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**CONTENT AND LANGUAGE-USING SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE
THEMATIC UNITS WITH SECOND GRADE ESOL STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences of ten Second Grade English Language Learners (ELLs) as they used social studies and science thematic units to learn English in a pull-out ESOL program. Participant observations, student work, surveys, reading assessments, and language stage forms were collected to detail the progress of the students during the study. Students learned social studies and science content while improving their oral, reading, and writing skills in English. There was an increase in the students' use of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), higher level thinking skills, student engagement, and motivation when learning English through content.

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Table of Contents

1. Abstract	iii
2. Acknowledgements.....	iv
3. List of Tables.....	ix
3. List of Figures	x
4. Researcher Stance.....	1
5. Literature Review.....	6
BICS and CALP.....	6
BICS, CALP, and Bloom’s Taxonomy.....	9
Content-Based Language Instruction.....	11
Thematic Units.....	14
Connections.....	15
Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences	17
Student Engagement.....	18
Vocabulary.....	19
Higher Level Thinking Skills.....	20
Conclusion	22
6. Methodology.....	24
Setting.....	24
Participants.....	24

Research Design.....	25
Data Collection	26
Participant Observations.....	26
Student Work.....	27
Student Surveys.....	27
Reading Assessment.....	27
Stage Forms.....	28
Trustworthiness Statement.....	29
7. My Story.....	32
Meet the Students	32
Communities.....	36
Magnets	65
World Holidays.....	77
Conclusion	91
8. Data Analysis.....	93
Ongoing Analysis.....	93
Analysis After Data Collection.....	94
Bins.....	95
Theme Statements.....	96
9. Findings.....	97
Introduction.....	97

Discussion.....	97
Gateway to Higher Level Thinking.....	98
Oral Rehearsal.....	99
Language Use.....	101
Self-Learning Strategies.....	106
Cooperative Work and Peer Help.....	106
Requesting Help.....	107
Positive Learning Behaviors.....	108
Connections.....	108
Prior Knowledge.....	109
Student Engagement Levels.....	110
Learning Obstacles.....	113
Limited Experience.....	113
Non-application of Skills.....	114
Conclusion.....	114
10. The Next Step.....	116
11. References.....	118
12. Resources.....	124
13. Appendixes.....	126
A. Student Surveys.....	127
B. Stage Forms.....	128

C. Stage Form Descriptors.....	129
D. HSRIB Approval.....	133
E. Parent Permission.....	134
F. Principal Permission.....	135
G. School Puzzle.....	136
H. Rules Discussion Worksheet.....	137
I. 3 Column City, Suburb, and Rural Communities Worksheet .	138
J. Communities Advantage/Disadvantage Worksheet	139
K. KWL Chart.....	140
L. Is It Magnetic? Experiment Sheet.....	141
M. Double Bubble Map.....	142

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 DRA Scores in September and December..... 104

Table 2 ESOL Stages in September and December 105

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Community Pre-test	38
Figure 2 Community Worker Paragraphs	48
Figure 3 Students' Comments During Rules Discussion	49
Figure 4 Discussion With Martin and Alonzo's Group	57
Figure 5 Community Similar Paragraphs	62
Figure 6 Community Different Paragraphs	63
Figure 7 Community Post Test	64
Figure 8 K Section of Magnets KWL Chart	66
Figure 9 W Section of Magnets KWL Chart	66
Figure 10 Pastiche of Comments While "Playing" With Magnets	68
Figure 11 "Is it Magnetic?" Paragraphs	74
Figure 12 L Section of Magnets KWL Chart	76
Figure 13 Students' Thanksgiving Traditions	78
Figure 14 Why We Celebrate Thanksgiving Responses	80
Figure 15 Kwanzaa and Ramadan Comparison Paragraphs	85
Figure 16 Kwanzaa and Hanukkah Comparison Paragraphs	88
Figure 17 Students' Double Bubble Maps	92
Figure 18 Bins	95
Figure 19 Theme Statements	96
Figure 20 Comparison of Writing Samples	100

RESEARCHER STANCE

When I registered in college as a Spanish/Elementary Education major, I never envisioned myself as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. I wanted to be an elementary school teacher with my own little classroom full of smiling faces. I was only majoring in Spanish because the college I was attending required a major besides elementary education and I had already had many years of Spanish. Four years later, as I took my first teaching position, the thought of teaching ESL still did not enter into my picture of myself as a teacher.

Part way into my first year teaching second grade, it was simply by chance that, when the district suddenly enrolled a first and a second grade student from Mexico who did not speak English, I was the only elementary certified teacher in the district I was teaching in who could speak Spanish. It was because of this language background that I began teaching ESL as an after school program for these two little boys. I was given no formal training on what to do with these students and no curriculum to follow. The school district itself was very unsure of what to do with these students and reasoned that an hour after school three days a week was the best they could do at the time, so that is what the students received. All of my knowledge of how to teach ESL came from what I could find on the internet and what I knew about teaching. I met with these students three days a week doing my best to help them learn English. All along I was thinking that what I was doing with them was probably not the ideal situation they needed

to be successful and happy in school, but it was better than no language instruction at all.

A year and a half later, I moved back to Pennsylvania and began looking for a teaching position in the area. I was again picturing a regular elementary classroom, but I needed a job. When the call came to interview for an ESOL position (when I first received the message, I did not know what ESOL stood for), I went on the interview. At the interview, I found out that they called their ESL program English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). When I was called back for a second interview where I would have to teach a lesson to a small group of students, I again used what I knew about teaching elementary students, along with the few things I had read on the internet about teaching ESOL, and I was offered the position. My part-time, after-school program of teaching two little boys English was now my full-time job.

Since I had no formal training, education, or experience in teaching ESOL, I looked to what had been done by the teachers who had previously held my job. I was lucky enough to have a mentor my first year, who had held my job for the previous two years. I was given lesson formats and ideas of what to do with my students, the state standards the students were working toward meeting, and all the paperwork that accompanies ESOL students. I began teaching my ESOL classes as I would a language arts class. We did guided reading, word work, and

writing. Only about five minutes of each class was given to oral language development.

During my second year teaching ESOL, the state decided that teachers should have some formal course work to teach ESOL. Colleges and universities in the area quickly began putting together programs for an ESL Program Specialist. Through these courses I began to learn the theories and methods of teaching ESOL and I began seeing that they were not necessarily aligning with what I was using in my classes.

Unfortunately, it sometimes takes time for information to be absorbed and reflected upon in order for us to make changes in how we are teaching. I completed the four courses I was required to take while processing information about learning and teaching a second language. Because I was completing all the coursework quickly in back-to-back semesters, due to Pennsylvania's given timeline of teachers obtaining their ESL Program Specialist, there was not a lot of time to internalize what I was learning in these classes and reflect upon it in terms of my classroom and teaching methods. It took a year for me to start to think about what I was doing in my ESOL instruction compared to the methods and theories I had learned about teaching ESOL. I was also hearing from the grades three to five ESOL teacher that students who I thought were doing well in the primary grades were not meeting with great success in the upper grades where there was more of a focus on independence and content area reading. The upper

grade classroom teachers were shocked that these students were identified as advanced and exited ESOL students. While sitting at many collaboration meetings with classroom teachers and the reading specialist I realized I was doing many of the same types of things with my students that they were doing in their classrooms. My schedule with my little group of ESOL students looked very similar to the schedule the reading specialist had with her students. If they were all supposed to be learning to read, this must be a good thing, right? I began to question my “schedule.” If I was doing the same thing as the reading specialist, then what was the point of ESOL class? Shouldn’t ESOL class be more than reading for the ESOL students? I saw a need to change how things were being done, but to what? What was ESOL class supposed to look like?

In looking for a different way to teach first and second grade ESOL students, the first idea I found that looked promising was that of Ana Chamot. Her method is the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). At first glance the academic language piece seemed to be what I needed. Upon closer inspection, this was a very metacognitive approach that seemed a bit beyond where my young students were. I began to read work by Early (1990) and Papai (2000) about using content--math, science, and social studies--to teach English. This looked like a promising and exciting way to go, but as second graders, my students do not deal with a lot of content in their reading. I again went back to the articles and research and found an article by Crandall (1998).

She wrote about how the job of an elementary ESL teacher was ever-growing, and yet, our time with our students was ever-shrinking. She looked at applying the method of content-based language instruction at the elementary level by using thematic units. The more I thought through this and thought about what I was picturing my class to look like, the more I realized that what I needed about at a primary level was to center my curriculum around social studies and science thematic units and have the students learn reading, writing, and oral language through thematic units.

Through my study I asked, what are the observed and reported behaviors of using social studies and science based thematic units with second grade ESOL students? In answering this question, I looked at different types of data so that I could obtain a clearer picture as to what was happening in the classroom when I made this change in my instruction. Besides just looking at the work that the students handed in and their language levels, I also observed their habits in class day to day. I wanted to see how this change in instruction affected the student as a whole and the classroom atmosphere and climate. While I hoped for a positive change within my classroom, I did not go into my study with a particular outcome in mind, which hopefully lead me to be more open to and aware of all the things this change in instruction effected as a I analyzed the data I collected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The idea of teaching a second language has been around for many years, and has evolved as educators have learned more through research. Formal methods of the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) began to appear in the 1920s and 1930s with an oral and situational approach, where everything was done orally by drill and repetition and the reading and writing pieces came later (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As education has changed with the standards movement, Cummins ideas of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), and Chamots' work with BICS and CALP and their correlation to Bloom's Taxonomy, the ways in which ESL is taught have had to change as well. Students need to learn language and content at the same time through methods and approaches, such as content-based language instruction and thematic units.

BICS and CALP

In the late 1970s Cummins introduced the idea that there are really two types of language a person learns when learning a language. He began his theory as an extension of Oller's idea that there was a global language proficiency, based on data showing correlations between performance on cloze tests and standardized tests and oral verbal ability (Cummins, 1999). Cummins pointed out that "not all aspects of language use or performance could be incorporated

into one dimension of global language proficiency” (Cummins, 1999, p.1). He suggested that there was the Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS are the language skills required to carry on conversations with other people where meaning can be negotiated and interpreted using social cues as well as language skills. CALP is the language that a person needs to be able to use written language to succeed in a school setting (Collier, 1987). This academic use of language requires a deeper level of proficiency (Collier, 1995) and becomes more difficult as the students move into the upper grades in school.

The rate with which a student becomes proficient in a second language varies. It also depends on the language that is needed. Cummins found that it generally takes students two years to master BICS, whereas it may take five to seven years to be comparable in CALP to the language proficiency of native speakers, as measured on standardized tests (Collier, 1987). This was one of the reasons that Cummins stressed his theory of the different language proficiencies. He found that

failure to take account of these data led to inappropriate psychological testing of bilingual students and premature exit from bilingual or ESL support programs into “mainstream” classes where students received minimal support for continued academic language development. In other words, the

conceptual distinction between BICS and CALP highlighted misconceptions about the nature of language proficiency that were contributing directly to the creation of academic failure among bilingual students. (Cummins, 1999, p. 2)

Many students were being exited from ESL programs with only a mastery of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills. Saville-Troike (1984) found that it requires little or no language to participate in social activity, since most of the language negotiation is non-verbal. Yet it was thought that if second language students were able to communicate basic ideas with others in English they, therefore, had enough mastery of the language to be as successful as their native-speaking peers in an academic situation.

Their seeming communicative competence and fluency are deceptive: although they can talk with their peers, engage in informal conversation with their teachers, read simple narratives, or write informal notes or letters, they are not able to deal with more abstract, formal, contextually reduced language of the texts, tests, lectures, or discussions of science, mathematics, and social studies. (Crandall, 1995, p. 6)

They were being exited from ESL programs and mainstreamed into regular classes based simply on their social language ability and expected to do well without having proficiency in the CALP language.

When Cummins suggested these two types of language, he was not suggesting that BICS and CALP are completely separate things and are learned in different ways. Children learn their conceptual foundation through oral language and conversations about issues. These conversations lead to a deeper level of understanding of the concepts. Cognitive skills are also needed, to a greater or lesser extent, in most social interaction (Cummins, 1999). That is to say that to hold many conversations, cognitive language is needed and that discussion, or communicative language, helps us to deepen our level of understanding of cognitive concepts. However, BICS and CALP language acquisition do part at certain points.

Despite their developmental intersections, BICS and CALP are conceptually distinct insofar as they follow different developmental patterns. . . .Children usually reach a plateau in the development of native-like phonology and fluency after several years of acquisition but CALP continues to develop throughout schooling. (Cummins, 1999, p. 4)

Therefore, an ESL program needs to focus on the cognitive development of the students, encouraging higher-level thinking skills, academic skills and content information, as well as language skills.

BICS, CALP, and Bloom's Taxonomy

Although knowing Cummins' (1999) research shows that there are two types of language that a student learns, it does not specifically help to identify

what constitutes each type of language when working in a classroom setting. Chamot (1985) took Cummins' idea of BICS and CALP and made a very important correlation between these two types of language skills and Bloom's taxonomy. She identified the levels of Bloom's taxonomy that represent BICS language and the levels that represent CALP language. Using these levels, person could easily identify the type of language skills being used.

In Chamot's work she identified the Knowledge, Comprehension, and Application levels of Bloom's Taxonomy as the BICS language levels (Crandall, 1995). At the Knowledge level, the students are recalling vocabulary and labels for different things. At the Comprehension level, the students are beginning to combine known words and are code-switching between their first language and the new language. At the Application level, the students are able to communicate and are able to use the new language they are acquiring in informal situations. It is not until the Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation levels that the students begin using CALP language. At the Analysis level, the students are starting to apply factual information to their discussions and classroom activities. At the Synthesis level, the students have to start using information they learn from reading to make inferences, find relationships, and form conclusions. At the Evaluation level, the students need to use their language skills to make judgments about information they are acquiring through reading and express these judgments through speech and writing activities.

Content-Based Language Instruction

Knowing that English Language Learners (ELLs) need to have fluency and proficiency in both BICS and CALP, many ESL programs began using content: mathematics, social studies, and science, to teach English. This method of teaching ESL has been widely used at the adult, professional, and college education levels, but it has only been more recently that ESL teachers have begun using content to teach ESL at the elementary and secondary levels (Crandall, 1995). This change in how ESL programs are being developed has come as a response to increasing standards and standardized assessments. Previously, when teaching second language learners, emphasis was placed on teaching the language first and then beginning academic instruction when the student had acquired enough English. Research began to show us that stopping the students' academic development was leading to academic failure. As education has become standards-based, and the students are expected to learn more sooner, the second language students cannot afford the time to learn the language first and academics second (Collier, 1995). Students do not have time to learn English and then learn content and meet the standards. English Language Learners need to begin learning both English language and academic content at the same time. Teachers need to integrate language learning and content instruction to give the ESL students a way in which they can continue their academic learning while they acquire language proficiency (Early, 1990). A study completed by Kasper (1997)

shows those students who were enrolled in content-based language classes not only did better while they were in those classes, but also did better in the semesters following those classes.

Using content to teach English also lends itself to Krashan's ideas of comprehensible input (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In Krashan's research, he found that "input must be comprehensible to the learner at or just above the learner's level and be offered in such a way as to allow multiple opportunities to understand and use the language" (Crandall, 1995). Language input has to be at or just above the student's proficiency level in order for the student to learn. This will provide the student meaningful use of the target language in a low-anxiety environment. This natural exposure mirrors the environment in which the student acquired their first language (Troncale, n.d.).

Krashan (1982) recommends using activities and texts that are authentic, interesting, and real-world. Using content to teach English gives the students their comprehensible input by using content that is real-world and texts that are authentic and not written just to teach a skill. The use of content in ESL programs also allows the students to focus on the content and meaning of the language they are learning rather than on the specific form and structure of the language (King, Fagan, Bratt, & Baer, 1995). Papai (2000) found in her research study that using content as a basis for language learning provides students with conceptual knowledge as well as meaningful language instruction and allows them to use the

target language to apply their content knowledge for specific purposes. Using content to teach language gives the students conditions to use real language (Kessler & Quinn, 1995).

In a study of second through sixth grade ESL students, Saville-Troike (1984) found that knowledge of English vocabulary was one of the most important things for an ESL student's academic achievement. Because of this, she suggested that the vocabulary that is being taught to second language students should closely match the vocabulary they would need in their subject matter classes. Within specific content areas, knowledge of vocabulary becomes increasingly important. In science, for example, the use of new terminology and vocabulary generally poses a problem for most students, but it is a particular problem for ESL students (Kessler & Quinn, 1995). Using content to teach English facilitates the acquisition of this needed vocabulary and helps to prepare the English Language Learners (ELLs) for what will be expected of them in the regular classrooms. "Language (ESL/bilingual) teachers can use content-area texts and tasks as a vehicle for developing language proficiency while helping develop academic concepts and skills" (Crandall, 1992, p. 114). It helps to give them the background and knowledge they will need to be successful in regular content classes. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who learn English language and content-area skills at the same time will make an easier transition into the regular mainstream classes (Crandall, 1995).

Thematic Units

Elementary ESL teachers have to find an effective way to teach content and language learning at a level suitable for elementary students. Thematic units offer a way to integrate vocabulary, concepts, and learning strategies, as well as offer opportunities for the students to participate in a variety of activities and experiences (Crandall, 1998). Thematic units provide a method for integrating language learning and content learning (Mickel & Goerss, 1996). Thematic units are groups of lessons that cover a variety of content and topics that are related to a major topic. They integrate different activities and subjects together by having them all related to one big topic. Thematic instruction integrates basic disciplines like reading, math, science, and social studies with the exploration of a broad subject, such as communities, rain forests, river basins, the use of energy, and so on (Mickel & Goerss, 1996). Smallwood (2002) suggests that using thematic units with young ELLs, ages three through eight, is particularly beneficial for them because it gives them practice with the language they need to hear and use, and provides them with background knowledge and experiences they need for success in their later education. Creating instruction around thematic units helps to bring together both the content that is being learned and the process of learning (Sheerer, Dettore, & Cyphers, 1996). Students are able to learn the information as well as how to learn. Through connections of information, building of vocabulary, student engagement and motivation, access to learning through

multiple intelligences, and higher level thinking skills, students are able to make the most of their learning within the time constraints of a regular school day.

