

## READING STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT HOME-TO-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS USED BY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

SOCORRO MENDOZA

*Bilingual Coordinator, Chicago Public School, Chicago, USA.*

### ABSTRACT

*This particularistic qualitative case study design examined reading strategies, approaches, and resources teachers of ELL (English Language Learner) students in kindergarten through third grade use to support reading development and promote the home to school connection regarding literacy proficiency. The purpose of this study was to examine strategies, resources, and approaches used to support home-to-school partnerships focused on reading development of K-3 ELLs in the X Public School District. Data analysis resulted in six emergent themes consisting of 22 teacher interviews. The first finding in this study that was revealed through teacher interviews identified guided reading, visual aides, reader's theater, and modeling/oral reading fluency as strategies that contribute to ELLs reading proficiency. In the second finding, teachers identified inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom, sending home a reading log that helps track the students' reading at home, and inviting parent participation in extracurricular activities as approaches to encourage partnerships regarding reading development of ELLs. The results of this study provided recommendations for educational leaders to provide teachers specific professional development to encourage parent participation to focus on increasing students' reading development that is tailored to the students' and caregivers' language needs. For future research, it is recommended that the study be replicated using different school districts to determine if similar findings were consistent across different districts.*

*Keywords: ELL, Reading Strategies, Elementary Bilingual Education.*

### INTRODUCTION

This article contains the findings and interpretations of the participant's responses and includes recommendations for organizations and suggestions for future research. The research problem is the lack of resources and approaches identified by teachers to support the home-to-school connection regarding reading strategies of ELLs in kindergarten through third grade. The purpose of this study was to examine reading strategies, approaches, and resources used by teachers in K-3 with ELLs. The goal was to describe and explain the teacher's perspective regarding the reading strategies used in the classroom and the parental involvement in regard to their child's reading development. The researcher chose a particularistic case study to examine teachers' reading strategies, resources, and approaches used with ELLs to support the home-to-

school connection. The main source of data collection was twenty-two face-to-face interviews. The objectivity of the information gathered was reflective of the participants' strategies to gain caregiver support to the population of ELL K-3 students in the district. The findings may be generalizable, but limited because of the unique population involved in the study.

### 1. Methodology

The qualitative method is appropriate for this study because the researcher relied on the views of the participants to gather in-depth narrative descriptive accounts of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). This method entails asking open-ended questions that provide a deeper insight of the participants' perceptions. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning people give to their experiences and how they create a

sense of their world (Merriam, 2009). The interviews helped obtain strategies used by teachers to support the home-to-school connection on the reading strategies, resources, and approaches used with ELL students in K-3. Research regarding early literacy strategies, interventions, and kindergarten curriculum led to the development of interview questions by the researcher. Research regarding the impact of parental involvement and its effects on their child's literacy development also led to the development of interview questions by the researcher. Examining teachers' initiatives, resources, and approaches used to increase parental or guardian involvement on reading, provided insight on the factors that affect parental involvement have regarding student's reading proficiency. The open-ended questions in this study required responses that provided insights to the teachers' perceptions of how the home-to-school connection applied to the reading, strategies, resources, and approaches teachers used with ELL students in K-3.

Multiple sources of information are necessary to maintain scientific rigor (Merriam, 2009). The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and collected teacher anecdotal. However, through the data collection process, threats to reliability may occur. Reliability threats during the study are reported and may include incomplete interviews, scheduling conflicts, and volunteers may withdraw from the study, or refuse to provide anecdotal notes.

## 2. Findings of the Study

The basis and resources to recognize themes associated with the perceptions of teachers regarding reading strategies used in the classroom with ELL students in kindergarten through third grade were provided through the use of this qualitative case study design and Nvivo10. The first research question asked, what reading strategies, approaches, and resources are teachers of ELL students in kindergarten through third grade using in the classroom to promote literacy development? Teacher interviews revealed several strategies and resources used in the classroom to help ELL students' reading development. Teachers identified guided reading, visual aides, reader's theater, and modeling/oral reading fluency as strategies that contribute to ELLs reading proficiency.

The second research question asked, what practices/ approaches are teachers using to facilitate parent or guardian involvement regarding reading achievement for English Language Learners? Teachers identified inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom by helping during the reading block, sending home a reading log that helps track the students' reading at home, and inviting parent participation in extracurricular activities such as classroom projects, and field trips as approaches used to encourage the partnerships regarding reading development of ELLs (Otto and Johnson, 1996).

### 2.1 Study Limitations

This particularistic qualitative case study contained several limitations. One limitation was the transferability of the study to a larger context. The purpose of the research study is to replicate by providing as much detail as possible about process, data collection, and analysis (Patton, 2002). However, some researchers may not consider this study replicable because not enough information was provided. In addition, this research study is limited by the fact that only one school district agreed to be used and the grade levels were confined to kindergarten through third grade. The findings within this study can be used by teachers within the same school district, which may set boundaries to expose teachers to explore other strategies, approaches, or resources.

