom. I will use the functional language approach to present the text and the language features associated with the text. This is where the MGR approach and the functional language approach align somewhat. I will include a written response to the text that will serve as a language function performance target for the students to use that mirrors the language features found in the guided reading text. Avalos et al (2007) indicates in the research and pilot study that more extensive research is needed to show the extent of MGR’s effectiveness when instructing ELs. How can I modify the standard methods of teaching guided reading to better meet the language needs of non-native speakers? What adjustments do I have to make to include the teaching of academic language functions with guided reading instruction? I aim to explore these questions in my research.

**Summary**

This chapter began by looking into how and why we need to modify guided reading and its components for ELs. The literature highlights the main areas of struggle
for ELs and strategies for increasing student comprehension and reading proficiency. The literature indicates that there are a couple of approaches to teaching ELs literacy that can help them make gains in their reading proficiency. The modifications I will use for guided reading instruction will follow the model provided in the 2007 study by Mary Avalos, Alina Plasencia, Celina Chavez, and Josefa Rascon which I believe follows a functional language approach to language teaching and effectively combines the teaching of literacy and language in the model of guided reading lessons. Finally, the chapter closes by focusing on a modified approach to teaching guided reading for ELs that aims to combine language and literacy lessons that has shown to help students make significant gains in their reading proficiency. The next chapter presents the methodology for this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

English learners (ELs) need to learn to read and do it quickly to gain access to the academic curriculum they need to learn. They also need to learn the English language. This paper looks at modifications that can be made to traditional strategies used to teach guided reading in order to make them more effective for teaching ELs to read. In this study, I wanted to know:

• How can I modify the standard methods of teaching guided reading to better meet the language needs of non-native speakers?

• What adjustments do I have to make to include the teaching of academic language functions with guided reading instruction?

This chapter includes a discussion of methodology, the participants in the study, the tools used to collect data, and the steps in the action research process.

This study was designed to explore the modified guided reading approach (MGR) to teaching guided reading to ELs as described by Avalos et al (2007), and to incorporate the functional language approach as described by Derewianka (1990). To get a better picture of how well this method’s effectiveness, I used both reading scores from the Reading A to Z running records (n.d.) and from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (1996) to see if student performance improves as well as anecdotal notes which can show how the approach is effective. This study used a mixed methodology using both qualitative and quantitative data. Per an article by King and Mackey (2016) in
second language research, we often find ourselves in the debate between quantitative versus qualitative research like many social sciences. Using a mixed methods approach is one means to address that challenge of finding an approach along with measuring how the approach worked. The mixed methods approach is to use a mix of both methods or a mixed methodology.

Action research can typically be described as a four-step process which includes planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988 as cited in Burns, 2010). This action research study was done with two instructional cycles of four weeks. I matched the cycles to the topics, strategies or themes covered in collaboration with the classroom teacher as that is best practice. In these cycles, I did all the steps of action research which included instructing, assessing, reflecting on what happened, making changes or adjustments and then planning for a new cycle. I used action research cycles to plan lesson cycles using the Modified Guided Reading (MGR) with a functional language approach. In these cycles, I did all the steps of action research which included instructing, assessing, reflecting on what happened, making changes or adjustments and then planning for a new cycle. To collect data in these cycles, I created lesson plans that include the components of the approach I have used. I journaled about my planning and resulting observations about the lessons taught in each cycle. I planned my groups using language proficiency as part of the MGR approach using WIDA language proficiency data. I also measured each student’s reading level with running records prior to beginning the study and at the conclusion of each cycle.
Research Paradigm: Action Research

In the first phase, which is planning, a problem is identified and a plan of action is developed to improve the situation. The next phase, which is action, is where the interventions are carried out over a period of time. Then the observation phase is where researcher collects the data that indicates the effects of the action taken. The final phase and some would say one of the most important phases of action research, is the reflection. This is where the researcher evaluates the data in order to make sense of what happened during the intervention. More cycles of the research can be planned to improve the result, or the information of the results can be shared with others.

Burns (2010) identifies four kinds of reflection that can be useful in action research:

- reflecting on practice
- on the process
- on beliefs and values
- on feelings and experiences

Targeting questions for reflection on practice include:

- How did I select my actions to improve my classroom situation?
- Were the actions effective?
- Did I need to change them?

A question for reflection on the process might be:

- How did I use the data collected to illuminate what was working in the classroom?

For beliefs and values one might ask:
• How did my beliefs about teaching or learning affect the decisions I made as I did my research?

Reflecting on feelings and experiences is more personal. A question to answer might be:

• What were your personal reactions to the changes that resulted from your actions?

• Were they positive or negative?

After reflecting the final step is to plan for another cycle or share what was learned. Reflecting in action research can have a dramatic effect on the knowledge a teacher builds because of the systematic examination of their teaching and student learning.

The modifications I used for guided reading instruction followed the model provided in the 2007 study by Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, and Rascon, which combines the teaching of literacy and language in the model of guided reading lessons. I also used academic language functions to guide the written responses which will reflect the language features as in the functional language approach by Derewianka, 1990. I used lesson plan designs that follow this approach as shown in Figure 2 with modifications made for the addition of a language function activity or written response. I selected this approach in particular because of the success that I saw with my own students based on what was done by Avalos in the Modified Guided Reading approach. I did a small pilot study where I modified my own guided reading instruction to include pre-teaching of vocabulary and a shared reading with the students prior to the students reading the text independently. My pilot study also included using a text above the students’ instructional level. The students were happier to read with me after having heard the text read aloud and they were excited to read it on their own. I did not include a functional language
approach with a writing component at that time. I then used journaling and field notes to record the qualitative effects of this approach on the students’ attitude toward reading. Finally, to measure overall quantitative effect on student proficiency levels in reading I used running records to periodically benchmark each student’s reading level. Using the data in this way made the methodology mixed. By combining both techniques in a single study, I used mixed methods to capture some valuable information and data on my lessons.