Connections

When thematic units are used in any classroom setting, it helps the students to connect ideas. As the students participate in activities that require them to use language purposefully, they are able to expand their concepts and make connections to prior knowledge and experiences (Bergeron, Wermuth, Rhondes, & Rudenga, 1996). Students can make these connections to their own experiences as well as other content they are learning. These connections of ideas and concepts are particularly important for at-risk students, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Langer (2001) studied of features of English instruction that made students successful learners, one of the pieces she found in successful schools was connecting learning across lessons, classes, skills, ideas, grade levels, and in and out of school experiences. She found that over 90% of the successful teachers in the study consciously planned out their lesson to help the students make connections between the new material and prior knowledge and experiences. Within their discussion of at-risk students, students who have or are expected to have difficulty or failure in school, Gutknecht and Gutknecht (1997) advocate for the use of thematic units for these students. They say these students need instruction that does not rely on low expectations and meaningless lessons that target isolated skills, but rather high expectations and lessons that help them

to build connections. Thematic units provide this opportunity for these students. They give the students the occasion and framework to discover connections across facts, topics and themes because discovering connections is at the center of thematic instruction (Freeman & Sokoloff, 1996; Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, & Peters, 1993).

When Peters (1995) studied an elementary school in Aleknagik, Alaska, that implemented a thematic approach throughout the school, he found many positives for using thematic teaching. One of the pieces he observed was that the students were making connections on their own between the content they were learning in different classes. The students were able to see that the information they were learning in math connected to what they were learning in science and reading. This proves that, as Rakow and Vasquez (1998) contend, thematic teaching shows students how the different content areas are related and connected. This helps the students to come to a higher level of understanding of the information they are learning in all of their classes. Thematic units encourage students to explore ideas more thoroughly so that they develop, on their own, an awareness of the connections across ideas (Shanahan, Robinson, & Schneider, 1995). This idea also applies to the connections between content areas and related arts classes. Shubert and Melnick (1997) studied the integration of the arts with civics, English, history, and geography. When they interviewed the students, they found that the students were more ready for each class because “although they

changed classes, they didn't have to change gears" (Shubert & Melnick, 1997, p. 11). The students were able to make connections between the classes and had a deeper learning and understanding of the material they were seeing in all of their classes. Teachers even noted that students would make comments during class that showed knowledge that was not directly taught in that class.

Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

In Shubert and Melnick's (1997) study, they also saw students doing well in classes where they had not before. Integrating the subjects allowed the students to see the material in different ways with different learning styles. Gardner (1993) put forward that there were seven types of intelligence, not just one. His work suggests that students need the opportunity to show what they know through these different intelligences. Students also have various learning styles. Some students are visual learners, some auditory learners, and some kinesthetic learners (Fuller, 2001). Shubert and Melnick (1997) saw that when students were presented with information in several ways, the students were better able to comprehend the material. Thematic units, by integrating several disciplines, give more opportunities for the students to benefit from their diverse learning styles and intelligences. Activities within the units allow the students opportunities for singing, chanting, reading, story telling, drawing, orally giving and following directions, and completing projects and experiments (Crandall, 1998). These

various activities allow students the chance to learn and show what they have learned in ways that best suits their needs.

Student Engagement

When teachers use thematic units, the students become more interested in what they are learning. Yorks and Follo (1993) completed a study of engagement rates of students during traditional and thematic instruction. Through the Engagement Rate Observation form, Yorks found that students' engagement rates were higher during the thematic units (95.7%, 95.7%, and 93.2%) as compared to the engagement rates during her traditional instruction (85.7%, 78.6%, and 80.1%). In comparing these numbers to the students' perceptions, she found that the students reported having been on task more frequently during the thematic instruction. She noted and the students reported being much more excited and involved during the thematic instruction compared to the traditional instruction. Shubert and Melnick (1997) discovered the same results with regards to student engagement. While not specifically looking for student engagement, they reported that students were assuming roles of leadership where they had not before, and there was a decrease in absenteeism with the integration of the arts and several content areas. Fuller (2001) saw similar results in her six-year study of the impact of the Partnerships Advancing the Learning in Math and Science (PALMS) approach in Massachusetts. Teachers' input showed that there were significant gains in student enjoyment of learning and participation in class when

using this integrated approach. Thematic units “tend to lend themselves to high-interest and motivating lessons in which children learn and use English in a variety of ways” (Peck, 1992, p. 136). When the students’ interest in the lesson is high, they are more motivated to learn and there is a greater chance of participation in the lesson. Thematic units give the students real reasons to use the target language that are based around interesting topics and content that are worthy of study. Students’ attitudes and motivation towards reading and writing are also positively influenced by thematic units. As the students begin to see reading and writing as a means to learn more about a topic of interest to them, it becomes a means to an end. They develop and refine their reading and writing skills within the context of real and interesting information (Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, & Peters, 1993). The students can see a purpose for learning to read and write rather than simply knowing they have to learn to read and write because someone told them. Students need to learn that the primary goal of reading is comprehension. Through a thematic approach, the students can learn these skills while reading about content they need to learn (Gutknecht & Gutknecht, 1997).

Vocabulary

Thematic units facilitate the learning of vocabulary. As discussed earlier, it is essential for ESL students to develop their vocabulary for success in an academic setting. Papai (2000) saw in her study of a middle school English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class that teaching using thematic units

facilitated the acquisition of vocabulary for the second language learners. When the vocabulary was presented to the students within a thematic unit, rather than as a decontextualized vocabulary list, the students were exposed to the vocabulary repeatedly and in different contexts. Consequently, they developed a deeper understanding of the vocabulary and were able to use the new words in different situations. Hippner-Page (2000) found similar results when she studied using different ways of clustering vocabulary words for second language learners. While she did not see a significant difference between thematically or semantically grouping vocabulary words, she did find that students saw connections between the words which helped them to learn the words when they were grouped together thematically. By teaching using thematic units, teachers can present vocabulary to the students many times and in many ways, and can show students the connections between the words. This will lead to more vocabulary learned and better understood.

Higher Level Thinking Skills

At-risk students “must be challenged with high expectations and meaningful instruction” (Gutknecht & Gutknecht, 1997, p. 19). Students cannot just learn information in order to recite it back the way it was given to them. They need to be given the opportunity to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the information they are learning in order to understand it at a higher level. Thematic units allow the teacher to create projects and assignments that require the students

to use higher level thinking skills in order to complete them (Ferguson, 2002).

They allow the students to take what they have read about the content and, through discussion, move to higher levels of thinking. Because a thematic unit is meaningful, the students have to think at higher levels to search for connections and patterns in what they are reading (vanDeusen & Brandt, 1997). Within a thematic unit, the students are going beyond learning the content. They are putting pieces together and making connections as they progress toward a higher level of understanding that requires higher level thinking skills.

While planning a thematic unit takes a lot of time, the benefits and advantages that exist for the students within a thematic unit are well worth it (Mickel & Goerss, 1996). It combines vocabulary instruction; connections between content, skills, and life; higher level thinking skills; multiple intelligences and learning styles; and increased student engagement and involvement altogether. Although teachers found this type of teaching very time-consuming to plan, they reported that they had more time in the classroom to observe and help their students in order to meet their needs and help each student find their greatest learning potential (Fuller, 2001). Most importantly for elementary ESL students, it allows a way to join the learning of content with the learning of English, which encourages life-long language growth. Even low language proficiency students are able to find success with thematic units (Early, 1990). As ESL teachers find themselves with more and more to teach, and often

less time in which to teach it, thematic units provide a way to combine many pieces in order to achieve the greatest level of learning for the students and use the time they do have to its fullest extent.

Conclusion

Research has changed the way that second language instruction is delivered. Cummins' (1999) idea of the social language, BICS, and the academic language, CALP, has made us aware that there are different types of language a student must learn in order to do well in social situations and academic situations. Chamot has taken Cummins' ideas of BICS and CALP and showed that the BICS language is the language used at the first three levels of Bloom's taxonomy levels, whereas the CALP language is the language used at the higher level thinking skills of the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Work done by many educators and researchers including Early (1990), Papai (2000), Saville-Troike (1984), and Kasper (1997) clearly show the need for second language students to learn language and content at the same time. There is neither time nor reason for these students to stop their academic development in order to learn a new language. Language and academic content must be presented together. Students will be able to develop both their BICS and CALP as they are learning English by teaching them language through content. This should lead to more success for the students as they spend more time in the regular classroom where more content knowledge and cognitive language is expected of them. Finally, thematic units present a way

to bring content-based instruction to an elementary level as well as to help students make connections and improve their vocabulary, engagement, and higher level thinking skills. Taken altogether, there is a body of evidence showing both the need and value of teaching elementary second-language students content and language through thematic units.

METHODOLOGY

Setting

I teach at Jefferson Elementary School in the LaCrosse Area School District. This is a large urban school district. My elementary school is in a mixed community, with half of the students coming from the lowest income level of subsidized housing and the other half coming from single family homes. There are 397 students in the school. Of these 397 students, 229 are Hispanic, 136 are Caucasian, 27 are African American and 5 are Asian. More than half of the students in the school are considered socio-economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. There are 71 English Language Learners (ELLs) in the school who are serviced by two English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers, one full-time and one half-time. The school also receives funds through Title 1 as a school-wide Title 1 building.

Participants

I conducted my study in a second grade elementary ESOL class. The class consisted of ten students pulled from two regular second grade classes. There were ten students in the group. There were three girls and seven boys in this group. Based on their language proficiency in oral language, reading, and writing, two of the students were beginner ESOL students, five were intermediate ESOL students, and four were advanced ESOL students. All of the students

returned their signed parent permission form, so all ten students were participants in my study.

Research Design

For my study I designed social studies and science thematic units for my second language students. I created units based on social studies and science standards so that the students would be learning the content material along with oral English language, reading, and writing skills.

Throughout the units the students completed activities and assignments that allowed them to meet language objectives, reading and writing standards and objectives, and social studies or science standards and objectives, depending on the unit we were doing. Within each lesson there was an objective that dealt with reading and/or writing skills and standards, science or social studies standards, and oral English language skills. In this manner the students learned the English language at the same time they were learning reading and writing skills needed for their grade level as well as social studies and science content as deemed necessary by the Pennsylvania State Standards.

My method was founded in the idea that by fusing these three pieces together throughout the lessons in each unit, the students would gain the language necessary for them to be successful in the regular classroom. It also gave their language learning purpose because they need not only be able to communicate with their peers and teachers, but they must become proficient in academic

language so that they are successful learners in the regular classrooms (Crandall, 1995). The ultimate goal of any ESOL program is that students become proficient in English at a level at which they are able to succeed in the regular classroom.

Data Collection

During my study I collected various forms of data to support my study. By using various forms of data collection I was able to triangulate my data to ensure I was getting a true understanding of what was happening in my classroom during the study.

Participant Observations

I conducted daily observations of my class by taking notes during the class that were written into formal observations within an hour after the class (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). I tried to capture the sense of what had taken place in the classroom by including many direct quotes from the students. To be as accurate as possible, I wrote down verbatim what the students said during class in my field notes. Within these written observations I was careful to separate what I actually observed and my comments about what I observed by using a 2-column sheet with one side for the observed behaviors and comments and the other side for my reflection and analysis of what was observed. All of my participant observations were kept in a field log so that I could analyze and code them as a complete set of data as well as individual pieces of data.

Student Work

I also collected student work that was completed during class activities. These work samples included paragraph writing samples, graphic organizers, experiment sheets, and any written pieces of work the students completed during class. Their work allowed me to see the extent to which the students were able to apply the skills and content being taught to their independent work.

Student Surveys

At the end of each unit I administered a survey to the students (Sagor, 2000). The students were asked to write one thing they liked from the unit we had just completed and why they liked that activity. They were also asked to write one thing they did not like during the unit and why they did not like it (see Appendix A). I surveyed the students so that I would get a chance to hear what they were thinking about the activities we did during the study. I also used the surveys to get an idea about why the students did and did not like certain activities. I wanted to make sure I was getting accurate feedback from the students so that I could determine whether they liked or disliked an activity because of the activity itself, or the difficulty they have with that type of expressive language, be it oral, reading, or writing.

Reading Assessment

I also looked at some assessment data for the students. I looked at their Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs), which were done both at the

beginning of the study and at the end, to look for growth in the students' reading proficiency. The DRA is an assessment that is administered individually to each student. The students are required to read a selection and then orally retell the story to the teacher. They must pass both the accuracy, the ability to read the words, and the comprehension, the retell of the story, portions of the test in order to pass a level. The levels on the DRA correspond to grade level benchmarks that students must meet to be considered proficient in reading at that grade level. This assessment is used heavily in second grade to determine whether or not the students are reading on grade level. By collecting the students' DRA scores I was able to track their reading progress during my study.

Stage Forms

I also collected the students' ESOL stage forms that were completed in May and again in November (see Appendix B and C). These stage forms use descriptors of oral, reading, and writing competencies that correspond to numbers. These numbers then plot out on a grid that helps to determine the student's English proficiency level-beginner, intermediate, or advanced. We use these forms to monitor the progress of the students through the ESOL program. Once the students have reached the competencies at sixth level, they are considered proficient and are exited from the ESOL program.

By collecting different forms of data and reflecting on all of them, I had more credibility to make assertions and conclusions about my study (Sagor,

2000). These different forms of data also gave me a clearer understanding of everything that was happening within my classroom, which made my study more trustworthy (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). To help ensure the anonymity of my students all data collected was kept secure in my home during my study and was destroyed at the conclusion of my study.

Trustworthiness Statement

In conducting my research study, I wanted to ensure that my research methods, data collection, and data analysis were trustworthy. In following the suggestions of Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) and Sagor (2000), there are several things that I did and was aware of as I conducted my study.

In following with the requirements of the college, I began by submitting my proposal to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSRIB). Once I had their approval (see Appendix D) I was ready to begin my study.

Before beginning my data collection, I obtained the consent of the parents for my students to be participants in my study (Sagor, 2000) (see Appendix E) as well as the permission of my building principal (see Appendix F). I also made my students aware of the study that we were going to be doing in the class (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). While I needed only the permission of the parents, having the students aware of what was going to take place would make them more active and involved participants in the study. The parents and the students also needed to be aware that they could choose to withdraw from the study as they

deemed necessary without penalty (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). A student's grades would not be affected by participation or non-participation in the study. If a student was withdrawn from my study, no data collected about that student was included in any part of my study. I created fictitious names for each of my students to be used in place of their real names (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). In doing this I protected and secured their identity. I also allowed them a freer and more open voice in their surveys and work as they knew there was no consequence or direct link to them based on their work and the information they shared. All of my students participated in the activities in the classroom as part of their regular ESOL instruction. There was no delineation between the participants and non-participants in my study. However, only data for students whom I had parental consent was included in my research study.

Throughout my study I shared my data with a researcher support group consisting of four other thesis candidates. This helped me receive feedback on my study and get other views and insights into my study.

As I collected and analyzed the data, I kept in mind any biases I may have had about my students that could impact the collection and analysis of the data (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Since I completed with study with my second grade students, this is the third year in a row that I have had many of these students. While I knew a lot about them, which could be a positive when trying to meet their specific needs, it also meant I may have had preconceived thoughts

about their abilities and attitudes. Throughout my study I kept these biases in mind so that they did not affect my data collection and data analysis.

By ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and unbiased reflections of myself and the data I collected, I ensured that my research study was credible and that my findings were trustworthy.

MY STORY

My group this year is the largest group I have had. In the entire second grade I have 21 students, which is a large number for one grade level at a mid-impact school (our schools are identified as high, mid, or low impact based on the number of English Language Learners we have). Due to the large number of students, the size of my classroom, and the schedules of the regular second grade classes, I had to break the students up into three groups. I decided to focus on my second group of the day. This group had the most diversity of the students' language proficiency levels, reading levels, and years in the school.

Meet the Students

Tabib

I am a second grade student at Jefferson. I was originally born in the country of Turkey and lived there until I was almost six years old. Then my family moved to Catasauqua in the United States. I went to First Grade in Lawrenceville and learned how to speak some English and how to read and write in English. Just before I started Second Grade my family moved to LaCrosse. While I can read, write, and speak in English, it is still difficult for me. At home we only speak Turkish. I still think in Turkish and there are lots of words I do not know in English.

Adil

I was born in Russia. When I was six years old my family moved to the United States. I started school in First Grade in Lawrenceville. I did not know any English when I started and things were very confusing. I watched other people a lot to see what I was supposed to do. About halfway through that year my family moved to LaCrosse and I started going to school at Jefferson. I knew a little English at this point and I was learning to read and write lots of new English words. Reading and writing in English are easier for me than speaking in English. At home I speak mostly Turkish and Russian with my family. I sometimes speak English with my sister because she is learning English in school too.

Carlos

While my family comes from Puerto Rico, I was born in LaCrosse. When I was little my family spoke both English and Spanish. Now that I am in school I mostly speak English at home. My mom sometimes speaks Spanish to me, but I usually answer her in English. I only use Spanish when I talk to my grandma because she lives in Puerto Rico and does not speak English.

Efrain

I was born in LaCrosse because my family moved here from Puerto Rico when my oldest sister was just a little baby. At home we speak both English and Spanish. When I started school, I got to go to Jefferson's first all day Kindergarten class. Sometimes I get a little confused between English and

Spanish words when I talk. I do not know how to read or write in Spanish, only English.

Maria

I was born in Puerto Rico. My family moved to LaCrosse when I was just a little baby. I went to Kindergarten at Totaro Elementary, but my family moved to a new house after Kindergarten so for First Grade I started going to Jefferson Elementary. I speak a lot of Spanish at home with my family, although we all know how to speak English also. My parents think it is important for me to remember how to speak both Spanish and English because most of my family still lives in Puerto Rico and speaks Spanish. I love reading and writing at school, but sometimes I can't remember the word I need to use in English.

Javier

My mom moved to LaCrosse from Puerto Rico a long time before I was born. When I was little she would speak to me in English and Spanish. When I started talking I used both languages. There are lots of words I know in English that I don't know in Spanish, but there are also some words I know in Spanish that I don't know in English.

