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**BUILDING VOCABULARY AND BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE
ONE BRICK AT A TIME:
AN EXPLORATION OF PRE-READING STRATEGIES USED WITH
THIRD GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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Abstract

This study investigated the observed behaviors and reported experiences of third grade English language learners when pre-reading activities intended to build schema and vocabulary were implemented. A preliminary student survey was taken to assess students' reading attitudes and use of strategies. Then a variety of pre-reading strategies such as hand-on experiences and games, visual aids, scaffolded texts, and direct vocabulary instruction were employed with the goal of increasing comprehension of non-fiction texts. Through tests, quizzes, reading assessments, observations and a post-study survey, several themes emerged. Research showed that hands-on activities and games increased student engagement and provided opportunities for students to use new words authentically. Learning new words through meaningful experiences helped students retain vocabulary. Visual aids helped build and activate student schema, which made the text more accessible. Using texts that gradually increased in complexity and that revisited key concepts, provided students with effective scaffolding. By reading nonfiction books, English language learners acquired English and science and social studies content simultaneously. Although interventions did not result in increased reading levels for all students, students successfully acquired new vocabulary and demonstrated strong comprehension of specific texts within the fall unit. For the greatest success, teachers need to combine strategies that meet the needs of their individual students.

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Researcher Stance

When I entered kindergarten, I was unable to speak a word of English. I was scared and overwhelmed. I did not attend preschool experience and was an only child used to interacting with adults who spoke Polish or Ukrainian. My parents were both of Ukrainian descent, but lived most of their lives in Poland. I was mostly raised by our landlady who spoke Polish to me. My parents however, spoke Ukrainian to me. Although I could speak two languages, entering kindergarten, I felt “my backpack” was sorrowfully “empty”.

It was not just the language that I found foreign; it was the school and the culture. Growing up in a poor working class family, I lacked familiarity with books and basic school supplies. My parents were immigrants struggling to make ends meet, and I can honestly say that we did not have a single book in the house. Everything about school was foreign to me, resulting in extreme culture shock. Since I did not know how to ask to go to the bathroom or communicate basic needs or wants, I cried often. Not surprisingly, I remember feeling sad and isolated from my peers.

What I learned about literacy and the English language is entirely due to my elementary school teachers. I remember my kindergarten teacher pointing to letters written on the chart paper and wondering why she kept pointing at those lines and squiggles. She was the first person to show me that letters make sounds and that letters could be arranged to make meaning. I learned to watch the teacher

very closely and listen intently. I recall my teacher sounding out words and the students reciting them back to her. I mouthed the sounds for a very long time before I could articulate them, hoping that no one would notice. I found comfort in this group process, because then I could blend in with the group and feel anonymous. There was safety in numbers. Today, I am especially aware of students who try to hide in the background, and who may be embarrassed because they cannot read or speak English.

I recall feeling inferior to my English-speaking peers. Even so-called “familiar” nursery rhymes were foreign to me since they were not a part of my culture’s oral tradition. While other students chimed in with familiar rhyming words, I sat silently. The one song that I really liked in kindergarten was “Old MacDonald” because I could at least make the animal sounds. Then, I could participate. As a teacher, I am reminded that children come to school with varied linguistic, cultural and background knowledge. Despite these differences, each student needs to feel included and successful.

As a child, I avoided reading. I recall faking that I was sleeping [we had nap time back then] or feeling sick, so that I would not have to endure the torment of reading one-on-one with the teacher. In my classroom today, I see students who engage in avoidance tactics when it comes to reading, and I seek to help them overcome this aversion.

What I did enjoy was story time. Looking at the pictures during read-alouds provided me with visual aids, which made the language more comprehensible. The pictures gave me an escape from the constant effort of making sense of the world around me. I learned to love books, because I could tell that my teacher loved books. Looking at the pictures, being able to use my imagination and listening to the relaxing sound of the teacher's voice were happy moments for me. Now, as a teacher I try to rely mostly on authentic literature for language instruction and instill a sense of wonder and literary appreciation in my students.

Although I hated being singled out and removed from class in the middle of activities, I greatly benefitted from English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in a pullout setting. I bonded strongly with the other children, particularly with another girl who also spoke Polish, with whom I remain friends today. As a teacher of English language learners (ELLs), I remember how vital it is for a student to have at least one friend in class who can translate when possible, and the importance of supporting students' first language as much as possible.

I learned to speak English very quickly, supporting Chomsky's theory that children have an innate capacity for language. My parents spoke almost no English and could not afford English books or tutoring. Despite this fact, I went from not speaking a single word of English in kindergarten, to being

mainstreamed in grade two. I believe part of the reason I learned to speak English so quickly, was because I was highly motivated. I was extremely eager to play with the toys, the other children, and engage in experiences like finger painting and group games on the playground. I had to learn how to ask to use the bathroom and tell the teacher I was thirsty. I acquired language out of sheer necessity and through social interaction with my peers and teachers. My experience affirms Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels argument that students learn through collaboration (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p.15). For this reason, my study includes many opportunities for students to interact with one another before, during and after reading.

Throughout elementary and middle school years, I was sent to Ukrainian school each Saturday morning as part of a heritage language program sponsored by the Toronto school district. As a child, I thought having to attend school every Saturday instead of watching cartoons, was cruel and unjust. However, in the long run, I learned to understand, appreciate and love languages in general. I learned how language works and was excited to compare the English language rules, with the underlying rules of Ukrainian and Polish. In high school, these analytical skills helped me learn French with greater ease. I believe that my experiences as an ELL, both positive and negative and my background learning foreign languages, work together to help me provide better instruction to my own students.

Years later, through a series of serendipitous events, I found myself, again an outsider, looking in. This time, the contrast was not as stark. I became a Canadian transplanted to Pennsylvania soil. Working in an inner-city school with students learning English as a second language, I recognize that their backpacks are full of their parents' aspirations and growing knowledge of two languages. To improve my instructional practice, I conducted action research based on the following question:

What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences when implementing extended pre-reading activities intended to build schema and vocabulary on the reading comprehension levels of third grade English language learners?

To help students overcome their lack of personal experiences, I aimed to provide them with in-class experiences, visual aids and a rich variety of texts to build up their vocabulary and prior knowledge. I offered opportunities for them to interact at ease with their peers and discuss texts and how their lives connect to what they are reading. The life of an inner-city kid living in poverty is a practical one, based on survival. Therefore, I selected nonfiction target text centered on science and social studies, which I hoped would help students understand the world around them and pique their curiosity. I aimed to teach students science and social studies content, while improving their overall English. My objectives were to improve students' understanding of nonfiction text and raise their overall

reading levels, while at the same time building up their sense of cultural pride.

Literature Review

The Research Question

This research study seeks to answer the following question: What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences when implementing extended pre-reading activities intended to build schema and vocabulary on the reading comprehension levels of third grade English language learners? To address this question, one must examine the literature pertaining to English as a Second Language (ESL), child development and reading comprehension pedagogy.

Reading to Learn and Succeed

Reading comprehension is central to both academic success and future career readiness. English language learners (ELLs), in particular, experience significant difficulty with reading comprehension (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p.135). Even when ELLs read with the same accuracy as their monolingual peers, they still struggle to make meaning of the text (Burgoyne, 2013, p.142). Poor readers then become reluctant readers, compounding the problem further. Since reading comprehension is at the heart of academic success, improving ELLs' understanding of text is, in essence, a quest to improve their academic standing before their "window of academic opportunity closes" (National Panel on Reading, 2002 in Rubinstein-Avila, 2006).

The Rise of English Language Learners

The number of ELLs struggling with reading comprehension will likely continue to rise. Demographic data clearly show that the number of ELLs entering American public school systems in grades K through 12 continues to grow. ELLs are the fastest growing segment of the public school population. In 2013, there were approximately *five million* ELLs enrolled in school, representing nearly 10 percent of public school enrollment (Migration Policy Institute, data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013). According to recent projections, by 2025, nearly one out of every four public school students will be an English Language Learner (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008). This growing trend cannot be ignored.

English Language Learners - Who Are They?

There is a common misconception that English language learners are a homogeneous group of newly arrived immigrants. However, ELLs vary in their home language (L1), country of origin, age of arrival, amount of formal schooling, and English proficiency levels. Some students are highly literate in their first language, while others are not. A number of students arrive having acquired some English in their home countries, whereas others arrive without any English at all. There is considerable variation among ELLs.

As a whole, ELLs usually fall into three general categories: early immigrants, recent immigrants and U.S.-born students. Surprisingly, the majority of English language learners are students born and raised in the United States. Native-born U.S. citizens form 76% of the ELL population at the elementary level, and 56% at the secondary school level (Capps et. al., 2005). Four of seven students in my study are U.S.-born.

Many ELLs come from low-income families. In 2007, two-thirds of ELLs had a family income below 200% of the federal poverty level (EPE, 2009). Poverty plays a powerful role in student learning. Studies show that students living in poverty enter school with more limited vocabulary (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2010). Students from low socio-economic status often are not afforded the same extra-curricular opportunities as their more wealthy peers.

The Achievement Gap

Despite individual differences in culture, language, and socio-economic status, one disturbing commonality shared by all ELLs is that they tend to underperform in comparison to their Native English-speaking peers. There is a wide and persistent gap in overall academic performance among ELLs as seen by their daily classwork, and results on high-stakes tests (Carlo et. al., 2004). On a recent national assessment of reading comprehension in the United States, only 7% of fourth grade ELLs scored at or above the proficient level compared to 34%

of non-ELL students (McElvain, 2010). English-language learners are also twice as likely to drop out of school as their peers who are native English speakers (Gandara et. al., 2003). As educators, we must ask ourselves if we are using best practices to meet the academic and social needs of this growing population.

Teacher professional development

The underachievement of ELLs is due, in part, to the lack of professional development afforded teachers. Many mainstream teachers lack training in second language acquisition and ESL pedagogy (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006). Facing increased demands for students to perform well on standardized tests, some teachers resort to teaching English by presenting isolated lists of terms or teaching concepts without context (Luke, Woods & Dooley, 2011).

As discovered by Boyle et.al., (2014), many teachers lack knowledge about how to teach vocabulary and differentiate instruction for diverse learners. This situation is reflective of a broader dearth of expertise. Nationwide, only 2.5% of teachers have received special preparation to work with ELLs (Ruiz-de-Velasco, et. al., 2000). Consequently, many teachers are unfamiliar with the different proficiency stages through which ELLs progress and underestimate the amount of time required for students to attain full proficiency in English.

Without training, teachers may confuse ELLs' difficulties reading and writing in English with cognitive challenges. According to Cummins (1999, p.2), misconceptions about the nature of language proficiency have contributed directly

to the creation of academic failure among bilingual students. He attributes a lack of understanding of second language acquisition as resulting in “ inappropriate psychological testing of bilingual students and premature exit from ESL support programs into ‘mainstream’ classes” where students received minimal support (Cummins, 1984).

Second Language Acquisition Theory

If teachers become familiar with linguist Stephen Krashen’s second language acquisition theories, which form the basis of ESL instruction, this will likely improve the educational outcome of ELLs. A central tenet of Krashen’s *Natural Approach* theory is that we “acquire” rather than learn a second language. When studying a foreign language, many of us have undoubtedly copied definitions, memorized vocabulary terms and conjugated verbs, yet are unable to retain this learning over time. According to Krashen, “drill and kill” methods of learning are ineffective. We “acquire” language subconsciously as we use it to communicate for different, but authentic purposes (Krashen in Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Krashen’s theories are in agreement with those of Noam Chomsky, who contends that language is an innate function of the human brain. According to Chomsky (1959), “humans are born with a knowledge of those aspects of grammar common to all languages”. Only through exposure to

language from caregivers around them, do individuals subconsciously select features of their own native tongue.

Just like children who acquire their first language, ELLs require meaningful and natural interaction in the target language in which “speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act” (Krashen, 1982). In the classroom, students require ample opportunity to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in meaningful ways.

Comprehensible input and output.

According to Krashen’s (1982) “Input Hypothesis”, second language acquisition happens only when students receive “*comprehensible input*”. Such input consists of oral or written messages with words or language structures that are slightly above the student’s present level of proficiency. He denotes *comprehensible input* as “i+1,” meaning “input plus one.” Krashen (1982) recommends using activities and texts that are authentic, interesting, and real world. Providing learners with this kind of input helps them acquire language easily and naturally, rather than learning it consciously.

Receiving “*comprehensible input*,” while a key component, is still insufficient in and of itself to ensure successful language acquisition. Canadian linguist Dr. Merrill Swain (1985) contends that input alone is inadequate for a student to reach full competency in a language. According to Swain’s “output hypothesis,” a learner must also produce *output* in the form of speaking, reading

or writing. Teachers are encouraged to supply “comprehensible input” but also to be patient and wait for students to produce output until they are ready to do so.

Lowering the “affective filter”. For second language learning to occur, students need a safe learning environment in which they feel comfortable taking risks and practicing their new language skills. When students feel nervous, bored or anxious, this triggers their “affective filter” (Krashen, 1985). Teachers must help students overcome this state. When students are relaxed the “affective filter” is low and learning can more easily reach the “language acquisition device,” the part of the brain that processes language (Chomsky, 1965). Creating a safe environment or “nest” in which students learn through interaction with peers, and engage in hands-on activities, helps conquer the “affective filter” (Igoa, 1995, p.21).

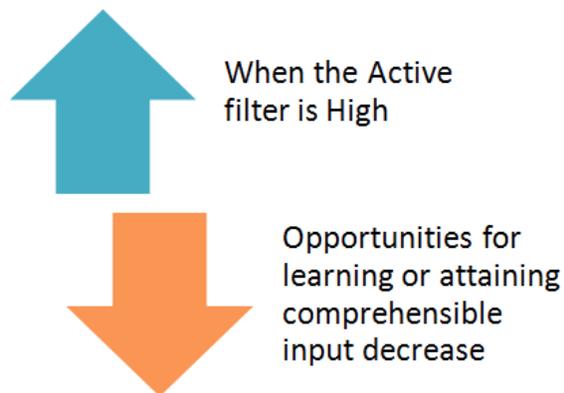


Figure 1. The Affective Filter

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Stages of Language Proficiency

English language learners acquire a second language following a series of predictable, developmental stages that form a continuum (Gottlieb, 2006, p.26).

The names for each stage vary by state and district, but consistently move from Level 1 - the earliest stage - to Level 6 - the most advanced stage.

C. The Language Proficiency Levels and Performance Definitions

The five **language proficiency levels** outline the progression of language development implied in the acquisition of English as an additional language. Levels 1 through 5 represent levels in the process of language acquisition. Level 6 represents parity with native English speakers.

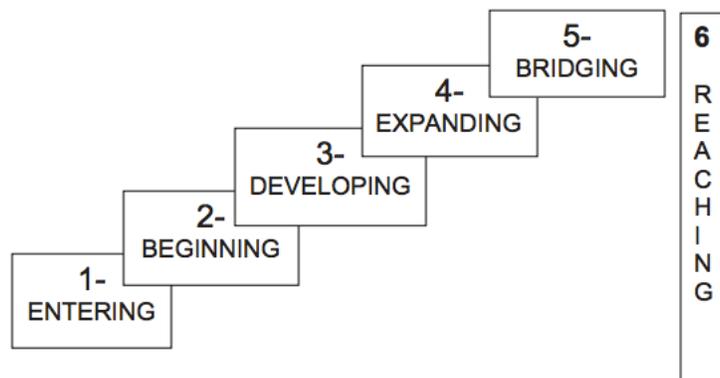


Figure 2. English Language Proficiency Levels, Pennsylvania Department of Education (2007)

Students may take a minimum of five to seven years to move through all of the stages (Cummins, 1984). The rate of progression through the many stages varies with each individual and depends on age, motivation, exposure to input, aptitude and learning style (Snow & Katz, 2010. p. 91).

When planning instruction, the teacher must consider each student's individual proficiency level and hold reasonable expectations of their capabilities. For states that belong to the WIDA (World Class Instructional Design and Assessment) consortium, a useful reference is the "Can Do Descriptors" (Appendix H). These documents are organized by language domains: reading, writing, speaking and listening and grade "clusters" or groups. They serve to identify specific skills that are reasonable to expect of students at each proficiency level. Understanding the criteria associated with each proficiency level, helps teachers provide suitable instruction and assessment for ELLs.

Formal Academic Language

To accurately assess student's English proficiency level, teachers need to be aware of the distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). A student who competently speaks English with peers can often be misidentified as an advanced English language learner. Dr. Jim Cummins made the distinction between BICS and CALP. BICS constitutes everyday informal language or conversations where social cues can be used to determine meaning. CALP is more formal academic language often specific to certain subjects (Cummins, 1979). Cummins postulated that individuals learn the two types of language simultaneously. For ELLs to successfully progress through level 3 the intermediate or developing

stage, to level 4 and onwards, they must increasingly utilize specific academic language.

English language learners may appear to be proficient in English when speaking with their peers, yet struggle with academic language, such as that found in science and math. English language learners often gain oral fluency in English in about two years (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1984), yet it takes them much longer to achieve *academic-language proficiency*. To reach *academic language proficiency*” students need to comprehend and use specialized or technical vocabulary and language patterns related to the subject area (Gottlieb, 2006, p.25). Some teachers erroneously believe that ELLs must *first* become proficient in English before they learn technical terminology specific to science, social studies or math. However, academic language proficiency is a very lengthy process, taking more than a decade for some ELLs to achieve (Thomas & Collier, 2002 in Gottlieb, 2006, p.25). Therefore, students need to learn English *and* content-specific vocabulary *simultaneously* or risk lagging further behind English-speaking peers.

Content-Based Language Instruction

The traditional approach to second language instruction was to first teach students English language skills, which were considered to be a prerequisite for content learning. Once an adequate level of English proficiency had been

obtained, students could then receive content instruction. However, with this approach, ELLs become locked into a never-ending race to catch up with their English-speaking peers.

ELLs cannot afford the time to learn the language first and academic content second. Integrating language learning with content instruction is as an effective response to increasing academic standards and the rise of standardized testing, which require students to learn more sooner (Crandall, 1995, cited in Possinger, 2007). Content-based language instruction benefits English language learners' acquisition of English and overall academic achievement. As demonstrated by Kasper (1997) ELLs enrolled in content-based language courses achieved higher academic performance. When students learn language through content instruction, they become more proficient in the cognitive academic language (CALP) described by Cummins. Using content to teach language provides students with real-world experiences in accordance with Krashen's recommendations and provides students with needed context to learning subject-specific vocabulary.

As articulated by Dr. Jodi Crandall, language 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). In my fall-themed unit, one objective was to teach students scientific concepts such as the life cycle of different plants (apples and pumpkins), requirements for seed

growth, pollination and photosynthesis. Learning such concepts not only relates to seasonal change students experience around them, but helps ELLs comprehend their reading material and science content simultaneously. Content-based language instruction helps level the playing field between ELLs and their English-speaking peers.

Non-fiction texts. Related to content-based learning is the pressing need for elementary students to read more nonfiction texts. Reading comprehension in the latter years requires moving beyond narratives and understanding expository text. On average, students spend just 3.6 minutes with informational text each day. Lower-income students fare worse, logging just 1.9 minutes of exposure to informational text (Duke, 2000). The Common Core language arts standards seek to address this disparity by emphasizing non-fiction reading, critical thinking, and research. By reading nonfiction text, ELLs can forge valuable real-world connections. Reading non-fiction familiarizes students with text organization and features, builds world knowledge and strengthens vocabulary, while simultaneously imparting essential content (Dreher & Gray, 2009).

Graphic organizers. Graphic organizers serve as a visual aid that can be used in all subject areas. They reduce the reading demands for ELLs, making content more comprehensible. Use of graphic organizers is an essential component of ESL pedagogical practice (Vaughn et. al., 2010, Rubinstein-Avila,

2006, Herrell & Jordan, 2012). Venn diagrams, main idea and details and problem and solution charts, all reduce complex information to their simplest form.

Graphic organizers such as KWLs and anticipation guides encourage ELLs to draw on prior knowledge and measure content learned. Graphic organizers can serve as a tool in aiding comprehension for all students.

Lack of Cultural Awareness and Cultural Bias

However, knowledge of second language acquisition theory and use of selected instructional tools alone are insufficient, if teachers lack cultural awareness. Without cultural awareness teachers cannot effectively connect classroom learning to students' lives and community (Andriansyah, 2012, Luke et.al., 2011, Manyak & Bauer, 2008). Some researchers indicate that low performance may actually be a result of an over-reliance on a curriculum that fails to connect classroom learning to students' lives and use of standardized tests that are culturally biased (Luke, Woods & Dooley, 2011).

Other researchers point out that, teachers may view ELLs from a "deficit" perspective, focusing on what they do not know and, therefore, have lower expectations of them. "Deficit thinking" may be an unintentional by-product of the No Child Left Behind Act, which delineates students who are "proficient" from those who are "not". Such thinking has produced thousands of ELLs that lack the skill, motivation, or desire to read (McElvain, 2010).