1. Determine objective of lesson(s) based on instructional need.
   a. Determine main idea or essential message
   b. Read for information to use in performing a task or learning a new task
   c. Identify words and construct meaning from the text

2. Group students by name/WIDA level – instructional reading level

3. Select guided-reading books based upon objectives and students’ reading levels

4. Analyze the text and identify literacy challenges based upon your knowledge of the students.
   a. Semantics
      i. Vocabulary
         1. Focus on common English morphemes (e.g., affixes) or orthographic patterns.
         2. Identify two or three receptive vocabulary and five to nine words for productive vocabulary.
         3. Understand the meaning of the story whenever possible
      
      ii. Figurative language
      
      iii. Homophones (words that sound the same, different meanings)
         
         1. Homographs (words that are spelled the same, but have different meanings and origins)
         
   b. Grammar (complex syntax, verb tenses, adjective use)
c. Punctuation

d. Text structure (narrative, expository)

    I will use Derewianka’s (1990) work to guide this part.

e. Content or concept (cultural relevance)

f. Strategy instruction (if needed, or matched to mainstream strategy currently taught)

Extending the lesson(s) Here is where I will also include the functional language approach (Derewianka, 1990)

Word Work:

Writing:

Possible Mini-lessons:

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*Figure 1.* This lesson framework is adapted from Avalos, M. A., Plasencia, A., Chavez, C. & Rascon, J. (2007). Modified guided reading: Gateway to English as a second language and literacy learning. *Reading Teacher, 61*(4), 322.

**Functional Language Approach to MGR lesson planning framework**

This was an action research study with two instructional cycles of four weeks. In these cycles, I did all the steps of action research which included instructing, assessing, reflecting on what happened, making changes or adjustments and then planning for a new cycle. I matched the cycles to the topics, strategies or themes covered in collaboration with the classroom teacher as that is best practice. I used Action research cycles to plan lesson cycles using the MGR with a functional language approach. To collect data in these cycles, I created lesson plans and writing assignments that include the components of the approach I have used. I journaled about my planning and resulting observations
about the lessons taught in each cycle. I planned my groups using language proficiency as part of the MGR approach using WIDA language proficiency data. I also measured each student’s reading level with running records prior to beginning the study and at the conclusion of each cycle.

**Data Collection**

**The Context and Participants of the Study.** This study took place at a suburban K-5 elementary school in the Midwest. There are approximately 455 students in the school, 24.6% of the students are ELs, and 56% receives free and reduced lunch (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). The school is a Title One school and this refers to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which is legislation that was enacted to help fight poverty. This act mandates funds that are authorized for professional development, instructional materials, for resources to support educational programs, and for parental involvement promotion. Qualifying to be a Title One school means that more than half of the students in the school are low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) students.

This study was conducted during the guided reading part of the balanced literacy block for third grade. ESL teachers worked with small groups of students in the mainstream classroom. The study focused on the use of the MGR and functional language approach within the context of this guided reading inclusion model as it is taught to one or two guided reading groups of four to six students. The instruction was delivered in two cycles and for 20 minute lessons for an average of four times a week per text selected.
The students that participated in this study were all ELs, and they were from a sample of convenience. All the names were changed to protect confidentiality of the students.

The students selected for this study came from a variety of language backgrounds and were all in the 3rd grade. There were twelve students in all who participated in the reading groups. Of these twelve, two did not participate for the entire length of the study because they transferred schools. The core group included seven Somali speakers, one Hmong speaker, one Oromo speaker, and one Spanish speaker.

Each student in the study was assessed with the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading test by the school. This assessment is given to each student in the district and each student in this study showed an intensive need for reading instruction based on their scores on this assessment. It was a grade level team decision that the ELs who showed an intensive need according to our district’s scores and standards should receive extra reading and language support in a small group with the EL teacher.

**ACCESS data from WIDA.** Each EL in the study has current language proficiency scores from the WIDA ACCESS test. This test is standardized and gives us information on language proficiency for the four language domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Along with scores in those four modalities, students also receive an oral language score, a literacy score, and a score that is a composite of all four modalities. The scores are presented in six levels and they begin at a level one which is a newcomer to a level 6 or native speaker. This data is included in the following tables
along with the student’s reading level and language background. The students are all grouped according to reading level so they can read a similar level text.

**Table 2**

*Level A Reading Group (Group A)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Pre-reader</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

*Level D Reading Group (Group B)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4**

*Level M Reading Group (Group C)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Groups: Cycle one**

The study began with three reading groups and then in October it shifted from three groups to four with the addition of two new students whose data I will not include
here. The change in number of groups and group size took place as the second cycle of the action research began. I wanted to keep the reading groups to a small group number of 3 to 5 as that is effective practice for guided reading according to Fountas & Pinnell (1996).

**Group A.** Harry is a newcomer who had not attended school regularly until he arrived in the United States. As a third grader, he did not know all of his letter sounds at the beginning of the year and he could not read any sight words. His reading work was delivered one-to-one following this approach along with phonics and sight word interventions done at other times during the day to fill in other literacy gaps that he has because of missed schooling.

**Group B.** This group is two grade levels behind their peers and reading at a level for the beginning of 1st grade. One of the students, David, is identified for special education in speech. Another student, Alexander, is not able to see far distances, seldom wears the glasses he has just gotten, and is absent from school a lot. The other student, Oliver, is struggling with literacy as well, however; his oral language scores are quite high on the ACCESS test.