Alonzo

I was born in LaCrosse. I started school when I was three years old in the SPARK pre-school. I went there for two years and then I went to Kindergarten at Jefferson. After Kindergarten my family moved to a new house and I went to

First Grade at a different school. At the end of First Grade my family moved again and now I go to Jefferson again. My parents came from Puerto Rico and speak a lot of Spanish at home, but they also speak English sometimes. I can speak both pretty good. I also go to the Speech Therapist once a week to get help with how I say some of my words.

Martin

My mom and dad came to the United States from a French-speaking island. They both know how to speak French and English, but I only know how to speak English. I used to hear them speaking French sometimes to each other and could understand some, but they never speak it with me.

Selena

I was born in Puerto Rico. Before I was a year old my family moved to LaCrosse. When I was little my family spoke English and Spanish, so I did too. I can speak and understand in both English and Spanish, but I can only read and write in English.

Linh

I was born in Vietnam. When I was four years old my family moved to LaCrosse. At home I speak mostly Vietnamese because that is the language that my mom speaks. At school I speak only English because that is what everyone else at school speaks.

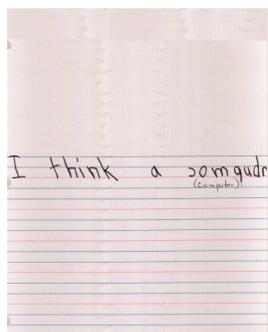
Communities

As I began this first social studies unit about communities with the students based on the Pennsylvania Geography standards 7.3.3C Identifying the human characteristics of places and regions by their settlement characteristics and 7.3.3D Identifying the human characteristics of places and regions by their economic activities, I was at first concerned that I may be teaching them content and vocabulary they were already familiar with, which would be both a waste of their time and mine. I decided to start with a small pre-unit assessment. I wrote the question “What is a community?” on the board and asked the students to respond to it on paper. I, of course, was greeted with the typical question students ask when given a writing assignment, “How much do we need to write?” I told them to write as much as they needed in order to answer the question. Since many of the students did not know the exact answer there was a lot of staring off and playing with pencils and erasers. It was not until Efrain suggested that he was going to start with “I think” that many students began to write. My two beginner students, Tabib and Adil, required the most prompting to get started. I had to reassure them that it was okay to be wrong and to take a guess at what they thought a community might be. I began to worry a little about what I was planning to do with the units. I knew I would be asking the students to do some higher level thinking, which was going to require some harder work on their part.

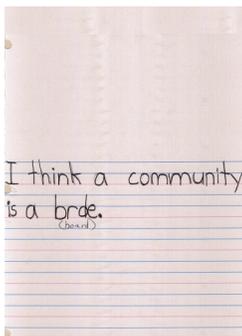
The shutdown response I was getting to this initial question was not very encouraging.

Besides being amused by some of their responses, I was happy to see that I had not chosen a topic that would be a repeat of what they have done. In fact their responses showed that a unit on communities was very much needed (see Figure 1).

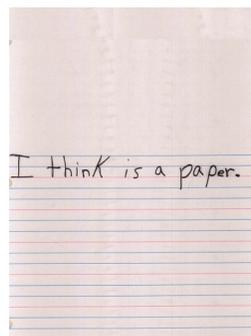
Since there seemed to be so little knowledge of what a community was I decided to start very small and concrete for the students and then move to the more abstract concepts. As Vygotsky (1978) tells us, “Concreteness is now seen as necessary and unavoidable only as a stepping stone for developing abstract thinking-as a means, not as an end in itself” (p. 89). We would begin with the idea of our school as a community and move out from there. This way of looking at things also helped the new students to become more familiar with the school building so they were more comfortable. I also wanted to see how the students worked together and get a better feel for some of their personalities and strengths, so I had the students break into two groups and map the upstairs and downstairs of our school. I tried to let the groups work while I stepped back to observe. A good way for students to build language proficiency is to have to use language for a specific purpose (Kessler & Quinn, 1995). My hope was that the students would negotiate meaning and language as they collected the necessary data for their maps.



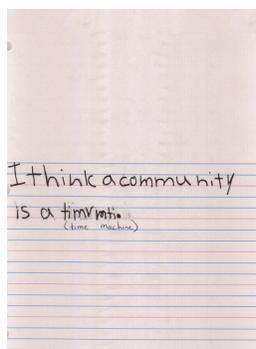
Carlos-I think a computer.



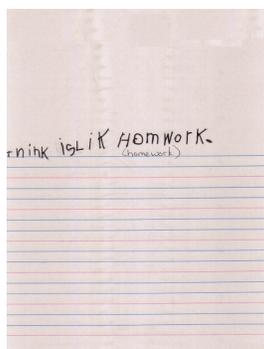
Efrain-I think a community is a board.



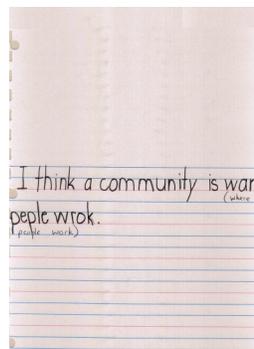
Martin-I think a paper.



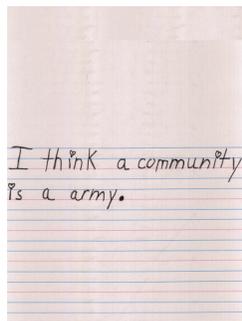
Selena- I think a community is a time machine.



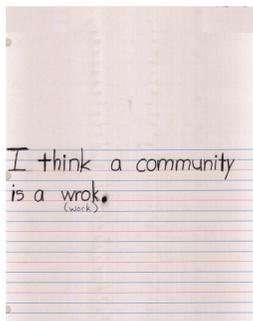
Tabib-think is like homework



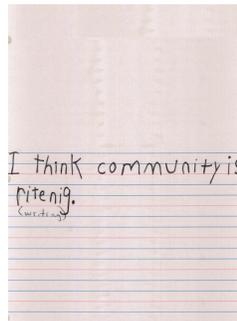
Linh-I think a community is where people work.



Maria-I think a community is a army.



Alonzo-I think a community is a work.



Adil-I think community is writing.

Figure 1 Students' answers to community pretest-What is a community?

The students went around the building taking note of where classrooms and offices were so they could make a map of it when they were back in the classroom. As we walked around the building the downstairs group; Alonzo, Maria, Selena, Martin, and Tabib; walked quietly saying nothing and had to be reminded multiple times about what they were supposed to be doing. The upstairs group; Carlos, Efrain, Adil, and Linh; discussed everything they saw and helped each other write it down. The behavior of the groups carried over into the actual making of the maps in the classroom. The upstairs group worked together and discussed where everything had to go on their paper. The behaviors in the downstairs group were split. Maria and Selena took charge and began arranging their squares on the paper to represent the different classrooms while the boys in the group sat back and watched. Even when the girls struggled with where certain rooms should be placed, the boys offered no assistance.

After the first day of having only some of the students engaged in the activity and using language, I decided I needed to do something to encourage the other students. This came in the form of assigning simple jobs to the students who were not engaged the previous day. I simply asked these students to be the map holders and the pen holders. Tabib and Carlos were asked to hold the maps for their groups and Martin and Adil were asked to hold the pens for their groups. The change in behavior and attitude was incredible. Suddenly Tabib was working at the center of his group. He offered suggestions about how to write the

information and how to spell the teachers' names. Carlos began to help his group make sure the map was turned the correct way so that all the information would be written in the same direction. I noted that Adil was still not adding much to the conversation of his group, but he was a part of the group now instead of hanging back from the group.

Once we had our maps completed, the students were able to visualize all the people and places that were a part of our school community. The students were then able to make a chart of the people that made up the Jefferson School community. Now that the group had a basis for what our school community looked like and who was in it, it was time to turn up the thinking level a bit. I wanted the students to see that all of these places and people were important to Jefferson and the school would not be the same without them, but in the spirit of building language and knowledge and making connections, I did not want to just tell them this. So toward the end of the class period the students were given a puzzle picture of a school with all different people and places in it (see Appendix G). With a bit of moaning and groaning about how hard it was to put this puzzle together, the students assembled their pictures and got a chance to see the whole picture put together. They then had to take it apart and put it away for the next day. After the students were back in their regular classrooms, I removed a puzzle piece from each student's puzzle envelope. The next day the students were asked

to once again assemble their puzzles. As the students worked they began to realize they didn't have all the pieces.

Linh: I'm only missing one.

Efrain: I need one more.

Javier: I only have eight.

Selena: I need nine. I'm missing one more.

Maria: I'm missing one.

Mrs. Possinger: What's wrong with that? It's only one piece.

Selena: No-I'm missing the parents.

Linh: I'm missing the students reading.

Javier: I'm missing the nurse.

Selena: You took it (indicating me).

Linh: Adil's missing the teacher.

Selena: He's (pointing to Alonzo) missing the nurse.

Efrain: See, no bus.

Mrs. Possinger: Isn't that alright?

Maria: I'm missing the one with the janitor.

Mrs. Possinger: What's the problem with that?

Selena: Cause then I don't have a puzzle. If I'm missing a piece, then I can't do it. I need all the pieces.

Mrs. Possinger: If this was Jefferson, would it be good?

Javier: If everything disappeared then this school, then, oh forget it.

Maria: We need everything.

Javier: It's not good without all the parts.

The students are then given back their missing piece to complete their puzzles.

Alonzo: That's better. It looks better with everything.

Maria: Just like Jefferson, there's everything and everyone we need.

Linh: The puzzle didn't work good without all the pieces and Jefferson wouldn't work good without all the pieces either.

I was impressed with how the students were able to make the jump in thought and connect the idea of the missing puzzle piece to our school. Through discussion, most were able to connect the idea of needing all the different parts to make the school a whole community. I did not know if Selena realized how poignant her words were when she said "...then I can't do it, I need all the pieces." Her words helped to turn the focus of the discussion from the specific pieces they were missing to the idea of not being able to have a school without all the pieces. Even at this early stage in the unit the students seem to be able to make connections between the concrete and the abstract and do some higher level thinking.

After having used the school for the basis of what a community is, we turned our attention to the larger community we live in. Our readings and discussions quickly took us to the topic of community helpers and workers. As

we read our first book, My Community, it was interesting to note which community helpers the students were familiar with and which they were not. As we looked at pictures of different community workers they knew firefighter, police, nurse, mail carrier, and mechanic, but not grocer or chef. While I had not thought they would know the actual word grocer, I thought they would know what he did or where he worked. On the flip side of this, I did not think that they would come up with the mechanic. I especially did not think that Tabib would know the word mechanic.

As I reflected on the unit thus far and looked to see where it should go, I realized that I had not incorporated much reading into the unit up to this point. While the students' oral language and vocabulary development are important, I also have to work on their reading skills and teach them how to pull out information from what they are reading. Using the Reading a-z website, I was able to find four books about community helpers and workers at varying reading levels-Caretakers, Community Helpers, Workers, and Community Workers. Because of the various levels of the books and the reading levels of the students, I had the students work in groups to read each book and make a poster about one person in the book. I tried to assign the groups so that there was a strong reader in each group, although in a group of 10 students who are coming out of the classroom for extra help, this is not always doable. To address the language

levels and individual strengths of the students, I had them use pictures and words on their posters to tell about a community helper or worker from their book.

As the groups worked, the two groups-Maria and Martin and Linh, Tabib, and Alonzo-that had a definite strong leader and reader worked quickly and quietly and needed little help or redirection. Javier and Efrain, the group without a distinct leader, did not need help with the reading, but needed re-explanation of the directions and redirection twice to get them started. Adil, Selena, and Carlos, the group without a distinct strong reader, needed the most reminder and redirection to work. They chose instead to have conversation about what they had done the previous evening and then to have a sword fight with the markers. Since it was only one group that seemed to be having some behavioral issues, I was able to focus my attention on them to help keep them working. I found as I sat by their group, it was not that they were not able to do the assignment, but that they were more interested in the other, more social, things they were doing. As I looked more closely at how the students were broken into groups I realized that all three students in this group also come from the same regular classroom, which may have played a part in their behavior with each other. Because I had all the groups read all the books, this activity took two days to complete. On the second day of the activity the groups really began to work together rather than trying to work individually within the group. The students began asking each other how to read certain words and how to spell things correctly for their posters. As the students

moved from book to book they knew what they were supposed to do and needed no direction or help from me. One of the books only talked about three community workers, so I had anticipated the group that got this book last would be telling me there was nothing left to do. Instead what I saw was some problem solving on the group's part. Rather than telling me there were only three listed and they had nothing to do, they used a worker who was pictured in the book, but not talked about. The level of work and engagement in the reading and in the writing of the information on the posters was thrilling to see. The students were really getting into the people they were reading about and talking about. Besides discussing just the factual information they needed for the posters they began to talk about where they had seen these different people and people they knew who had these jobs. The conversations in the groups stayed on the topic of community helpers and workers even when the group was finished and was waiting to move to the next book.

As the year and our first unit had been progressing, the students had been learning about how to write a four sentence paragraph. This is a foundational writing format that the students learn in second grade so they are able to write written response paragraphs and reports in the upper grades. It is a writing format that my students need to know very well in order to find success with the reading curriculum in third, fourth, and fifth grades. It is very new to the students, but it is a piece that I need to incorporate into anything I am doing in my classroom.

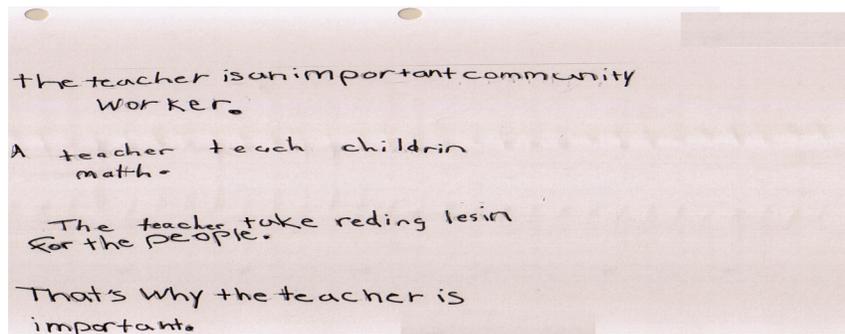
Since we had done so much on the different community worker and helpers, I felt this was an excellent time to bring paragraph writing into the unit.

We began by reviewing the parts of the paragraph-main idea, two supporting details, and restate the main idea. I found that Linh, Javier, Maria, Selena, and Alonzo answered most of the questions about the paragraph. I wondered whether this was because they were the only ones who knew the information or if the other students were just not willing to participate in class. As we worked together to write a sample paragraph about a grocer, the students needed a little help with the wording of the main idea, but were able to easily tell me details to write. There was, of course, more trouble when we got to restating the main idea. They were able to tell me what it meant to restate the main idea, but did not have any ideas for how to do this. This sentence took more language on their part. It is difficult enough at times for them to find the words they need to talk and write about academic subjects without having to say the same thing they already said using different words. This was part of the reason I wanted to do the sample paragraph first. I gave the students a format they can use for any time they restate the main idea. It may not be the most original or creative way of doing it, but having the format gives them the confidence to go ahead and write their ideas to show what they know without getting hung up on language and vocabulary. Once we finished the sample paragraph the students picked a worker or helper they wanted to write about and went to their seats to start. Tabib sat

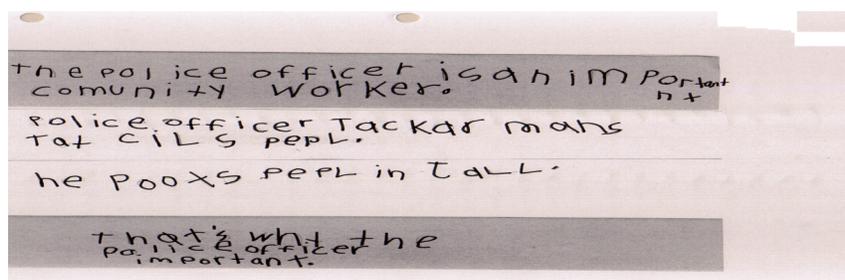
down and stared at his paper. I could almost see the train of thought going through his head.

“Why do I have to do this? I don’t like writing. It is very hard for me. I just don’t know to write. Mrs. Poss..., how you say her name again, she tells us to write, but for me is hard. I like when we talk, then I can sit back and not have to do so much. Other people do the talking, I just have to listen. I have all of these English words in my head, but writing them down on paper in the right way, I just can’t do. Maybe I sit here and it be time to go back to my class and I don’t have to do this. Oh no, she sees that I have nothing.”

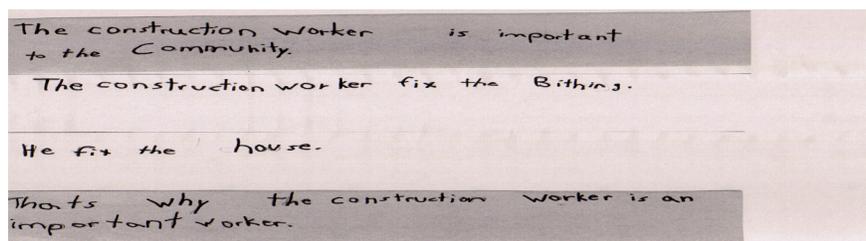
As I worked with Tabib reading over the sample paragraph we had done, he was able to verbalize what he wanted to write and then write it. Since this seemed to be working for him I continued doing this for each sentence. He told me orally what he wanted to write and then wrote it down. The little bit of discussion about what he wanted to write gave him the vocabulary and confidence that he could do this on his own. While I hoped to have him eventually writing on his own, now that I had found a trick to help him write I was going to continue it as long as he seemed to need it. As I collected the students work, I was glad that we had done a sample paragraph together. The students were able to use the formats from the sample paragraph to construct their own paragraphs. Aside from a few spelling and capital letter errors, the paragraphs were well written (see Figure 2). The students were able to pull the information from the books and



Selena-The teacher is an important community worker. A teacher teach children math. The teacher take reading lesson for the people. That's why the teacher is important.