Culturally relevant curriculum. Teachers should be aware that difficulties English language learners experience comprehending text may be due, in part, to differences in background knowledge. As explained by Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson (1996), “children from diverse backgrounds may struggle with comprehending a text or concept presented in class because their schemata do not match those of the culture for which the text was written”. To truly assess how well ELLs perform academically, we need to ensure that we are teaching culturally relevant curriculum. By resolving the difference between students’ lives and what happens in the classroom, we show students how learning connects with their families, communities and culture. Minority students bring “funds of knowledge” to school, yet these often go ignored (Moll, et. al, 1992). When lessons are culturally relevant, ELLs can more easily draw upon personal experiences and known terminology.

Teachers need to take an “additive” perspective and show students how knowing two languages is an asset, not a hindrance. Classroom learning should value students’ culture AND students’ first language to the greatest extent possible (Freeman & Freeman, 1998). When bilingual programs are not feasible, districts are encouraged to offer after-school programs that teach students in their first language. At the very least, teachers should be aware of Spanish-English **cognates** and help students tap into first language literacy skills (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p. 142, Manyak & Bauer, 2008, Montelongo et. al. 2011).

Child Development

Zone of proximal development. Related to Krashen's concept of *comprehensible input +1* is psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the *zone of proximal development*. The zone of proximal development is,

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers...[It] defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow.... These functions could be termed the ‘buds’ or ‘flowers’ of development rather than the ‘fruits’ of development” (p.86).

Teachers must know what students can achieve independently, yet look forward and plan instruction and assessment based on what students can achieve with assistance from the teacher or more advanced peers.

Schema Theory

Schema theory explains how knowledge is acquired, processed and organized. Schema theory, first introduced by British psychologist Sir Frederick Bartlett, is an explanation of how readers use prior knowledge stored in their mind to comprehend text. Bartlett defined schemata as “unconscious mental structures

that represent an individual's generic knowledge about the world" (Shuying, 2013). Schemata (plural form of schema) are "the reader's concepts, beliefs, expectations, processes-virtually everything from past experiences-that are used in making sense of things and actions (John McNeil in Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004, p.45). By using our schemata, old knowledge influences new information, which in turn changes existing knowledge.

According to Piaget, the mind has mental structures or schemata by which individuals intellectually adapt to and organize the environment. Schemata can be compared to "concepts, categories or index files" (Wadsworth, 2004). When a person integrates new information into existing schemata or patterns of behavior, assimilation takes place. When confronted with a new stimulus, one can create a new schema in which to place the stimulus (a new index card in the file) or modify an existing schema (Wadsworth, 2004, p. 17). In my study I try to help students, "add index cards to their file" or build up their schema. Both Jean Piaget's theory of how we come to know and his idea of stages of cognitive development are relevant to my study.

Piaget also identified four major, universal and consecutive stages in cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. According to Piaget (1961) cognitive development can be viewed as a continuous process along a continuum. While every child passes

through the stages in the same order, how quickly they progress depends on various factors (Wadsworth, 2004).

Piaget's Developmental Stages

Preoperational stage. During the preoperational stage of cognitive development children begin to use language. Memory and imagination also develop. Their play is categorized by make believe and manipulating symbols. Children do not yet understand concrete logic (Wadsworth, 2004). Children's thinking is egocentric, meaning they have difficulty seeing another's viewpoint. At this stage, they often want to know everything and ask questions, such as "why?" (Piaget, 1977).

Concrete operational stage. At this stage, the child is mature enough to use logical thought or operations (i.e. rules) but can only apply logic to physical or concrete objects. Children's thinking is more organized and rational. They can solve problems in a logical fashion, but are typically not able to think abstractly.

An important implication of Piaget's theories is providing curriculum and instruction that are consistent with student's developmental stage. At the preoperational stage children aged two to seven need visual aids, models and concrete manipulatives. Students in the later elementary years (concrete operational stage), learn best through hands-on discovery learning, while continuing to work with tangible objects. Teachers are encouraged to take

advantage of students' natural curiosity and create a variety of experiences and activities that allow students to experiment and explore (Wadsworth, 2004). The teacher acts as facilitator to help students create knowledge. Since my students are eight and nine years old, they would largely be in the concrete operational stage (7-12 years old), while retaining some characteristics of the preoperational stage (2-7 years old).

Collaborative Learning and Social Interaction

Collaborative tasks effectively promote the language development of English language learners (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006, Mitchell and Myles, 2004, Swain & Lapkin, 2008 in Snow & Katz, 2010, p. 93-94). Such tasks encourage students to interact with another in their second language and to use key vocabulary terms meaningfully and in an extended way. When students talk among themselves, they express ideas in a way that is often more comprehensible than "teacher talk".

Multiple Intelligences and Modalities

Howard Gardner (1983) theorized that students possess "different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways." He initially identified seven distinct intelligences: 1) visual-spatial, 2) bodily-kinesthetic, 3) musical, 4) interpersonal, 5) intrapersonal, 6) linguistic and 7) logical-mathematical. Teachers are advised to use a variety of instructional

strategies that appeal to students with different types of intelligences. These include visual aids, hands-on activities, games, songs and student interaction.

To further make content comprehensible, ESOL methodology includes using gestures, demonstrations, a slower rate of speech, pauses to allow for extended thinking time and ample opportunities for student talk (Moses, 2013, Manyak & Bauer, 2008, Wessels, 2008, Herrell & Jordan, 2012, p.7, Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p.24, 17, McElvain, 2010, p. 200, Luke et. al., 2011, p.159). Student talk benefits interpersonal learners. ELLs are better able to make meaning using “an array of modalities” (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006). Providing instruction using different modalities ultimately benefits all learners, not just English language learners.

Reading Instruction – Best Practices

Reading comprehension, “the longitudinal goal of school reading” is a dynamic and multifaceted process (Luke et. al., p.158). The literature on reading instruction is large and complex. According to the *Simple View of Reading*, reading consists of 1) *word recognition* which includes a) decoding, b) sight word recognition, c) fluency and 2) *linguistic comprehension* which includes a) concepts, b) vocabulary, c) text structures and d) verbal reasoning strategies. (Gough & Turner, 1986, Hoover & Gough, 1990 in McElvain, 2010, p. 179). While decoding is essential in the early years, accurate reading at an adequate

rate, does not guarantee comprehension (Burgoyne, 2013, Luke et. al, 2011, McElvain, 2010). By the time students enter 5th and 6th grades, decoding accounts for only 13% of the variability among readers compared with linguistic competence (McElvain, 2010, p. 180).

Instead of word recognition which includes decoding, this study focuses on *linguistic comprehension*, the second component of the *Simple View of Reading* described above. This focus makes sense, since it blends significant principles of both reading and ESL pedagogy. ESL researchers commonly agree that building background knowledge (concepts), teaching vocabulary and familiarity with text structures, strengthens reading comprehension (Vaughn et. al, 2010, McElvain, 2011, Dreher & Gray, 2009, Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). A discussion of verbal reasoning lies outside of the scope of this study.

Schema and reading comprehension. Schema or background knowledge is considered by many researchers to be the main determinant of reading comprehension. Broadly defined, schema can mean prior knowledge of concepts *and* vocabulary. Carrell (1998) provides the classic definition, which stresses the reciprocal nature; “knowledge of vocabulary entails knowledge of the schemata in which a concept participates”. Vocabulary and background knowledge are intertwined. The main tenet of schema theory is that written text does not carry meaning by itself. Making meaning is an interactive or interpretive process

between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Schema affects how a reader understands and responds to text.

Many researchers contend that ELLs living in poverty often lack the schema (plural schemata) that aids students in making meaning of new text. Whereas others argue that, ELLs *do not lack schema*, but are unable to draw upon their lived experiences because of a mismatch between classroom learning and their outside world (Luke et. al, 2011). Still other researchers point out that ELLs may lack confidence and are inexperienced or reluctant to independently use "their funds of knowledge" as a comprehension tool (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006, McElvain, 2010, Burgoyne et. al., 2013). They do not recognize that what they already know can act as a bridge for new learning. Regardless of students' existing levels of background knowledge, teachers are encouraged to help students expand and access their schema. Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) contend, developing schemata is a key component of literacy instruction for English language learners.

A poverty of words. In addition to helping students build and access schema, strong agreement exists about the importance of *vocabulary* instruction in strengthening reading comprehension. ELLs' struggle with reading comprehension is largely because they may be unfamiliar with key vocabulary terms (Kessler & Quinn, 1995, Burgoyne, 2013, Vaughn et. al, 2010). Burgoyne

et. al. (2013) discovered “weaker receptive and expressive vocabulary skills... make a significant contribution to ... weaker reading comprehension” of ELLs, revealing that vocabulary plays a greater limiting factor on ELLs than native-English speakers (p.145, 140). Struggling readers may have less exposure to new words, may lack awareness of the roots of words both written and oral, may lack experiences to create background knowledge, and may have limited content-specific vocabulary (Elvin Thomas, 2014). The fact that many ELLs live in poverty compounds this “word deficit” (Bellafante, 2012).

Psychologists Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley revealed astonishing differences in the sheer number of words to which children of different socioeconomic backgrounds were exposed. Children of professionals were, on average, exposed to approximately 1, 500 more words hourly than children growing up in poverty. This resulted in a gap of more than 32 million words by the time children reached the age of 4 (Bellafante, 2012). Addressing the word deficit is a crucial first step in beginning to close the overall academic gap.

Frontloading: Building background and vocabulary. Reading a new text, particularly a non-fiction text, poses numerous challenges for my ELLs. The term frontloading originates from the investment world and essentially means paying upfront for benefits to be reaped later. Used in the classroom, it describes an initial, expanded amount of time during the pre-reading stage, used to introduce a new topic, set the purpose for reading, and build both the *vocabulary*

and the *concepts* students need to read text successfully (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, Hoyt, 2002).

Other researchers interpret frontloading even more broadly as a pre-reading experience that clarifies important information in a text such as vocabulary (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2009), content area knowledge (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004), or the language structure of a text (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). Examining language structure of future text includes looking at word choice, sentence complexity, sentence length, and how a book is structured. Dutro & Moran (2002) emphasize the need for teachers to guide students in analyzing functions (e.g. compare and contrast text structure) and forms (sentence structure and academic language). Overall, frontloading builds and activates background knowledge, by serving as “scaffolds before reading... [that help students] to make connections from the known to the new” (McCall, 2005). Frontloading strategies include KWLs, pictures, videos, and read-alouds of related books before students read independently (McCall, 2005).

In the general education classroom, today’s trend is towards minimizing frontloading and involving students in repeated close reading of text. Close reading directs students to grapple with unfamiliar text using repeated reading. The potential danger of frontloading is that teachers give away too much of the text and teach long lists of vocabulary before students engage in reading. However if it is done correctly, for English language learners, frontloading

remains a crucial instructional strategy during pre-reading, which facilitates comprehension. Sometimes a text presupposes cultural background or vocabulary knowledge that English language learners may not have, and using frontloading makes the text more accessible. Whereas teachers may dedicate 2-5 minutes to frontloading for native-English speakers, the ESL teacher needs to spend considerable more time planning and executing pre-reading activities that are authentic and contextualized.

Vocabulary instruction – addressing the word deficit. To address the “word deficit”, ELLs require explicit and direct instruction in general academic vocabulary and content-specific vocabulary. General academic vocabulary can be defined as “words that students are unlikely to encounter in regular conversation with their peers, but that they are likely to find in many texts that they read in school in a variety of content areas” (Hiebert & Lubliner, 2008 in Dreher & Gray, 2009, p. 138). Examples include terms such as “similar”, “compare”, “contrast”, and “describe”. Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002) also stress the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, which they refer to as Tier Two words. According to them, vocabulary can be separated into three categories or tiers.

Tier One: Basic words that rarely require instructional focus (*leaf*).

Tier Two: Words that appear with high frequency, across a variety of domains, and are crucial when using mature, academic language (*compare, contrast*).

Tier Three: Frequency of these words is quite low and often limited to specific fields of study (*isotope, Reconstruction*). (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002)

Beck et. al. (2002) recommend that students will benefit the most when teachers focus instruction on Tier Two words, because these appear with greatest frequency and are used across all subjects. However, for English language learners who are beginners, instruction in Tier One words is still necessary. Whenever possible, teachers should carefully select words from all tiers that directly relate to the subject. Teaching content-specific vocabulary is also rooted in Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP (1979), which stresses the need for academic language and Crandall's (1992) argument for content-based learning.

Vocabulary instruction has a profound effect on student comprehension of academic content (Marzano & Pickering, 2005 p.2). This is especially important for students, such as those in my study, that do not come from academically-advantaged backgrounds. For them, Marzano describes "systematic instruction" of academic vocabulary based on a six-step process:

Step 1: Provide a description, explanation or example of the new term (along with a nonlinguistic representation).

Step 2: Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.

Step 3: Ask students to create a nonlinguistic representation (picture/symbol) of the term.

Step 4: Engage students periodically in activities that help add to their knowledge of the vocabulary terms.

Step 5: Ask students to discuss terms with one another.

Step 6: Involve students in games that allow them to review terms.

(Marzano & Pickering, 2005, p. 35-37)

I incorporate many of Marzano and Pickering's tenets in my study, such as asking students to draw a picture of new words in their vocabulary notebooks and engaging them in vocabulary matching games.

Cognates. Since the first language of most ELLs in the U.S. is Spanish (nationwide, three out of four ELLs are Spanish speaking), teaching Spanish-English cognates makes good sense (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008). A cognate is a word that has the same linguistic derivation as another; meaning it shares the same origin or root. For example, the Spanish cognate for the English word "gratitude" is "la gratitude". Many academic English words are similar in form and meaning to everyday Spanish words (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006). Over 20,000 Spanish- English cognates exist (Montelongo et. al., 2011, p.432). Fortunately, teachers do not need to speak Spanish to make use of this vocabulary strategy, since there are many print and on-line resources available which list common cognates (Montelongo et. al, 2011, p. 433 recommend specific resources).

When students can draw on words that are similar in their first language, they see themselves in the position of “knowing.” The teaching of cognates “has the potential to be a very powerful way for students to use their first language as an asset to improve their English reading comprehension” (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p. 142). Of course, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on ELLs’ level of proficiency in their first language. Teaching cognates is most valuable in increasing vocabulary knowledge and consequently reading comprehension, when combined with other instructional strategies.

Robust vocabulary instruction of carefully selected terms, within meaningful contexts that allows for multiple exposures to words and their meanings, becomes especially important as vocabulary demands increase through the grades (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p.139). A strong reciprocal relationship exists between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Greater vocabulary knowledge leads to greater reading comprehension; better comprehension also leads to learning more vocabulary words (Stanovich, 1986 in Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p. 136).

Reading comprehension strategies. Like all students, ELLs benefit from explicit instruction in comprehension strategies such as: predicting, making connections, questioning, visualizing, inferring, summarizing, evaluating and synthesizing (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000). Good readers employ these strategies before, during, and after reading which enables them to derive meaning. Specific

comprehension strategies during **pre-reading** include, predicting, previewing text for challenging vocabulary, language structures and forms and accessing prior knowledge. One way for students to access their schema is by making connections between an upcoming text and one they have already read and connecting their reading to their personal lives.

Summary & Conclusion

Although there is significant research on native-English speakers and reading comprehension, much less data is available specific to English language learners. To address the specific needs of English language learners necessitates a blending of the most relevant and supported aspects of both reading and ESL instructional practices. A greater emphasis on pre-reading activities centered on building background and vocabulary, better prepares ELLs to make meaning of text. Increasing the amount of instructional time devoted to frontloading will help solidify students' background and vocabulary knowledge, allowing them to see themselves as capable learners and thereby increase their reading comprehension.

We must find better ways to meet the particular reading needs of struggling English-language learners who form an ever-growing proportion of the student body. Although debates continue as to the exact cause of the academic underachievement of ELLs, and the most significant determinant of reading comprehension, what is clear is the need for immediate action. Rubinstein –

Avila calls “the miseducation of Latinos a ticking social and economic time bomb” (2006, p.39). Her remark applies equally to all English language learners. Finding effective interventions will not only help English language learners, but all students improve their reading comprehension and consequently their overall academic achievement.

Methodology

Research Goals

Effective reading instruction in the primary grades helps build a strong foundation for future academic success. For students to understand content area subject matter at the middle and secondary levels, they must first develop strong reading comprehension in the elementary years. Many factors influence students' understanding of what they read. My research question explored the effects of implementing pre-reading strategies to build students' schema and vocabulary on the reading comprehension levels of third grade English language learners. While expanding students' background and word knowledge, I wanted to improve their understanding of nonfiction fiction and increase their reading levels. In addition, I aimed to teach science and social studies content, while improving students' English proficiency.

Pre-reading

Pre-reading refers to activities that elicit and build up background knowledge, and increase students' vocabulary knowledge. For my study, I have taken pre-reading a step further to include reading of simpler texts that lead up to and prepare for more difficult reading. This approach is in accordance with Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development*. According to him,

Learning that is oriented towards developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective ...it does not aim for a new

stage in the developmental process, but rather lags behind this process. The notion of the zone of proximal development enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only “good learning” is that which is in advance of development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Pre-reading strategies. The interventions I utilized are visual aids, hands-on experiences and games, scaffolded reading and direct and explicit vocabulary instruction. My teaching of vocabulary included providing students’ with Spanish translations of key terms, using Spanish texts when possible, and introducing Spanish-English cognates (words that share the same Latin root).

Visual aids, hands-on experiences and games. As indicated by Howard Gardner (1983) visual aids such as images, picture books and videos appeal to students with visual-spatial intelligence. I used visual aids to trigger background knowledge and spark discussion. A widespread consensus exists among researchers that students learn best through experiential learning. Although I used the transmission model of instruction at times, my study centered on teaching vocabulary and building background knowledge through hands-on experiences. This method is in accordance with Piaget’s (1977) pre-operational and concrete operational stages and Gardner’s (1983) description of students who learn

in bodily-kinesthetic ways. Students matched pictures or words with definitions. They engaged in activities such as designing and carving jack-o-lanterns and tasting various kinds of apples. Such activities allowed students to use new words orally and apply vocabulary to real situations, before they encountered the terms in their reading.

Scaffolded reading. I structured a series of texts (books, songs, and videos) so that earlier books served as pre-reading steps for more difficult books students would encounter in the near future. These easier texts were a combination of fiction and nonfiction, whereas the target texts are all nonfiction. I selected texts that complemented one another to ensure that key words and concepts were reviewed and gradually expanded upon (For scaffolded readings see Appendices I, J, K & L). By introducing students to simpler texts before reading more complex non-fiction text based on a fall theme, I aimed to build up students' background, vocabulary and concept knowledge simultaneously. At the same time, I utilized a variety of other pre-reading strategies to scaffold students' learning.

Vocabulary instruction. Many studies support that vocabulary is the major determinant of reading comprehension. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) reported that vocabulary levels in first grade predicted over 30% of reading comprehension variance in eleventh grade. Not only

do ELLs arriving knowing fewer words in English, but because they are less able to use context clues, they rely even more than English-speakers on knowing vocabulary to understand the text. English language learners need to know between 95% to 98% of the words they read if they are going to comprehend the text (Laufer, 1989 cited in Schmitt, Jiang & Grabe, 2011).

Since an integral component of reading comprehension is vocabulary knowledge, Christen and Murphy (1991) recommend teaching vocabulary as a pre-reading step and providing experiences for students, both within and outside of the classroom. Explicitly teaching new vocabulary before students encountered terms during guided reading became central to my study. Prior to reading new nonfiction text, I provided students with explicit vocabulary instruction.

Thematic Learning and Content-based Instruction

Thematic learning allows ELLs to receive both content area instruction that corresponds with state standards and simultaneously acquire English literacy skills, a model promoted by many researchers such as Peregoy & Boyle (2005). I designed my fall unit to provide students with opportunities to use academic language specific to science, general academic language that spans across all subject areas, and everyday vocabulary.

Setting

The school where I teach is one of twenty-two schools in a district that serves a total of approximately 15,000 students. The district is located in a small city in eastern Pennsylvania. I teach at a high-needs inner-city elementary school (K-5), which serves approximately 334 students, 93% of whom qualify for free lunch. The school is designated as a Title I school; meaning it receives federal funds to help disadvantaged children reach state academic standards.

Students at this school are predominantly Hispanic (77%). African American students constitute 11%, whites form 10%, students who identify as being of two or more races total 1% and Asian Pacific and American Indian students form the remaining 1% combined. The gender distribution among the student body is fairly equal, consisting of 155 males and 179 females (U. S. Department of Education, 2014 -2015).

Participants

I provided instruction to grade three students. My study focused primarily on students in my guided reading group, which consisted of seven students in all; four girls and three boys. All seven students participated in class instruction and activities related to my study. Two of the seven students; Barbara and Sarah (pseudonyms) are Native English students. Both of these girls had an

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and received learning support as well as small group instruction throughout the day.