**Group C.** These students are one grade level to a half a grade level behind their peers in terms of reading leveled text. They often can read the words in front of them but are not able to comprehend the words they read. Vocabulary is a main concern for this group.
Reading Groups: Cycle 2

Group C was split into two groups because I needed to add two more students to our cycle. In order to keep things as a qualified small group, a Group D was formed. The following tables six, seven and eight reflects the changes to these two groups.

**Group C.** Oliver was moved up a group. His decoding skills took off from the beginning of the year and he was ready to move up. He was doing well and needed more of a challenge according to his running records and his comprehension of the texts he was reading. Katie, Natalie, Oliver and a new student, became part of the new group C.

**Group D.** Group D was then formed with Rachel, Sarah, Zack, Allen and the other new student. They score closer to grade level with their decoding skills and fluency, and yet continue struggle mostly with vocabulary and comprehension.

**Groups for second four-week cycle – updated reading levels**

Table 5

*Level B Reading Group (Group A)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Level D Reading Group (Group B)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Level H Reading Group (Group C)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Level N Reading Group (Group D)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>ACCESS Composite</th>
<th>ACCESS Reading</th>
<th>ACCESS Writing</th>
<th>ACCESS Speaking</th>
<th>ACCESS Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benchmark Assessment Systems, and Running Records.** I selected these assessments per what is currently being used by the school to gauge the reading proficiency of the students. I used the Reading A to Z benchmarks (n.d.) provided by my school to do a pre- and post-assessment of my students reading levels. The results will be presented in the results section.

I used Informal Reading Inventories (IRI) or running records at the end of each cycle to check on student’s text level and their overall progress. An IRI or running record is an assessment of a student’s accurate reading of a text. The student is asked to read a short text while the assessor listens and marks any errors that the student makes when they read. A proficiency score is made for the level of text the student reads and that
percentage of words read correctly can be used to determine if the student should advance to a higher level of text. A 98% accuracy rate is deemed as an independent level for the student and they can be moved to a higher level of text for instruction (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996.) This reading can be done on a text that student has not read before or on a familiar text that the student has already read. These included a comprehension questions to answer with the passage. The advantage of using of running records is their flexibility and ease of administration because they can be generated from any text and can be used to track progress over time (Burns, 2010). I have interpreted the scores for ELs based on current recommendations. I used the features of the Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs) that are described by Pergo and Boyle (2001) as beneficial to ELs. Accordingly, I also ignored miscues and mispronunciations that do not affect the meaning of the passage and are related to the child’s first language, especially dropped endings. I assessed prior knowledge before the passage was read, used multiple passages of narrative and expository text, implicit and explicit questions for comprehension and a retelling as a measure for comprehension.

**Journal/Daily Log/Anecdotal Records and Field Notes.** I kept a reflection log of time spent planning and analyzing text for MGR and this will give an accurate depiction of the time spent with individual texts (Burns, 2010). I also kept anecdotal records to note any striking events of importance of insights the students shared regarding their perceptions towards the MGR functional language approach and their attitude towards reading.
Procedure

I began with the baseline IRI from Reading A to Z. I will administer the IRIs, which are running records, individually with each participant and record scores for later comparison.

The rest of the study took place over eight weeks and in two cycles. Each instructional phase or cycle lasted 4 weeks and followed the same format. First, I planned my lessons using the MGR approach with a functional language activity. An example can be found in appendix A. Next, I implemented my plan. Then, I reflected on the use of this approach by studying the data collected from anecdotal records, logs, and running records. I evaluated the success or drawbacks of the approach. Each phase concluded with preparation for the new cycle where I made changes based on my observations and reflections. Then I described each cycle and included the description of the lessons and texts used in the study. I concluded the study with a post IRI, given in the same manner as the baseline IRI.

Data Analysis

**Informal Reading Inventory (IRI).** I did a full pre-post administration and took note of the instructional reading A to Z levels. I calculated the gains made by each student and compared the pre- and post- assessment scores and then from those scores I found a mean gain in levels for the group and saw if there was growth.

**WIDA ACCESS.** I analyzed each student’s growth and their WIDA access scores to see if there is any correlation to the ACCESS data and the improvement in a student’s ability to access more complex text as evidenced by their reading level. This ACCESS data will be used to primarily describe each student’s English proficiency.
**Journal/log/anecdotal records.** I coded and categorized anecdotal records and notes into categories related to vocabulary, writing, and student’s attitude or disposition. I was looking for evidence of student engagement and attitude towards reading. Reading and writing can be frustrating for ELs and I was looking to see if there is any affect positively on the students towards their reading and writing tasks.

**Verification of Data**

The data was verified using triangulation between the data collected from the running records and the IRIs. They both shared several similarities with the exception that running records can be generated from any text. Another triangulation was found by comparing Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments from the reading specialists who also works in the elementary school.

**Ethics**

This study employed the following safeguards to protect informants’ rights: 1) research objectives were shared with participants and guardians through an interpreter by telephone, 2) written permission/informed consent was obtained from guardians, 3) anonymity of participants was maintained through changing names, 4) all names were changed on written documents, 5) code names are kept secure in a locked drawer, 6) commonly accepted educational practices were employed, and finally 8) participants were observed in their natural setting.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the research paradigm and reflective practices of action research that was incorporated throughout this study. I described the methods that were used for data collection and the procedures that were implemented. I discussed how
data was analyzed and how the data was verified. Lastly, the ethics of this study were considered. The next chapter will present the results of this study.
Chapter Four: Results

There are modifications that can be made to traditional guided reading strategies when teaching guided reading to make them more effective for teaching ELs to read. This study takes the work of modifying guided reading by Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez and Rascon (2007) as well as a functional language approach by Derewianka (1990) and combines them to see if putting the two approaches together is a more effective way to teach ELs language and reading. For this study, I researched guided reading strategies and I wanted to know:

- How can I modify the standard methods of teaching guided reading to better meet the language needs of non-native speakers?
- What adjustments I will I have to make to include the teaching of academic language functions with guided reading instruction?