Tabib-The police officer is an important community worker. Police officer take care mans that kills people. He puts people in jail. That's why the police officer important.



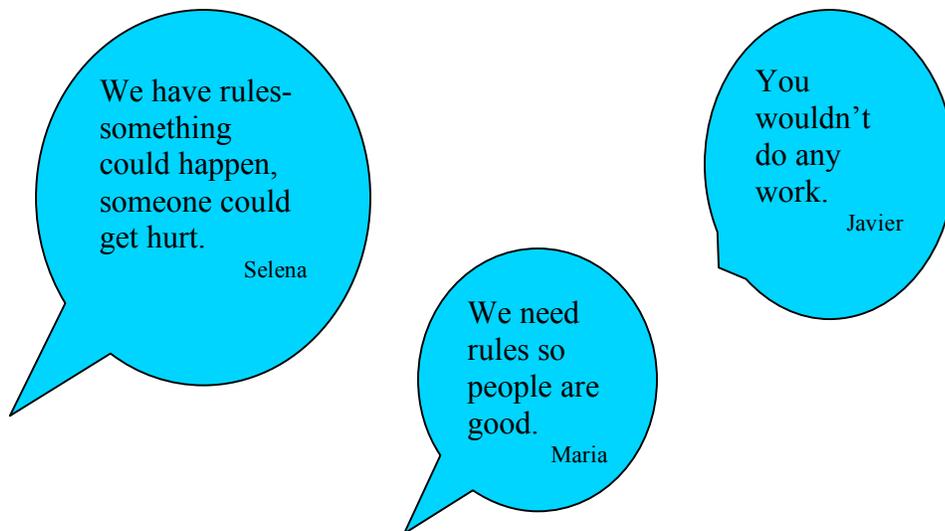
Javier-The construction worker is important to the community. The construction worker fix the building. He fix the house. That's why the construction worker is an important worker.

Figure 2 Samples of students' community worker paragraphs

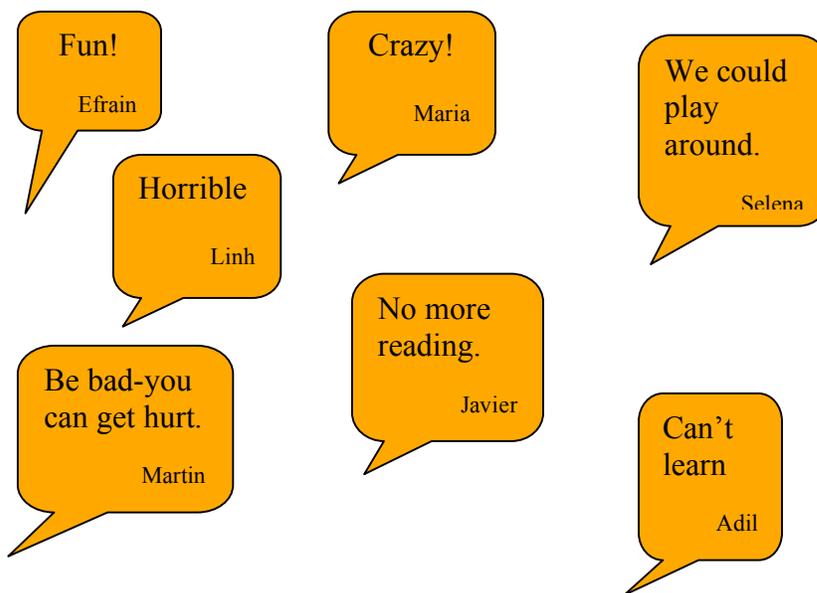
posters we had done to write their own sentences about their community helper/worker.

As I continue to strive to mix the content with oral language, reading, and writing, I wanted to focus on some oral language. I designed an activity where the students would have a discussion about rules. Keeping in mind the oral rehearsal that Tabib needed in order to be comfortable with what he was going to say, I gave the students the opportunity to talk about and answer the questions in small groups before discussing them as a whole class (see Appendix H). As I listened to the groups discuss the questions, this is what I heard.

Are rules important?



What would school be like without rules?



What would your community be like without rules?

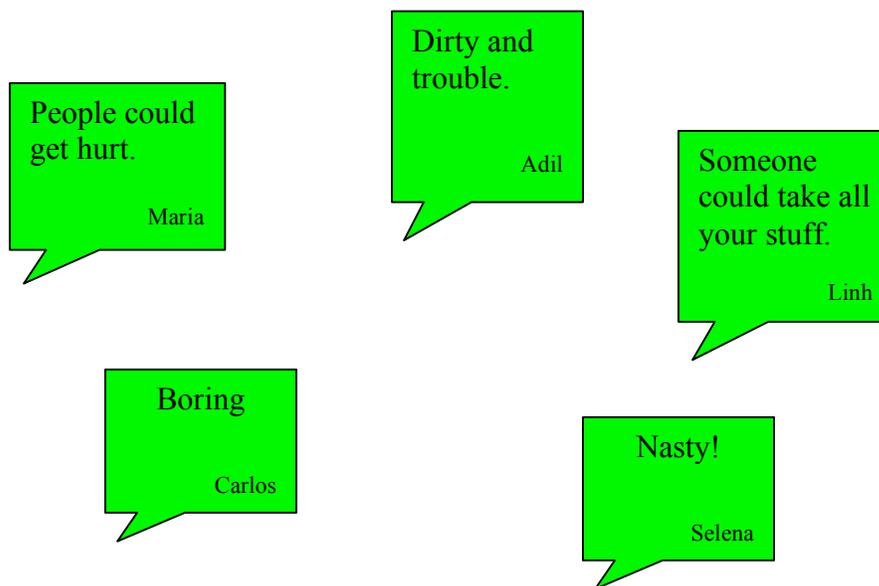


Figure 3 Students' responses as they worked in groups

As the group came back together for the discussion I felt good about the discussion they would be able to have based on the small group discussions I had heard. While there was a little hesitation when the students first started talking in the larger group, this seemed to dissipate as the conversation progressed and they began to feel more comfortable adding their opinions. I think at the beginning they were waiting for me to lead the discussion, but soon realized this was not going to happen. This became a great opportunity for the students to not only voice their opinions, but also, through discussion, learn what others were thinking.

Mrs. Possinger: Are rules important?

Linh: Someone can get hurt without rules, so they help us.

Selena: Someone can steal, the world would be nasty.

Efrain: We are safe because of rules.

The class gets quiet as they look at me for direction or the next question, so I give them a little help.

Mrs. Possinger: What would it be like without rules?

Maria: It would be fun and crazy.

Javier: But no one can learn if there were no rules.

Selena: Yeah, but we could do anything we want.

Linh: Someone could get hurt and no one would say anything or get in trouble.

Javier: Someone could push you down and make you bleed.

Linh: Then you would be hurt and not happy.

Javier: We would have nothing to do if everyone takes our stuff.

And our community would be mad dirty and gross.

Linh: Someone could come in and steal your stuff.

Adil: People break your stuff.

Carlos: Maybe there be fights too.

Alonzo: The police would stop it.

Mrs. Possinger: Would the police stop it if there were no rules saying you can't do that?

Javier: Police wouldn't care if people go racing cars, they could crash and get hurt.

Mrs. Possinger: So why do we have rules?

Selena: You have to clean up; you don't want to step in trash.

Maria: To be safe and not messy.

Linh: To keep the world safe and not messy.

Javier: You need to be much safe with rules.

As the discussion ended I could see and feel the students really thinking about these ideas. Looking at their comments from their small group discussions and the whole group discussion, some of the students even rethought some of their ideas. As they listened to others talk about the questions, they began to look at the questions a little differently. I really felt good about this class discussion.

Even if not all the students were convinced at the end of class that we needed rules in school, they were definitely seeing rules and the reasons we have them in a new light.

In order to again try to have the students hear and use language in a different way, I started the next part of the unit with a different type of language input, a movie. I thought it would also be a way to increase the students' motivation by allowing them to use computers to view their movies. The students divided themselves into three groups as this is how many desktop and laptop computers we had available in the classroom that day. With Adil being absent the groups worked out evenly with Linh, Selena, and Javier working together (Group 1), Alonzo, Carlos, and Efrain working together (Group 2), and Maria, Tabib, and Martin working together (Group 3). I had previously downloaded the movie *City, Suburb, and Rural Communities* from www.unitedstreaming.com about rural, urban, and suburban communities for the students to watch and start to hear about and see different types of communities and the characteristics those communities have. As they were watching the video, the students were expected to write down some characteristics about each community on their three column paper (see Appendix I). I saw a huge difference in many of their attitudes toward their work as they set up to watch their video. As soon as Group 2 got to their computer they quickly started the movie and talked to each other about what they were seeing. They helped each other figure out what to write and where to write it on their

paper. Groups 1 and 3 also began to work right away, but they made the worksheet an individual activity and never talked about what they were seeing or what they were writing. The students were so involved with watching the video on the computers that when they found it more difficult to hear they simply moved closer to the computer. I never heard a word of complaint about the conditions of watching and listening to a laptop with two other people. After the students watched the video and completed their charts we came together as a class to make whole class charts about the different types of communities. I was surprised and delighted with the way the students handled incorrect information they heard from other students. When a student offered information that was incorrect there was no yelling or arguing. When Tabib suggested that there were apartments in a rural community, Efrain simply interjected with the fact that he had that written under the urban communities. Linh added that she agreed with Efrain, but Tabib insisted that is what he had heard and written. During the course of the discussion Javier suggested that we go back to the video to see where the apartments were. Given the level of the discussion up until this point, and the problem solving Javier was doing to try to solve the misunderstanding, the class went back to the desktop computer so everyone could hear and see to find out on which poster we should put the information about apartments. After reviewing the video the class came to a consensus that apartments were in an urban community and we went back to making the posters. The class continued

this way as we made the posters. Any misunderstanding was handled, by the students' initiative, as a class discussion rather than as something I decided for them.

As we continued our discussion of different types of communities, I presented the students with another video, *How Communities Are Alike and Different*, which showed and explained the similarities and differences between the three different types of communities we had been talking about. When I watched the next video I felt that it would be a bit confusing for the students, so I decided to preview and talk about the video as a whole group before the students watched it in small groups and completed their assignment. As we watched the video together I took note that it was Efrain, Alonzo, and Javier who were able to identify the different communities by what they saw. During most of the classes up to this point Efrain and Alonzo had generally remained quiet and only answered when they were called on to answer. Using the computer and the video these two students were participating in the discussion more. As they had the previous day, the students were highly engaged in watching the videos on the computers. I also saw a big difference in the interaction of the groups this time as compared to the previous day. The one noted difference was that I had a fourth computer this time and the students were working in groups of two rather than groups of three. In most of the groups the students talked to each other and wrote the same advantages and disadvantages for each type of community on their

papers (see Appendix J). The only exception to this was Martin and Alonzo. They watched the whole video and wrote nothing on their papers. They had not even written the examples we had done together. Because the period ended, students were not able to finish the activity. The next day we had to start again. Even though most of the groups had done well I decided to explain the directions of the activity and what advantages and disadvantages were again to the whole group since Alonzo and Martin had had such a difficult time the previous day. As the groups were sent to work at their computers I stayed close to Alonzo and Martin. They decided to write the example from the board and then start the movie. While I wanted the students to do their own work and use their own ideas as they watched the movie, I was encouraged that they were at least writing something on their papers today. I noticed as they watched the movie they were still not talking. I decided it was time to sit down with this group and use a little guided discussion to get them started. Martin had written “have cars” under rural communities. So I began to try to stretch their thinking beyond the facts to what that tells us about an advantage or disadvantage of that community.

Teacher: Why do they have cars?
Alonzo: Their houses are far apart.
Teacher: Do you think it is an advantage or a disadvantage to have the houses far apart?
Alonzo: I think it is a disadvantage because it is hard to go there.
Teacher: Where should we put that information?
Alonzo: Under the disadvantage.

Figure 4 Discussion with Martin and Alonzo's Group

This guided discussion helped to get them working and they were able to continue working on their own. When all the groups were finished I brought them back together so that we could combine all the things they wrote down into a whole class chart of advantages and disadvantages. What the students proceeded to do at this point made me want to give up trying to get them to think on a higher level and go back to doing a guided reading model with them. As I asked for an advantage of an urban community the students started making up information. Nobody was looking at or reading their papers. I would have thought it was due to total confusion from watching the movie, but I had walked around and looked at what they wrote as they were working and it was good stuff. Then when we came back together they were just saying anything. Before I got overly frustrated with the lack of connection to what they had just worked on for two days, I stopped the whole class and made them read their papers to themselves and then asked again for an advantage of an urban community. This momentary break and

chance to gather their thoughts seemed to help as they were then able to tell me things they had written down. Just as Alonzo and Martin had needed some guided discussion to move from knowing a fact about a community to telling a generalized advantage or disadvantage for that community, the group as a whole needed this support as we made our group poster. With just a few “why” questions, the group was able to turn their factual information about a characteristic of a community into a generalized advantage or disadvantage statement.

Now that the students had made posters of information about the different communities and were somewhat comfortable with talking about and working with the information at a comprehension level of thinking, it was time to increase the demand on their level of thinking. The question “How is your community similar to another type of community?” was posed to the students. The students were given a quick review of the paragraph format, two student examples of how they could write their main ideas from Maria and Linh, and a reminder of the six posters hanging around the room with lots of information about the different types of communities to help them and were set to work on their own. As the students started working Linh and Maria quickly wrote their main ideas and brought them up to be checked; Javier, Efrain, and Selena had their pencils to their papers and appeared to be writing; while Alonzo, Tabib, Martin, and Carlos sat and played with their pencils. After watching the last four students play with their pencils

and stare off for about five minutes I asked Maria and Linh to read their main ideas again. This seemed to help because at this point Alonzo, Carlos, and Martin began writing. As our class ended I checked everyone's work to see how far they had gotten. Most of the students had their main ideas completed and were working on their details. Martin had written three sentences, but they were all details and Tabib had written only two words of his main idea.

Even though my classroom is small, the students sitting at the end of the table are pretty far away from me. From reading through my previous observations, I was seeing a few students who were not able to work as well independently as other students. So I started the next class by moving some of the students' seats. I was hoping the new location might encourage some students to work a little better during individual assignments. The assignment of new seats also created a "help chair" next to me. This chair was not assigned to any particular student, but was available as a place to sit and get help when they had a problem. Because of the lapse of the weekend we started our work with a review of the question and a review of ways to start their main ideas. Although I had not provided the students with a visual example of a main idea they could use, they still needed a little support. Having some of the students read their main ideas seemed to be a help because many students began writing right away.

I moved Martin to the "help chair" to begin working. He seemed to need the extra support of proximity to the teacher to keep him working. I continued to

be perplexed by his high level of reading and writing skills on classroom and district assessments and the seemingly lack of ability on a day-to-day basis. He comes out proficient on various reading and writing assessments, but cannot seem to produce the same level of work in class every day.

As the students completed their paragraphs comparing the similarities between their community and another community, they were asked to write a paragraph showing the differences. Since the most difficulty came in getting started with their main ideas for the first paragraph, I had each student tell me their main idea before they began writing their second paragraph. The oral rehearsal seemed to be all the students needed because they were able to go to their seats and begin working immediately. I was happy to see as the students worked they came up for help as they needed it rather than sitting in their seats and doing nothing. Even Adil, a student who tends to stay quiet and tries not to be noticed when he is having difficulty, came up and asked for help. I did not know if it was the addition of the help chair that made the students more comfortable with the idea of asking for help, but the help chair was definitely staying. Most students only needed help with phrasing of their sentences to have them comparing information. As the students continued working I could hear several students using the oral rehearsal that I was having them do when they came up to me on their own. It was a little moment of joy and internal celebration for me as I saw the students begin to use these support techniques on their own.

At the end of the second day all of the students, those who did it on their own and those who needed various levels of help and support, had detailed paragraphs comparing and contrasting their community to other types of communities (see Figures 5 and 6). The students even seemed proud of the amount of work and thought they put forth for these paragraphs as they asked if I could hang them up in the room.

As we ended our first unit, one that we had spent just over a month on, I took the students back to where we started and ask them “What is a community?” In contrast to the first time they were asked this question, the students thought for a moment and then began to write. From all the things we had talked about, their answers were all very different. Some students focused on the actual buildings of a community, some on the people, and some on the jobs the people do in a community. While their answers did not pull everything together, it showed that different students had taken different pieces from what we had talked about, read about, and written about (see Figure 7).

To complete the unit I asked the students what they liked and did not like about the communities unit. I got very different responses for the activities, but very similar responses for the reasons. The activities the students liked were ones they found easy or were based around things they found enjoyable. The students who liked to read enjoyed the activities that required reading. The students who liked to draw liked the map making. The activities the students picked out as the

• my community is similar to a suburban community.
• They both have houses.
• They both have sports.
• That's why a suburban community is similar to my community.

Adil-My community is similar to a suburban community. They both have houses. They both have sports. That's why suburban community similar to my community.

• My community is similar like the suburban community.
• They both play any sports.
• They both have parks.
• That's why a suburban community is similar to my community.

Carlos-My community is similar like the suburban community. They both play sports. They both have parks. That's why a suburban community is similar to my community.

• My community is similar suburban community.
• We both have houses.
• We both have bikes.
• That's why a suburban community is similar to my community.

Martin-My community is similar suburban community. We both have houses. We both have bikes. That's why a suburban community is similar to my community.

Figure 5-Students comparison paragraphs

NAME: _____

My community is different then the suburban community.

They don't have Buss.

There Houses are Big and the houses are small.

That's why my community is different from suburban community.

Tabib-My community is different then the suburban community. They don't have buses. Their houses are big my house small. That's why my community is different from suburban community.

NAME: _____

My community is different from a rural community.

They city have lots of traffic and a rural don't.

The rural community have a horses and a city don't.

That's why a rural community is different from my community.

Linh-My community is different from a rural community. The city have lots of traffic and a rural don't. The rural community have a horses and a city don't. That's why a rural community is different from my community.

NAME: _____

My community is different from the suburban community.