The remaining five students were English language learners at varying levels of proficiency. Nancy, Denise, and Adam (pseudonyms) were all beginner students. Joseph was an advanced student, who received speech therapy along with Adam. Leo was an intermediate ESOL student with a learning disability. All five of the English language learners identified Spanish as the primary language in the home. Of the five, four students; Leo, Nancy, Denise and Adam were born in Puerto Rico, whereas Joseph was born in the United States. Although my study centers on guided reading instruction, I see many of the same students throughout the day for writing and RTI. When relevant, I included data for these same students from various instructional blocks.

Trustworthiness

As a researcher I wanted to ensure that my study was both ethical and trustworthy. My application was reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) at Moravian College (Appendix A). In addition, I sought and obtained approval for my study from my building administrator (Appendix B). Since the families of my students are Spanish-speaking I provided them with a consent form written both in English and Spanish (Appendix C & D). After obtaining parental permission, I also explained my research project to my

students and sought their permission to participate (Appendix E). Since my students are elementary English language learners, the student permission form consisted of short, simple sentences and emoticons (smiley/sad faces). Again, translation was provided by my educational aide, a Native Spanish speaker.

All consent forms provided details about my research, assured confidentiality, and informed parents and students that participation was voluntary. Students and parents were informed that they could withdraw their child/themselves from the study at any time, without penalty. Consent forms, data and all related documents were kept in a secure filing cabinet to maintain student confidentiality. Real student names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect students' identities.

I utilized various methods to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings. First of all, I conducted my study over 12 weeks, providing me with ample time to implement pre-reading interventions and collect data. This longer observation period allowed me to “see and confirm patterns...” and to say with greater certainty that the effects I reported, are in fact, directly related to pre-reading interventions (Johnson, 2008). To further increase the credibility or truth of my study, I triangulated data. Triangulation, as explained by Cher Hendricks (2009), means cross-referencing data from various sources. I corroborated my conclusions or findings by a minimum of three different sources of data.

Methods of Data Collection

My data consisted of both formal and informal measures. My findings were based on the following:

Formal reading assessments: DRAs and WrAPs. I administered a formal reading assessment, - The Developmental Reading Assessment or (DRA) at the start of the study. I selected nonfiction texts within the DRA kit. In cases where test results were unclear or a student had previously read the text, I administered the reading portion of the Writing Assessment Program test (WrAP). I readministered these same assessments at the end of my study to compare results. On an informal level, I carefully noted my observations in a double-entry field log.

Observation: Field log

Much of my data was collected during student discussion of texts during guided reading. Within our small group setting, students had many opportunities to share what they already knew about a topic, discuss the meaning of new words, pose questions about texts and tell what they learned. Fortunately, immediately after guided reading students had snack time, which provided me with a few minutes to note observations in a double-entry field log. By using the double-entry format I was reminded to remove personal opinions from the situation and record observations *only*, in a detached, scientific way. Listening closely to students' discussions and making notes on student talk, provided me with direct quotations

from students (*low-inference descriptors*) and rich data. These notes gave me insight into students' word knowledge and reading comprehension needs.

Informal reading assessments.

Retelling rubrics. Non-fiction oral retell rubrics were used to record students' ability to summarize text and apply newly learned vocabulary terms (Appendix S).

Running records. Running records were used primarily to assess students' ability to decode or sound out words, rather than to check for understanding. Such data does not indicate students' understanding of what the words means. To assess students' understanding of new words I relied on vocabulary quizzes and the end of unit test (Appendix V).

Vocabulary quizzes. Vocabulary quizzes consisted of both multiple choice questions as well as cloze sentences (Appendices O & P). Students selected words from the word box provided to complete cloze sentences accurately.

Comprehension tests and quizzes. Comprehension quizzes consisting of multiple choice and open-ended questions were administered after studying selected texts (Appendices Q & R). These were obtained from an online reading program, *ReadingAtoZ*.

Student artifacts. Student work samples included KWL charts, Venn diagrams and other graphic organizers used as part of direct vocabulary

instruction (Figures 18 & 23). Other artifacts include a “vocabulary quilt” (Figure 10) and Main Idea/Details graphic organizer (Appendix N).

Surveys. I began my study by asking students to complete a reading attitude and comprehension survey (Appendix F). Survey questions were read aloud to students in English and also translated into Spanish by an educational aide. Although I planned to follow up on surveys by conducting interviews, I ran out of time.

Finally, since I am in essence telling the story of my students’ experiences, I often shared my notes with students and asked for their direct feedback, known as *participant feedback* or member-checking (Hendricks, 2013, p. 126). This helped ensure I accurately reported students’ comments and experiences, which strengthens the validity of my claims. I was the scribe telling the story of my students’ journey towards strong reading comprehension.

Our Story

New Students

Teaching ESOL, I have discovered that my students, as a whole, struggle with reading comprehension. I also learned that students enjoyed but especially struggled with reading nonfiction texts, so I knew I wanted to focus on this genre. Previously, the majority of my students had been at the intermediate or advanced level of English proficiency. When I submitted my proposal, months before I even met my actual students, I anticipated teaching a group with similar abilities.

To my surprise, my new grade three ELLs in the fall of 2015 were mostly at the beginner level of English proficiency. The reading levels of most of my new students ranged from DRA 3-DRA 6, meaning they were reading at late kindergarten/early grade one levels, which was much lower than I expected. Many students were also English language learners with special needs (SpELLs) who have an IEP (Individual Education Plan). In my guided reading group, five of seven students receive special education services (Table 1). Sarah had shown no growth in reading in nearly a year and was just recently identified as having a learning disability. Leo was also identified as having a learning disability and struggles immensely with reading and writing.

Table 1. Initial baseline reading levels of students.

Grade three students (pseudonyms)	English Proficiency Levels	Special Needs	Initial reading level (Developmental Reading Assessment - DRA) Sept. 2015
Nancy	Beginner	N/A	4
Sarah	Native English speaker	learning disability	3
Leo	Intermediate	dyslexia, memory challenges	3
Adam	Beginner	ADHD, learning disability, receives speech therapy	6
Barbara	Native English speaker	learning disability, receives speech and occupational therapy	4
Joseph	Advanced	autism, receives speech therapy	10
Denise	Beginner	N/A	4

In addition to having difficulty comprehending text, my students used a lot of “junk language” such as “thing” and “stuff” in their oral retells and general discussions. They lacked a bank of everyday English words needed for communication, impeding both their social interactions and academic performance. How could I help them both build up their vocabulary and better understand what they read, while teaching necessary content?

Clearly what worked for last year’s students would not work for this year’s students. Within a short time, I realized that many of my new students learned in alternative ways, rather than with traditional paper and pencil tasks. I

had to quickly adapt my unit plan based on their English proficiency levels. I also needed to think “outside of the box” when planning lessons and assessments.

While teaching vocabulary is crucial, I recognized that it alone would be insufficient to help my students improve reading comprehension. Students’ background knowledge affects how they understand what they read. Growing up in poverty in Puerto Rico and/or in eastern Pennsylvania, my students lack the many personal experiences afforded to more affluent families. As part of pre-reading activities, I decided to create classroom experiences and hands-on activities to help students build up their schema.

Pre-reading Strategies

English language learners (ELLs) in particular, have significant difficulty jumping into new books without a rich introduction and support. They need help activating existing schema or building schema that may not exist either due to limited experiences related to poverty or socio-cultural differences. To address the vocabulary and comprehension needs of my early readers, I increased the amount of instructional time devoted to *pre-reading* activities and utilized the following strategies (Table 2):

- a. visual aids, including picture books, images, videos, realia and anchor charts
- b. hands-on experiences and games

- c. texts, including songs and videos, that gradually increase in complexity and that recycle key vocabulary and concepts
- d. direct and explicit teaching of new words, which includes using students' first language skills and identifying cognates

Table 2. Pre-reading Strategies

Pre-reading Strategies	Examples used
Visual aids	Picture books - picture walks Anchor charts Picture Splash Videos
Hands-on experiences & games	Making connections with linking chains Tasting and graphing different kinds of apples Tasting apple products Phonemic awareness dice game Designing jack-o-lanterns Carving pumpkins Counting seeds Eating pumpkin pie and seeds Sorting pictures of “Now” and “Then” Playing Thanksgiving Vocabulary Bingo
Scaffolded texts	Using simple picture books, songs and videos to introduce key words and concepts, leading up to more challenging nonfiction text
Direct & explicit teaching of new words	Vocabulary quilt Vocabulary notebooks Vocabulary matching games Using students’ first language and cognates: <i>Carlos y su Maestra</i> (text in Spanish and English) Cognate list Use of L1 in anchor charts and vocabulary notebooks

By using many different strategies to build background and word knowledge, my objective was to improve reading comprehension and overall academic success of my ELLs.

Pre-reading strategies, which Ringler and Weber (1984) refer to as “enabling activities” contain many elements. Of the “4Ps” associated with pre-reading: previewing, predicting, prior knowledge and purpose, I focused on previewing and prior knowledge. Previewing includes looking ahead at linguistic difficulties in the text. I previewed each text to determine which words my students were likely to find unfamiliar or challenging. I also involved students in previewing text and selecting their own “tricky words.”

Introducing My Study

I tell my students that, like them, I also go to school and have homework. I project an image of Moravian College for them to see. Leo asked, “Is that the place by the casino?” Sarah asked, “Is that the same as Moravian Village, where the old people live?” I explained that, no it’s not. It is a college located downtown, where students can go after they finish high school. Jane tells us “My big sister is a hairdresser. Maybe she goed there.” I think she means community college. Although it is a few city blocks away, the world of my students is far removed from the small liberal arts college I attend. Their world consists of subsidized housing, poverty, crime, drugs and violence.

Barbara asked me to show her a picture of my classroom. Barbara is curious and obviously likes visuals. I find a picture of the building where my classes are held. Then, I show a generic picture of college students sitting in a room. Barbara commented: “You have to sit and listen, that’s boring!” I learn that

Barbara is likely a hands-on learner. She also loves to talk and interact with others. As the study progressed, I discovered that she likes to show what she knows verbally.

I went on to say that to be a better teacher, I take notes about what has happened in class. I write about what went well, and what I would change. I showed them my coil notebook. They nodded in an appreciative way. I asked students, “Do you understand what I am doing?” Nancy responded, “Yes, so you can teach us to learn better.” With the help of my learning support aide who provides Spanish translation, I explained the student consent forms. I am pleasantly surprised that the students seem to have a good understanding of what I am doing. They all enthusiastically granted me permission to include them in my study. My students want to be helpful. I was relieved and excited to get started.

Administering the Reading Survey

At the start of my study I administered a reading comprehension and attitude survey (Appendix F). Again, I designed this before I met my students and in my eagerness to collect data, I made the survey too complex. I re-administered the survey at the end of my study, but this time split it into two different surveys and simplified the choices (Appendix G). As before, the learning support aide translated each question into Spanish.

Back To School

Pre-reading strategies.

Using visual aids & picture books, David Goes to School. Although my focus is on the comprehension of nonfiction text, I often selected fictional books as “pre-reading” books, since they present content in an easy to understand manner. I began the unit by reading one of my favorite back-to-school books by David Shannon, *David Goes to School*. I chose this funny picture book to engage students and help build and trigger background knowledge before students read *Getting Ready for School*, a non-fiction text. I show the book to the students and read the title, *David Goes to School*.

During our discussions I am surprised at students’ overall low levels of book knowledge and lack of general vocabulary.

Adam: Who is David?

Me: He is the author and illustrator.

Leo: What’s that?

Me: The author is the person who writes the book and the illustrator is the person who draws the pictures. In this case, the same person did both. David Shannon wrote the book and drew the pictures.

Adam: Oh, *he* is David!

[Other kids, laughing and pointing at the picture on the cover, making comments about the size of the character's head and his crudely drawn pointy teeth.]

Me: Yes, he is writing a book about when he was little. He is making his pictures look like a kid drew them.

Students: Oh! (gasps of understanding).

Me: Let's do a **picture walk**, starting with the front cover. Then I will ask you to make **predictions** about what happens in the story.

Barbara: What is a prediction? What does that mean?

Me: A prediction is a good guess about what may happen. It does not have to be right; it just needs to make sense.

I slowly turned the pages, students looked closely at the pictures.

Nancy: He make a paper _____ ! [Nancy points to the picture on the front cover. She could not think of the word airplane. **Visual aids** are key to help beginner students convey their thoughts and ideas.]

We discuss the page that shows David daydreaming. Students are unfamiliar with that term and I explain it to them. Students debate what they see in the picture of the clouds, a car, a turtle or a dinosaur. Next we look at a picture where David is about to pull a girl's hair with paint-covered hands.

Nancy: Color the hair! She really has much hair! {She lacks the vocabulary to say that David is putting paint on the girl's hair. As a beginner student, it is natural for her to speak in short phrases. Fortunately she is not allowing her lack of vocabulary to get in the way of her participating.}

Students are struggling to identify common words such as *airplane* and *paint*. They desperately need more vocabulary instruction!

During reading. I read the story aloud to the students. The illustrations in the book are very evocative. Several pages of the story contain only pictures, which I used as a basis to stimulate discussion. I asked students “How do you think David was feeling?” “How do you think the teacher was feeling?” “What did David do now?” “What would you do, if you were his teacher?” This was an excellent book to use for oral language development. Sarah told a story about finger-painting with her younger brother. Another one of her younger siblings turned off the light as a joke. She got scared and jumped up and got paint all over the wall. Adam described making a mess in art class when he was in grade one in Puerto Rico and getting in trouble. He had to stand in the corner. Denise eagerly shared, “that reminds me when I got in trouble in Puerto Rico for draw on desks.” Students eagerly discussed the story, using school-related vocabulary in an authentic context.

Students really seemed to enjoy this funny, relatable book, which provided a great introduction to our back-to-school theme. Adam, who identified funny books as his favorite on my reading attitude survey, laughed hysterically at the picture of David running down the street without his clothes. When discussing daydreaming, Leo seemed relieved when he admitted, “sometimes I do that.” Sarah, a quiet, respectful student, seemed to love the fact that David “is always in trouble!”

Since there was very little text in this book, students need to rely on the pictures to retrieve school-related vocabulary from their memory and use it during authentic discussion with their peers. Even the simplest of picture books can serve as a helpful visual and conversational aid.

After reading: Using hands-on activities to make connections.

Linking chains. After reading the book, we discussed the rules and consequences in our classroom. Next, I showed students images to depict the word “connect” and explained its meaning. I passed out toy plastic chain links and instructed student to “connect” the links together (Figure 3). I explained that we were going to make a **text-to-self connection**, meaning we are going to think of something from our lives that is just like the book we read. Having a visual and kinesthetic aid helped my students make the leap from the concrete (linking chains) to the abstract (linking their ideas to the story).

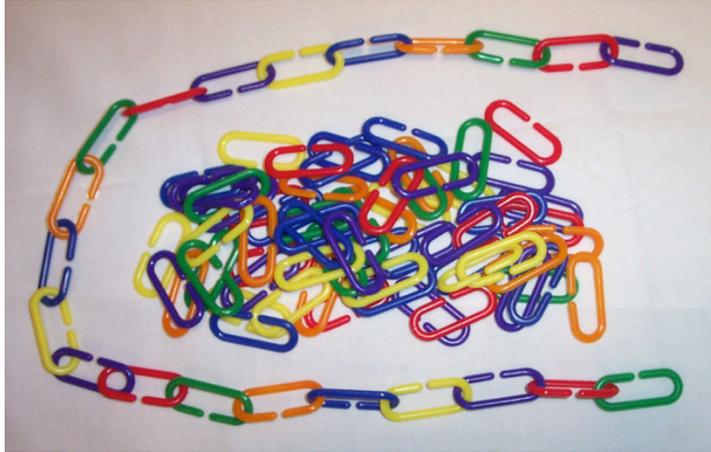


Figure 3. Linking chains were used to make the abstract concept of making a connection to a book or experience, more concrete.

Nancy described how she wore a new dress to school in Puerto Rico and another girl bumped into her and got paint on her. Nancy's mom was mad. The other students nodded in empathy. Whereas earlier Nancy struggled to explain that David got "paint" on a girl's hair, after hearing her peers use the word to tell their stories, she easily integrates this new word in her own talk. By guiding students to connect their book to their own personal experiences, I am helping them access and develop their schema. As the school year progresses, students compete to be the first one to grab this book for quiet reading time. It becomes one of their favorite books.

Using visual aids - picture splash, *It Is Time for School*. To build students' confidence in reading, I selected a couple of easy school-related books, *It is Time for School* and *Carlos and His Teacher*. Both books fall within students' *actual developmental level*, meaning they consist of tests and tasks that children are able to complete successfully on their own (Vygotsky, 1978). I am gradually moving students from the familiar to the more challenging, or from their actual zone towards their *proximal zone of development*. Both books were intended to prepare students to read the more difficult "target" text of *Getting Ready for School*.

To help students access what they already know about school and different subjects, I created a simple *Picture Splash* of images related to key vocabulary terms from *It is Time for School*. These few pictures act a springboard for lively conversation (Figure 4).

Adam talked about recess in Puerto Rico and how he likes the playground here better. Denise said she liked recess more in Puerto Rico because she could spend time with her cousins and friends, and it was always warm outside. Other students see the picture of cereal and talk about their favorite kind. Included among the vocabulary words is the word "science" (Figure 4), which led to the following conversation:

Denise: I wish we had science here. (Denise is often sulky. She misses Puerto Rico.)

Adam: Like in Puerto Rico, in first grade I had science.

Other kids: Yeah, we like science.

Not only do these students lack personal experiences that expose them to science, but generally lack science instruction at school. With so much emphasis on standardized test scores, science and social studies are often neglected. That is why I selected nonfiction as the target texts for my study.

After students echo the individual words and definitions from the *Picture Splash*, I invited them to match a word with its corresponding picture. Leo, who has dyslexia, mistakenly matched the word **science** with the picture of **cereal**, because he focused on the initial sound. Noticing this I realized, that Leo relied heavily on auditory clues.



Figure 4. *It is Time for School* - Picture Splash. After talking about the pictures in preparation for reading the text, students matched the word to the pictures.

Students matched words with corresponding pictures, thereby building up their familiarity with new terms from the text.

Picture walk: *It Is Time for School*. During our **picture walk**, we looked at pictures of common school items. School-related vocabulary, such as backpack, books, and pencils, naturally arose in conversation about what the students saw in the pictures (See key vocabulary, Appendix I). In this way, when students

encountered these same terms when reading other school-related books, they would have already integrated the words into their oral vocabulary.

Using students' first language skills, *Carlos & His Teacher/Carlos y Su Maestra*. I selected this book to give students practice **transferring what they know in their first language (L1) to the second language (L2)**. I showed students copies of two books *Carlos and His Teacher* and the Spanish version, *Carlos y su Maestra*, both from the *ReadingAtoZ* website. Adam can be very observant “Are those words in Spanish?” he asked excitedly. Using students' first language as a prereading strategy, can spark interest and make students more comfortable and ready to attack the same text in English.

Mrs. S read the book aloud in Spanish and we followed along. For her second reading we echo-read, meaning she read and we echoed back the same phrase or sentence. Most of the students read with great enthusiasm. Despite my best efforts, my reading was slow and awkward. I shared with them: “I am trying my best. Now I know how you feel when you read in English and are worried if the words sound right.” The students either nodded their heads or said “yah” in enthusiastic agreement. They seemed relieved that I appreciate their struggles and efforts.

I talked up the value of knowing two languages. I explained that both I, and their English-speaking friends were learning Spanish from them. Even Sarah

and Barbara (Native Spanish speakers) willingly joined the fun. Unsuspecting students were suddenly in the position of knowing. They were the leaders. I could sense that my Native-Spanish speakers felt empowered.

After we all read the book in Spanish twice, I proceeded to read the same book aloud in English. Usually students just listen to me read aloud. However, the students started echo reading right away. They were ready to read before I expected! They read in English, with ease and energy. Even after students read the book with a partner, they were eager to continue reading. Sarah, one of the lowest readers in the group suggested, “How about we read the whole book *again?*” To my great surprise, none of her classmates objected. Listening, repeated reading (echo and partner) provided the right amount of scaffolding.

This one class changed the overall dynamic of our guided reading group. Students treated Mrs. S with greater respect. This class also set the precedent... using Spanish at school was OK; it was better than OK, it was to be respected and admired. Using students’ first language proved an effective pre-reading strategy, since it increased student motivation and confidence.



Target text: *Getting Ready For School*

After reading several school related texts and practicing making connections, students were almost ready to read the target text of *Getting Ready*

for School. I downloaded this informational text levelled as a DRA 8 or level F, from the *ReadingAtoZ* website.

Prereading: Using visual aids - A picture splash. To stimulate conversation and activate prior knowledge, I created a visual display of pictures related to vocabulary terms from the next story, *Getting Ready for School*. The *Picture Splash* was intended to stimulate discussion and trigger background knowledge (Figure 5). Initially I showed the pictures (in a larger format) without their labels.