This study took place in an elementary school setting with third grade English learners (ELs) in suburb of a metropolitan area in Minnesota. I taught reading lessons in small groups over an eight-week period in two cycles of four weeks. The lessons were taught with the selected leveled texts using the functional language approach to teaching modified guided reading (Derewianka, 1990; Avalos et al. 2007). During the eight-week study, field notes were taken to document the students’ attitude towards reading and using the functional language approach. The students were also assessed with running records with leveled texts to determine their current instructional reading level at the end of each cycle which gave an insight into the growth made by each student in reading higher level texts. Another assessment that was used is a comparison point. The reading specialist does a benchmark assessment using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark
Assessment System (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). These scores are used to measure reading levels as well and will be compared to the informal reading inventory given. Through this collection of data, I sought to determine if my modified and functional language approach to teaching reading instructions would lead to an increase in reading levels and if this approach makes reading and writing more enjoyable and accessible to ELs.

**Field Note Results**

Over an eight-week period, students were given reading lessons using a functional language approach to modified guided reading. During this period after each class, I reflected upon the class to see what insights could be gained about teaching with this approach. In these notes, there was a focus on students’ attitude toward reading, their comprehension of the text and vocabulary, and their written responses to the text after reading it. Each note consists of an observation and how it is significant to teaching reading to ELs. Included are excerpts from the field notes with additional commentary information. The field notes included are the most significant observed insights from the action research and are categorized according to what each one addressed. From these observations, I have found insights into teaching that will help make me more effective at teaching ELs to read and write.

This first group of observations are all related to vocabulary. The observations on writing and attitude towards reading will follow.

**Vocabulary Acquisition**

1) Observation - Students were confused by words because they knew one definition of the word and a different one was being used in the text.
Significance - Direct pre-teaching of vocabulary was powerful for students’ comprehension, especially with words that have more than one meaning.

2) Observation – Katie had a light bulb moment and exclaimed, “Oh, these words are in the book we are reading.”

Significance – While I might think that I am being clear with learning targets, some students will miss it for various reasons. As a teacher, I can always restate why we are doing the tasks we are doing, and I should do it repeatedly.

3) Observation – There are some students who I wish would ask more questions about the words they are reading. I noticed one of these students asking more and more questions about words in the text as they read it.

Significance – I am excited that this student is thinking more about the meanings of the words as she reads. Pre-teaching vocabulary seems to have increased this student’s ability or motivation to monitor and self-check her comprehension.

4) Observation – David was excited to show me a vocabulary word that we had learned in his guided reading book was also in another book he was reading for self-selected independent reading.
Significance – There is transfer from vocabulary work done in the small group reading to other texts that this student is reading. David noticed that a word he had just learned, appeared in a text for him again to decipher and her remembered it and was excited about it enough to share it with me.

5) Observation – In a group studying folktales, we talked about a guiding question for the texts we were reading and the question of the word “value” was discussed. The students knew the meaning of the word from lessons in math classes, but they were lacking comprehension of the word in the context of the question, “How do folktales show us which behaviors are valued in a culture?”. We discussed how the term “value” in this case means that some behaviors are more important and encouraged in a culture.

Significance – Pre-selecting words to discuss in the context of what the students are reading or discussing is a necessary part of ensuring comprehension and access to the material. This is so clear to me now, knowing that a student may know a word in one context and then struggle to place the meaning of it in another context.

One important insight that I have gained about pre-teaching vocabulary is that students who need vocabulary support can sometimes be so overwhelmed by the words they do not know that they do not know where to start clarifying meaning. Pre-teaching vocabulary begins the conversation for students about words in the text that may be new
to them or that they do not understand. Beginning with just a few words that may have multiple meanings or that are new vocabulary starts the conversation about the meanings of words and when we read the text the students are more ready to talk about other words that they may not know (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2006). They begin monitoring their own comprehension more closely. This supports the research discussed in chapter two regarding vocabulary in that many ELs need this kind of support when they read texts so they can fully comprehend it (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Capellini, 2006; and Roit, 2006).

**Writing Acquisition**

6) Observation – In one group, two out of five of them could use punctuation related to dialogue with 70% accuracy in a creative writing assignment.

Significance – The target was to write a text much like the one we had just read which was a folktale about an animal that got lost and needed help. As the animals spoke in the text, the students were to use the punctuation to mark the dialogue in the text they had created, and this was a struggle for the majority. They could do it in isolation and identify the marks in the text, but then applying this skill was still at a frustration level for most of them.

7) Observation – Another group was working with the use of dialogue in writing and the punctuation related to it and they are also struggling. They can
identify it in the text, and write sentences using it related to that text, but when applying it to their own stories, the transfer is still not there.

Significance – While students may be able to copy to markings on worksheets or find them in a text, their lack of applying punctuation related to dialogue shows me that they do not understand the meaning of the markings.

8) Observation – When adding a writing task to a guided reading lesson, time is an issue. My students never seemed to have enough time to write, and edit their work.

Significance – I always felt like I was not giving the students enough time to do their writing assignments. If one day was interrupted because of a guest speaker, or fire drill, the writing was nearly impossible for the students to complete. It felt like they needed a day to plan, a day to write, and then another for feedback and a chance to edit their writing. Never felt like there was enough time.

The insight I gained about writing acquisition is that the transfer from the study and practice of a grammatical structure sometimes just does not readily transfer into a student’s writing. The academic language function that was targeted was narrating a story. While adding dialogue to a story is a function of the language needed for narrative writing for some reason the meaning of it may have been lost. Both Williams (2005) and Derewianka (1990) showed in their research that when students were explicitly taught the
structure of a text that they read showed better reading comprehension. Williams also showed that there was a transfer of skills to other texts. I was also hoping to see this transfer in the application of using that text structure in a writing assignment. So, while a student may passively be able to identify the structure and write using the target language in targeted writing practice, they may not fully acquire it and be able to produce it in their own written pieces of work. I could see it in only two out of three students when they were asked to apply the target language that we had practiced. I was frustrated by this and had hoped to see more of a transfer from the passive use to the productive use of targeted language.