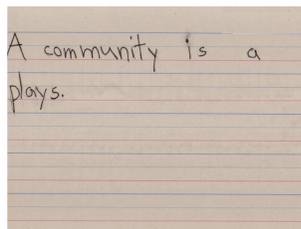
The Suburban is quiet but my community is not quiet.

My community have taxi but Suburban don't have taxi.

That's why my community is different from the suburban community.

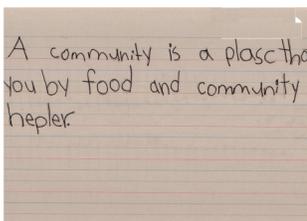
Alonzo-My community is different from the suburban community. The suburban is quiet but my community is not quiet. My community have taxi but suburban don't have taxi. That's why my community is different from the suburban community.

Figure 6 Students' contrasting paragraphs



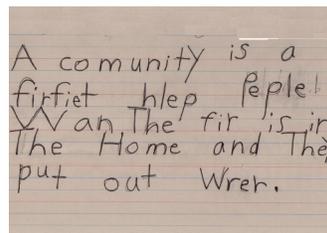
A community is a plays.

Carlos-A community is a place.



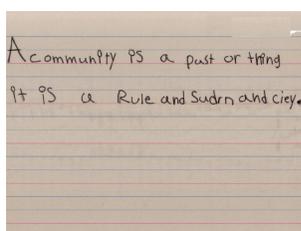
A community is a place that you by food and community helper.

Efrain-A community is a place that you by food and community helper.



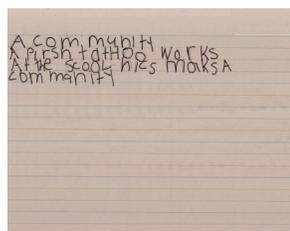
A community is a firefiet hlep peple Wan. The fir is in The Home and They put out Wreh.

Martin-A community is a firefighter help people when the fire is in the home and they put out water.



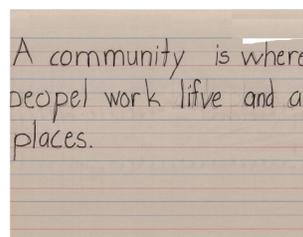
A community is a past or thing it is a Rule and Sudrn and city.

Selena-A community is a past or thing is it a rural and suburban and city.



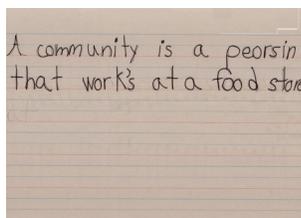
A community A person that works at the school helps makes a community.

Tabib-A community a person that who works at the school helps makes a community.



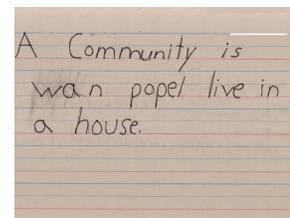
A community is where peopel work live and a places.

Linh-A community is where people work live and a place.



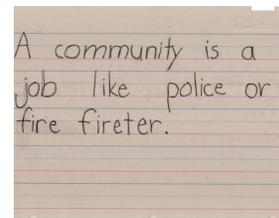
A community is a peorsin that works at a food store.

Maria-A community is a person that works at a food store.



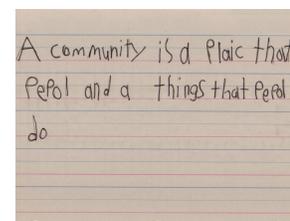
A Community is wan popel live in a house.

Javier-A community is when people live in a house.



A community is a job like police or fire fireter.

Alonzo-A community is a job like police or firefighter.



A community is a Plaic that Pepel and a things that Pepel do.

Adil-A community is a place that people and a things that people do.

Figure 7 Community Post test

ones they did not like were described as too hard. They seemed to pick the activities that required factual information as the ones that they liked and the activities that required writing and more thinking on their part as the ones they did not like.

Magnets

When it was time to move on to the second unit I decided to do a science themed unit. I created a unit on magnets based on the Pennsylvania Science and Technology standard 3.4.3C which talks about different types of force and motion. I actually had the similar trepidations starting the second unit as I did with the first. To begin with science is not a strong point for me and yet I wanted to be able to present the information with the same excitement and knowledge level as I had with the social studies units. I was also worried about how the students would receive this change in content area.

I began this unit as I had with the previous unit by finding out what the students already knew. I had the students complete a What I **Know**, What I **Want** to Know, and What I **Learned** chart (KWL chart) (see Appendix K). They started by writing one or two things they knew about magnets in the K section of the chart (see Figure 8). I could tell right away that we were going to have to unlearn some things we knew as we did this unit. Then the students wrote one question that they wanted to answer as we studied magnets (see Figure 9).

- They stick on the refrigerator
- They stick on marker boards
- Magnets stick
- They stick to metal stuff
- You can't break magnets
- Magnets have metal
- They stick to magnets
- They stick to gold

Figure 8 What the students know about magnets

- Efrain-How do they stick on stuff?
- Martin-How does a magnet stick to a car?
- Maria-How do they make magnets?
- Alonzo-Why do magnets stick?
- Javier-Where did the magnets come from?
- Carlos-Why do they stick to metal?
- Linh-Why do magnets stick to magnets?

Figure 9 What the students want to know about magnets

I preceded their question writing with a list of question words written on the board to help ensure the students wrote a question and not another fact.

I quickly found out that I had nothing to fear about how the students would take to the science unit. As the students were given the opportunity to “play” with different magnets I could feel the difference in excitement level and motivation on the students’ parts (see Figure 10). As the students were lining up to leave I even heard Carlos comment that “class was very short today.”

In order to continue the students’ high level of motivation, involvement, and self-discovery learning from the previous lesson, I set the students up to do an experiment to find out what was magnetic and what was not. The students started with small materials given to them on the table and then moved to testing objects around the classroom. Even though the task was individual, as the students worked they started to quietly show others at their table the results of what they were finding. There was a quiet buzz in the room as the students picked various items to make a prediction about and then experimented with to find the actual answer (see Appendix L). When the students were able to test objects around the classroom the noise level increased, but the students maintained control of themselves and the noise was all about what they were finding. Up until this point I had not always seen this. In previous assignments, when the students were to work on their own, most extraneous noise was a sign of off-task behavior.

Look it, magic, it moves.

The ball stick to the ball.

This way it sticks, this way it don't.

Cool, it moves.

Look, one makes the other move.

Look, why won't this stick to the middle, only one side?

It works from under the table too!

□

□

They stick on the legs of the chairs too, but not on the pencil cup.

The magnet can move the ball without touching it.

Figure 10 Pastiche of students' comments as they explore magnets

During this activity, even though there was a chaos of movement and noise, it was all directed and centered on the activity they were supposed to be doing. The noise came from their excitement of the activity. They could not wait to share what they had found with each other.

After working individually, the students were placed into groups to make two posters-one of magnetic items and one of non-magnetic items. As the students worked they not only wrote the things they had on their individual lists, but also discussed their responses when two people had the same object on different lists. As they discussed where it should go they began to describe what they had done to come to their answer. Other students in the group looked to see where they had it and the group came to a consensus. When the group of Carlos, Javier, Selena, and Tabib had a disagreement about whether the pushpin was magnetic or non-magnetic they finally decided to get a magnet and the pushpin and retest it together to decide where it should go. I was excited to be able to sit back and watch them engage in discussion centered on the content we were studying. They were using the content vocabulary, like magnetic and non-magnetic, properly as they talked about what they had done and how they knew what they knew. There was not even a need to redirect or remind anyone to be on task or focus on what they were supposed to be doing.

As the students finished we began as a class to move to a higher level of thinking by synthesizing some of the information we had found out about

individual items to make generalized comments about things that are magnetic and things that are non-magnetic. After hanging up the posters I asked the students “by looking at the posters we have made, what can we say about magnetic and non-magnetic things?” Not surprisingly, I was greeted by SILENCE. So I tried rephrasing the question to elicit more response. “By looking at the objects on our lists, how could I use this to help figure out if something is magnetic or not?” This is the conversation that followed.

Tabib: A crayon inside is non-magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: What is in a crayon?

Tabib: Paint

Mrs. Possinger: It is made of wax-so what can we say about things made of wax?

Tabib: Things made of wax are non-magnetic.

Selena: The door is made of wood, so it is non-magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: So what can we say about things made of wood?

Selena: They’re non-magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: What other conclusions can we make?

Selena: Books are made of paper, so they’re non-magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: So what can we say about things made of paper?

Selena: Things of paper are non-magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: Any other conclusions?

Selena: Metal stuff is magnetic.

Mrs. Possinger: Let's look at our charts; is there anything on the non-magnetic chart that is metal?

Alonzo: A quarter and a nickel

Adil: And a penny

Mrs. Possinger: So if a quarter, a nickel, and a penny are metal and they are on the non-magnetic chart, can we say ALL things made of metal are magnetic?

Class: Yes/No

Mrs. Possinger: If a quarter, a nickel, and a penny are metal and are non-magnetic, can we say ALL metal things are magnetic?

Javier: No.

Mrs. Possinger: So instead of writing all things made of metal are magnetic, what should we write?

Efrain: Some things made of metal are magnetic.

While I was not surprised that I had to rephrase things for the students and guide them to their generalizations, I was surprised at who did most of the answering. Tabib was the first to take a risk with language and information to try to make a generalization. Having the background of some of the vocabulary he was going to need seemed to give him the support he needed to be the first to contribute to the discussion. I was also pleasantly surprised to see Selena coming out with the rest of the answers. She was really able to take what she knew from the experiments and use the language structure that Tabib and I had negotiated for the

first one to come up with generalized statements about magnetic and non-magnetic things. Switching the word 'some' for 'all' to make a better statement was also a high language level on Efrain's part. Had I been asked before the class who I thought would be able to make the connections between the individual items we experimented with and generalized statements about magnetic and non-magnetic things I would not have picked out Tabib and Selena, but it was nice to see them use the higher language skills and higher thinking skills with just a small amount of teacher support.

To see if the students understood the concept of magnetic and non-magnetic and to practice some of their writing skills, the students were given a writing prompt to answer. "Would our garbage can be magnetic? Why or why not?" After a quick review of the paragraph format the students were given paper to answer the question on their own. Maria, Carlos, Linh, Selena, Alonzo, Martin, and Tabib began right away by writing their main ideas. Adil and Javier started by staring off for two minutes, but then even they began to write. Most of the students were able to write their main ideas to answer the question and one supporting detail to answer why, but were getting stuck on the second supporting detail. At this point the students were really starting to use the help chair as they needed it. Linh and Maria both came up for a little discussion to help them with the second supporting detail. Tabib began using the help chair on his own to orally tell me each sentence before he would write it down. Alonzo and Efrain

both came for help with their supporting details. They were able to independently decide if it would be magnetic or not, but needed some support to move to the higher skill of explaining why. A little prompting of “how do you know that?” seemed to help them to write their details. Javier chose to stay in the help chair to write his entire paragraph. While he did not ask much as he sat next to me, it seemed to help him finish. When he returned to his seat Carlos decided to do the same thing. Neither of them really asked for any help as they sat in the help chair, but the proximity to me made quite a difference in getting their work completed. While not all of their paragraphs answered the question correctly, they all were able to follow the format and use information to try to support their answer (see Figure 11).

As the students completed various experiments within the magnet unit, their interest levels remained very high. During all of the experiments, their discussions generally stayed focused on the task at hand and rarely drifted to social talk. What was missing from much of this unit was reading. While there were two short poems about magnets, there was not as much reading as there had been in the communities unit. While the lack of reading is not a positive in the grand scheme of the students needing to learn to read, the students were much more motivated and engaged throughout this unit. They also used much more of the vocabulary in their day-to-day discussions and experiments.

The trash is not magnetic.
 It is plastic.
 Plastic is not magnetic.
 That's why it's not magnetic.

Maria-The trash can is not magnetic. It is plastic. Plastic is not magnetic. That's why it is not magnetic.

the trash can is not - magnetic.
 It has plastic.
 The magnet don't stick
 of plastic.
 That's why It is
 not-magnetic.

Javier-The trash can is not-magnetic. It has plastic. The magnet don't stick to plastic. That's why it is not-magnetic.

The trash can
 is magnetic.
 The trash can is
 plastic.
 It look like it is
 stick on magnetic.
 That's why
 trash can is the
 magnetic.

Efrain-The trash can is magnetic. The trash can is plastic. It look like it is stick on magnetic. That's why the trash can is magnetic.

Figure 11 "Is the trash can magnetic?" paragraphs

The last activity we did in this unit was to read statements about the properties of magnets and try to match those statements to the experiments we had done. Besides being able to read the statements fairly easily because we had previously talked about and used the vocabulary in the statements, the students were able to recall and explain the different experiments we had done that showed those different properties. They were not only able to tell what we had done in the experiment, but were able to tell what we had seen that proved the statement. We completed the unit by finishing the L section of the students' KWL charts (see Figure 12).

After finishing the magnets unit the students completed a survey telling what they did and did not like about the unit. Every student picked the experiment of making scissors into a magnet as their favorite activity. The reasons for liking this activity focused on the physical act of scraping the magnet on the scissors and being able to pick up paperclips with the scissors. The activities the students did not like were a little more varied. Two students did not like the activities where they had to work with a partner. They noted that their partners did not always let them do everything and that was not fun. Two of the students did not like doing the KWL charts noting that they did not like to write. Two students did not like testing the magnets to find the north and south poles because it was hard to remember what attracted and what did not and it took too long to share the magnets. One student did not like doing the poems because he

does not like to read. The last student did not like working on any activities alone because he needs help and does not have it when he is alone.

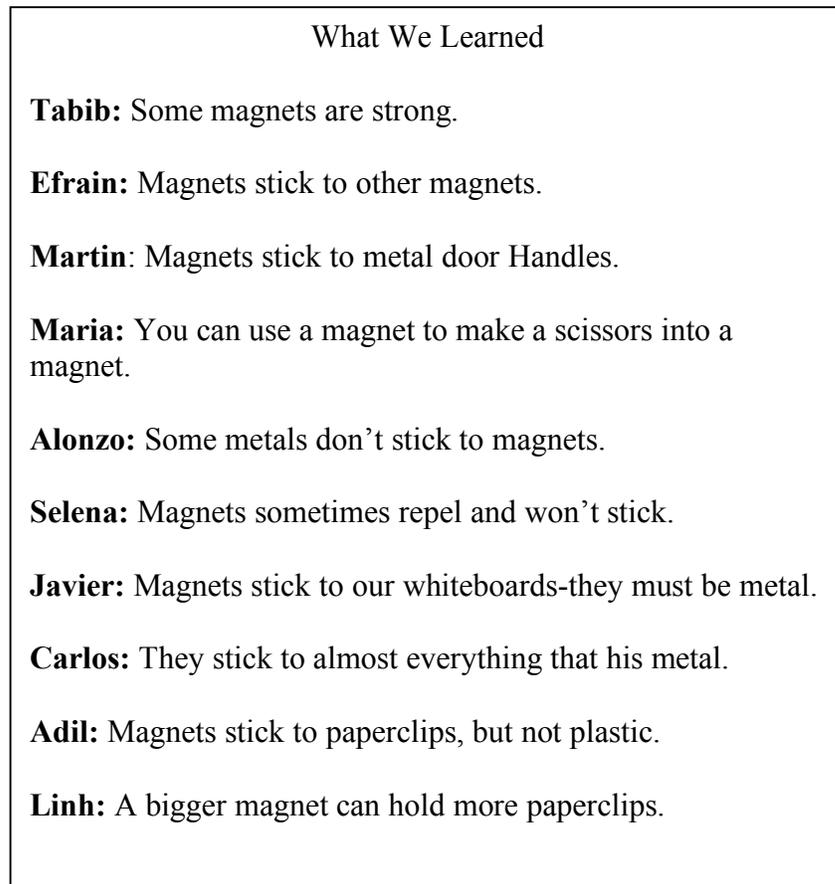


Figure 12 What the students learned about magnets

World Holidays

To begin the third unit, I decided to do another social studies unit. I based this unit on the Pennsylvania Geography standard 7.3.3 B Identifying the human characteristics of places and regions by their cultural characteristics. Because of the time of year and the short amount of time between starting the third unit and the Thanksgiving holiday break we began by talking about an American holiday that was not based on a certain religion, Thanksgiving. Students began by explaining some of their Thanksgiving traditions (see Figure 13).

Having noted the lack of reading in the last unit, I wanted to make sure I added more reading to this unit. The students began by reading and discussing the book Maria's Thanksgiving. By using the book we talked about Thanksgiving traditions and story characters, setting, problem, and solution.

As we continued with our Thanksgiving discussion, we moved to why we celebrate Thanksgiving. Knowing that any students who have been at Jefferson, and probably any students who have been in American schools previously, have talked about Thanksgiving and the Pilgrims and Native Americans, I asked the students to write why we celebrate Thanksgiving. I was not surprised that Tabib and Adil had the most difficulty with this assignment. Adil and Tabib knew very little English during the beginning of First Grade, and both boys mentioned that

Javier: We go to my tio's house and have a big turkey.

Maria: My mom buys a big thing like a chicken (turkey) and cooks it at my grandma's house.

Linh: We go to my brother's house and carve pumpkins, and eat pie and lots of rice.

Selena: Grandma makes rice, corn, turkey, and pumpkin pie.

Carlos: We eat salad, rice, turkey, and we go to my grandma's house to celebrate.

Efrain: Go to my grandma's house and we start and dig in.

Alonzo: Lots of people come to my house, like friends.

Martin: We stay at home and have turkey.

Adil: We don't have Thanksgiving.

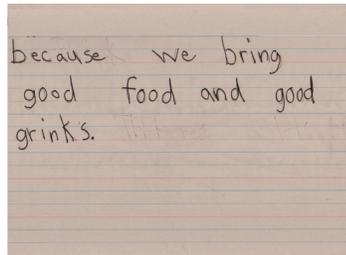
Tabib: Mine neither.