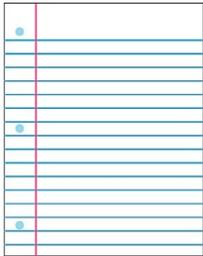
Figure 5. Getting Ready for School - Picture Splash



backpack



breakfast



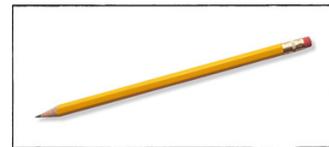
paper



everywhere *en todas partes*



children



pencil



friends



teeth

I asked students to look at the pictures and **predict** what the story will be about. Nancy responded “love, people.” I am confused, until I look again at the pictures I selected to represent “friends” I guess, *love* and *people* make sense. Adam answered “dentist, planet.” I meant to depict the terms “teeth” and “everywhere”. Pictures may be generally helpful, but are also subjective. Other students attempted to “label” or “identify” individual pictures without putting the pictures together in their mind and forming a cohesive prediction. Joseph is playing with his newly laminated nametag, but blurts out “school.” At long last, Ulrich, an advanced ELL put together the best, but not completely satisfactory answer of “people that go to school.” I’ll take what I can get! I am left feeling a little frustrated. Why did my images only evoke literal, fragmented thought? I vow to try this strategy again with another book to see if I can get better results.

Pre-reading: Making connections & previewing the text. I informed the students that we are going to begin reading a new book, entitled *Getting Ready for School*. To help them make a personal connection to the text, I asked the group “how did you get ready for the first day of school?” Barbara tells us she got a new bag. Nancy and Sarah say they got haircuts. Only Adam said he got new clothes. Denise, who missed the first day of school, explained, “We were in Puerto Rico and we came back. Then I went to school.” Secretly, I am surprised that their preparations for back to school were so minimal. Then, I realize that most of these students’ families do not have much money to buy new clothes and school

supplies. Most lack proper clothing and come to school wearing tank tops in winter. Nancy completed her homework in colored pencil until I gave her a pack of pencils. Getting ready for school, to them, may simply mean arriving at the door. How do I build or trigger background knowledge for my students when their lives of poverty preclude experiences that most middle class teachers take for granted?

Before starting our **picture walk**, I asked my students how they get to school. I wanted to activate their schema, so they could more readily interpret a bar graph in the text that depicts the various modes of transportation. Most of my students replied that they walk to school either by themselves or with a family member. A couple of them explain that they come by car, if they are running late. Barbara and Leo sadly admit that their family does not have a car. I share my story of my parents not owning a car when I was their age. My job was to help my parents carry groceries as we walked back to our house. This leads to the following discussion about food scarcity:

Nancy: In Puerto Rico, sometimes we didn't have food.

Me: It is good that the school gives us breakfast and snacks.

Nancy and the others nod their heads and say "mmhm", emphatically. They look relieved and grateful. I too am grateful. I noticed a significant decrease in

misbehavior now that the school provides breakfast and snacks. After this talk, I think my students began to see me as not quite so different from them. Perhaps, given my upbringing as a child of immigrants, I could relate to some of their struggles. Students are more likely to participate when they feel understood. I realize that it's no wonder my students have trouble with reading. They and their families are dealing with issues of hunger, poverty, lack of transportation and instability. Although I cannot solve all of their struggles, I can help make the text more accessible using pre-reading strategies.

Pre-reading: Direct and explicit teaching of new words. During our **picture walk** of *Getting Ready for School*, we stopped and examined the bar graph that shows the different ways children get to school. I wanted to incorporate Math terminology because ELLs at my school traditionally do poorly on the standardized state test. When I asked students to identify what we were looking at, none of them could tell me it is a ***bar graph***. Denise said her mom goes to a ***bar***; “where they have a drink and go for a party.” Leo told us, his dad goes to a bar too. Several students talked about police, people being arrested, and drugs, until I redirected the conversation.

I explained that there are different meanings of the word bar; it is a place where grown-ups can go to have a drink, like wine or beer. I showed students an image of a jail cell, and explain that the “bars” are also poles made of strong

metal to keep the prisoner inside. Ulrich told us his uncle is in jail. His classmates made sympathetic noises, but were not surprised. Many of them have relatives who have been to jail. I drew a Hershey's chocolate bar on the board and explained that a bar can be rectangle-shaped. I pointed to the "bars" on the graph and showed students how to "read" it. Without the images to depict the different meanings of **bar** and direct *pre-teaching* of the term **bar graph**, students were likely to have an incorrect or partial understanding of this section of the book.

Throughout the unit, as we encountered new vocabulary, I provided an explanation of the new term and showed students a picture. We discussed it and students recorded the word's meaning in a graphic organizer. Students also created a picture of the term. This procedure is in accordance with Marzano's (2005) recommended systematic vocabulary instruction.

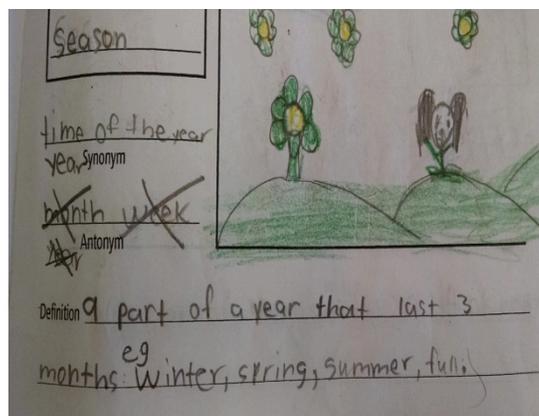


Figure 6. Students record the meaning of new terms in a vocabulary notebook. After discussing the word's meaning, students wrote synonyms and antonyms, and drew a picture.

Prereading: Vocabulary matching game. In our small group, students played a game in which they matched vocabulary words from the story with the definitions. I printed vocabulary cards from the *ReadingAtoZ* website, which correspond to the *Getting Ready for School* story. Like the game “concentration,” the cards were arranged face down and students turn one over at a time to match key story words with the definition. Again, students participated with zeal. Adam helped Sarah read some of the definitions on her cards. Nancy, who arrived from Puerto Rico less than a year ago, helped Barbara read some of her definitions. Students worked collaboratively to play the game.

Students were interacting, taking turns, and practicing their oral language and reading skills. After hearing her friends read the word several times, Denise, who yesterday identified a picture as being a *packback*, now read the word “backpack” correctly and made a match. Sarah, the lowest reader of the group, had been listening attentively and successfully read “friend” and “a person one likes and trusts.” Nancy chose the word “teeth” and explained how she wakes up, eats breakfast and brushes her teeth. Even before reading the text, she was already making connections and building up her own background knowledge. As students picked up the same cards again and again and try to make a match, they were engaging in repeated reading of key vocabulary terms and definitions. Matching games are ideal pre-reading strategies for kinesthetic learners.

Summarizing: Main idea & details graphic organizer. To summarize our reading of *Getting Ready for School* students' completed a main idea/details graphic organizer (Appendix N). Before they started, together we identified key cognate words, such as *idea/la idea*, *important/importante* and *detail/el detalle*. Students eagerly retrieved words they knew in Spanish. So far, using students' first language as a bridge to new learning was effective.

I referred to the *Picture Splash* again and asked what the book was mainly about. Joe replied "school." Adam added "kids." Denise responded "old friends, new friends." At least she was using keywords from the text. Adam looked back at the pictures again and said, "kids getting ready". The visual aids were working!

As a group we determined the main idea was that children do many things to get ready for the first day of school. As we completed reading each section of the book, students took turns orally paraphrasing each. After I provided two examples of details, students completed the remaining portion of the graphic organizer independently. Graphic organizers are important scaffolds for English language learners because they provide visual representations of key concepts and reduce the writing load for students (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001, Jenks, 2002).

Introducing Fall and Seasonal Change

Pre-reading strategies.

Creating an anchor chart as a visual aid. To assess students' current word and concept knowledge and to “prime the pump” or prepare them to learn about autumn, I drew a variety of pictures on chart paper.

Me: What do you think we are going to talk about today?

Nancy: **otoño!** (calling out in Spanish) (I am relieved that this time, students are able to look at the images holistically).

Jane: fall! (She is an advanced ELL, and code-switches quickly and easily.)

Me: Yes, why do we call it **fall**?

Nancy: The things fall down... (pointing at the picture of leaves) (From this exchange, I can see that I need to pre-teach the word “leaf” before we read the target text of *Why Do Leaves Change Color?*).

Jane: (hints in Spanish, “ It starts with L”).

Nancy: (still unsure, remains quiet).

Me: We say one **leaf**, but when we talk about more than one, the word is **leaves**. (I write the words on the chart paper).

Me: Something else may fall down.

Denise: Those things fall down! (pointing at the picture of an acorn)

Me: What is that called? (No one answers). It is a seed from a big tree. If you plant it, the big tree will grow.

Denise: You can cut it and eat it.

Me: No, not these. Maybe you are thinking of something else. It starts with “a”.... (I was not sure what she was talking about; acorn squash, coconuts or maybe chestnuts?)

Jane: acorn! (Unlike Nancy, Denise and Adam, Jane was born in the United States and has a more developed English vocabulary).

Me: Yes! (I “Googled” images of an acorn and oak tree, and explain that an oak tree grows from an acorn. I used Spanishdict.com to translate *acorn* and write the word in Spanish - *la bellota* on the chart paper. Some of the students still seemed confused about the meaning of *acorn*. I was not sure why. The next day I brought in an actual acorn, hoping this will clarify any confusion.)

I was surprised that students could not identify an acorn or an oak tree. However, rather than being dismayed at their lack of word knowledge, I should have been dismayed at my own cultural ignorance. Since Puerto Rico is a tropical island, obviously the plant life differs from that of Pennsylvania. Subsidized housing projects, where my US-born ELLs live, are also not known for their tree-lined streets. What teachers sometimes perceive as students’ lack of reading comprehension, may in fact be teacher’s lack of knowledge about their students’ home country, culture and environment.

Whenever possible, I encouraged my students to draw on their first language skills.

Me: What is another word for fall?

Students: (no answer)

Me: In Spanish the word for fall is *otoño*, just like Nancy said, in English the word is autumn. It sounds just like the Spanish word. (I add the word *otoño* to our growing list of **cognates**. I am trying to **draw on students' first language skills** as much as possible).

ME: When the temperature goes down we have to wear a _____

(pointing at the picture of a jacket. As we use our new words, I label the pictures on the chart paper.)

DS: *chaqueta* (jacket in Spanish)

Me: Yes, I brought my *jacket* to work today (gesturing).

Me: We need to wear a jacket because it gets _____ (I made sound effects of wind, and gestured to show blowing around).

Students: (No answer.)

I wrote the word in Spanish - *ventoso*. Nancy and Denise read it aloud and nod.

Beside it, I wrote *windy* and drew a picture.

I have instructed my students to use English as much as they can, but when they do not know the word, to use Spanish. While I am teaching, I allow some student discussion with peers, because I realize that often students are

translating and paraphrasing for one another, thereby making the content more “comprehensible”. The students seem relieved and happy to do this. In other classes where I push in, for example, I don’t see the same the levels of discussion and participation among the ELLs. I am comforted by the fact that students view our classroom as a safe place for taking academic risks.

However, I realized that providing translation in students’ first language is not always reliable, since some students do not even know concepts in their first language. When reading *Carlos y su Maestra*, Nancy admitted, “I just got confuse on this word ‘suman’ ” [‘add’ in Spanish]. Many of my Puerto Rican students speak an informal Spanish at home, and do not seem to know less common, academic terms even in their first language. When defining a verb, I provided the Spanish translation, “*el verbo*.” Denise freely admitted, “ I don’t even know what that means in Spanish.” Denise’s schooling has been disrupted as she moved from Puerto Rico to Boston when in grade one, then to Pennsylvania in grade two. Without a firm foundational basis in her native language, Denise was having difficulty connecting her new learning to prior learning.

Another useful scaffold that emerged from this discussion was the list of English-Spanish cognates. Now that students are aware of the existence of cognates and have had considerable practice identifying them; they tell me when to add a word to the cognate list and how to spell the word in Spanish.

We continued our discussion based on my hand-drawn illustrations.

Me: In the fall, we can pick these, apples and pumpkins. Nancy and Denise are puzzled when they see how I have spelled the word *pumpkin*. They explain that they did not know there is a “p” in the middle. Students may be familiar with hearing words, but not with seeing them in print. I look up *pumpkin* using online translation and add *calabaza* under the picture on the chart paper.

Denise: You cut it out.

Me: Yes, you *carve* it. (I place great emphasis on this word, since I know it is a word they will encounter in an upcoming book.)

Students: (puzzled expressions)

Me: (I drew a jack-o-lantern and gestured cutting or *carving* it.) For Halloween, you and your family may carve a pumpkin. When it is carved, it is called a *jack-o-lantern*.

Nancy: No, not like that. More scary!

Me: Well, I don't want to scare anyone (jokingly)! I write the word *jack-o-lantern* underneath my picture. (Again, I am pre-teaching vocabulary for an upcoming text. I want students to hear and use vocabulary in context and in meaningful ways).

Me: Are there pumpkins in Puerto Rico?

Adam: Yes!

Denise & Nancy: lots!

Denise tries to tell us about a fall event in Puerto Rico.

Jane tried to translate, but couldn't quite understand what Denise was saying.

Me: (I am increasingly concerned that Denise is unable to make herself understood even in her native language).

Me: Are you telling us about a trip to a farm?

Denise: No. (She gives up).

I am left feeling disappointed that I am not better able to help Denise. I wish I spoke Spanish and remind myself to enroll in Spanish classes after I complete my Master's degree. On a positive note, I am satisfied that just a few illustrations served as a successful springboard for an authentic discussion rich with the exact terms students will encounter in their reading. Before English language learners can read and write new words and about new concepts, they need to practice listening and speaking. Aural learning comes before print learning. Having the pictures, and later the identifying labels, served as an appropriate scaffold for beginner students who struggled with basic terms such as "leaves" and "pumpkin." Afterwards, I left this anchor chart up on display for students' reference. Anchor charts made key vocabulary terms and content learning visible and accessible.

Gradually increasing text complexity – Fall. To introduce the general concept of autumn, I selected a book within most students' independent reading level - *Fall* (DRA 3/4). This basic non-fiction text pairs up perfectly with *Why Do*

Leaves Change Color? Fall reviews color words, which are repeated and expanded upon in the latter text. The text *Fall* also builds up background about how apples, leaves and pumpkins change color; concepts that students will revisit in greater detail in upcoming books. Prior to reading this book, I explicitly taught key vocabulary words including “scarecrow” and “frost.” During our guided reading, most students read this book with relative ease as evidenced by my running records.

Building phonemic awareness: CH/SH game. I observed that a couple of my students have difficulty distinguishing between “ch” and “sh” when pronouncing and reading words, which is fairly common among Spanish speakers. For example, when talking about a class party, Denise used the word “potato *ships*.” When I drew the picture of a Hershey’s bar, Adam referred to it as “*shocolate*.” Since we were about to read a couple of books that describe weather and seasonal *change*, I wanted to address this phonemic difficulty. Knowing that worksheets are not effective for my group of students, I selected a dice game focusing on “ch” and “sh” digraphs.

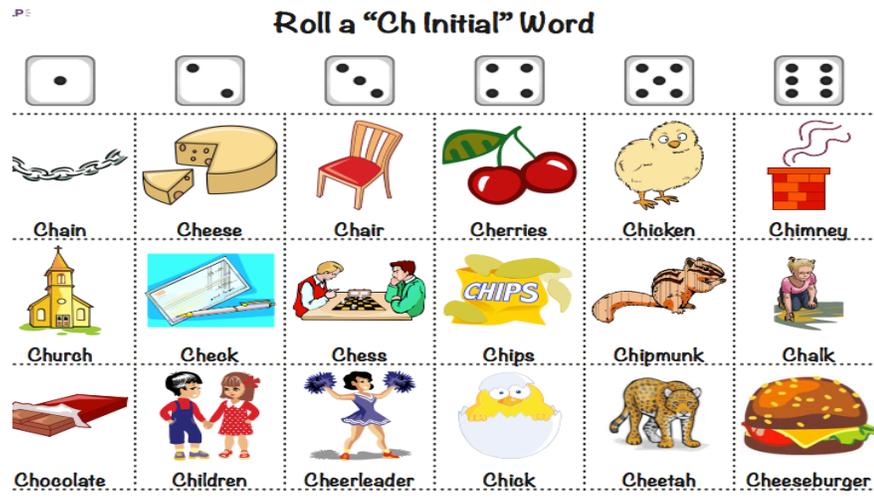


Figure 7. Roll a Dice Games

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/CH-SH-TH-Roll-a-Dice-Games-479646>

Students took turns rolling the dice. Each turn they marked off one word under the number rolled. When a student gets one word under each number (1-6), he/she wins. They loved this game! I was especially pleased at the amount of oral practice it provided.

Clifford The Big Red Dog, The Big Leaf Pile. When I asked my students if they had ever jumped in a leaf pile, I was dismayed that most had not. I tried my best to provide them with a simulated experience, by reading aloud *Clifford The Big Red Dog; The Big Leaf Pile*, adapted by Josephine Page. I remembered that when Denise tried to explain that “leaves” fall down in autumn, she could not retrieve this word. I wanted to ensure she was exposed to the word “leaves” in numerous contexts. Again, this text reviewed color words and helped build background about seasonal change and fall activities, such as raking leaves.

Pre-reading: *The Four Seasons*. At the start of my study, students confused the concepts of months and seasons. To help clarify this, we read *The Four Seasons* (DRA E/8). This book appealed to students, because it described children's favorite activities for each of the seasons. It linked back to previous learning about carving pumpkins and at the same time provided more scientific detail about changing temperature and amounts of daylight, which facilitated students' understanding of photosynthesis and why leaves change color in autumn. I was helping students build their schema of seasonal change one brick or book at a time.



Target text: *Why Do Leaves Change Color?*

Now that students had multiple opportunities to construct their schema about fall, it was time to read the most challenging nonfiction text, *Why Do Leaves Change Color?* This book from *ReadingAtoZ*, describes changes in sunlight and temperature and introduces the concept of photosynthesis. Despite some initial confusion about how leaves make food, students demonstrated a good understanding of the book. Even though most students were at a DRA reading level of 3-4, using pre-reading strategies, I was able to make this level 12 book comprehensible. To assess their learning, I administered vocabulary and comprehension quizzes specific to this target text (Appendices P and R). In

addition, I assessed students' opinion writing about whether or not they like fall and why.

An Apple a Day

To gauge students' current background knowledge about apples, I asked them to complete a KWL chart. Looking over their shoulders, I cringed at the scarcity of information: "red," "round," and "you can eat them." Denise asked hesitatingly "is it a fruit?" The other day during snack time, Nancy admitted that she did not know that apples could be yellow. I was puzzled by how little students seemed to know about apples. Don't all students learn about apples in kindergarten? After speaking with an aide who is from Puerto Rico, I learned that apples are not a common fruit in Puerto Rico.

I asked my students if any of them had been to an apple orchard before. Out of seven students, only one – Adam - had visited an orchard. While I wished I could line up my students then and there like Mrs. Frizzle on *The Magic School Bus*, and take them on a field trip to an orchard, the reality of the school budget made this unfeasible. I tried to address this lack of background knowledge as best as I could with in-class experiences.

To start off our apple theme, we watched a variety of brief videos (Appendix K). I selected the first video, Apple Tree Life Cycle to introduce the concept of a life cycle. Since it consisted of silent animation, the video reduced students' cognitive load, allowing them to focus on the visuals and content

without needing to translate terms in their heads. My students loved this video and asked to watch it several times.

The video provided students with the opportunity to use relevant vocabulary and build oral language skills. At first, students' comments consisted mainly of single words or short, general phrases, e.g. "sun", "rain" and "it's growing". With subsequent viewings, I paused the video and provided description using target vocabulary e.g. "The seed needs soil, sun and water to grow." For the next viewing, I stopped the video at select times and asked students direct questions e.g. "What do you see here?" and "What is this called?" I observed that students quickly incorporated many specific terms, such as "sprout" and "blossom" into their verbal descriptions. Before students can be asked to read and write vocabulary terms, they require repeated opportunities to hear words and use them in their own talk. Oral language development precedes reading and writing skills.

The second video, *Life Cycle of An Apple* reinforced the same concepts, but this time added simple text (labels), such as "seeds" to the images (Appendix K). Next, we watched a video of *Caillou Goes Apple Picking*, which explained how apples change color and showed different varieties of apples growing in an orchard. This video provided further opportunity for students' to hear content-specific vocabulary in an enjoyable, and accessible way. Students who are both ELLs and learning support, need lots of repetition and review, as well as

information presented to them using different modalities. In addition to seeing and listening to videos about apples, we tasted different varieties of apples.

Pre-reading strategies.

Hands-on experiences - Apple tasting.

Me: Today we are going to try different kinds of apples. (I used the corer to demonstrate how it pushes out the core and seeds of an apple).

Leo: That's neat, that thing!

Me: Yes, it's pretty cool how it cuts the apples into pieces for you.

Barbara: I want one!

Me: You will need to be careful with it, because it has sharp blades, like a knife (pointing). I used it to cut out this part. What is this called? (pointing to the core)

Denise: I know it in Spanish...*centro*.