**Attitude and Motivation**

9) Observation – A newcomer, Harry, showed a change of attitude when it came to doing a shared reading of the text. It was initially a struggle to get him to participate in the shared reading. His avoidance behaviors came out each time we started to work with a new text. This one day about three weeks into the cycle, he took the new text from me and was insistent that he read it by himself. Since the text was not at an independent level for him, he finally handed it back to me and said “you read it.”

Significance – It was in this moment that I realized that Harry finally understood that we did the shared reading first, so that he could better access and decode the text. From this moment on, this student was always asking me to read the book first and he was feeling more and more successful at reading.
10) Observation – Katie literally let out a squeal of delight when I came into the classroom for small group time. She could not wait to get to work.

Significance – Katie is feeling successful at reading challenging books. She is excited to read with this group because she is learning and she feels good about it.

11) Observation – Emily’s hands flap a little when she is happy and she does this when we read a new book together.

Significance – Even though Emily has only been in the country for about 2 years, she is super excited to read and be reading about topics that are interesting to her.

One insight into students’ attitudes towards reading was that each time I asked a struggling reader if they would like to read a more difficult text, the answer was a resounding “yes.” I know that challenging students and adding scaffolds to help them access the text would help accelerate language acquisition (Krashen, 1985) and in doing this the student feels more empowered and successful at reading. They enjoyed it and it did not feel so hard. I have begun to tell my students that reading should not be difficult and if it is, then here is what we could do to fix it. Vocabulary study, targeted language practice and functional writing practice have all helped my students grow as learners and I could observe this in their pure joy of the reading and the excitement they shared to be in my reading group.
I found that reflecting on my teaching was very helpful. I found that the parts of
the guided reading modifications made for ELs such as directly pre-teaching vocabulary
and shared readings have a profound effect on the success that a child appears to have
while reading a text. It appears to increase their access to the meaning of the text as well
as their own awareness of comprehension and this allows them to self-monitor and
encourages asking questions about unknown words. The notes here show that when a
child feels successful, they are more motivated and show it. What I have learned from my
field notes and observations will lead to changes, such as directly pre-teaching
vocabulary especially when a word has multiple meanings, and planning for more time
for students to complete writing tasks. The benefits of students’ success and attitude are
worth the time and effort in preparing lessons with these things in mind.

Informal Reading Inventories Results

The informal reading inventories were done from a selection of texts from
Reading A to Z (Reading A - Z, n.d.). This is an online reading system that is widely used
in my school district. Table 10 is data that shows correlations in reading leveled texts
from between the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark System and the Learning A - Z online
system of level texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Table 9 is an excerpt from a document
retrieved online at Learning A - Z (n.d.).
Table 9

Reading Level Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Learning A - Z</th>
<th>Fountas &amp; Pinnell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>aa</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlations between the two leveling systems are very similar for grades one and two. Some differences are there for grades three and four, but those are slight. The number of levels a student advanced was calculated for each student and presented in Table 10 and Table 11.

The informal reading inventories (IRIs) were taken to assess reading levels at the beginning and end of each cycle. There were twelve students who were in the reading groups and all twelve were participants in the study; however, ten of them have IRIs for the entire period of the study. Two students missed the first three weeks of the study, so their IRIs will be excluded from the results. The IRI scores are shown for each cycle for
each student in Table 11 and the Fountas and Pinnell scores from the reading specialist are included in Table 12.

**Table 10**

*Informal Reading Inventories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Reading Level - Beginning of Cycle</th>
<th>Reading Level - End of First Cycle</th>
<th>Reading Level - End of Second Cycle</th>
<th>Number of levels gained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>aa</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average level gain</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11**

*Fountas and Pinnell Reading Levels assessed by Reading Specialist*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Level in September</th>
<th>Level in November</th>
<th>Levels gained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Pre-Reader</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zack</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Level Gain</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the data from the *Informal Reading Inventory*, the average gain was 2.8 reading levels. The most levels gained was five and the fewest was two. The students
were all able to answer comprehension questions with the text in order to move up a level.

According to the data from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, most of the students moved up two reading levels; one student had a one level gain and two gained more than two levels. The average was 2.2 levels in growth.

A typical student in first or second grade moves up six or seven levels in an academic year per the Reading A to Z correlation table (n.d.). Our school year is about 38 weeks long so that means that a reading level should be advanced at a minimum of one level every five to six weeks at the first and second grade. If a student is reading at a third grade level the levels, they move up are less in number. The leveling systems for Fountas & Pinnell (2011) show an increase in three levels in third grade and the Learning A - Z text levels show an increase in four levels (n.d.). Since my students are reading at a first and second grade levels, the expected growth would be one level every five or six weeks. So, an average of over two levels in an eight-week period for my students at their reading levels is accelerated growth.

All the students started a half of grade level or more behind their peers in reading level. They all were identified by their classroom teachers as having an intensive need for reading support per their Fall Measures of Academic Progress in Reading Score on a standardized reading test by NWEA.

Discussion

I was hoping to see more accelerated growth like the gains in reading levels that we saw from Oliver’s scores. I looked back at Oliver’s assessments from the spring and I saw an incredible summer loss of reading level from Spring to Fall. His gains in reading
in the fall may also be attributed to the loss over the summer that was regained quickly.

He also started to wear his glasses more consistently.