Fig

ure 13 Students' Thanksgiving Traditions

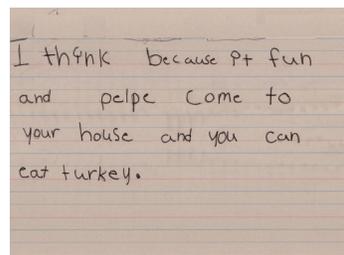
they did not celebrate Thanksgiving in their homes. Even though I knew many of them had discussed Thanksgiving in their classes this year and previously, I was a little stunned that only Linh mentioned anything about Pilgrims and Indians in her writing (see Figure 14).

I then read the book The Very First Thanksgiving to the students. At the end of the book the students wrote down one fact about the first Thanksgiving from the book. Unfortunately before being able to go over their facts our class time was over. This is one of the downfalls to having 60 minute pull-out classes. I am stuck to a time schedule because I have to have the students back on time and I have to be at my next class on time. I try not to carry things over, but occasionally things happen and we cannot finish within the hour we have. This tends to detract from students' ability to make connections between materials because of the time between doing the work and going over the work. This was evident when two days later we were finally able to get back to the facts they had written. Many students had forgotten the book and this gave very little meaning to their fact. The next book The First Thanksgiving was a little easier for the students because they were able to write and talk about their facts within the same class period. While writing the fact for this book, Carlos wrote a question instead, which is actually a harder language skill than writing a fact. With a little discussion he was able to answer his question and write a fact. With the two



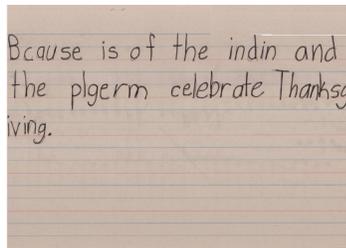
because we bring
good food and good
drinks.

Carlos-because we bring good
food and good drinks.



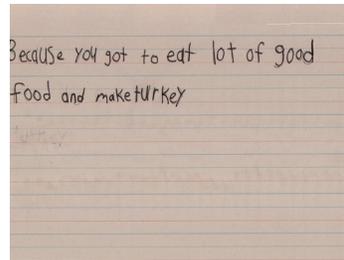
I think because it fun
and people come to
your house and you can
eat turkey.

Selena-I think because it fun and
people come to your house and you
can eat turkey.



Because is of the indian and
the pilgrim celebrate Thanksg
iving.

Linh-Because is of the Indians and
the pilgrim celebrate Thanksgiving



Because you got to eat lot of good
food and make turkey

Adil-Because you got to eat lot
of good food and make turkey.

Figure 14 Writing Samples-Why do we celebrate Thanksgiving?

books and their facts, students were able to make a direct connection between the first Thanksgiving and why we celebrate Thanksgiving today. Even though I will not have these students next year, it would be interesting to see if they remember why we celebrate Thanksgiving.

With the completion of the Thanksgiving holiday break and four weeks until winter break, the students were ready to start their discussion of different winter holidays that are celebrated around the world. I formed this part of the unit around two books Holidays Around the World and World Holidays. These two books are basically the same book, but one is written at a third grade level and one is at a second grade level. We started with the easier book to get a little background about each holiday and then used the harder book to get more details and information about the holiday.

I started this part of the unit by talking about all the different holidays the students celebrate. Given the mix of the students' cultural backgrounds I was hoping to get a mix of different holidays. What I got was six students picking Christmas. I had five of them change and allowed Alonzo to write about Christmas because he already had four sentences written and the others had not written anything yet. Tabib told me he only celebrates Turkish holidays so I told him to write about one of them. He proceeded to write about celebrating Mother's Day. All of the students ended up writing about more American holidays; Christmas, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Halloween, New Year's,

and Easter; instead of having a wide cultural mix, but the students were able to get the idea that people celebrate many different holidays.

We began by reading about and talking about Ramadan. It took till about halfway through the reading from the first book for Tabib to realize “Hey, I celebrate this.” Because of the difference in the American and Turkish pronunciations of Ramadan, he had not realized that this was a holiday he celebrated. Once he realized this he began to participate more in the conversation about the holiday. He was even able to explain to the group what fasting meant. As we read about Ramadan I started to model an informational reading technique for the students. I had them stop after each paragraph and explain what they had just read. This way I was able to integrate the learning of the new holidays with the learning of reading comprehension strategies. At the end of the reading the students had to tell me one fact about Ramadan. This way we were able to make a poster about Ramadan to post in the classroom and use at a later time for various writing activities. I noticed at this point that the students who participated in the conversations as we read were able to tell me something about Ramadan right away, but the students who just listened and did not participate during the reading had a more difficult time. I tried to carefully point this out to the students as a way of reinforcing the comprehension strategy of stopping and thinking about chunks of information as we read it.

In keeping with the idea of thematic units integrating many subjects and learning styles into them, I incorporated an art project into the discussion of Ramadan. While Fanoos, colored lanterns, are not a huge, important part of Ramadan, I was hoping that by talking about them and then making one the students who are more interested in art or are more kinesthetic learners would be able to connect to the information we were learning about Ramadan through the art project. Plus adding a little fun into the unit seemed to help keep their motivation high.

We then moved on to the reading and discussion of Kwanzaa. In following with the suggestion of the people in my researcher support group, I began calling on students even when they had not volunteered to answer. I had been reluctant to put the students on the spot like that because of their possible language level insecurities, but my group had suggested that this is done often in regular classes and that my class may be a safe place for students to start being called on so they could learn how to deal with it. They also suggested this might be a better way to assess if it was a language issue or a lack of understanding that kept the students from answering in class. The students were again asked to give a fact about Kwanzaa and to make a poster about the holiday. Some of the students figured out that it was easier to give their fact first rather than wait until the end. Alonzo and Selena, who did not participate in the class discussion and

waited till last to give a fact, had a very hard time finding something from the reading that was not already on the poster.

Now that we had talked about two holidays I wanted the students to do some comparing and contrasting of the holidays. I introduced the Double Bubble Thinking Map (see Appendix M) to the students. While the students had used Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast things before, they had not used the Double Bubble map. I talked about and modeled where the different information went since all the bubbles on the paper can be a little confusing at first. I compared the Double Bubble map to the Venn Diagram showing students how the placement of the information is similar. As we started to fill in the information I showed the students where to put the information, but had the students tell me what I should write from the information on the posters about Kwanzaa and Ramadan. Once the students had all the information on their Double Bubble map we reviewed where to find the things that are the same and the things that are different on the maps. The student then had to write either how Kwanzaa and Ramadan were the same or how they were different (see Figure 15). All the students began to work independently except for Tabib. He turned to orally rehearse every sentence to me and then wrote. Upon looking at the paragraphs they turned in, I probably should have made them write one or the other. Many students mixed up which they were writing about. They wrote their main idea as one thing and their supporting details for the other.

How are ramadan and kwanzaa different? They both eat a big meal. They celebrate with their friend. That why they are different.

Martin-How are ramadan and kwanzaa different?. They both eat a big meal. They celebrate with their friend. That why they are different.

Ramadan and Kwanzaa are similar. They have a big meal on the lasts day. They celebrate with family and friend. That's why Ramadan and Kwanzaa are similar.

Linh-Ramadan and Kwanzaa are similar. They have a big meal on the lasts day. They celebrate with family and friend. That's why Ramadan and Kwanzaa are similar.

How are Ramadan and kwanzaa different. kwanzaa last 7 day. Ramadan One month. That why they are different.

Javier-How are Ramadan and kwanzaa different. Kwanzaa last 7 day. Ramadan One month. That why they are different.

Figure 15 Ramadan and Kwanzaa Comparison Paragraphs

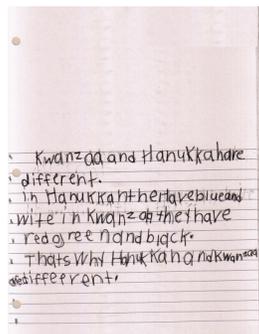
We then moved to the reading and discussion of Hanukkah. The students again used the stop and talk strategy as they were reading about Hanukkah. As we were using the same format for talking about each holiday; read about it, talk about it, make a poster about it; the students started to realize they were being held accountable for the information we were reading and were more prepared for giving a fact after we read. When we got to the point of making the poster, all the students had their hands up wanting to give their fact first before anyone else took it.

As with the Fanoos for Ramadan, I wanted the students to have different ways of learning about the traditions of Hanukkah instead of just reading about it, so the students made dreidels and played the dreidel game. It gave the students another way to remember and reinforce the ideas of what people do to celebrate this holiday as well as a way to have a little fun as they were learning.

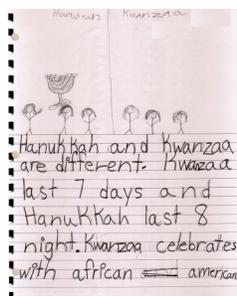
From the game, the students moved back to a more academic task of comparing Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. They again used the Double Bubble map to compare and contrast the two holidays. We completed the map as a group again to help the students become more familiar with the map so they can eventually use it on their own. As the students told me the information they seemed to be able to tell the things that were the same very easily, but had more difficulty with the things that were different. The students were then asked to use the information on their Double Bubble maps to write a paragraph comparing or

contrasting Kwanzaa and Hanukkah. They had to pick the opposite of what they had done in their Ramadan and Kwanzaa paragraphs. As the students worked most were able to complete the task independently. Tabib continued to need a little bit of assistance as he wrote his main idea and first supporting detail, but was able to write his second supporting detail and restated the main idea independently. Maria used the help chair twice as she was writing. She had the ideas and knew where the information was on her Double Bubble map, but needed help in wording her sentences to tell how the holidays were different. Martin's paragraph was a complete puzzle as his main idea told me the two holidays were the same, but his details explained how they were different. As he sat in the help chair on my request, we worked together to redo his paragraph. For each sentence he told me what he needed to write and then wrote it. Overall the students' paragraphs were much better this time than the last ones we did (see Figure 16).

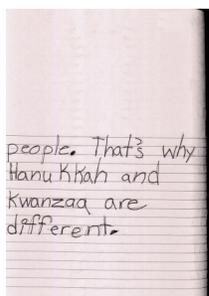
To the students' delight, we finally got to talk about Christmas. Just as with the previous holidays we read about and talked about Christmas first and then made a poster about the holiday. Almost all of the students participated in the discussion about Christmas as they had a lot of background knowledge, and excitement, about Christmas. Making the poster for Christmas was the easiest one we did. Students not only volunteered to tell one fact about the holiday, but many told two or three.



Tabib-Kwanzaa and Hanukkah are different. In Hanukkah they have blue and white. In Kwanzaa they have red green and black. That's why Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are different.

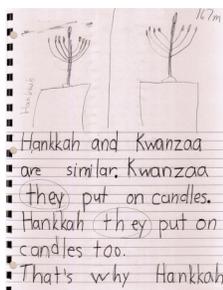


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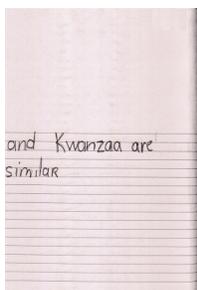


Page 2

Maria-Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are different. Kwanzaa last 7 days and Hanukkah last 8 night. Kwanzaa celebrates with african Americans people. That's why Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are different.



Page 1



Page 2

Alonzo-Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are similar. Kwanzaa they put on candles. Hanukkah they put in candles too. That's why Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are similar.

Figure 16 Hanukkah and Kwanzaa Comparison Paragraphs

Since we had completed two Double Bubble Maps as a group, I wanted the students to complete one on their own. I also gave them leeway in what holidays they were going to use. They all had to use Christmas, but had free choice for what holiday they wanted to compare and contrast it to. As the students began to pick their holidays and complete the maps Tabib asked “are we doing this together?” After I told him no, they were doing this on their own, he commented “Oh man, this is hard.” I think this is how many of the students were feeling at this point, but Tabib was the only one to put it into words. In contrast to when we had done these maps as a group, the students seemed to be finding the things that were the different easily, but were having difficulty finding the things that were the same. I began to help Adil and Tabib by reading down one of the posters for them while they looked for matching information on the other poster. For beginner students having to look at the information on two posters at the same time seemed to be too difficult a task for them.

About halfway through the second class period of working on the maps Alonzo announced “this is hard.” He then followed this comment by talking aloud about going to Chucky Cheese. My conversation with him followed like this.

Mrs. Possinger: Are you finished Alonzo?

Alonzo: No, this is hard.

Mrs. Possinger: Look up at the posters for help.

Alonzo: How can the posters help?

Mrs. Possinger: That's where all the information is about the holidays.

Alonzo: I stared at it 1 hour and still got nothing.

Mrs. Possinger: You have to read the poster, not just stare at it. (I usually try not to get sarcastic with my students, but when the work gets a little difficult Alonzo stops working and wants it done for him)

Alonzo: This is hard. (Alonzo then tries, to no avail, to engage others in social conversations)

Mrs. Possinger: Alonzo, you are finished?

Alonzo: This is hard. I have nothing.

Mrs. Possinger: Let's read the poster together, what is the first thing on the Hanukkah poster?

Alonzo: Friends and family celebrate.

Mrs. Possinger: Now look at the Christmas poster, is there anything that is the same as that?

Alonzo: Friends and family

Mrs. Possinger: So write that on your map.

Alonzo: I need two more-I don't know.

Mrs. Possinger: I showed you how to find them, now you need to do the other two on your own.

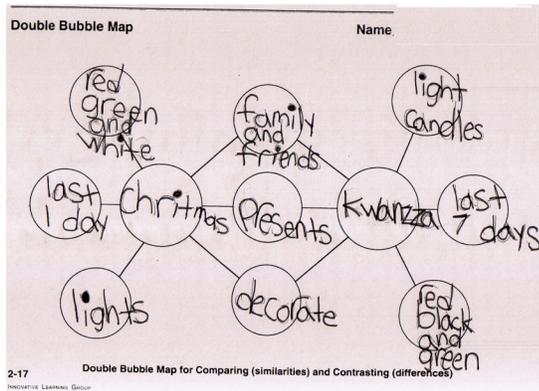
Alonzo: Oh-this is hard.

After doing the first one together, Alonzo did finally sit down and figure out two more things that were the same. With only Tabib, Adil, and Alonzo needing help, the students were able to complete the Double Bubble maps on their own (see Figure 17).

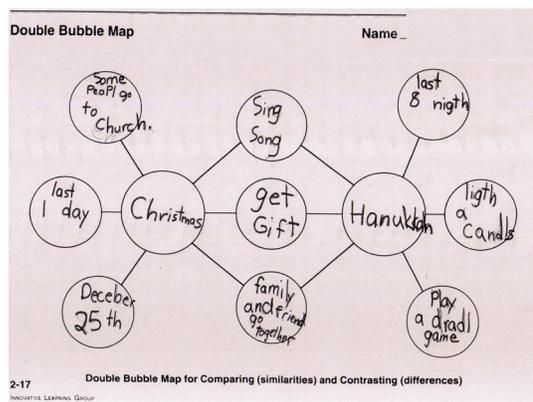
Conclusion

After completing our discussions of Christmas we reached the end of the approved dates for my study and winter break from school. Although we had not finished the unit at the end of the study, when the students returned from break we were able to complete the unit. We continued our holiday discussions by reading, talking, and writing about New Year's, Chinese New Year, and Holi. The students really seemed to be interested in the different holidays and the various traditions associated with each holiday. They were not always crazy about the writing assignments that went along with the unit, but loved the readings and the art projects.

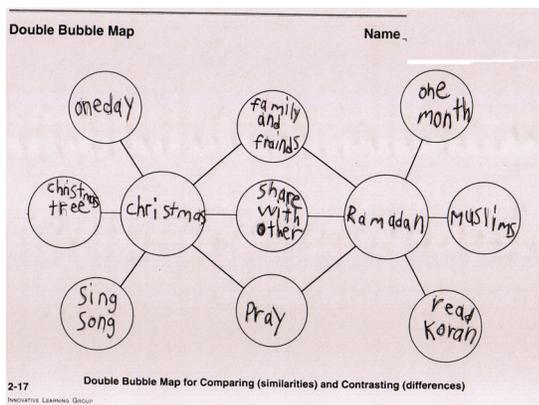
Without discussing specific findings here, I would say this time was very successful for me and for the students. There were times when we were all frustrated, there were times when things were more difficult, and there were times when things were just fun, but we hung in there together and learned a lot.



Efrain



Alonzo



Adil

Figure 17 Double Bubble Maps

DATA ANALYSIS

According to Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) “Analysis helps us to synthesize-to get a better picture of the whole. We synthesize and go back to the parts to check out our hunches, and we create a whole upon which we can base our assertions” (p. 192). The analysis of my data happened in various stages as Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) tell us “when analysis has not been ongoing, the end results tend to be less rich and insightful” (p. 174). During my data analysis I kept this in mind as I used many different ways to analyze the data I was collecting.

Ongoing Analysis

Throughout my data collection I constantly analyzed the data I was collecting. As Ely et al. (1997) tell us “the interweaving of data collection and analysis is highly transactional, each activity shedding new light on and enriching the other” (p. 165). Each day I wrote participant observations to record what was happening in the class on a day-to-day basis. These observations were typed onto a two-column paper so that I was not only recording what was happening, but also commenting on and reflecting on what was happening in the class. I then adjusted my teaching as needed based on what I was seeing in the observations. These pages were numbered and line numbered for easy reference for later analysis. I then went back and read and reread my data looking for what Ely et al. (1997) call meaning units or codes for my data. These codes were single words or

short phrases that helped me to see what was really happening in my data. I kept these codes in a list so I could keep track of the codes and where they were in my field log. This helped me to see how different pieces of data went together. I also collected student work as part of my data collection. As I was reading and coding my observations I also read over and coded the student work. This way I could see if the students' work was matching the observations and comments I was making. During my data collection the students completed surveys. As part of my data analysis I wrote analytic memos to help to analyze the students' responses on the surveys. I collected students Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores to help compare their reading levels at the beginning and end of my study. About midway through my study I also reread my data looking for sub-questions that were emerging as I collected my data.