Me: Yes, it is in the center. There is a special word that starts with the /k/ sound.

Katrina: seed (Katrina is a native English speaker. She currently receives speech therapy and is on Child Study to help determine if she has other special learning needs).

Me: Good try, but that words starts with the /s/ sound, not /k/. (Pause for more answers, no reply).

Me: The word is *core*. (I kept coring apples. As I did this, I referred to the core many times.) We will be trying different apples today. (I handed out samples. As we sampled the different varieties, I asked students to describe how each tasted.)

Katrina: *delicious* (referring to the Red Delicious variety).

ME: In Spanish - *delicioso*. (I added *delicious/delicioso* to our growing list of cognates. I also started creating an anchor chart of apple-related words and concepts (Figure 8). As students described each kind of apple, I added more information to the anchor chart.

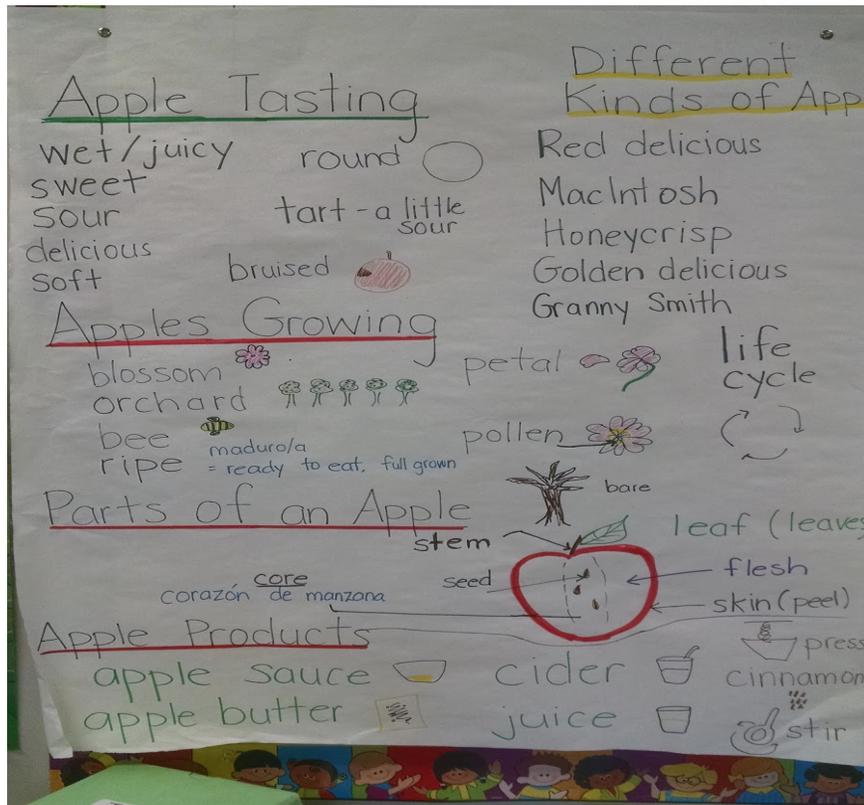


Figure 8. Apple Anchor Chart

Me: Is this apple dry or moist?

Katrina: It's wet. (I think she is unsure of the meaning of 'moist' and picked the 'safe' word).

Me: (As I cut the apple, it sprayed me.) Oh, it's *juicy*. (I am loving how new vocabulary is just arising naturally as part of our discussion!)

Denise (as we are eating): I don't like the skin. (She left it in her bowl. This leads perfectly into a discussion of the parts of the apple, just like I hoped.)

Me: There are different parts of the apple - the skin, the flesh under the skin... We have flesh too. (I demonstrated on my arm. They did not seem to understand how 'flesh' can refer to part of an apple AND part of the human body at the same time. I make a mental note to address this tomorrow.) Also, there is the seed. (I pointed to a cut-away picture of the inside of an apple. Then, I drew an apple and labeled its parts on the chart paper).

Nancy: My mom says if you throw the seed on the floor and pour water on it, it will grow.

Me: Yes, if you plant it in the ground, in the *soil*. (I can tell that Nancy understands the process of a seed growing, but still needs more practice to acquire more specific terms like *plant* [the verb] and *soil* into her oral vocabulary).

Me: This kind of apple is called a Honeycrisp. What do you think it will taste like?

The students all predicted that it would taste "sweet."

Denise: (surprised) It tastes sour!

Me: Maybe it's not *ripe*. What does that mean?

Denise: Not right for your body? (This is exactly the kind of word that does not arise in students' everyday conversation and requires explicit instruction, since it is content-specific.)

Graphing our apple choices: creating another visual aid. After students tried many different kinds of apples, they voted for their favorite. We reviewed the parts of a bar graph, and then created a bar graph on chart paper that students could connect to personally. Each sticky note represented one student's vote for their favorite apple. When our bar graph was complete, we practiced interpreting the data using math language such as "most," "least," "same," and "equal." Likely because we had spend so much time discussing the bar graph in the *Getting Ready for School* text, students were able to identify the type of graph and many of its features.

Students demonstrated retention of key terms from previous texts. When I asked students what the graph reminded them of, Leo said "that book that shows how kids get to school." "Fantastic," I thought. Although Leo struggles with decoding because of his dyslexia, he can listen and absorb information like a sponge. Pointing to the scale, I asked students if they knew what this part of the graph is called. After a long moment of silence, I told them it is a scale. Nancy replied, "they have that at the doctor's office." Learning vocabulary is a daunting task, when words can have multiple meanings. In addition to helping us integrate

math language with science, our bar graph served as a visual reminder of different apple varieties. Together with the “apple tasting” anchor chart, this graph acted as visual record of key terms that we referred to repeatedly.

Experiential learning: Tasting apple products. Both learning support and ELLs benefit from experiential learning. After trying out different kinds of apples, I brought in various apple products for students to try. They tasted applesauce, apple butter, apple pie, caramel apples, apple juice and apple cider. All the students had tried apple juice before, but of seven students, five had never tried apple pie and none had ever tasted apple butter. Barbara loved the apple butter and asked numerous questions. Luis finished his plate of goodies in seconds.

Pre-reading: Previewing for “tricky words”, My Apple Tree. Now that I helped students build some background knowledge about apples, they read their first non-fiction apple book, *My Apple Tree* from www.makinglearningfun.com. As usual, I asked students to preview the text and circle tricky words. Student selection of words is key, since I did not want to waste time teaching words that students already knew. Adam circled words, then tried to erase them. Nancy teased Denise about circling the word “winter.”

I interjected to explain that we were all here to learn and help one another. I reminded students, that we do not make fun of each other and that this was not a test. I instructed them to be honest about what words were difficult, so I could

know what I needed to teach them. I am grateful that at the end of my study, students became more forthcoming in what they know and do not know. They saw that I did not use this against them, but rather as a way of helping them.

After I collected the books, I quickly determined that two problematic words were *appear* and *bare*. I reminded students of a presentation in the auditorium in which the presenter made a bully “appear” and “disappear”. Then, I showed them images of a magician who made items appear and disappear. The kids start chatting. Prior to my study, I often curtailed student discussion sooner, dismissing it as off-task. However, now I am listening more to student talk and realizing that what may at first appear irrelevant is actually connected to in-class learning. For example, Denise first started talking about a big party, then her stepdad’s birthday and finally explained that there was a magician who did tricks. Other students started talking about magic acts they had seen and what objects *disappeared*. By connecting new words to their personal experiences, students are more likely to remember the meaning of the words.

Next, we discussed the word *bare*. Explicitly teaching homophones like bear/bare and homographs like scale (numbers on bar graph) and scale (to measure weight) is an essential component of vocabulary instruction. I shared the “Old Mother Hubbard Cupboard” nursery rhyme with my students. None of them had heard the rhyme before. They sympathized greatly with the dog. Adam remembered the scene in the *No, David* book by David Shannon where the main

character was running outside *bare* naked. We all looked at the picture again, and laughed. We created a joint experience and placed our new “tricky” words in authentic and memorable context.

Pre-reading: Gradually increasing text complexity. Next, I read-aloud *Let’s Visit an Apple Orchard* by Melissa G. Daly. My choice was strategic since this simple fictional text reinforced basic vocabulary: *fall, school, orchard*, but also introduced a new word *ripe*. I explained that apple trees often grow together in a place called an *orchard*, which is in the country. Several students, eager to correct me, pointed out that they have seen apple trees in the city. Adam told us “I have three tomato trees and one apple tree in my house.” Even though his word choice was imperfect, I was glad to see he was making a personal connection between the book and home. I was happy to see that while discussing the text, several students connected it to a field trip they took to a farm in grade one. This showed me that they were independently drawing upon their schema.

To further build students’ schema related to apples, we read several more complex texts. The beautiful photographs in *Apples for Everyone*, acted as a springboard for discussion. I selected and read aloud portions of *How do Apples Grow?* by Betsy & Giulio Maestro, and *A Day at the Apple Orchard* by Megan Faulkner, paraphrasing when needed. Key vocabulary and concepts were presented in a variety of ways. Students eagerly discussed how long it takes for a

tree to bear fruit, how bees carry pollen, which animals eat apples and more. I was pleasantly surprised that students grasped many of the concepts in these challenging books.

Pre-reading: Using video to gradually increase text complexity. Next, I showed students a more complex video, *The Life Cycle of an Apple* to help them visualize an orchard and reinforce more content-specific vocabulary such as ***pollen, bud, harvest, stem, and soil*** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgEclDLSh9I>). In this video, students ask farmers questions about apples in kid-friendly language, making content more comprehensible. Students learned that colonists brought apple seeds to America.

Adam: Yeah, yeah. Johnny Appleseed! We learned about him last year. (Starts singing/humming) He's the man with the plan...

Joe: Yeah, he planted lots and lots of apple trees!

Leo: Like thousands of apple trees!

(Joe and Leo also start singing along with Adam, excitedly. Barbara joined in, too. Then the four students started arguing over the words).

Me: (I don't know what song they are singing, but I was thrilled to see them so animated. I tried to find the lyrics online, but could not find the correct song. I was pleased that the kids were linking their prior knowledge to our study of apples.)

Leo: Dr. Gonzalez (pseudonym for one of the grade two teachers) played the guitar and we sang.

Me: I will ask her if I can borrow her book. (I am surprised to see Leo, who is usually very self-conscious, sang so happily in front of classmates).

Pre-reading: Using songs to reinforce vocabulary and science content.

To appeal to my reluctant learners I sought out apple-related songs. I selected *Here We Go Round the Apple Tree*, which describes the life cycle of an apple and is sung to the tune of *Here We go Round the Mulberry Bush* (<http://www.alphabet-soup.net/dir2/applesong.html>). I realized that for socioeconomic and cultural reasons, my students may not be familiar with this nursery rhyme. Students living in poverty often lack rich language experiences at home. When asked, none of the students had heard this nursery rhyme before. This short song reviewed a combination of general Tier 1 words such as *apple* and *tree* and Tier 3 words such as *sprout*, and *blossom*.

Me: When we were talking about Johnny Appleseed, I saw that many of you like music. Today we are going to listen to a song called, *Here we go Round the Mulberry Bush*.

(To help students understand the original lyrics, I showed them images of a mulberry bush and berries.)

Denise: I used to eat them with my cousins near the church. We use to go and get them.

Me: (Pointing to the image of mulberries). They look like raspberries but they are different. (I pointed to the close up image of berries and asked Denise which ones she eats. She pointed to the dark ones.)

Me: These are *ripe*, that means they are ready to eat, the light ones are not ripe. They are sour.

(I hoped this visual example, which connected to her own personal experiences would help Denise retain the meaning of the word.)

We listened to two different versions of *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush*. In between songs, the students talked about berries and fruit. Nancy tried to explain that she likes kiwi, but could not think of the term without my help. Denise said she liked strawberries, which led to a conversation about seeds. Adam pointed out that a strawberry has seeds on the outside. Sarah reminded everyone that apples have seeds inside too. Nancy concluded, “All fruits have the seeds!” I was thrilled that students were synthesizing information and making their own conclusions. We continued listening to the song; students bopped their heads and moved their bodies to the rhythm.

Next, we listened to an instrumental version several times to become familiar with the tune. Adam pretended to conduct an orchestra. Leo and Joe

attempted to sing along. Several students pretended to be play the piano. I explained that we were going to change the words or lyrics to the song. I handed out the lyrics to our modified song: *Here We Go Round the Apple Tree*. First I read the lyrics aloud, then the students echoed me verse by verse.

Nancy appeared to be having great fun. Even though we practiced repeatedly, she asked if each student could read a verse independently, just one more time. Leo struggled to keep pace with us as we read. However, he also surprised me. Having heard the words repeatedly, he remembered and repeated them when it was his turn. He smiled proudly. Even though he struggled to “read,” he wanted to participate. Despite his decoding difficulties, his aural comprehension is strong. When we sang our new song, Joe, one of my most reluctant students, sang loudly, off-key and enthusiastically!

Using graphic organizers as part of direct vocabulary instruction.

In addition to tasting apples, graphing our favorites, watching apple-related videos, singing songs and reading various texts, I provided students with direct and explicit vocabulary instruction. Students recorded the meaning of new vocabulary terms as they arose, using different graphic organizers. Students being able to draw their own representations of words helped them solidify their understanding. Students frequently included the Spanish translation of the word. When applicable, we also listed new terms on our growing list of Spanish/English

cognates. I continued this same process of direct vocabulary instruction throughout the fall unit.

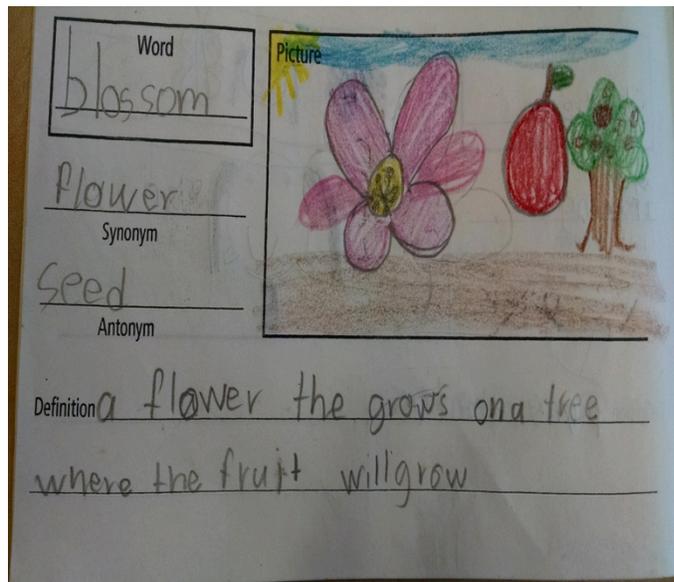


Figure 9. A graphic organizer showing the meaning of a new vocabulary term “blossom”.

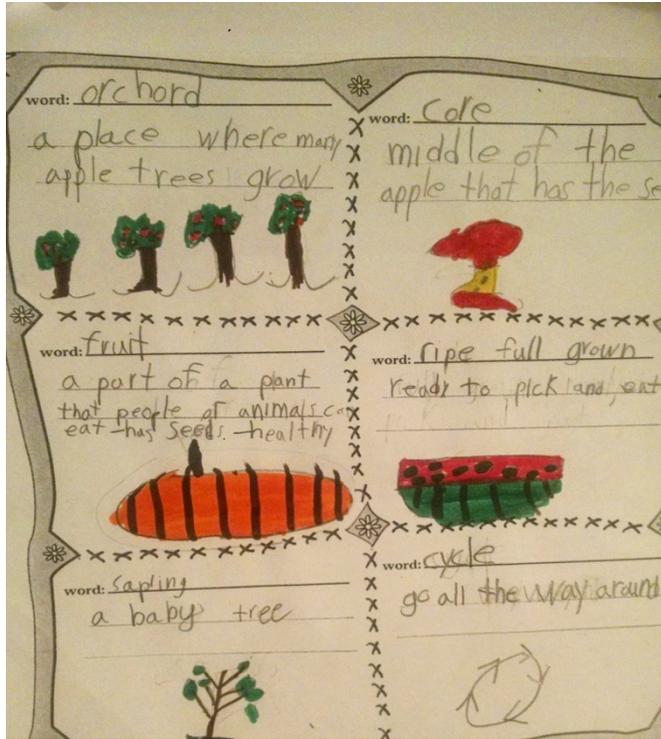


Figure 10. A “Vocabulary Quilt” graphic organizer



Target text: *Apple Life Cycle*

With substantial frontloading of vocabulary and building of background knowledge, students were ready to read the target text. During guided reading we read *Apple Life Cycle* by Lavinia Pop. Each page contained a picture to support the text and only one or two sentences, thereby distilling scientific content to basic facts. After reading, students cut and pasted words to label each stage of the

apple life cycle. The kinesthetic experience of placing events in order helped students with the more abstract sequencing of events in their minds.

I assessed students' vocabulary and concept knowledge related to apples, by asking them to write a quiz consisting of cloze sentences, label parts of an apple diagram, and complete a KWL chart, all of which students completed with great success (Appendices S and T, Figure 23). I was also very impressed with students' extensive learning as shown by their KWLs. Next, we moved on to our pumpkin subtheme.

Pumpkins

Pre-reading strategies.

Picture Splash - Take two. I attempted using the *Picture Splash* strategy again to introduce our pumpkin theme. As soon as students walked and noticed the assortment of pictures displayed in the pocket chart, they immediately launched into a lively conversation. The images allowed students to engage in conversation despite having limited oral vocabularies. Adam walked up and pointed to the picture of many different pumpkins and explained, "my grandpa in Puerto Rico has all these." Denise chimed in too: "At my grandpa's house there is a whole bush of them. He lets me take two or three of them to make faces. They grow on a flower. I know they are heavy. I pick them with my grandpa." Not to be excluded, Nancy commented: "My grandpa carve that one (points to a jack-o-

lantern with a scary face) and I carve that one” (a jack-o-lantern with a funny face). Adam added, “You have to get seeds out. When you have big spoon and go like this” (gestured for scooping).

Leo said uncertainly, “My sister told me you buy a pumpkin for Halloween”. I explained that you can grow them, or buy them from a farmer or store. Barbara exclaimed, “You can buy them at Walmart. I saw them there!” When I asked who has made a jack-o-lantern before, four of seven students informed me that they had. Those who had not, were all U.S. born. Poverty plays a powerful role in limiting students’ experiences. Leo, whose family of six lives in subsidized housing, never owned a pumpkin.

These exchanges showed me that some of my students have personal background knowledge of pumpkins, but lacked the specific vocabulary to fully express their experiences, such as *pumpkin patch*, *carve*, *jack-o-lantern*, *vine*, *scoop* and *sprout*. When I pointed to a picture of a sprout and asked: “What is that word when a plant first comes out of the soil?” Denise answered “ensalada” which is Spanish for salad.

Researchers have indicated that what was generally perceived to be a lack of prior knowledge among ELLs, may in fact be a result of difficulty articulating their experiences because of limited proficiency in English (Luke et. al, 2011). This was certainly the case among my students. Although some of my students possessed schema related to pumpkins, they also had some misconceptions, which

I hoped to clear up. When I asked how pumpkins grow, one student provided the Spanish word for root - **la raíz**. Denise asked if you can make pumpkin pie with the seeds. Adam and Sarah insisted that you do not, but other students were unsure.

Pre-reading: Using visual aids and realia. In addition to displaying pumpkin pictures to trigger background knowledge and initiate conversation, I also brought in a variety of pumpkins, gourds and squash. Items included a ghost pumpkin, a gooseneck gourd, acorn squash and a few common orange pumpkins of different shapes and sizes. Simple images in combination with realia acted as an effective stimulus for student-led conversation and helped pique student curiosity. Barbara wondered, “if you have a tiny, tiny pumpkin are there seeds inside?” Several students pointed to the acorn squash and asked, “What is that?” Leo asked, “How many seeds do you need to grow a pumpkin?” His friends thought you needed “A LOT!” Despite the fact that my students struggle with reading, when provided with adequate stimuli they demonstrated a natural curiosity.

Pre-reading: Hands-on experiences, designing pumpkins. First, students designed faces for their group jack-o-lantern on paper. This seemingly simple activity evoked lots of vocabulary. Students discussed whether the face should be “scary” or “funny,” whether the teeth should be “pointy.” Some students

complained that they were not good at drawing, and classmates kindly helped them draw noses or eyes, as needed. Students justified what they liked and did not like about their jack-o-lantern pictures. I was impressed at their ability to focus and collaborate. After designs were complete, we posted the pictures anonymously and voted for our favorites. After we selected our top three designs, I divided students into three groups, with one pumpkin per group.