Harry was a student who came to the United States the previous year with no 
primary schooling. He entered second grade with no kindergarten or first grade 
education. In third grade, he continued to struggle. He received a phonics intervention 
along with his reading of leveled texts. This along with the reading in the leveled readers 
contributed to his growth. He has made great gains. Though he is still behind his peers 
academically, he is becoming more confident.

Natalie’s growth was a surprise to me. She was struggling the year before and to 
see her succeed was impressive. She worked extremely hard. Her writing was also more 
comprehensible than is had been in the past. Literacy started to connect for her and she 
showed the accelerated growth that we hope to see in all students.

There is an interesting comparison when looking at the Informal reading 
inventories in reading growth between the first cycle and second cycle. In the first cycle, 
only two students made gains of more than one level. During the second cycle four 
students made gains that were of multiple levels. This could be attributed to making the 
reading groups smaller and the movement of students from a lower-level group to a 
higher-level group. Students were moved into groups according the IRIs at the end of the 
first cycle. I also had two new students to add into the groups as well. So, the large six 
student group was divided and I ended up with a group of four and a group of five. Oliver 
was moved from a group reading level D books was moved up to a level G group, 
because he was assessed at a level E. One of the modifications for ELs is that they have a 
shared reading of the text first and are moved one or two levels up from their
instructional level for a leveled text to read because an EL’s decoding skills are often limited by their lack of oral language (Avalos et al. 2007). This shared reading helps to supplement what they lack in oral language to access more complicated text features.

This was very successful for Oliver, who had the oral language he needed but just struggled with reading and writing according to his ACCESS scores. Students who were excelling moved up. Natalie was another such student. Her reading and writing scores were lower, but her oral language scores on ACCESS were higher.

There is a student who struggles with nearly everything. Alexander has been a struggling reader from kindergarten to the present day. Many of his academic problems come from his poor attendance. Some of the time he is sick, and some of the time he is just plain absent from school. We discovered last year in second grade that he needed glasses. He has been very reluctant to wear them. He keeps taking them off and he is just noticing how they help him see things, especially when I use the smartboard or have things posted. I am beginning to think he thought he just could not read things when the real problem was that he could not see them. He missed yearly screenings for vision because he was gone on the day they were done.

For this study, in the First Cycle Alexander was gone at least one or two days each week in September and October. His attendance continued to interrupt his learning in second cycle as well. It appears it does not matter what strategies I use with constant absenteeism; Alexander will continue to struggle to learn to read and write English language.

One of the language targets that I was working with the students was the use of dialogue in text and the punctuation marks. I was puzzled by the results of this target
because the students could always identify the dialogue by finding the marks in the text: however, they would not apply them in their writing. I had maybe one or two students who could do this consistently after completing the guided practice. I am now thinking that part of the guided practice should be identifying when the quotations marks are missing from dialogue and having the students put them where they belong.

One thing I would change is more time for the students to spend the writing process so that they could re-read their work, edit it and share it with their peers to get feedback. They had clear directions and assessment criteria for the writing, but they still struggled to include dialogue in their writing. More time to edit and rewrite may have proven productive for these students.

For writing, time is always an issue. When students are English learners they always seem to need one more day on their writing. Sometimes, we just had to move on, foregoing that gift of time. If I were to structure the functional writing piece, I would plan for with three days instead of two. In the study, one day was for planning the writing piece and another for writing it. I would add a third for revising the writing. Part of the revision would be getting and receiving feedback from peers and the teacher.

**Conclusion**

I used three sources of data to answer the research question. One source was field notes. The field notes showed some insights surrounding vocabulary acquisition, writing acquisition, and attitude towards reading. The most important insight was the vocabulary that is pre-taught could lead to more self-monitoring of comprehension while reading as evidenced by the questions students were asking. This extra support in vocabulary acquisition as discussed in chapter two, with explicit vocabulary instruction of words in
the text was a key component to the comprehension and self-monitoring that I observed from the students (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Cappelini, 2006; and Roit, 2006). The second source of data was the informal reading inventories that were given at the end of each cycle. The results for the IRIs showed that all students made growth in reading levels and some students showed accelerated growth. The students with high oral language according to their ACCESS scores in listening and reading showed the most growth. This is an interesting correlation. In Chapter Two, one of the modifications to guided reading by Avalos et al. (2007) includes the shared reading before the ELs attempt to read the text independently. This modification was made specifically because of the low oral language that ELs have to support comprehension and decode the text. This supports the result that the rest of the students grew consistently but not with the same acceleration as the students with higher oral language levels.

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment was also given before the first cycle and after the Second Cycle (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). This assessment correlates with the IRI leveled texts that were given from Reading A – Z online (n.d.). The Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment was given by a reading interventionist and the results in Table 12 showed that students also gained in reading levels and showed that the same students who showed accelerated growth with the IRIs also showed growth with the Fountas and Pinnell Assessment.

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the data collection. I gained important insights about vocabulary acquisition, writing acquisition and reading attitude. One insight is that pre-teaching vocabulary in the text leads to more self-monitoring of comprehension. Another is that targeted language in writing does not always transfer
from guided practice to independent application. The last important insight from the observation data is that when students are given more challenging texts with scaffolded language support, their attitude towards reading becomes a more positive and engaging one. The data from the leveled texts showed that all of the students made growth in reading levels and a few made accelerated growth. Further reflection on how these findings might inform classroom practice and future research will be presented in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

As a teacher of ELs at many levels, I have been asked more to work on teaching ELs to read and write fluently than to teach them oral skills. These are the most easily measured modalities of English and the most heavily assessed in schools, in my experience. My school uses guided reading in a balanced literacy model of teaching language arts to students. I wanted to use what I already knew about teaching reading to students and find better ways to teach it to ELs so that they also increase comprehension and struggling readers can accelerate their reading growth to catch up to their peers. A functional language approach to language teaching was also included in the reading lessons so that students would be given an opportunity to apply and use the targeted language. For this study, I wanted to find out the most effective ways to teach ELs how to read in guided reading groups.