Analysis After Data Collection

After I had collected, read, and coded all my data I began to look at my codes to see how they went together. I sorted my codes into bins. According to Ely et al. (1997) bins are broad categories "into which the coded data can be given an initial rough sort" (p. 162). I continued to sort my codes until I had concise bins. I then put these bins into a graphic organizer and gave each bin a title that helped to tie all the codes within the bin together and made it easier to see how all of my data went together (see Figure 18). From these bins I was able to create a theme statement for each bin that helped lead to my findings (see Figure 19).

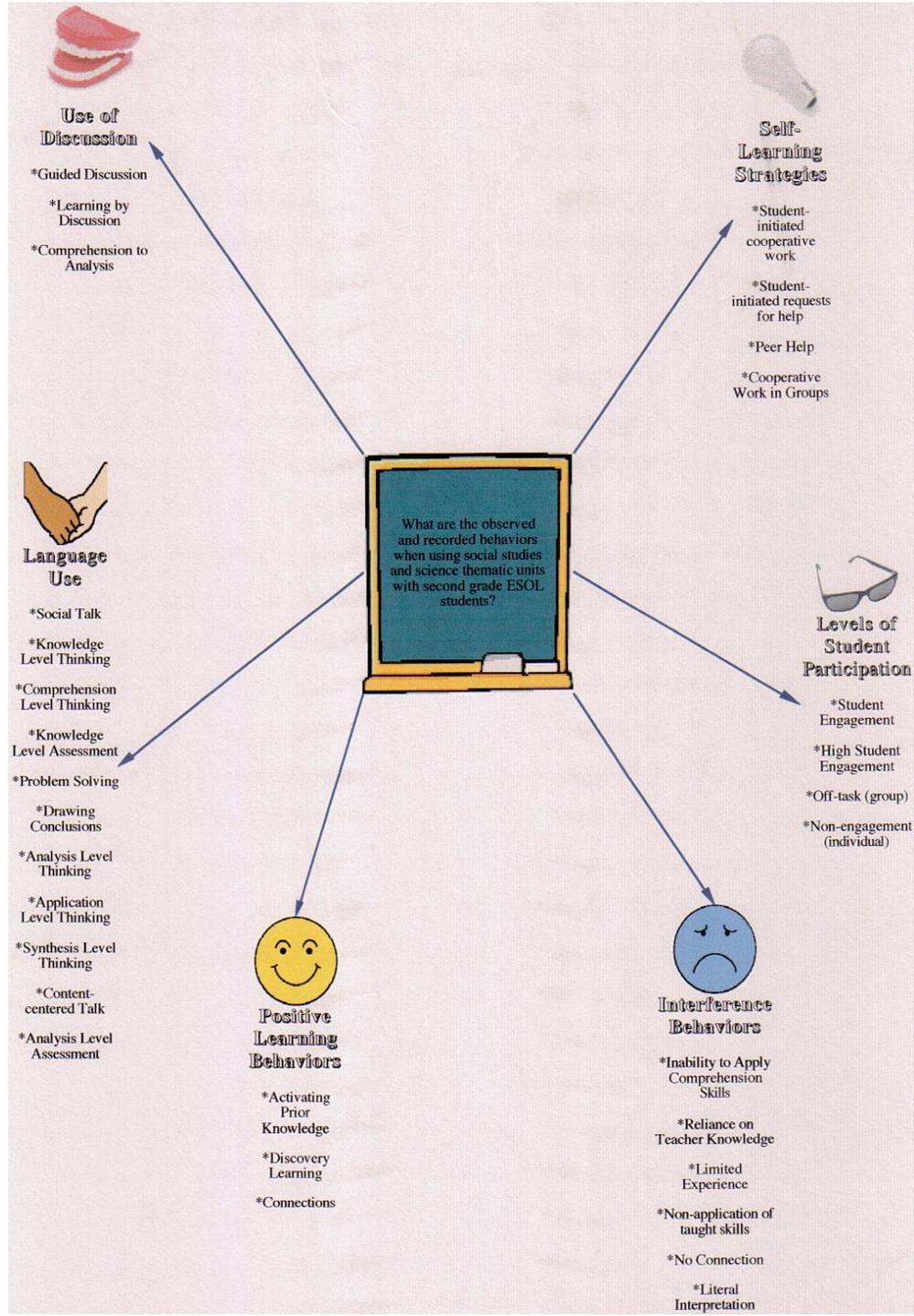


Figure 18 Bins Organizer

- Students use discussion to support and enhance their learning.
- In thematic units students tend to start a unit with more BICS language and work up toward the CALP language. As the units progressed, the students used the academic language more frequently.
- As students are required to use more language and higher level thinking to complete their work in thematic units they begin to employ strategies to help themselves.
- When students are taught through social studies and science units there is a change in their levels of engagement.
- When students learn social studies and science content there are interference behaviors that arise.
- When students meet with challenging material and new concepts within social studies and science units, there are positive learning behaviors that arise that help with the students' learning of the content and language.

Figure 19 Theme Statements

FINDINGS

Introduction

When I began my study I was looking for a better way to teach ESOL students. I wanted to see the effects of using social studies and science thematic units with my second grade ESOL students. After four months of collecting and analyzing the data from my classroom, I ended up with six major themes that arose from all of my data. These themes include discussion, language use, self-learning strategies, student engagement levels, positive learning behaviors, and learning obstacles.

Discussion

Students use discussion to support and enhance their learning.

While teaching through content-based thematic units I found that discussion became a very important learning tool for the students in various ways. The use of discussion became very important for the students as we were talking about the content. I had not thought about this as a consequence of raising the level of thinking required by the students in order to use more CALP language. It was only as I began to take a look at my classroom that I began to see this idea emerge. It was also cemented as I read Kohl's (2002) philosophies in The Skin That we Speak. "Teacher talk and student talk are essential components that determine the quality of learning in the classroom" (p. 147). As I analyzed my

field log, I saw that discussion tended to be used in two ways throughout the units.

Gateway to Higher Level Thinking

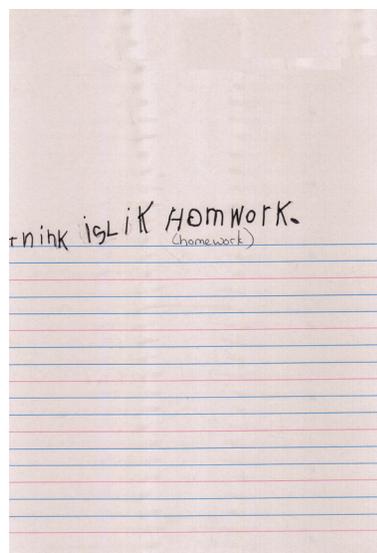
First and foremost discussion was used to help the students move from lower level thinking, BICS language, to higher level thinking, CALP language. During many activities when students were asked to respond at a higher level and use more academic language it took some guided discussion to get them there. Through conversation the students were able to put together the ideas and the language and vocabulary they needed to analyze factual information and really use it rather than just give it back in the same form. This was most evident when the students were asked to make generalizations about the different types of communities in our first unit. The students started with basic factual information, knowledge-level thinking, and through discussion were able to turn their factual information into generalized statements, synthesis-level thinking. They were also able to use discussion to do this same type of thing in the magnets unit. Through discussion, they took the individual pieces of information about the magnetic qualities of objects in the room and made generalized statements about things that are magnetic and things that are not magnetic. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the zone of proximal development. He says that "Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults" (p. 88). My students used the guided discussion to take their

learning to the step just outside their independent ability. Tabib and Selena knew the information about what was magnetic and what was not, but needed the support of discussion to move what they knew to a higher thinking level.

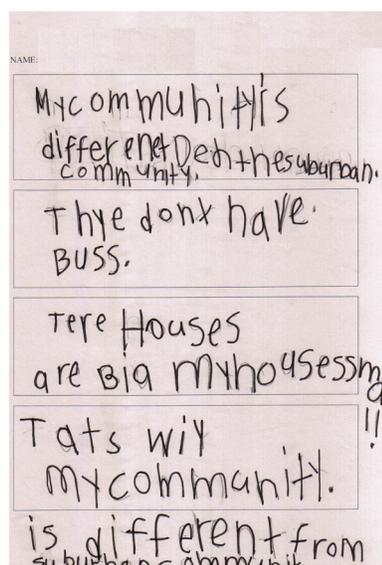
Oral Rehearsal

Discussion was also used a lot by the beginner students to rehearse what they wanted to write. I found, especially for Tabib, that when the students were given the opportunity to first rehearse what they wanted to write, their writing was greatly impacted (see Figure 20). The content of what the students wrote, the language structures the students used, the content vocabulary used, and even the readability of the writing, was improved when the students were able to use discussion before writing. It seemed to give them the opportunity they needed to put everything together before they had to try to write it down. It also made a difference because if a student forgot what they were writing in the middle of their sentence I knew what they were writing and could help them to remember.

This oral rehearsal also helped the intermediate and advanced students to get started with their writing. It became as simple as letting the students ask “should I write...?” and there was less off-task time before the students started working.



Tabib's writing sample without oral rehearsal.



Tabib's writing using oral rehearsal.

Figure 20 Writing samples from Tabib at the beginning of the study without oral rehearsal and further into the study with oral rehearsal.

Language Use

Students tend to start a unit with more BICS language and work up toward the CALP language. As the units progressed, the students used the academic language more frequently.

Dewey's observed that "every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (p. 38) sets the tone for the language use that I saw during my study. As we were doing the units I began to notice a pattern to the language use in the classroom. The units tended to start with more BICS language. By using content-based thematic units we had the opportunity to learn the basic facts of the content first. For instance, at the beginning of the magnets unit the students had to find out concrete information about whether or not the objects they tested were magnetic. At the beginning of the holidays unit the students were simply required to make a list of facts about the holiday we read about. The students worked at the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's Taxonomy which Chamot identified as the BICS language levels (Crandall, 1995). They were able to recite to me the basic information when asked straightforward, factual questions.

It was not until we got further into the units that I began to see the benefit of using thematic units in my ESOL instruction in relation to the students' use of language. As the units progressed the students were able to take the factual information they had learned and start to employ more of the higher level thinking

skills and CALP language. Cummins (1999) tells us that these language skills are the ones that are essential for the students' success in the regular classroom. By using content-based thematic units the students had a bank of prior, factual knowledge that they were able to use to complete activities requiring problem solving, analysis, and synthesis of information. In the magnets unit the students had to take the information they had gathered about magnetic materials through hands-on experiments and apply that to answer questions that required explanation rather than just yes/no answers. One of the assessments the students completed in the magnets unit asked them if the trash can was magnetic. The students were not allowed to use a magnet to figure it out, but rather had to take the factual knowledge, BICS language, they had gained during previous experiments and explain why something else would or would not be magnetic, CALP language (see Figure 11). In the world holidays unit the students had to take information learned about each holiday and use it to compare and contrast the different holidays (see Figures 15, 16, and 17).

In each of these instances the students had to search for connections and patterns in what they were reading and doing to complete the new task as vanDeusen and Brandt (1997) suggested thematic units allow for. All of these tasks required the CALP language, or higher thinking skills, and the content vocabulary that the students had previously learned in the unit. Had we not been using a thematic unit, where things build upon each other, the students may not

have had the language and content knowledge they needed to complete the higher level thinking tasks.

The use of the academic language not only had an effect on the tasks the students were completing in my room, I was also able to see improvement in most of their DRA scores from September to December (Table 1). By the nature of the DRA assessment, the students have to use academic language to do well. They have to read a leveled fiction or non-fiction selection and then retell what they read and answer questions about the selection. The students' increase in academic language use showed in most of their end of study scores. They used more specific language from the book in their retells. Their retells tended to be more organized as they followed the sequence of the book rather than telling the story out of sequence. With the exception of my two advanced students, Martin and Selena, all of the students improved their DRA scores at least one level. Efrain and Maria, both intermediate level students, increased their reading by two levels.

I saw similar results when I looked at the students ESOL stages from the beginning of the study and the end of the study (Table 2). With the exception of Martin, Selena, and Adil, the students increased their reading and or writing stage numbers one level. Since the reading and the writing reflect the academic language portion of their language acquisition, this shows an increase in their academic language proficiency.

Table 1
Students' DRA scores in September and December

Student Name	September DRA score	December DRA score
Carlos	18	20
Efrain	12	16
Martin	16	16
Selena	10	10
Tabib	10	12
Linh	16	18
Maria	16	20
Javier	16	18
Alonzo	18	20
Adil	14	16

Table 2
Students' ESOL stages in September and December

Student Name	ESOL Stage-September (Oral, Reading, Writing)	ESOL Stage-December (Oral, Reading, Writing)
Carlos	4, 3, 3	4, 4, 4
Efrain	4, 3, 3	4, 3, 4
Martin	4, 3, 3	4, 3, 3
Selena	5, 3, 4	6, 3, 4
Tabib	3, 2, 2	3, 3, 3
Linh	4, 4, 4	5, 4, 5
Maria	4, 3, 4	4, 4, 4
Javier	4, 3, 3	4, 4, 4
Alonzo	4, 3, 3	4, 4, 4
Adil	2, 3, 3	3, 3, 3

Self-learning Strategies

As students are required to use more language and higher level thinking to complete their work in thematic units they begin to employ strategies to help themselves.

As the tasks became more difficult and demanded more of the students, they had to find ways to help themselves. While this is not necessarily a skill that is taught in order to meet the academic standards of the regular classroom, it is a skill that I look for in second language students as I am deciding if they are ready to exit and be completely in the regular classroom without ESOL support.

Cooperative Work and Peer Help

By using thematic units I was able to create more activities for the students to complete while working in small groups with their peers. While I had intended this to be to help their language development because they had to negotiate information with their classmates, it had an unexpected effect on the learning community in the classroom. The students began to turn to each other for help. When they needed help with vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structures, or when they just did not understand something, they started to look to each other for the answers rather than coming to me first. Of particular note was when the students were working on an individual writing piece. The students were writing a paragraph to compare or contrast Kwanzaa and Ramadan. Carlos was stuck on his main idea sentence because I had not given a written example for

the students to follow. Rather than just sitting in his seat and wasting time, he turned to Javier to ask how he should start. Javier told him what he had written and then Carlos was ready to write his own paragraph. This had a positive effect on how the students interacted with each other and also the time I had to interact with the students. Because the small questions were being handled among the students, I had time to help the students who were having greater confusion and difficulty.

Requesting Help

Along the same lines as the students helping each other, I also saw the students asking for help more quickly on their own. Rather than just sitting for long periods of time when they did not understand something, as they had at the beginning of the study, the students were requesting help much sooner. I began to see a drop in the off-task time after directions were given for an assignment. The students would either ask a person sitting near them for help or would come to the help chair. Within the same comparison writing assignment described previously where Carlos turned to Javier for assistance, Tabib requested assistance right away. Whereas in assignments in the beginning of the study he would sit and be off task for a period of time before I came to him, he now asked for help immediately if he was having difficulty. If the students did not understand something or needed help with words or sentence structures, they asked for help instead of sitting and doing nothing until I noticed they needed help.

Positive Learning Behaviors

When students meet with challenging material and new concepts within social studies and science units, there are positive learning behaviors that arise that help with the students' learning of the content and language.

Connections

As we learned the content in the units, the students began to make several types of connections, which are very important for at-risk students (Gutknecht and Gutknecht, 1997). The students were able to make connections between the activities we were doing on one day and the activities we had previously done. They connected not only the ideas, but also the vocabulary. They were also able to make connections between what we were doing in my class and what they were doing in the regular classroom. These connections were not only between the materials being learned in the different places, but also in the types of activities we were doing. By using social studies and science as a basis for learning, the students were also able to make connections between themselves and the material we were learning. During the communities unit the students made connections to the different types of communities they were seeing and learning about. They compared what they knew in their community to what they saw in other communities. Throughout the holidays unit the students were able to make connections even to the holidays they did not celebrate. They commented on some of the things that are done in the various holiday celebrations that are

similar to things they do in their holiday celebrations. They were also able to connect information across the different holidays. These connections are very important for the students to make to help make their learning richer, deeper, and longer-lasting (Freeman & Sokoloff, 1996).

Prior Knowledge

One of the other learning behaviors that arose because of the thematic units was activating prior knowledge. Because of the structure of the units, where the students learned the factual information and then were asked to apply it to other tasks, the students had prior knowledge about the subject to use when they got to the more difficult, higher level tasks. When the students were asked to answer whether or not the trash can was magnetic without testing it with a magnet, they were able to use the prior knowledge they had from the previous experiments to help them. As the students worked on their paragraphs and needed help, many started their questions with information they had gathered from previous activities. They told me the pieces they knew and then used that to make the leap to what they did not know or were not sure of. Had they not had the previous experiences and content knowledge to use, they would not have been able to do the higher level thinking. The prior knowledge helped the students with the language aspect of the tasks as well. As they learned the factual information at the beginning of the units, they were also learning the vocabulary

they needed. Having this bank of content vocabulary enabled them to complete tasks and activities later in the unit.

Student Engagement Levels

When students are taught through social studies and science units there is a change in their levels of engagement.

Delpit (2002) says that “the object is not to lower standards or just teach what is interesting to the students, but to find the students’ interests and build an academic program around them” (p. 45). This is what I tried to do as I planned the units for the students. The students still needed to learn the same concepts and skills, but when geared to their interest levels they tended to be more involved with the activities. Many research studies, such as Yorks and Follo (1993), Shubert and Melnick (1997), and Fuller (2001), have found that students’ interest and engagement levels increase when thematic units are used. I generally found this same result within my study.

As the students’ interest levels increased in the units, so did their engagement levels. At the beginning of the first unit the students seemed to be as engaged as they had ever been previously. That is to say, some students paid attention and some did not. They did not see how things were different yet. It wasn’t until about halfway through the communities unit that I started to see a difference in their engagement in the classroom activities. It was at this point that the students were able to see the differences between the way we used to do

things and how things were with the thematic units. Because we were discussing different small topics under one big topic within the thematic unit, I was able to bring in various information sources. The students really responded to learning from things other than books. From this point I noted several times in my field log that the students were becoming more interested in what was going on in class. There was less off-task side conversations when the students were doing group work. When the students finished activities in their group before others the conversations stayed on the topic they were working on. Because of this I also noted a lot less constant teacher reminders (nagging) about what they were supposed to be doing.