The data collection process was also limited due to time constraints. Scheduling of face-to-face interviews was limited because many teachers were not available due to other commitments. Further, deadlines required by the doctoral program added additional time restraints.

### 2.2 Study Implications

The findings from this study and the teacher perceptions add to the body of knowledge related to reading strategies, approaches, or resources, teachers of ELL students are using in the classroom, to encourage parents and guardians to use similar strategies outside of the classroom to support reading development. By identifying strategies teachers are using in the classroom that help support the home-to-school connection and increasing reading development of ELLs, parents and teachers can work together to expand the classroom beyond the school

setting. Teachers identified Reader's Theater and Visual Aides such as graphic organizers as effective resources that are implemented in the classroom and can be used at home to support students reading development (Pang, 2013). Teachers expressed the need to systematically implement strategies that will engage parents and are welcoming to parents so that the home-to-school connection can be strengthened to help the students reach academic success. The findings in this study also revealed that teachers want caregivers to be involved; however, many teachers do not know how to involve caregivers or what strategies to put in place to increase the home-to-school connection. One teacher in the study stated, "The students that are ELL come from either bilingual or non-English speaking homes. So communicating with ELL caregivers can be a challenge to make sure that the correct information was conveyed and understood."

The NCLB (No Child Left Behind) requires schools to train teachers to implement student-support programs and communicate with caregivers about those plans as a means to increase caregiver involvement (Hoang, 2010). NCLB recognizes caregiver involvement as an important contributing factor to increase student achievement and positive student outcomes. Supporting a home-to-school connection that focuses on reading development requires parents and teachers to have a common goal of high expectations for reading proficiency and communication to identify practices or approaches that extend beyond the classroom. The response from the participants in this study indicate a strong desire for creating and supporting parent partnerships to support reading development, but oftentimes do not know which strategies or approaches are best to use because of the various challenges.

The findings in this study identify reading strategies that are used in the classroom with ELL students that can be expanded beyond the classroom and supporting the home-to-school connection. The literature review shows parental involvement which positively impacts reading achievement (Burgess, 2011). Research suggests teachers can identify successful strategies in the classroom that parents or guardians could use at home to promote a literacy-rich environment; thereby improving the child's

reading ability (Burgess, 2011). Teachers in this study identified successful strategies they (teachers) used in the classroom and saw improvement in the students' reading development when implemented. This research question yielded information regarding teacher perceptions on what strategies, approaches, or resources are used in the classroom with ELL students. Teachers, parents, and guardians want to build a partnership that support the students' reading development, but oftentimes teachers and caregivers do not have the necessary support or resources to establish the home-to-school connection.

### 3. Recommendations

Case study participant responses resulting from the qualitative data analysis retrieved from Nvivo10 identified themes that contributed to the findings. The recommendations may facilitate to improve instructional strategies that influence reading development and increase the home-to-school connection.

#### 3.1 Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are offered to practitioners in the field of education. The initial recommendation is that educational leaders offer specific professional development opportunities focused on identifying and examining resources and activities that will encourage parent participation to support and increase students' reading development that is tailored to the language needs of ELL caregivers. Although, the findings in this study revealed strategies and approaches used in the classroom with ELL students, teachers indicated the need for additional strategies and approaches that extend beyond the classroom to support students' reading development.

A subsequent recommendation offered to practitioners is to develop a plan that includes caregivers and teachers to work together to evaluate and develop strategies, approaches, and resources to encourage and maintain the home-to-school connection. Educational leaders can support teachers and the home-to-school connection by providing opportunities for teachers, parents, and guardians to develop relationships through collaboration. The findings in this research study also revealed teachers want caregivers to be involved; however, many teachers do not know how to involve caregivers or what strategies to put in place to

increase the home-to-school connection. One teacher in the study stated, "The students that are ELL come from either bilingual or non-English speaking homes. So communicating with ELL caregivers can be a challenge to make sure that the correct information was conveyed and understood".

The concluding recommendation for practitioners is to create a school environment that supports, encourages, and implements purposeful reading resources and strategies that encourages caregiver involvement that will contribute to students' reading development. As indicated in the literature review of this study, research has demonstrated that implementing caregiver involvement strategies will increase reading development. Combining effective caregiver involvement practices with reading strategies, approaches, or resources used in the classroom will provide the additional support ELLs need to increase their reading development. If a goal is to support caregivers and help their children increase their reading development, then parent involvement must be encouraged and methods to increase participation implemented. Building a learning community with caregivers that requires collaboration to help develop and identify reading strategies and approaches that is supportive of both the home and school will contribute ELLs' reading development.

### **3.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researchers may be able to provide additional information regarding strategies used in the classroom with ELL students to support the home-to-school connection. Future research will be an important part of helping identify reading strategies and approaches to use with ELL students that extend beyond the classroom. The insight gained by the 22 interviews that provided teachers' perspectives were valuable and future research should continue to explore.