In this action research study, I attempted to answer the questions:

- How can I modify the standard methods of teaching guided reading to better meet the language needs of non-native speakers?

- What adjustments will I have to make to include the teaching of academic language functions with guided reading instruction?

Research has shown that ELs need more support in targeted vocabulary instruction in order to comprehend the text they are reading (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Capellini, 2006; and Roit 2006). For this reason, I began to look at models
to teach ELs to read like that of the Modified Guided Reading (MGR) approach by Avalos, Plascencia, Chavez & Rascon (2007). This MGR approach to teaching reading also included a shared reading or preview of the text before the student read it to themselves in the small group. A study by Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) find that students retained more vocabulary with a preview of key vocabulary before the story is read aloud. This allows students to make better meaning from the text and supported the acquisition of the vocabulary words.

An important part of learning English for ELs is the acquisition of academic language and text structures. A student’s familiarity with the predictable text structures of narrative and expository texts can help increase comprehension and recall of a text when explicit instruction of the English text structures is provided (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Derewianka, 1990; Williams, 2005). I predicted if I planned reading lessons that included the features of the MGR approach and the functional language approach to teaching English language and reading, then I could find some accelerated growth in the students reading levels for guided reading instruction. In this chapter, I will discuss the major findings of this study, limitations of the study, implications of the study and suggestions for further research.

**Major Findings**

The results of the data collected suggest that the students benefit from the modifications and adjustments made to teaching language. First, the data suggests that students are more engaged with vocabulary when it is explicitly taught and connected to the text they are reading. This finding supports the research of Ulanoff & Pucci (1999). They find that the explicit and direct teaching of vocabulary in the context of the text a
student is reading is the most efficient way for an EL to acquire the vocabulary. They did a preview of the vocabulary, read the text with the vocabulary in context and then reviewed the vocabulary at the end. This process results in better recall of the vocabulary than the concurrent translation method that they were comparing it to. In the observations that I recorded during the study, I noticed some students asking more and more questions about the words in the text. This preview of vocabulary before reading the text seemed to ready the students to ask about more unknown words as they encountered them in the reading.

Secondly, the data suggests that the functional language approach helped students to identify a targeted language structure in the text. They were all able to find examples of the language being explicitly taught in the text, and there was transfer to other texts. This supports the work of Williams (2005), and Derewianaka (1990) who show in their research that transfer from one text to another happens. The transfer I saw into writing was inconsistent. This may be due to factors that I will discuss in the next section on limitations.

The third major finding is that the data suggests an acceleration in growth in reading level. This supports the research of Avalos et al. (2007) on modifications to the traditional model for teaching guided reading. On both informal reading inventories and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessments (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011), the students gained an average of more than two levels of reading in an eight-week period. That is more than the expected growth of one level every five to 6 weeks for students reading at the first and second grade levels.
The fourth finding is that students with a higher oral language proficiency score on the ACCESS test gained three to five levels in the eight-week period. This leads me to wonder more about the relationship between oral language proficiency, language acquisition and literacy. I wonder if this is connected to the reading lesson structure from the research on Modified Guided Reading from Avalos et al. (2006) and the research of Ulanoff and Pucci (1999) that a shared reading of the text supports vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of the text for students. The students that need access to the text because they do not have the oral language to help comprehend and decode the text get to hear the text first in a shared reading and this gives them an opportunity to ask clarifying questions as they monitor their own comprehension first by listening to the text as it is read to them. Then, as they read it themselves, they would again ask more questions about unknown words or words with multiple meanings in the text. A review of vocabulary words after reading also helped with recall of the newly identified vocabulary.

**Limitations**

As with any study there were limitations to my research. First, my study looked at a small pool of students. I was only able to work with and take notes on the students I work with in one grade level. (In addition, because of time there were two students who moved newly into the school in the middle of the study for whom I was not able to provide pre- and post-level data.) A small size of students limits my study because I am only able to report on the students I saw for small group instruction. Perhaps if I had other teachers participate in the study, I would have found that some students were asking different questions than others. I could further benefit from an extension of this study
which examines the questions asked about vocabulary by students who are struggling readers but whose first language is English.

A second limitation for my study was time constraints. The study was based on a five-day lesson plan per text read and sometimes there was an interruption. A guest speaker was scheduled during the group time with little time to make up the time lost with the students. I also had only 20-30 minutes with the students per lesson and the writing assignments could have always used more time for the students to complete them. I would have liked to look at the feedback that students got and seen if they could have used it to complete the tasks successfully using the targeted language structures for the lessons.

The third limitation to my study is the bias that exists in the data and the results from my role as both a researcher and a teacher. During the data collections and analysis of that data I tried my best to be unbiased, but I know that as a teacher-participant in this study, I was not a completely neutral party (Brice Heath, 1996). Many months’ worth of background knowledge and experiences with these students which was not part of the study was something I carried with me while I collected and analyzed the data. I would not have been able to control or change my role for this study because of how it was setup. However, I think it is important to acknowledge that given time and scope constraints, I was not able to involve another researcher who could have compared and perhaps validate my results.

**Implications**

This study cannot prove the extent to which my modified and functional language approach to teaching guided reading had an effect on the growth in reading levels for
struggling EL readers. The data does suggest that the use of this combination of approaches can be more or less beneficial to the increase in reading growth for EL readers that are reading a grade level or more below their peers. For example, the students who had low oral language scores also asked lots of good questions about unknown vocabulary words. The students with higher oral language scores asked some good questions about multiple meaning vocabulary words. This suggests that there is benefit to a functional language approach to vocabulary instruction for both students with higher oral language proficiency and those with lower oral language proficiency.