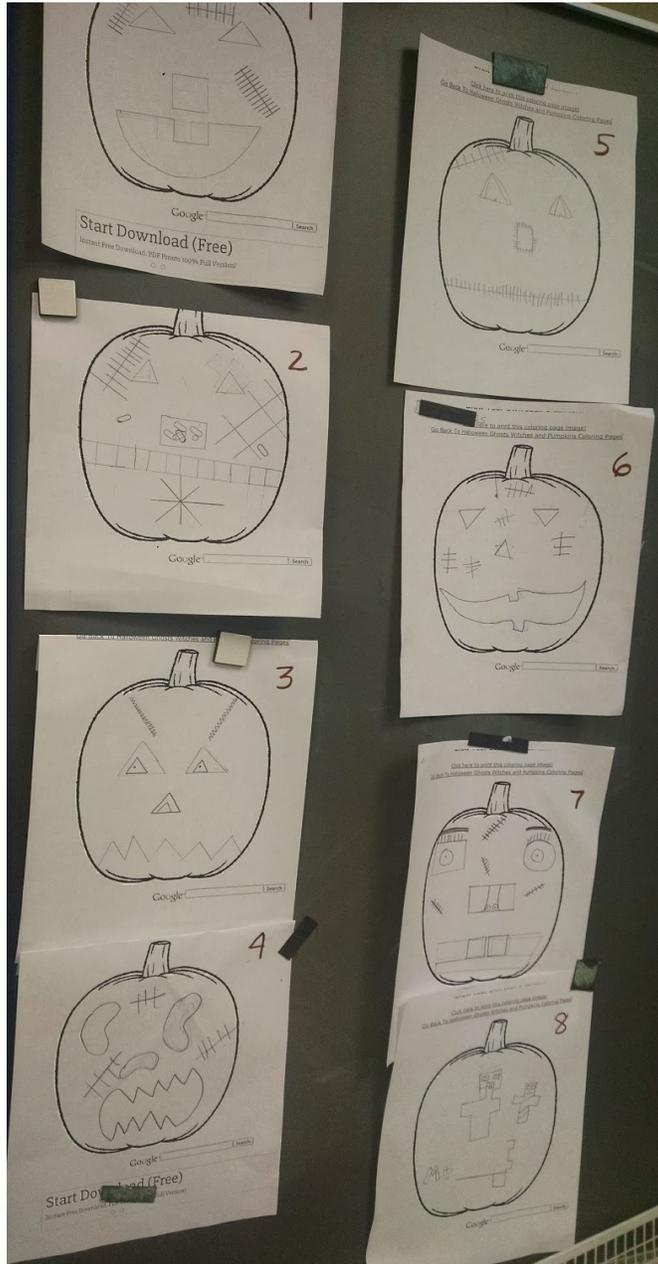


Figure 11. Students designed jack-o-lanterns and voted for the winner.

Estimating seeds and carving jack-o-lanterns. Students walked in and were excited to see pumpkins, bowls and carving kits spread out on plastic tablecloths. Adam asked, “What is that for?” (pointing at the carving tools). Denise replied, “We are going to make faces.” I pointed to the picture of a jack-o-lantern and asked, “What is the pumpkin called when you carve a face into it?” Denise attempted to answer, but could only recall the initial sound “j ...j.....” Nancy came to the rescue, “*jack-o-lantern.*” I was determined to help Denise and others retain new vocabulary by repeatedly exposing them to the words in context. I wanted them to hear the words, use the words orally in a meaningful way, see them repeatedly when reading, and apply them in their writing.

Before we carved our pumpkins, I explained we were going to *estimate*, or make a good guess at how many seeds are in each pumpkin. (Again, I tried to incorporate academic Math language). I gave each group their pumpkin. I recorded students’ estimates on the board. I deliberately selected pumpkins that varied in shape, size and number of ridges on the outside. When I asked students to predict which pumpkin has more seeds, Leo, Barbara and Sarah stubbornly insisted, “ours”. Not to be outdone, Nancy and Denise contend “*ours*, because it is bigger”. We’ll see about that...

Providing students with something active and fun to do with their hands, allowed me to circulate among them and ask questions.

Me: How does this feel? (referring to the pulp)

Nancy: Mushy!

Me: Yes, *stringy* too.

Off to the other group...

Me: What is the mushy inside called?

Barbara: *Pulp* (Yes!)

Me: What is this called (mimic action of scooping)

Joe: *Scooping*. (Yes! I am thrilled that students are using key vocabulary.)

Leo, who is often self-conscious, hesitated getting his hands dirty. Adam also held back. I informed students that they needed to at least *try* scooping out the pumpkins once. Leo discovered that if he used the metal spoon instead of his hands, he really liked the messy job. Adam obediently tried scooping, then switched to holding the pumpkin steady for Nancy and Denise. Joe (who has autism), on the other hand, became fixated with the tactile experience. He needed to touch and squeeze the pulp and feel the seeds. It is common for children with autism spectrum disorders to be especially drawn to sensory experiences involving taste and touch (Wiggins, Robins, Bakeman & Adamson, 2009). Joe kept asking if he could have some seeds. I assured him he could take some home, after we separated the pulp from the seeds and counted them.

Now, all heck broke loose. Joe tried to hide some seeds in his pocket.

Even after giving instructions on how to handle the carving tools safely, Barbara

walked around with her tool pointing outwards. Nancy and Denise argued over whose turn it was to scoop. There was gooey pulp mixed with seeds everywhere. To my horror, my principal walked in to conduct an unannounced observation of my lesson!

Although I was afraid that the chaos would result in a poor evaluation of my teaching performance, I was fortunate that my principal appreciated the value of hands-on learning. She was able to see how, among the mess, students were engaged and acquiring new vocabulary. Phew!



Figure 12. Working together and carving pumpkins

While many of the vocabulary terms I preselected arose organically during student interactions, incidental learning occurred as well. The terms “design” and “vote” were new to most students and led to discussion of how the president is elected. We discussed having hands “like a surgeon,” which led to questions about who or what a surgeon is and what they do. Incidental learning does have value. However, I agree with (Marzano & Pickering, 2005) that vocabulary instruction needs to be planned, direct and explicit.

Not only did carving pumpkins build vocabulary, but also greater confidence. I could tell from students' inexperience using the carving tools, that even students who said they had carved a jack-o-lantern before, were not the ones who actually handled the tools. Now they beamed with pride having done it themselves. When Eddie (pseudonym), another grade three student saw the jack-o-lanterns he exclaimed "Wow, that's awesome. They did a great job!" Another unintended benefit was that students learned problem-solving skills, such as how to compromise, take turns and share utensils.

Counting seeds. Later that day, I separated the seeds from the pulp, washed them and put them out to dry. I returned the seeds to each group's bowl.

Me: How are we going to find out how many seeds are in each pumpkin?

Leo: You can count by 2s, 5s, or 10s. If you count by 1s it takes longer.

Me: Excellent answer! (I am impressed by his explanation. Since the start of my study I find that I am asking students' more questions, which gives me greater insight into their thinking.)

The class agreed to count by tens and I went around and drew boxes on the newspaper, which I had spread out on the tables. I explained that students should put groups of ten seeds in each box. Students began counting the seeds. I was surprised that Barbara and Sarah both had trouble counting to ten independently. Fortunately, Mrs. S. the learning support aide intervened to help

them. Nancy and Denise counted their seeds in Spanish. I wondered if I should tell them to use English, but decide against it. When I push in to their Math class everyday, they use English only. This room is their safe-haven. They need some time for their brains to rest from the fatigue of internal translating.

Students were excited about which pumpkin would have the greatest number of seeds. Periodically they would sneak peeks to see how the other group was doing. We were all amazed at how many seeds there were. Other teachers popped their heads into our room to see what all the fuss was about. Students were on-task and having a great time!

I tried to keep up with the groups by subdividing existing boxes into smaller ones, but the students quickly run out of room on the newspaper and space on the table to arrange their groups of ten seeds. When Leo saw the seeds about to slip off the edge of the table, he remarked: “Let’s do something.” He then acted as “team captain.” First he moved the tablecloth so that more seeds could fit. Then he held up the edge of the tablecloth to keep the seeds on and asked Barbara to do the same at the other end. Despite having special learning needs, Leo remained calm, showed leadership, problem-solving skills and teamwork. Leo, who was extremely anxious about reading and writing, had more opportunities to shine during hands-on learning experiences.

Once all of the seeds were sorted, we all counted aloud by tens to determine the total number. I was delighted how well this lesson connected to

their study of place value in Math class. To our amazement, we discovered the larger pumpkin had 504 seeds and the smaller had 518 seeds. Most students had estimated there to be 100 seeds or less. There were hoots of incredulity: “No way!” “How come?!” “I can’t believe it!” Joe who likes to hide in his coat, and often requires prompting to participate, walked over to the acorn squash and said “I wonder if that has seeds too?” Experiential learning fosters wondering and questioning.

Now the students wanted to cut open all the different gourds. I appeased them by agreeing to cut open the acorn squash. There was some questioning about whether you could eat it and what this kind of squash is called. I referred back to our fall anchor chart where I drew an acorn and explained, “It is called an acorn squash, because it has the shape of an acorn. Pumpkins and squash are in the same family.” Students then conceded that it likely has seeds inside. After I carefully cut it open, I passed around the acorn squash for students to see and touch.

Barbara: What are those strings?

Me: They are what the seeds are attached to. Remember when we were scooping out the pulp we said it was mushy and *stringy*? The strings hold the seeds and each ridge on the pumpkin, holds a row of seeds (using an uncut pumpkin to point to the ridge). That is why the smaller pumpkin had more seeds. It had more ridges

than the larger pumpkin. Another word that is used for *ridges* is *ribs*. (We stopped to find and feel the ribs on our bodies).

I deliberately selected pumpkins with these characteristics and structured the seed counting activity to act as a prequel to the book *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin* by Margaret McNamara. Just as we did in our classroom, the students in this book estimated and counted seeds. Having experienced this first-hand, my students could easily connect with story events and comprehend the text. They now possessed the background knowledge to which they could attach their new learning. Throughout the read-aloud, students exclaimed, “That’s just like what we did!”

Pre-reading: Building background through fictional text. Although *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin* is fictional, it relayed scientific information about parts of a pumpkin, how a pumpkin can grow from one tiny seed, and conditions needed for growth. I paired this book with *It’s Pumpkin Time* by Zoe Hall (DRA 6), which tells the story of a brother and sister who get ready for Halloween by planting their own pumpkin patch. The book describes children making jack-o-lanterns, just like we did in class. Many of the same key vocabulary terms are presented (Appendix L). We moved from learning vocabulary orally to reading it in simple print. With help, students comfortably read this book during guided reading.

Next, students read a more challenging non-fiction text, *Let's Carve a Pumpkin* (DRA 8), which described the process of carving a jack-o-lantern with greater detail. Students cut and pasted pictures of story events in the correct order, and then used this visual aid to help them orally retell the story.



Target text: *From Pumpkin Seed to Jack-o-Lantern*

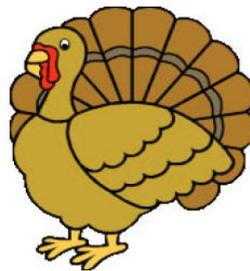
Finally, students were ready to read the target text, *From Seed to Jack-o-Lantern* (from *ReadingAtoZ*), the lengthiest, most challenging non-fiction text (165 words). Having already been exposed to the pumpkin life cycle in the read-aloud of *It's Pumpkin Time* students both read and comprehended the text with ease. Hooray! Students created a craft to sequence the stages of the pumpkin life cycle and then used it to orally describe each stage (Figure 13). Since the majority (five of seven) of my students are learning English and have special needs, I wanted to assess them in a variety of different ways to ensure a more accurate picture of their word and concept knowledge.



Figure 13. Students made a craft to show the stages of a pumpkin's life cycle, then used the aid to orally retell the progression from seed to adult.

As our pumpkin unit came to a close, I felt exhausted. I was tired of preparing for activities and collecting data. Just before Halloween I drew names to determine who would take the carved jack-o-lanterns home. Leo, Nancy and Sarah were the winners. Nancy told me afterwards: "My mom was so happy when she saw the jack-o-lantern!" She beamed with pride. With those simple words, I felt rewarded and ready to move forward and begin our study of Pilgrims.

Thanksgiving or Turkey Day



Me: We celebrate Halloween in October. What do we celebrate next month in November?

Jane: Turkey day!

Denise: Yes. Turkey day. In Puerto Rico we kill a pig.

Nancy: Yes, they kill a pig, I was crying.

Me: When I was little I went to visit my grandmother in Poland. To celebrate we had a big feast. She chopped the head off a chicken, and I cried too.

Students - (collective gasp) Oh!!!

Nancy: How old were you?

Me: I think I was nine or ten years old. When a visitor comes from a long distance, you prepare a special meal. What do we celebrate in November? (Surely, with my hints, the students will know the name of the holiday).

Students: (no answer)

Me: (I Googled images of Thanksgiving and showed them. When asked, none of the students could identify cranberries, a few correctly identified potatoes.)

Leo: I love mashed potatoes!

Adam: Me too!

(Still, they do not name the holiday. Finally, seeing a close up of a roast turkey triggered a memory.)

Jane & Denise: yeah, yeah, **turkey day** (agreeing with one another).

ME: It's *not* called turkey day.

Students: (Nancy looks confused.)

Me: On this holiday, we want to say thanks for the food. (Still no student response. I resort to online translation). In Spanish you say, día de acción de gracias.

Denise: Oh, yeah!

Denise chattered away about Thanksgiving in Puerto Rico in Spanish. Her friends listened attentively and interjected their thoughts in Spanish.

Me: (After a couple of minutes, out of desperation, I clicked on a banner that says “Happy Thanksgiving.”) I asked Jane an advanced ELL, “can you read this?”)

Jane: Happy Thanksgiving!

(It was time for us to go. I felt frustrated and discouraged that not even the students born in the U.S. could name the Thanksgiving holiday.)

A couple of weeks later, all of the students in the school gathered for the “student of the month” assembly. At the end of the assembly, the principal wished students and their families a “Happy Turkey day!” My work was undone. I felt like teaching vocabulary is like waging an uphill battle.



Figure 14. *This is America Charlie Brown, The Mayflower Voyagers* (1988)

Linguistic overload. One afternoon in mid-November, I walked into a grade three homeroom class and saw that students were watching a Charlie Brown Thanksgiving special; *This is America Charlie Brown, The Mayflower Voyagers* (1988). For my English language learners the wording in this video, which imitated the language of a middle school social studies textbook, was too linguistically complex. I could see from the puzzled expressions on a few of the students' faces, that they were finding it difficult to follow along with the quick-moving storyline. At the end of the video when I questioned students, even some of the Native-English speakers could not identify the Mayflower and confused Pilgrims with pioneers moving westward. When the level of vocabulary and sentence structure of information being presented is too high, students feel overwhelmed or frustrated. As described by Krashen (1988), this raises the “affective filter”, forming a ‘mental block’ that impedes second language acquisition.

Building up background & vocabulary.

The Story of Thanksgiving. The *Charlie Brown* Thanksgiving video hindered, rather than helped ELLs learn social studies content and vocabulary. I played a simpler, shorter video read-aloud of *The Story of Thanksgiving* by Nancy J. Skarneas, which presented historical facts in a clear manner https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APJrQ_wGIHc. The video explained why the Pilgrims left England, described conditions of their early settlement and how Native Americans helped Pilgrims hunt and plant crops. This time, several students skillfully answered questions or retold the video in their own words.

Pre-reading strategies.

Pilgrim picture splash. Next, to further build their concept knowledge, I provided my own description of who the Pilgrims were, why they came, their travel conditions, and the challenges of early settlement. I added slightly more detail than the second video contained. As I told the story, I pointed to the various images I displayed or “splashed” on the bulletin board. These images introduced key vocabulary such as “celebrate” and “feast”, which students would encounter in later texts. I presented information and chose challenging content-specific vocabulary, so that students understood words and ideas with the help of printed pictures. According to linguist Stephen Krashen (1988) ELLs acquire language by hearing and understanding messages that are slightly above their current

proficiency level (comprehensible input +1). My oral narrative in conjunction with the following activities, built up students' background knowledge, so that they would be prepared to read non-fiction text related to Thanksgiving, independently.

Hands-on games – Vocabulary match. To check for basic understanding, I invited students to use the images in the *Picture Splash* to answer specific questions, e.g. “where did the Pilgrims come from?”, “show me the picture of Plymouth Rock” and “which picture shows the Mayflower?” The *Thanksgiving Picture Splash* played an important role as a visual reference that we referred to often. The following day I handed out the “labels (identifying words)” and students took turns matching the words to their pictures.

Matching a word to its picture may seem mundane, but students were excited that they could carefully stand on a chair to put up their labels. Students seemed honored that I trusted them with pushpins and clamored to attach the labels onto the cork bulletin board. This bit of movement was just what they needed. They worked together to solve problems of which word goes where and to move images around so that everything would fit on the bulletin board. Students greedily argued over who would “get the next word.”

The following day, I extended the activity so that students were not only matching pictures to words, but now to definitions as well. Within our small group setting, students talked with one another to help decode text and find the

correct match. Not only did students really enjoy this activity, but it provided a useful review of terms and their definitions.

Gradually increasing text complexity.

This First Thanksgiving Day: A Thanksgiving Counting Book. To further build schema and vocabulary, I read picture books that provided on-going repetition and review and gradually increased in linguistic complexity. *The Story of the Pilgrims* by Katharine Ross, which was slightly more advanced than *The Story of Thanksgiving* described earlier, provided additional detail about the length and conditions of the voyage on the Mayflower, the challenges of surviving the first winter, and settlers' interactions with Native Americans.

Next, I read aloud a counting book written in rhyme. *This First Thanksgiving Day: A Counting Story* by Laura Krauss Melmed, reviewed numbers one to twelve and showed daily activities of Native American and Pilgrim children. Although it is a counting book, it contained some sophisticated language. Like many children's books it romanticized the Native and Pilgrim relationship, yet provided many accurate historical facts. Several illustrations connected to earlier apple books that described how colonists brought some seeds with them to the New World. Students enjoyed the rich illustrations and requested that I read this book repeatedly. Again, since several students have learning disabilities and associated problems with memory, repetition and review were

necessary. Most importantly, this book prepared students for the upcoming sorting activity.

Hands-on activities, Sorting “Now & Then”. I selected *Thanksgiving Now and Then* to increase students’ knowledge of Pilgrim children’s lives (www.sharingkindergarten.com). After reading this booklet, students first cut and pasted the words “then” or “now” on each page to identify which time period the page described. Next, we cut, sorted and pasted images to jointly create a large “Now” and “Then” Venn diagram on chart paper. With this hands-on activity, students compared clothes, toys, travel, cooking and communication methods from colonial times to present day (Figure 15). Students retrieved information they had learned from previous texts we had read, and we incorporated these additional facts in our Venn diagram.

In essence, this was more of a classification exercise and lesson in text organization. Many social studies textbooks are organized using a compare and contrast structure, and I wanted students to become familiar with this format. The Venn diagram we created as a group acted as a scaffold that enabled students to independently create their own Venn diagrams to compare and contrast the two time periods. This simple text, which students read independently, helped build their schema, so that they could more easily comprehend the upcoming target text.

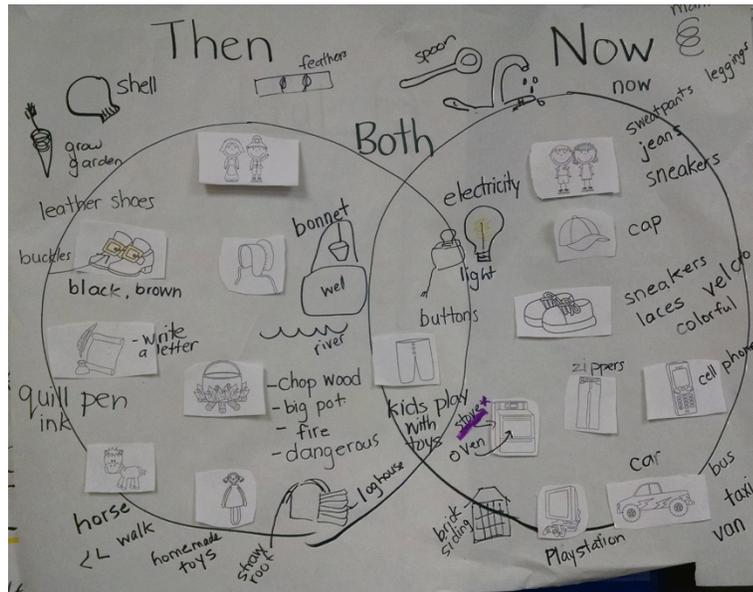


Figure 15. Students cut and sorted pictures under “Now” (present day) and “Then” (colonial times). They recalled and added information from texts we read previously.



Target text: *The First Thanksgiving, A Mini-Book.* As implied

by the title, I selected this book because it is brief, but informative, with pictures that support the vocabulary. As usual during guided reading, I first read the text aloud. Then students engaged in echo reading and choral reading of the text. Having received considerable frontloading, students were able to read the target text with ease and enthusiasm. I had not planned on asking students to complete the learning reflection page at the end of the book, yet students eagerly wrote what they had learned.

Applying learned vocabulary to Thanksgiving writing.

The four language domains.