The first recommendation for future research is that the study be replicated using different school districts to determine if similar findings were consistent across different districts. Replicating the study and using a different sample may help identify more strategies than those identified. Participants were recruited using a snowball method (chain); it is recommended that future research use a random sample. A random sample would also ensure a

broader representation of the population. Conducting research on a broader population such as different school districts might increase the significance of the results and provide additional insights.

The second recommendation for future research is to interview caregivers of ELLs and ELL students. The interviews would offer different perspectives of stakeholders. Insight from teachers, caregivers, and students will provide additional information that may help identify successful strategies to incorporate in the classroom and beyond to support the home-to-school connections. Caregivers will be able to provide their perspectives regarding reading practices or approaches recommended by teachers to use at home with the student. Students will be able to express their perception of the strategies used in the classroom and their transferability outside of the classroom.

The findings from this study propose some practices that educational leaders may consider. As indicated in the literature review of this study, research has demonstrated that implementing caregiver involvement strategies will increase reading development. Creating a school environment that supports, encourages, and implements purposeful reading resources and strategies that encourages caregiver involvement will contribute to students' reading development.

### **4. Significance to Educational Leadership**

Based on the findings from this study, the researcher has several suggestions for education leaders to consider. Activities that may incorporate students' culture and living environments may increase the parent involvement and participation. Participant 2 stated:

"I give each student a reading log that goes home on Monday and is returned on Friday with a parent signature, but most students don't return it. I thought it would get parents involved, but it's just not working as I hoped".

This statement exemplifies the need to develop purposeful reading activities that will engage caregivers at home to support the classroom. Respondents reported they would like to receive professional development that would provide resources and strategies to implement in the classroom that encourage caregiver involvement. The findings in this research study also revealed that teachers

want caregivers to be involved; however, some teachers do not know how to involve caregivers or what strategies to put in place to increase the home-to-school connection. Educational leaders must offer as many resources to caregivers to help encourage participation but must also provide professional development to teachers to offer resources, ideas, strategies, and approaches to increase parental involvement that will help increase their child's reading development.

### Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, particularistic study was to examine reading strategies, approaches, and resources K-3 teachers use in ELLs. The goal was to describe and explain the teachers' perspective about caregiver involvement in regard to their child's reading development. The researcher chose a particularistic case study method to examine the reading strategies, resources, and approaches teachers used with ELLs to support the home-to-school connection. The researcher collected data via 22 face-to-face interviews with K-3 teachers of ELLs. To maintain objectivity, the participants were interviewed using 17 predetermined questions and all participants were asked the same questions. The results from the 22 interviews indicated teachers are using strategies, resources, and approaches in the classroom such as visual aids, reading logs, and caregiver volunteers in the classroom to support the students' reading development. The teacher anecdotes regarding students' reading development showed that teachers use various reading strategies in the classroom to help their students achieve reading success. The strategies, resources, and approaches teachers noted in their informal notes supports the strategies (graphic organizers, pictures, and reading log to encourage reading at home) identified during interviews. Teachers want to support the home-to-school connection and have identified visual aids such as a graphic organizer or pictures as reading strategies, approaches, or resources that could be used outside of the classroom. However, barriers such as language and caregivers' work schedules hinder the home-to-school connection.

Stakeholders might use this data to increase caregiver involvement and support the home-to-school connection.

Administrators should offer professional development programs focused specifically on enabling teachers to build and maintain caregiver partnerships that support students' reading development. The study also showed that teachers want caregivers to be involved; however, as participant 13 indicated, "I don't know how to encourage parents to participate and get them to help (with reading)." Education leaders must offer professional development and training to teachers that will examine resources and activities that will encourage parental participation that will help increase students' reading development.

The implications of the study encompasses the need for schools to develop a plan to welcome, support, and create partnerships with parents of diverse cultures to provide them an opportunity to be involved in their child's academic development. The school may develop workshops to help parents gain the necessary skills to help their child's reading development. Loera, et al. (2011), Gibbons (2010), and Harper and Pelletier (2010) agreed that ELL families see education as a tool to success. Creating partnerships between caregivers and teachers help support the students' academic goals and increases student achievement (Rodriguez-Valls, 2009). Active participation in their child's education is often a challenge for non-native English speaking caregivers because of the language barrier and a lack of understanding about how to contribute. Understanding the cultural values of ELLs' families and incorporating those ideals in school may increase caregiver involvement in their child's education, thus strengthening the caregiver-teacher partnership (Ramirez and Soto-Hinman, 2009).

Identifying reading strategies, approaches, or resources used in the classroom that can extend outside of the classroom will contribute to the home-to-school connection. Caregivers and teachers want to work together to help students gain reading proficiency, but both need to be equipped with the proper tools and training to create a partnership.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Socorro Mendoza is currently the Bilingual Coordinator for an elementary school within the Chicago Public School District. Dr. Mendoza's research interest in English Language learners stems from her 10 year experience in the classroom as a Bilingual teacher. She also assists with Professional Development Trainings for educators to support English Learners. She currently holds an active publishing and presenting schedule with various peer reviewed organizations as well as an active family in Chicago.