The data also showed that extending a guided reading lesson to include vocabulary study and a shared reading before the students read it by themselves could lead self-monitoring of comprehension. This supports the research findings of Ulanoff and Pucci (1999). Pucci and Ulanoff which find that taking the burden away of decoding the text first without having heard it read to them, allowed the students to focus on the meaning of the text and their own comprehension. Then as students begin to read and decode the words as they did in the study by Avalos et al (2007), they are able to decode and use their comprehension of the text to help them decode the words. This allows them to work at instructional levels higher than previously thought and lowers the students’ frustration levels.

The lowering of frustration levels for students as they read creates those happy moments when a student realizes that we are going to read a new text in a way that will not create an excessive amount of frustration for them. They will know how it will sound and what the words will mean and have that background knowledge built up before they
dig into the actual process of decoding the text. I tell them, reading should be easy, and it should be fun. If it is not, then we have got to change how we do it.

**Further Research**

This study provided me with a great opportunity to reflect on what makes ELs’ reading skills stronger. I am left with many more questions than I had before. I want to know more about oral language proficiency and how it supports readers as they decode text and comprehend what they are reading. For example, I think it would be interesting to assess students’ oral language proficiency and then assess comprehension of the text a student reads at an independent reading level to see if there are any correlations.

Another area of research I would like to investigate would be how oral language proficiency and language acquisition are related. I am wondering if an exam like the Mondo Oral Language Assessment (Mondo Educational Publishing, 2017) would correlate to the WIDA ACCESS oral proficiency levels (WIDA Consortium, 2016). I am also wondering if oral language proficiency in a student’s first language also as a significant effect on the rate of English language acquisition for ELs.

**Conclusions**

This study found that guided reading can be modified to make it more effective for ELs who are struggling to learn to read. The data collected from students who were taught reading lessons that used modifications to guided reading as researched by Avalos et al (2007) and adding a functional language approach to teaching language (Derewianka, 1996) suggest that accelerated growth can be made. The data from this study also suggests that students can decode and comprehend more complex text when unknown vocabulary is explicitly taught and the book is shared with a read aloud before
the book is read by the students. This allows students to target their learning first on understanding what they are going to read and then on decoding to words in the text.

As a result of the conclusions of this study, I plan to carefully design reading lessons to include a targeted language function enabling students to know how to use the language of the text and why someone would write what they are reading. I will also carefully select vocabulary words in the text to pre-teach and review. I will also make sure that I include a shared reading of the text and that I select texts that are a level or two above the instructional level for my ELs to access.

I believe that the findings presented in this study are useful for ESL teachers and classroom teachers in the primary grades from kindergarten through third grade. Although not all teachers work with students who are ELs, they will work with students who have low oral language proficiency and have vocabularies that are low as well. All students will benefit from teaching functional language approach in the text they are reading and taking the time to self-monitor their comprehension. This will transfer to new texts as well. In order for teachers to implement the findings of my study, it will need to be shared. I will share my findings with the collaborative team that I work with in my school. I will also share my findings with my fellow EL teachers in my school. Finally, my capstone will be catalogued in Hamline’s Bush library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository.
References


Instruction. Retrieved from:


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Appendix A

Week Long Lesson Example

Students

Skill/ Strategy
To ask and answer specific questions about the main ideas in the text

Grammar skill: Use gerunds to describe a sport or game.

Text: Soccer is a Kick!
Vocabulary- 2-3 receptive and 5-9 productive vocabulary words.

Productive: dribble, foul, match, out-of-bounds, penalty, referee, penalty, trap, tie, trip
Receptive: exercise, protect, without

Build background knowledge.
Ask if anyone has played soccer or seen a match or game on TV? Or has a favorite team?

Introduce the text.

Look at the cover and talk about what the kids see and look at the table of contents
And look for non-fiction text features.

Shared reading. (Read aloud and with explicit text questions where the answers are right there in the text.)

Day 2:

Grammatical structure: Gerunds

Introduce the verb dribble and tell the students that when you add –ing to the verb it can be used as a noun in the sentence and this is called a gerund.

Use the sentence: Dribbling is hard.

Points to emphasize:

- Rules for adding –ing such as dropping the silent –e, and doubling the consonant for CVC words i.e. stop, stopping
- A gerund can be used as a subject, an object, or an object of a preposition

  _Dribbling_ is hard. I think _dribbling_ is hard. Players run with the ball by _dribbling_ it.

**Students read the book to themselves- Staggered.** Students should look for and notice gerunds as they read the text in several places. There are multiple examples of this in the text.

**Practice:**
Using cut apart sentences with gerunds from the text, the students work in pairs to make complete sentences out of the words.

**Day 3:** Students will practice answering and asking questions about the main ideas presented in the text today. We will list wh- question words and use them the make questions about the main idea and answer the questions with details from the text.

Explain that we not only ask questions as we read, we also answer them as we go too. Do this for at least 3 sections of the text. Then do a Think, Pair, Share and have the students pick a section and think of questions for it and then with a partner ask and answer each other’s questions.

**Day 4 and 5:**

**Informative/explanatory writing task.**

Using the text about soccer as a guide, I will model a think aloud for another sport. Say I pick Tennis. I will use the page on soccer equipment to think of tennis equipment. As I read about equipment for soccer, I will share the connections to tennis equipment. For example: “I need a racket and tennis balls.” I write: *Tennis players use a racket for hitting the ball to the other players. They wear rubber-soled shoes to keep them from slipping on the court.* “Then I’ll do that for three other areas of tennis that I can write about.”

Have students share their ideas for writing.

Students will use a main idea and details graphic organizer to plan their writing. Write a rough draft and then write their own book using a book template.

In the text, they will use gerunds to describe a sport or a game.