For students to fully acquire academic language, it must be used in all four domains of language - reading, writing, listening and speaking. During the course of my study, I strove to select exercises that addressed the four domains depicted below (Figure 16). These same four language domains are stressed in the Pennsylvania English Language Proficiency Standards (Department of Education, State of Pennsylvania, 2007).



Figure 16. The Four Language Domains

<http://image.slidesharecdn.com/teamalanguageproficiencysummary-150125110628-conversion-gate02/95/team-a-language-proficiency-summary-10-638.jpg?cb=1422205704>

For most English language learners, receptive language (listening and reading) generally develop prior to productive language (speaking and writing). To fully assess students' acquisition of new vocabulary, I wanted to see if they were able to apply terms to their writing, often the most cognitively demanding language task.

Students had heard new terms during read-alouds, practiced using them orally in discussion and read these same terms in guided reading. Now it was time to apply new vocabulary to their writing and show their acquired content knowledge. Through shared writing, we synthesized what we had learned and wrote ten facts about Pilgrims and colonial settlement on chart paper. Our list reached sixteen facts. I was very pleasantly surprised at the amount and quality of information students retained.

However, as I moved from shared to guided writing, results were less impressive. After reading about Pilgrims' sense of gratitude, students discussed why they were thankful. As advocated by linguists and ESL gurus David and Yvonne Freeman, teachers should use students' first language as a bridge to new learning (Freeman & Freeman, 1998). I created an English/Spanish T-chart graphic organizer to jot down students' ideas (Figure 17). Despite my efforts, students were still using general terms such as "food" rather than specific terms.

I AM THANKFUL FOR...
English/ Spanish
food/la comida
toys/juguetes
Dorney Park tickets (Teacher provided term of "season's pass"/
pase de temporada para Dorney Park

Figure 17. A portion of the "I am Thankful For" Thanksgiving T-Chart

Thanksgiving vocabulary Bingo. I addressed students' persistent word-deficit by selecting a hands-on activity, *Vocabulary Bingo*. Kinesthetic activities increase students' motivation, making learning more likely to occur. Although words on the card were largely content-specific, i.e. related to Thanksgiving, they also included a mixture of general vocabulary such as *corn* and general academic terms such as *celebrate* that cross subject areas (Figure 18).

Although for native-English speakers, most basic everyday words do not require instruction in school, since three of my ELLs were beginners, teaching basic vocabulary, also known as Tier 1 words was essential. According to Beck, McKeown & Kucan (2002) who developed the three-tiered model of vocabulary, considerations for teaching vocabulary from Tier 2 (general academic) and Tier 3 (content-specific) include, deciding how the word relates to other words students are learning and if the word helps students with understanding selected text. Since the word *cornucopia* is not essential for my English language learners, I did not devote substantial time to it. On the other hand, words like *feast* and *celebrate* are used in other contexts beyond Thanksgiving and the texts we read, so they received more instructional attention. At the same time, the Bingo card contained review words related to the overall fall theme such as *autumn*, *harvest* and *crops*.

After students cut apart and reassembled their Bingo cards to individualize them, we played several games of Bingo. I had never seen students so interested

in reading and locating words, even without being offered prizes. I loved how students repeatedly read new words aloud without even realizing it. As we were playing, Adam questioned why there was a picture of football on the card.

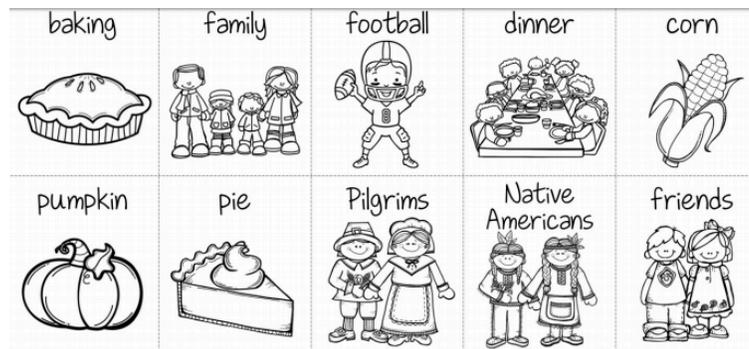


Figure 18. Part of a Thanksgiving Vocabulary Bingo Card.
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Thanksgiving-Activities-FREE-922045>

Fixing gaps in schema.

Football & The Macy's Day Parade. As a foreigner myself, I was also initially unaware of the popular American tradition of watching football on Thanksgiving. I explained to students that Thanksgiving is a day off of work for many, so it became an ideal day for people to play or watch football. Denise added that many people also watch the “festival” in New York City, and described some of the noise and activities. Only one student, Adam, seemed to know what she was talking about. To address this, I selected a clip of the Macy's Thanksgiving day parade to watch on YouTube. For many students, this was the first time they had seen a parade. They were in awe of the costumes and floats.

What can be perceived as a *lack* of background knowledge, is often a discrepancy between the cultural knowledge a student brings, and the knowledge generally ascribed to all students by white middle class teachers (Luke et. al., 2011). Another prime example of how students' personal experiences may differ from the "norm" can be seen in Denise's description of how Thanksgiving was celebrated at her school in Puerto Rico.

Denise: Parents come to school on Fete day. They watch you run. If you don't win, you race with your dad and pass the stick like this (gestures to show a relay).

Me: Oh, a relay race.

Denise: You do a race. If you win you get a turkey, if you are first. If you are 2nd, you get a chicken, if you are next, you get a big soda.

Nancy: Sometimes there are raffle tickets.

Denise: How you say "platano"? (asking Nancy.)

Me: Do you mean plantains?

Denise: Yeah, my stepdad win them. They are very good.

Me: That sounds like fun. (I can't help thinking how different this experience is compared to that at our school, where at best, parents may be asked to bring in food for a classroom feast.)

In some cases, poor reading comprehension is actually due, not so much to a lack of background information, but to a cultural disconnect between the lives of

students and the curriculum or reading materials. Without activities to introduce unique aspects of how Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, it would not be surprising for some of my students to struggle understanding detailed text.

Assessments: Venn diagram & I Am Thankful For...

To assess students' knowledge of new Thanksgiving content and word knowledge, I examined both their completed Venn diagram and Thanksgiving writing, in which they described the things for which they were grateful. In their *Now & Then* Venn diagram students were asked to show how their lives are the same and different than those of Pilgrim children (Figure 19).

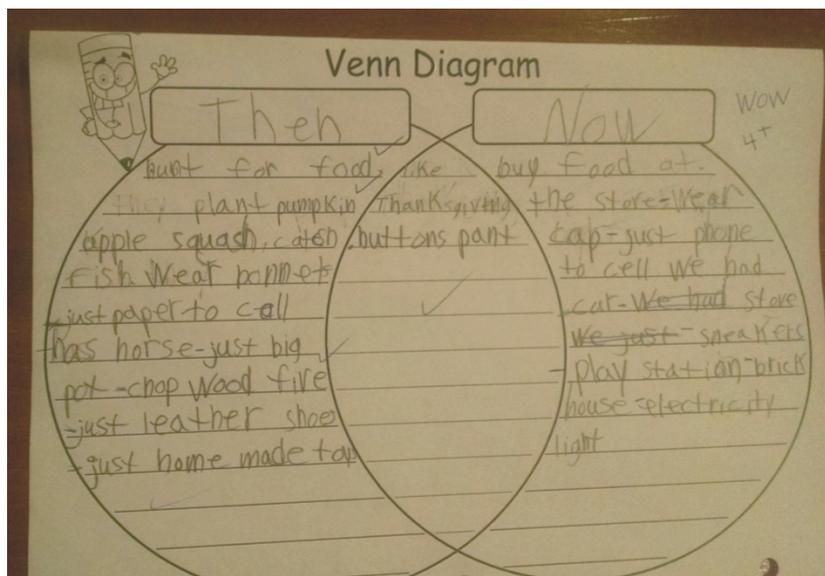


Figure 19. “Now and Then” Venn diagrams. Students progressed from the concrete; sorting pictures with small group support, to the more abstract task of independently writing facts. Completed Venn diagrams demonstrated students’ social studies content knowledge.

Although the written output is limited to short phrases, the final product shows students’ ability to synthesize information from many texts. The use of visuals

and graphic organizers is highly supported as an effective strategy for English language learners (Dutro & Moran, 2002). As recommended by Dutro & Moran (2002), I moved from the concrete (cutting and pasting the words “now” and “then”) to the more abstract, - completing a Venn diagram independently.

After discussing how Pilgrim children had to chop wood or gather kindling, work in the garden and fetch water, students showed a new appreciation for modern day conveniences. They were now ready to write about grateful. Rather than using the word “food”, students wrote about enjoying a “feast” that includes rice and beans, or pork chops and mashed potatoes. They described being thankful for cellphones and electronic toys, such as PlayStations. Fortunately both students’ completed Venn diagrams and “I am Thankful for...” writing showed, that my students were using more specific vocabulary.

Over twelve weeks, we learned about going back to school, seasonal change, apples, pumpkins and the origins of Thanksgiving. As we learned about these fall topics, I implemented pre-reading strategies to build students’ schema and vocabulary before reading new texts. Now I needed to examine my data to determine if my use of visual aids, hands-on experiences and games, scaffolded texts and direct vocabulary instruction, effectively improved students’ reading comprehension levels.

Data Analysis

Formal Reading Assessments: DRAs and WrAPs

I collected various forms of data to measure my students' progress and the effectiveness of my interventions. At the start of my study, I assessed students' current reading levels using Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs). In cases where a teacher had previously used a particular DRA text and its alternative, I used the reading portion of a Writing Assessment Program (WrAP) test to ensure students were reading unfamiliar text. As demonstrated by Table 3, four of seven students showed growth in overall reading ability.

Table 3. Guided reading students. Post-study reading levels.

Students (pseudonyms)	English Proficiency Levels	Special Needs	Initial reading level (DRA) Sept. 2015	Final reading Level (DRA) End of Nov. 2015
Nancy	Beginner	N/A	4	12 ↑
Sarah	Native English speaker	learning disability	3	3
Leo	Intermediate	dyslexia, memory challenges	3	3
Adam	Beginner	ADHD, learning disability, speech therapy	6	14 ↑
Barbara	Native English speaker	learning disability, speech & occupational therapy	4	6 ↑
Joseph	Advanced	autism, speech therapy	10	16 ↑

Denise	Beginner	N/A	4	4
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Although our district uses DRAs and WraP equivalents to measure reading progress, I felt that these were not the “best fit” assessments of student learning, since they did not connect to vocabulary and content included in my fall unit. Fortunately, I collected and examined other sources of data.

Surveys

Initial survey.

At the beginning of my study I administered a reading attitude and comprehension survey. For questions related to use of strategies, students were directed to check off as many choices as they wanted. The results are given in Table 4. I wrongfully assumed that my struggling readers did not enjoy reading. My initial survey demonstrated that the majority students *love* reading; only one student, Leo, *did not like* reading. Although I thought that students would favor fiction, they did not show a strong preference for reading fiction or nonfiction. Based on students’ perception of their own understanding, four of seven students claimed to *always* understand both fiction and nonfiction texts. Initially, most students either sometimes or never made predictions, thought about what they know or made text-to-text connections (Table 4).

Post-study survey.

Another survey was administered at the end of the study. For the post-study survey, students were asked to rank strategies. They put a circle around

their top three and a star beside what they thought was the most helpful strategy. When encountering an unknown word, more students wrote they “look at the pictures”, an increase from two to four (Table 5). Most noticeably, the number of students who selected “I don’t know” decreased from three to zero (Table 4). One student responded that she “thinks of a Spanish word” and her classmate responded similarly (Table 4). She answered, “ask if it sounds like Spanish.”

In the post-study, a greater number of students responded that they learned words best by “writing what the word means and drawing a picture” (seven students compared to four, Table 5). A greater number of students also valued watching a video (changed from four to six, Table 5). This choice was more popular than the use of pictures alone (three in the post-study, Table 5).

There was a positive change in students’ perceived comprehension of nonfiction text and increased use of background knowledge (Table 4). A greater number of students replied that they always understood what they read when reading nonfiction text (six compared to four) and the number of students who replied that they *never* understood it, decreased from one to zero (Table 4). Respondents who said that they draw upon their background knowledge before reading a book, increased from one to four. Those who replied they think of other books, increased from two to five (Table 4). Students seemed to realize the value of making connections to prior knowledge and previously read texts. For both categories, there was an increase of students from one to four (Table 4).

Table 4. Pre and Post Study Reading Attitude and Comprehension Survey

Survey Questions	Student choices & number of responses		
	<i>Post-Study results underlined</i>		
1. Do you like to read?	I <i>love</i> to read 4 <u>5</u>	I like to read most of the time 2 <u>1</u>	I don't like reading 1 <u>1</u>
2. Do you prefer reading fiction or non-fiction ?	Fiction 3 <u>3</u>	Non-fiction 3 <u>3</u>	Both 1 <u>1</u> Neither 0 <u>0</u>
3. When I read a book that is fiction , I understand what I read	Always 4 <u>5</u>	Sometimes 3 <u>2</u>	Never 0
4. When I read a book that is non-fiction , I understand what I read	Always 4 <u>6</u>	Sometimes 2 <u>1</u>	Never 1 <u>0</u>
5. What do you do when you come across a word you don't know? (open-ended)	"Look at the pictures" 2 <u>4</u>	"I don't know" 3 <u>0</u>	"Think in my head" 1 "Skip it" 1 "Think of a Spanish word" <u>1</u> "Sound it out" <u>1</u>
Before I read a new book, I ...			
6. Predict what the book will be about	Always 1 <u>1</u>	Sometimes 4 <u>4</u>	Never 1 <u>1</u>
7. Preview/skim the book and look at the pictures	Always 2 <u>6</u>	Sometimes 5 <u>1</u>	Never 0 <u>0</u>
8. Think about what I already know, and make a text-to-self connection.	Always 1 <u>4</u>	Sometimes 5 <u>3</u>	Never 1 <u>0</u>
9. Think of other books or videos and make a text-to-text connection.	Always 2 <u>5</u>	Sometimes 4 <u>2</u>	Never 1
10. Making connections helps me understand what I read:	Always 1 <u>4</u>	Sometimes 6 <u>3</u>	Never 0
11. Thinking about what I already know helps me understand what I read:	Always 1 <u>4</u>	Sometimes 5 <u>3</u>	Never 1

Table 5. A summary of pre-and post-study reading survey questions related to learning new words.

(For the full surveys see Appendices F & G)

These strategies help me learn new words...	Pre-Study Choices selected	Post-study Choices selected	Post-study Rating
Seeing pictures of what the word means	3	3	
Matching games	1	6	*2 nd
Doing hands-on activities	1	7	*1 st
Using new words when talking with friends in class	2	2	*4 th
Telling me the word in Spanish	1	3	
Knowing that the word sounds similar in Spanish (cognates)	0	3	*3 rd
Using pictures to help express ideas	1	3	
Looking at the chart paper with pictures and key words	0	1	
Writing what the word means and drawing a picture	4	7	1 st
Watching a video	4	6	2 nd
Reading books with many of the same words used again	3	5	3 rd

Table 6. Pre-and post-study survey questions related to learning new ideas.

These strategies help me learn <u>new ideas</u>	Pre-Study Choices selected	Post-study Choices selected	Post-study Rating
Doing hands-on activities	1	7	*1 st
Looking at the chart paper to review what we learned	0	1	
Watching a video	3	6	*3 rd
Reading books with many of the same ideas	1	5	*2 nd
Reading easier books before reading harder ones	2	4	

All students indicated that hands-on activities help them learn new ideas; a substantial change from the pre-study survey (Table 6). Watching a video helped students learn both new words and new ideas (Tables 5 and 6). In addition, students also increasingly recognized the value of scaffolded texts (Table 6).

At the conclusion of the study, I administered additional questions that I did not include in the pre-study survey. I asked students to rate how much they learned about fall and to list their favorite activity (Appendix F). All students unanimously answered that they learned *a lot* about fall. Students varied in their choice of favorite activities; with tasting apples and carving pumpkins being the two top choices.

Observation: Field Log

My field log also revealed ways in which my interventions were effective. By analyzing my observations and conversations with students, I identified key

themes. Hands-on activities and games increase student motivation and provide opportunities for students to use new words orally and authentically. Students greatly enjoyed tasting apples, carving pumpkins and playing vocabulary matching games. At the same time, they used key terms during their interactions. In addition to student surveys and field log entries, I relied on vocabulary and comprehension quizzes, running records, oral retells and a unit test, as additional sources of data.

Informal Reading Assessments

Vocabulary and comprehension quizzes.



Target Text - Getting Ready for School

To assess students' vocabulary knowledge of fall related terms, I used ready-made quizzes from the *ReadingAtoZ* website (www.readinga-z.com) (Appendix 0). For the target text *Getting Ready for School*, six out of seven students received a perfect score on the vocabulary quiz. Students also performed similarly well on the comprehension quiz. Adam was the first student who completed the comprehension quiz. He obtained the lowest score (Table 8). Five students answered all but one question correctly. Students' most common error was neglecting to answer both parts of the last question.

Table 7. Getting Ready for School Quizzes

Student	Comprehension Quiz Score out of /7	Vocabulary Quiz Score out of /6
Nancy	6	6
Sarah	6	6
Leo	6	6
Adam	4	6
Barbara	6	4
Joseph	5	6
Denise	6	6



Target Text - Why Do Leaves Change Color?

I assessed students' vocabulary and comprehension using quizzes. Students generally performed well, particularly on the vocabulary quiz, with six out of seven students scoring 83% (5/6) or higher (Table 8).

Table 8. Quizzes - *Why Do Leaves Change Color?*

Student	Comprehension Quiz Score out of /5	Vocabulary Quiz Score out of /6
Nancy	5	6
Sarah	4	4
Leo	3	6
Adam	5	6
Barbara	4	5
Joseph	4	6
Denise	4	5

Other Tests and Quizzes

Utilizing the *Life Cycle of an Apple Tree Quiz* (Appendix T) provided me with one measure of students' vocabulary and concept knowledge related to apples. Four students scored a perfect 12/12, one student each scored 8 and 9. One student, Barbara scored a 6/12. The average score was 84.5% or 10.14 out of 12.

As demonstrated by students' strong performances on both vocabulary quizzes and tests, learning vocabulary in context and through meaningful experiences helps students retain word knowledge over time. Several questions on the end of unit test directly assessed vocabulary. Four students received perfect scores, and the remainder only got 1 or 2 answers wrong (Table 9).

Table 9. All About Fall end of unit test, vocabulary related questions
(For the full test see Appendix V)

Vocabulary related questions	Number of correct student responses /7
# 2. Another word for fall is...	5
# 7. When apples are ready they are...	7
# 10. The stringy inside part of the pumpkin is called the..	6
#11. You can find many pumpkins growing at the...	6
#12. The flower where the pumpkin or apple grows is called..	7
#13 The stem of the pumpkin is attached to a long, green...	7
#17 When you cut something carefully into the shape you want, the word is...	7
#20. To become different, means to...	5

Running Records and Nonfiction Oral Retells

For students to understand what they read, they need to read with relative accuracy. I conducted running records to ensure that students were able to decode the text. Five students read the text *Fall* at an independent level (92% to 100% accuracy), whereas two - Denise and Luis read it an instructional level (90 and 93% accuracy). For the harder text, *Let's Carve a Pumpkin* (DRA 8/E), Leo did not complete reading the passage. Both Sarah and Denise read at frustration level with 74% and 80% accuracy, respectively. The four remaining students read at an instructional or independent level (Joseph 98%, Nancy 95%, Adam 92%, Barbara

90%). To assess students' comprehension, I measure their ability to orally retell each story using a nonfiction retell rubric (Appendix S).

Most students (five of seven) skillfully retold *Fall* (Table 10). Despite the fact that *Let's Carve a Pumpkin* was a more difficult text, all seven students were able to correctly sequence story pictures and incorporate relevant vocabulary as part of a full retell (Table 10). Overall, direct and explicit vocabulary instruction prior to reading new text, improved students' word knowledge and consequently, reading comprehension.

Table 10. Students' Oral Retells

Student	Fall (DRA 3-4) score /20	Let's Carve a Pumpkin (DRA 8) score /20
Nancy	18	18
Sarah	13	15
Leo	15	16
Adam	20	20
Barbara	18	19
Joseph	20	18
Denise	17	19

Student Artifacts - Main Idea And Supporting Details Graphic Organizer

One way of gauging student comprehension of text is by assessing their ability to summarize what they have read. I assessed students' ability to

summarize *Getting Ready for School* using a Main Idea/Details graphic organizer (Appendix N). All students scored satisfactory (level 3), with one student, Leo scoring a level 4.

Student Artifacts

Fall writing. I assessed students' ability to synthesize information and apply new fall-themed vocabulary by examining their writing. I asked students to write about whether they like or do not like fall and provide reasons. Denise's writing showed limited vocabulary growth and concept development. She received a Level 2 of 4 for her writing. The writing samples of the remaining six students however, indicated that pre-reading strategies had been effective in helping students learn new fall words and content. Six students scored a Level 3 or higher.