The magnet unit was the biggest area in which I saw significant differences in their engagement. From the first day of the unit, when they were allowed to manipulate the magnets on their own and see what would happen, the excitement level in the class was up and the students' engagement in what they were doing was up. This carried over from the hands-on activities to the writing tasks as well. As the students wrote paragraphs as part of an assessment they commented on what they had previously done and related what they were writing to what they had done. As Maria handed in her paragraph she explained the supporting details of her paragraph (see Figure 11) she said "when I tested the marker with the magnet it did not stick, so was non-magnetic and the marker is of plastic. So the garbage can is of plastic too, so it won't stick to the magnet and

can't be magnetic." She did not have to explain her paragraph at all, but was very excited to tell me exactly how she figured out her answer and why she wrote what she did.

I really got an idea of their interest levels in the magnet unit when they completed the end of unit surveys. As they had to write one thing they liked and one thing they did not like about the unit, many students commented that they could not think of anything they did not like about the unit. They were hard pressed to pick something when I told them they had to write one thing on their paper.

This interest level and engagement then carried over into the holidays unit. As we read and talked about different holidays the students asked questions and wanted to know more. With this level of engagement they built their content knowledge as well as their language skills.

As Delpit (2002) said in the quote that started this section, it wasn't a matter of lowering the standards. Once I was able to get their attention with the subject we were learning, I could use that content to teach the students the skills they need to have and the standards they need to meet.

Learning Obstacles

When students learn social studies and science content there are interference behaviors that arise.

Of course not every outcome to my study was positive. As we used social studies and science units to teach language, there were bound to be some pitfalls as well. As the students were learning, they ran into some problems that made the learning more difficult for them.

Limited Experience

One of the major areas that came up again and again as we were learning was the lack of experiences the students have had. Partially because of their age, partially because of their socio-economic status, and partially because of their language abilities the students have had limited experiences to relate to new concepts. This was especially evident when we were discussing communities. As we talked about different places in a community many students were hard pressed to tell me places outside of a few blocks of their homes. Even though LaCrosse is a fairly large city with many historical and cultural opportunities, most of my students have not traveled outside of a 15 block radius of their homes. Even though half of my students were born outside of the United States, they have not gone to other places since moving to LaCrosse, and this has been at least two years or longer for many of them. The other five students were born in LaCrosse and have not gone anywhere else. This lack of experience makes the learning of

content information more difficult because the concepts are abstract to them and made some of our conversations more difficult.

Non-application of Skills

As in any classroom, this is probably the most frustrating for the teacher. The skills are taught and practiced together, but when the students are sent to do it on their own, they are not used. This was seen most in the use of the paragraph format for the students' writing. The students were given instruction, whole group practice, small group practice, guided practice, and examples to follow and a few still sat down and wrote as they had been doing before. For these few students it required one-on-one guidance each time we did writing to have them use the paragraph format.

Conclusion

As I started my study I was looking for a new, yet effective way to teach my second language students. My students need to learn more, faster (Collier, 1995) and I saw content-based thematic units as a way to do this. While not every day and every lesson was a success, the data I collected overall strongly supports using social studies and science thematic units to teach my second grade ESOL students. Using the content gave my students a purpose for reading and writing. We were not just reading and writing for the sake of reading and writing, but rather to accomplish a larger task. As Krashan (1982) suggests, the content gave the language learning a real purpose. When the skills needed to be learned were

set in a purposeful context, the students really engaged in the material and the skills. My goal was to find a better way to teach my ESOL students, and using the content-based thematic units was a better way for me and for my students.

THE NEXT STEP

Now that my study is completed, and I have written everything I can about it, the question I keep coming back to is “now what?”

The first answer to this is the easiest. I have found enough success, for myself and my students, with the units that we studied during the study that I am continuing to develop other social studies and science units. While I am still focused on the language, reading, and writing skills I see a need for the students to be more accountable for the content information. Since I also saw Language Arts content pieces lacking in some of the units, I want to focus on developing more complete units that focus more evenly on the reading, writing, oral language, and social studies and science content.

Looking further ahead I am trying to see how I can bring the idea of using social studies and science units to my First Grade students. Since this idea worked well for the Second Grade students, I want to see if I can bring the content and materials down to a level where it would work for my First Graders.

Another possible area that this could be expanded to and studied is using math content units. Since I only used social studies and science content within my study, it would be interesting to see the effects of using math units in an ESOL class.

As I look toward next year, I am also looking at how I can incorporate this idea into the new reading series that has been adopted by my school district. Up

until this point there has been no specific curriculum or set of materials for the ESOL classes, which was one of the things that lead me to create my study. With the adaptation of the new reading series, there is a specific ESOL component we are getting. Since I feel that the units we have done are important and so is the set up of the new reading series, I am looking to try to tie both of those pieces together for both my First and Second Grade students.

In completing this study, I have gained an invaluable insight into the importance of constant, and formal, reflection of my teaching. I realize that it is one thing to say that I observe what is happening in my class and make changes in my teaching based on that and quite another to write daily logs, collect student work and reflect on those things in order to change what is happening in the class. It is my hope that the experience I have gained through this study will help me to continue to identify areas of need and find ways to improve my teaching skills to meet the needs of my students.

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Appendixes A-M

Appendix B Stage Forms

CENTER FOR LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

Bethlehem Area School District
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Student: _____

School: _____

Student #: _____

Date: _____

Gr: _____

D.O.B. _____

ENGLISH ACQUISITION STAGES

	Grades: Kindergarten to Third (K-3)			Grades: Fourth to Twelfth (4-12)		
	Beg.	Int.	Adv.	Beg.	Int.	Adv.
Oral/Aural	1 2 3	3 4	4 5 6	1 2 3	4 5 6	5 6
Reading	1 2 3	2 3	4 5 6	1 2	3 4	4 5 6
Writing	1 2 3	3 4	4 5 6	1 2 3	3 4	4 5 6

FIRST QUARTER

BEG = Beginner
INT = Intermediate
ADV = Advanced
EXIT = Needs program change form completed to exit

LAST QUARTER

BEG = Beginner
INT = Intermediate
ADV = Advanced
EXIT = Needs program change form completed

Directions:

First Quarter – Circle the student's present levels in oral language, reading & writing and the student's present program.

Last Quarter – please **double** circle the levels.

Please mark if YES for current year:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading Recovery
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vo-Tech
<input type="checkbox"/>	St. Luke's Program
<input type="checkbox"/>	Retention
<input type="checkbox"/>	Migrant
<input type="checkbox"/>	Academy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Special Education

Change recommended by CLA

Signature of teacher completing this form _____

Date _____

White copy: to CLA 1st quarter

Canary copy: to CLA last quarter

Pink copy: student's folder

Appendix C Stage Form Descriptors**WORKSHEET FOR STAGES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION FOR ORAL/AURAL, READING,
AND WRITING DEVELOPMENT**

Stages are not exact points but describe a continuum from the beginning of a stage to the upper limit of a stage. An occasional non-English word is acceptable at the higher stages. An accent is acceptable at all stages.

To determine the numerical stages of oral language, reading, and writing, check off the descriptors that apply. Then circle the appropriate numbers on the "Stages" Chart. A student may move to the next stage if most of the criteria at that stage are met.

ORAL/AURAL STAGES

STAGE 1:

- ___ Understands little or no English
- ___ Uses no English except for a word or two
- ___ Names objects

STAGE 2:

- ___ Understands only slow simple speech; requires repetitions
- ___ Speech is slow except for short patterns
- ___ Is able to use functional words and phrases
- ___ Is unable to use English for significant communication
- ___ Vocabulary is limited to basic personal and survival areas

STAGE 3:

- ___ Understands simplified speech with repetitions and rephrasing
- ___ Speech is hesitant and uneven; some sentences left incomplete
- ___ Uses simple speech and gestures with predominantly present tense verbs
- ___ Demonstrates errors of omission: leaves words out; leaves endings off
- ___ Vocabulary is limited preventing continuous conversation.
- ___ Uses some strategies when he/she meets with difficulties: asks peers or teacher for help, asks for restating of directions, asks meaning of unknown words, asks for clarification if meaning doesn't make sense

STAGE 4:

- ___ Understands adult speech but requires repetition and rephrasing
- ___ Speech may be hesitant because of rephrasing and groping for words.
- ___ Uses some complex structures.
- ___ Over generalizes rules of grammar.
- ___ Has difficulty with choice of verb tense, verb tense consistency, and subject/verb agreement.
- ___ Vocabulary is adequate to carry on basic conversation; some word usage difficulties.
- ___ Uses most of these strategies when he/she meets with difficulties: seeks out help from peers, teacher, asks meaning of unknown words, takes risks to speak in class

STAGE 5:

- ___ Understands most adult speech except some advanced structures.
- ___ Responds in detail, often with hesitations or digressions that do not impede narrative.
- ___ Errors made are not uncommon among proficient speakers of standard American English and do not detract from story line.
- ___ Uses most basic grammatical structures with occasional error in syntax. Some errors in a young learner may be seen as developmental.
- ___ Vocabulary is sufficiently varied to express ideas clearly.
- ___ Uses strategies as needed when he/she meets with difficulties: seeks out help from peers, teacher, asks, meaning of unknown words, takes risks to speak in class
- ___ Is moving toward meeting the speaking, listening and viewing standards at his or her grade level
- ___ Is able to deliver an individual presentation in which the student:
 - ___ shapes information to a particular purpose
 - ___ uses notes or other memory aides to structure the presentation
 - ___ engages the audience with appropriate verbal cues and eye contact

STAGE 6:

- ___ Able to express himself/herself adequately to succeed in a regular education program with no ESOL support
- ___ Has met some of the speaking, listening, and viewing standards at his or her grade level

READING STAGES IN ENGLISH

STAGE 1: (one of these criteria, not all, may serve as descriptor for the stage)

- Attends to pictures and objects, but not print.
- Beginning to understand conventions of print such as reading from left to right and the concept of letters and words.
- Participates in choral reading activities and/or can identify some sound/symbol relationships along with some high frequency words.

STAGE 2:

- Decodes simple sentences without assistance but may not associate meaning.
- Uses some of these strategies when he or she meets with difficulties: rereading, self-correcting, asking himself or herself if the text makes sense, looks right and/or sounds right, transfers some first language literacy skills

STAGE 3:

- Reads some simple passages (not necessarily on grade level) without assistance and is able to retell the meaning of a simple passage and responds to comprehension questions appropriately
- Uses most of these strategies when he or she meets with difficulties: rereading, self-correcting, asking himself or herself if the text makes sense, looks right and/or sounds right, transfers first language literacy skills to derive meaning

STAGE 4:

- Understands main ideas/details appropriate to the student's ^{grade} grade level/academic program; but may need ESOL support to understand more advanced concepts and the academic language of texts

STAGE 5:

- Demonstrates reading ability appropriate to succeed in a regular education program with ESOL support or support from the reading specialist
- Reads and comprehends informational material
- Makes responsible assertions about the texts
- Supports assertions with convincing evidence
- Compares and contrasts themes, characters, and ideas

STAGE 6:

- Demonstrates reading ability appropriate to succeed in a regular education program with ESOL support
- Is moving toward meeting the standard for his or her grade level
- Makes responsible assertions about the texts
- Supports assertions with elaborated and convincing evidence
- Draws texts together and compares and contrasts themes, characters, and ideas
- Restates and summarizes information
- Relates new information to prior knowledge and experience

WRITING STAGES IN ENGLISH

STAGE 1:

- ___ Draws a picture
- ___ Has no knowledge of the written word
- ___ Writes name only
- ___ Writes isolated letters or words only

STAGE 2:

- ___ Writes in phrases and simple patterned sentences only
- ___ Uses limited vocabulary, and mostly present tense verbs
- ___ Many spellings are unreadable, making the writing hard to understand

STAGE 3:

- ___ Writes sentences centered around one idea, but not necessarily in sequential order with error, but commensurate with student's oral ability.
- ___ Has some knowledge of rules of punctuation and capitalization, and some basic grammatical structures but may not use them consistently.
- ___ Uses spellings which are readable.
- ___ At low stage 3 uses mostly present tense verbs.
- ___ High stage 3 evidence of past tense in common verbs
- ___ Uses some strategies when he or she meets with difficulties: checks word-wall, rereads writing, asks peer or teacher for help, compares writing with rubric, circles difficult words, takes risks to use new words

STAGE 4:

- ___ Has story line and/or central idea present.
- ___ Able to write a summary of a story in correct sequence.
- ___ Shows sequential relationship between sentences
- ___ Uses some compound and complex sentences
- ___ Demonstrates general control of most basic grammatical structures, (e. g. subject/verb agreement, standard word order, consistent verb tense), but still contains errors. Uses punctuation and capitalization correctly most of the time.
- ___ Uses some conventional spellings.
- ___ Consistently uses past tense in common verbs (when appropriate).
- ___ Uses most of these strategies when he or she meets with difficulties: rereads writing, asks peers or teacher for help, compares writing with rubric, self corrects errors, takes risks to use new words, checks words on word lists, dictionary, thesaurus, or word wall

STAGE 5:

- ___ Is moving toward meeting the standard for his or her grade level
- ___ Engages the reader with a good beginning
- ___ Has effective organization
- ___ Includes sufficient content and relevant details
- ___ Provides a sense of closure; a conclusion
- ___ Includes conventional spelling, punctuation, mechanics
- ___ Writes in a variety of genres appropriate to the writing standard rubric

STAGE 6:

- ___ Demonstrates writing ability appropriate to succeed in a regular education program with ESOL support only as needed.

Appendix D HSRIB Approval



MORAVIAN COLLEGE

August 2, 2006

Lynette Possinger
1612 Ranger Road
Effort, PA 18330

Dear Lynette Possinger:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: Content-based Thematic Units in Elementary ESOL Classes. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415

Appendix E Parent Permission

September 5, 2006

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am currently taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses help me in using the most effective methods in my classroom and in reflecting on my own teaching.

During this semester, August 28th through December 13th, I am required to conduct a systematic study of my own teaching. My research will examine the use of thematic units to improve the students' academic language proficiency. This language proficiency will help the students to be successful in the regular classroom.

During my study I will be collecting information to support my study through classroom observations, student work, and reading assessments. I will only use information collected from students who have permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. All of the students' names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers and other staff, and school names. No names will be used on work samples or in any reports of my study. All research materials will be kept in a secure location in my home. All data collected during the study will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

All students will be participating in the thematic units activities as part of the regular ESOL curriculum; therefore no student will be singled out as a participant or non-participant. Your child will only be considered a subject in my study if I receive your written permission below. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Withdrawal will not affect your child's grades. If your child withdraws, I agree that I will not use any data pertaining to your child in any written reports of my research. Please notify me by phone or in writing if your child wishes to withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research at any time, please contact the principal or me at the school at _____. My faculty sponsor at Moravian is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted by phone at (610) 625-7958 or e-mail at crzales@moravian.edu.

If you approve of your child's participation in my teacher research, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Possinger

I understand that Mrs. Possinger will be observing and collecting data as part of her research on thematic units in her classroom, and my child has permission to be a participant in the study.

Child's name: _____

Parent/Guardian signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F Principal Permission

August 29, 2006

Dear [REDACTED]:

During the 2006-2007 school year, I will take courses towards a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. Throughout these courses I will reflect on my teaching practice and work to find the most effective ways of teaching in order to provide the best learning environment for my students.

As part of Moravian's program, I must conduct a systematic study of my teaching practice through action research. The focus of my research this semester is using content-based thematic units to increase the academic language proficiency of my second grade ESOL students. This study will take place from August 2006-December 2006.

During my study on thematic units, I will collect students' work as they complete activities within the unit. I will observe my students as they are working on the activities in the classroom. There is no anticipated risk in this study.

I will give all the children in my second grade group the opportunity to participate with the thematic unit activities as part of my regular ESOL program. However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the child's grade in any way. Any child may withdraw from the study at any time. If a child withdraws, or the parent/guardian chooses not to allow them to participate in the study, I will not use any information pertaining to that child in my study.

I will keep all the children's names confidential. The name of any student, faculty member, cooperating teacher, or cooperating institution will not appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Only my name and the names of my sponsoring professors will appear in this study. I will secure all research material in a protected location.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-7958 or e-mail at crzales@moravian.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class project, please feel free to contact me at school or e-mail me at [lpossinger@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:lpossinger@[REDACTED]). If not please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Lynette Possinger

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I read and understand this consent form, and received a copy. Lynette Possinger has my permission to conduct this study at [REDACTED] School.

Principal's Signature: _____

Date: 8-30-06

Appendix G School Puzzle

Note: Reproduce this page for each student. Provide a plain sheet of paper on which to assemble and glue the completed puzzle.

Each Part Is Important to the Whole

Cut on the lines. Put the pieces together to show a school community.



Appendix H Rules Discussion Worksheet

RULES

1. Are rules important?
2. What would the school be like without rules?
3. What would the community be like without rules?
4. What are some important school rules?

Appendix I 3 Column City, Suburb, and Rural Communities Worksheet

Name: _____

Types of Communities

Rural	Urban	Suburban

Appendix J Communities Advantage/Disadvantage Worksheet

NAME: _____

City/Urban

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

Suburban

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

Rural

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

Appendix K KWL Chart

Reading a-z Graphic Organizer **KWL Chart • Primary**

Name: _____

Topic: _____

What I know	 What I want to know	What I learned

INSTRUCTIONS: Before reading, have students draw or write what they know about the topic in the first column and what they want to know in the second column. After reading, have them draw or write what they learned about the topic in the final column.

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Appendix L Is It Magnetic? Experiment Sheet**Is It Magnetic?****Objects on the Table**

Object	Prediction	Is it magnetic?

Objects in the Room

Object	Prediction	Is it magnetic?

Appendix M Double Bubble Map

Double Bubble Map

Name _____

Double Bubble Map for Comparing (similarities) and Contrasting (differences)

2-17
INNOVATIVE LEARNING GROUP
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