Student artifacts related to the apple subtheme. Most students excelled at sequencing the pictures of an apple's life cycle. After reading the *Apple Life Cycle* booklet, six of seven students quickly and correctly sequenced the pictures.

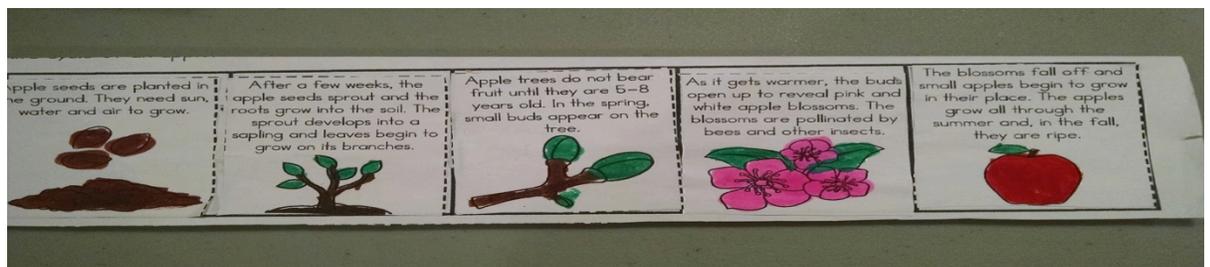


Figure 20. Nancy's sequenced apple life cycle strip.

KWL charts. Before we began learning about apples, students recorded what they already knew on a KWL chart. I scribed for students both before and after, as needed. Based on the KWL charts, students remembered concepts and vocabulary a month later. Each student demonstrated increased knowledge related to apples.

Student artifacts related to Thanksgiving. After reading a variety of books related to Thanksgiving and Pilgrims, students completed a Venn diagram comparing colonial times to present day. Whereas previously many students believed that Laura Ingalls Wilder was a pilgrim, students' Venn diagrams revealed a more accurate and complete knowledge base (Table 11). They included many facts about food production, hunting, clothing, travel, communication and leisure in colonial times.

Table 11. Venn diagrams comparing colonial times to modern day.

Students	Grade
Adam	4+
Nancy	4
Barbara, Sarah, Joseph	3+
Leo, Denise	3

End of Unit Test

To measure students' cumulative word and concept knowledge related to the autumn theme, each student wrote an *All About Fall Test* (Appendix V). As a whole, students answered most questions correctly. While two students, Leo and Barbara attained 17/25 or 68%, five of seven achieved an overall score of 80% or higher.

Pre-reading strategies help build vocabulary and background knowledge, which in turn increased reading comprehension for most students. A couple of students still need continued practice with phonemic awareness and decoding. Although my interventions did not result in general improved reading ability for all students, they did result in strong understanding of the specific texts we read, overall vocabulary growth, and increase in science and social studies content knowledge.

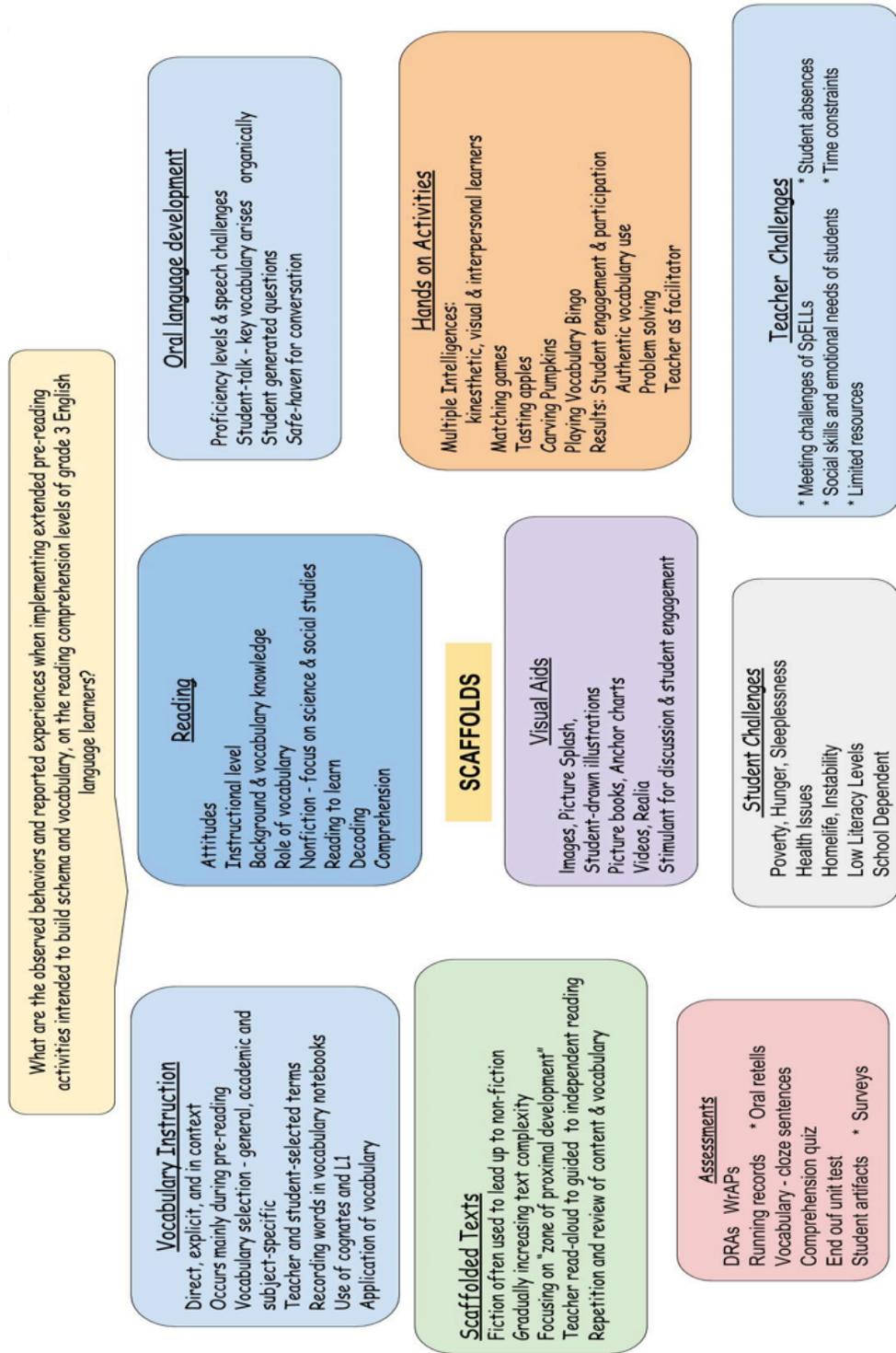


Figure 21. Coding Bins

Themes

Throughout my study several themes emerged that were confirmed through my literature review, reading and vocabulary assessments, field log data and student survey responses.

- Hands-on activities and games increase student engagement. They also provide opportunities for students to use new words orally and authentically.
- Learning vocabulary in context and through meaningful experiences helps students retain word knowledge over time.
- Direct and explicit vocabulary instruction prior to reading new text, improves students' word knowledge and consequently, reading comprehension.
- Using texts that gradually increase in complexity and that revisit key terms and concepts, provides students with effective scaffolding.
- Using nonfiction texts helps English language learners acquire English and subject content simultaneously.
- Visual aids such as videos, pictures, and simple picture books help build up and activate student background knowledge, which makes the text more accessible.

Research findings

Hands-on activities and games increase student engagement. They also provide opportunities for students to use new words orally and authentically.

Dewey (1938) rightfully questions: “How many [students] came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom?” At the start of my study, several of my students used avoidance strategies. They did not respond well to pencil and paper tasks or the transmission model of education. Joe hid in his coat. Barbara liked to chitchat. Leo admitted he liked to daydream, like the character David. However, as my study progressed, students were more eager and engaged and off-task behavior decreased. They lined up quickly when I picked them up from their homeroom and excitedly asked, “What are we doing today?” I attribute this change to my introduction of hands-on activities and games.

Several researchers support the use of hands-on activities as an effective instructional strategy. Not only do hands-on activities appeal to kinesthetic learners as described by Howard Gardner (1983), but the activities I selected also appealed to students who are visual and intrapersonal learners. The matching games I designed frequently involved matching pictures with the word and meaning. Leo, a very reluctant reader loved playing matching games because he relied on his visual perception and strong listening skills. During the *Thanksgiving Picture Splash* he proudly remembered what they Mayflower looked like from the

video read-aloud of *The Story of Thanksgiving* and matched the picture to the word. Other students competed to see who “gets the next word”.

While playing “concentration style” vocabulary matching games, students were eager to see who could make the most matches and often held their cards proudly like they had won them in a card game. Although games created competition, they also fostered camaraderie. Students like Nancy and Adam who have strong decoding skills helped Sarah and Leo read the cards with longer definitions. Barbara acted like the team cheerleader and encouraged and congratulated everyone. After students had played several games, they developed a rule that we would play until everyone in the class had a match. This resulted in student-led repeated reading of vocabulary terms and definitions. I learned not to underestimate the power of cut-up, colored cardstock.

Providing materials for students to manipulate not only makes learning fun, but it is also an appropriate scaffold for students’ developmental levels. At the “preoperational stage,” as described by Piaget, children aged two to seven need visual aids, models and concrete manipulatives. Older students aged seven to twelve who are in the “concrete operational stage,” can not yet think abstractly and need continued work with tangible objects. They learn best through hands-on discovery learning.

Rather than having students just read about pumpkins, they designed jack-o-lanterns, scooped and carved pumpkins, tried pumpkin pie and ate pumpkin

seeds. Most students loved getting their hands dirty with pumpkin goop. During the carving of the pumpkins and the counting of the seeds, the teachers next door both came to see what the excitement was about. Students were so enthusiastic we could not stop at just carving the pumpkins. Joseph demanded we cut open the acorn squash to see if it had seeds inside and Barbara wanted to see if the seeds inside the white pumpkin were the same size and color as the large orange pumpkins. Based on my field log entries I could tell students were highly engaged. Survey results revealed that hands-on activities were students' (seven out of seven) favorite way to learn new words *and* new ideas (Tables 5 and 6).

Student talk

Using hands-on learning positions the teacher as facilitator and creates greater opportunities for student-led discussion. During the scooping and carving of the pumpkins and tasting of the apples, I was able to circulate and ask students questions and listen in on their conversations. Students used selected target vocabulary while participating in activities. In my field log I noted that students used terms such as “carve”, “scoop”, “seeds” while carving pumpkins. Tasting apples led to discussion of the apple parts, such as skin. Sarah asked if you could eat the “stem”. Occasionally students required prompting, but mostly, vocabulary arose naturally.

Hands-on activities focused on speaking and listening language domains of ESOL methodology. ELLs need opportunities to hear language modeled by

peers, and practice speaking English. Oral language skills are closely related to students' successful literacy development (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007 & Snow & Katz, 2010). When students speak with one another, their language is more kid-friendly and "comprehensible". Comprehensible input, according to linguist Stephen Krashen (1982), is a prerequisite for second language acquisition. When students talk in a small group, they are less anxious, which lowers their affective filter and "opens the gates" for learning (Krashen, 1982, Wadsworth, 2004). As students got better at speaking English, they participated more frequently and took more risks, which built up their confidence.

Learning vocabulary in context and through meaningful experiences helps students retain word knowledge over time.

Not only do hands-on activities *engage* students, but result in *vocabulary growth*. The vocabulary that students learned and practiced through hands-on activities was further reinforced in the texts students read. Rather than providing isolated lists of terms for students to define and know, I carefully selected scaffolded texts, so that key terms were repeated within an integrated thematic unit.

Anderson and Nagy (1992) argued that the word-learning task is enormous. They estimated that students reading on grade level learn between 2,000 and 3,000 new words a year. Therefore, they concluded that most words

must be learned through context. Although they refer to context as learning words within stories, I interpret context more broadly to mean learning words from texts, experiences and related dialogue. This interpretation is consistent with American philosopher and educational reformist John Dewey (1956), who emphasized learning in social and meaningful contexts. As the champion of experiential education, Dewey argued that it is important to provide many different experiences to enable children's learning through discovery and play. This is particularly true for ELLs, as Nguyen's research shows. Nguyen (2012) explains that, "a hands-on approach makes it easier for ELLs and ELLs with learning disabilities (LD) to grasp abstract concepts."

Students' performance on vocabulary quizzes and test support my claim that students retained word knowledge over time. Because of numerous interruptions to our schedule, students did not write the end of unit test until they returned from holidays, the first week of January. Despite so much time passing, most students (five or more of seven) answered vocabulary-related questions correctly (Table 12).

Table 12. All About Fall excerpts from end of unit test
(For the full test see Appendix V)

Vocabulary related questions	Number of correct student responses /7
# 2. Another word for fall is...	5
# 7. When apples are ready they are...	7
# 10. The stringy inside part of the pumpkin is called the..	6
#11. You can find many pumpkins growing at the...	6
#12. The flower where the pumpkin or apple grows is called..	7
#13 The stem of the pumpkin is attached to a long, green...	7
#17 When you cut something carefully into the shape you want, the word is...	7
#20. To become different, means to...	5

Students scored similarly well on vocabulary quizzes administered after reading target texts (Tables 7 and 8). During their oral retell of both *Fall* and *Let's Carve a Pumpkin* students successfully used key words (Table 9, Figure 22). The fact that students retained vocabulary is seen in *Life Cycle of an Apple Tree* quiz results. Students' average score was 84.5%. Since the quiz contained cloze sentences in which words were omitted from a sentence it tested both students' vocabulary and content knowledge related to apples (Appendix T).

Direct and explicit vocabulary instruction prior to reading new text improves students' word knowledge and consequently, reading comprehension.

Researchers agree that there is a strong link between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Marzano and Pickering (2005) underscore the profound effect vocabulary instruction has on student comprehension, especially related to academic content. Many researchers have demonstrated that one major determinant of poor reading comprehension for Latino children and other struggling readers is low vocabulary (García, 1991; Nagy, 1997; Verhoeven, 1990 in Carlo et. al, 2004). Vocabulary instruction is vital for English language learners. Whereas as Native English speakers can figure out the meaning of unknown words using linguistic cues and drawing on what words they do know, this is significantly more difficult for ELLs to accomplish. Unlike their Native-English speaking peers, ELLs need to know 98% of the words in a text to comprehend it adequately (Nation, 2005). Since ELLs need to know such a high percentage of words, many researchers uphold the value of frontloading for ELLs, which includes pre-teaching new vocabulary, building up background, familiarizing students with a text's structure and sentence complexity (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, Hoyt, 2002, Blachowicz & Fisher, 2009, Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004, McCall, 2005).

Providing hands-on activities that engage students and encourage them to use vocabulary in peer discussions, increases word knowledge. However, this strategy is most effective when combined with direct and explicit vocabulary instruction. As part of my direct vocabulary instruction I selected words from different tiers. Gradually, I involved students in selecting their own “tricky words”. At first, students were reluctant to do this and acted as if they knew all the terms already. I asked students to write “tricky words” on a post-it anonymously and submit it to me, from which I compiled a master vocabulary list. Once students realized that I was not using their post-its to judge them on what they knew, but to help me know what to teach, they became more honest and willing participants.

I provided students with the meaning of each new word. Then we discussed the word and students recorded synonyms and antonyms using various graphic organizers. Next students orally constructed sentences containing the new term. Students also drew a picture to help them understand and remember the word. These steps are part of the “systematic instruction” proposed by Marzano (2005). The post-study survey revealed that writing the word’s meaning and drawing a picture was tied with hands-on activities as students’ favorite way of learning new words (Table 5).

Part of vocabulary instruction involves teaching students cognates and preparing them to use this strategy independently (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006),

Montelongo et. al., 2011, Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, Carlo et. al, 2004). Post-study results revealed that whereas previously only one student used “telling me the word in Spanish” as a word-strategy, this increased to three students. Similarly, reliance on cognates increased from zero students to three. Even after this study ended, students eagerly pointed out cognates that they independently recognized and demanded these be added to the growing list.

This direct vocabulary instruction resulted in improved word knowledge. Students would excitedly exclaim, “I know that word!” as they read new books within the fall theme. Students answered most vocabulary questions on quizzes and the end of unit test correctly (Tables 7, 8 and 12). As seen by their running records, students could read new terms accurately, and also apply them in their oral retells (Figure 7, Table 10).

Nonfiction Retelling Rubric

Student's Name _____ Date Nov. 19, 2015

Book Title Fall Level of text C 3-4

Comprehension	Intervention	Instructional	Independent	Advanced	Comments
Key Ideas & Facts	Includes at least 1 idea/fact from text	Includes at least 2-3 ideas/facts from text	Includes most ideas/facts from text 3.5	Includes all ideas/facts from text	
Details	Includes at least 1 detail; may include incorrect information	Includes at least 2 details; may include mis-interpretation	Includes some important details x first 3.5	Includes most important details	
Vocabulary Key terms: <u>fall</u> <u>grass</u> ✓ <u>corn</u> ✓ <u>frost</u> ✓ <u>pumpkins</u> ✓ <u>leaves</u> ✗	Uses general terms or labels; limited understanding of key words/concepts	Uses some language/vocabulary from the text; some understanding of key words/concepts	Uses language from the text; basic understanding of most key words/concepts	Uses important language/vocabulary from the text; good understanding of key words/concepts 4	
Level of Prompting	Requires many questions or prompts (5+)	Requires 4 or 5 questions or prompts	Requires 2 or 3 questions or prompts 3	Requires 1 or no questions or prompts	
Reflection - Making Connections What does this book remind you of?	Unable to make a connection	Makes a very limited connection to another text, world or self	Makes adequate connection to another text, world or self	Makes an insightful, rich connection to another text, world or self 4	" - the leaf falls down + people rake it + I jump in "

F 30

- tells u about grass, corn, frost, pumpkins (leaves)
 - all about fall
 - many different things turn color*
 - in fall it can be cold.

Tell me what happens to grass?
 - turn brown
 - corn turns yellow
 - pumpkins turn orange

What else changes color?
 - apples.

Figure 22. Sample of completed non-fiction oral retell rubric.

Reading more accurately increased students' comprehension. This improvement in comprehension could not be generalized into a higher reading ability for all students as measured by DRAs. Only four of seven students moved up in reading level as measured by the DRA. These results were lower than I expected. However, a couple of students who did not show progress at the end of November, did so in early January. Denise moved up to a DRA 8 in Jan. 2016.

Sarah attained a DRA 6 in January, and then DRA 8 in February. To me, this indicated that perhaps students with learning challenges required more than 12 weeks for gains to become visible.

Students did however, demonstrated strong comprehension of texts related to the unit. When provided with aids such as pictures, manipulatives or graphic organizers, many showed an impressive ability to understand and synthesize text at their instructional level or slightly above. For example, they successfully summarized *Getting Ready for School* (DRA level 8/E) using a Main Idea/Supporting Details graphic organizer (Appendix N). By moving pictures around students effectively sequenced and retold story events from *Let's Carve a Pumpkin* at DRA level 8/E (Table 10). Using an aid they created (pictures sequenced on a string, Figure 13), students correctly sequenced and verbally described the life cycle of a pumpkin as explained in the *From Pumpkin Seed to Jack-o-Lantern* text (DRA level 12/G).

Using texts that gradually increase in complexity and that revisit key terms and concepts, provides students with effective scaffolding.

To build students' vocabulary and background in preparation for reading a text above their reading level, I began with one or more texts (books, videos or songs) on the same subject at their level within their *zone of actual development*, as described by Lev Vygotsky (1978). While they read these texts with relative

ease, exposure to the same words repeatedly in context and with pictures, helped students work through the more difficult text just outside of their independent reading level. In this way, students progressively learned to read and understand text within their *zone of proximal development*.

Each text acted to build up students' *schema* or background knowledge. Schema is considered by many researchers, one of the main determinants of reading comprehension (Vaughn et. al, 2010, McElvain, 2011, Dreher & Gray, 2009, Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). Students could see the same key vocabulary terms and concepts repeated, and gradually expanded. By scaffolding reading, students learned to make text-to-text connections. At the end of the study five students always made text-to-text connection, up from just two students before the study. Similarly, four students reported that making connections helped them understand the text, whereas only one did so before the study. Post-study surveys also demonstrate that scaffolding worked. Five students compared to one before the study, indicated reading books with many of the same ideas helped. Four students claimed that reading easier books before harder ones helped them learn ideas, whereas only two did so earlier.

Using nonfiction texts helps English language learners acquire English and subject content simultaneously.

Reading non-fiction familiarizes students with text organization and features, builds background knowledge, strengthens both general academic and content-specific vocabulary, while simultaneously imparting essential content (Dreher & Gray, 2009). Looking at students' completed KWL charts about apples, I was amazed at the breadth and depth of knowledge students acquired about where apple trees grow, the apple life cycle, varieties of apples, parts of an apple, apple products, and pollination. After I interviewed Barbara to scribe her ideas, she inquired, "Are you going to ask me more questions tomorrow? Because I have a *lot more* I can say". I had already filled in the "L" section of her KWL and turned it over.

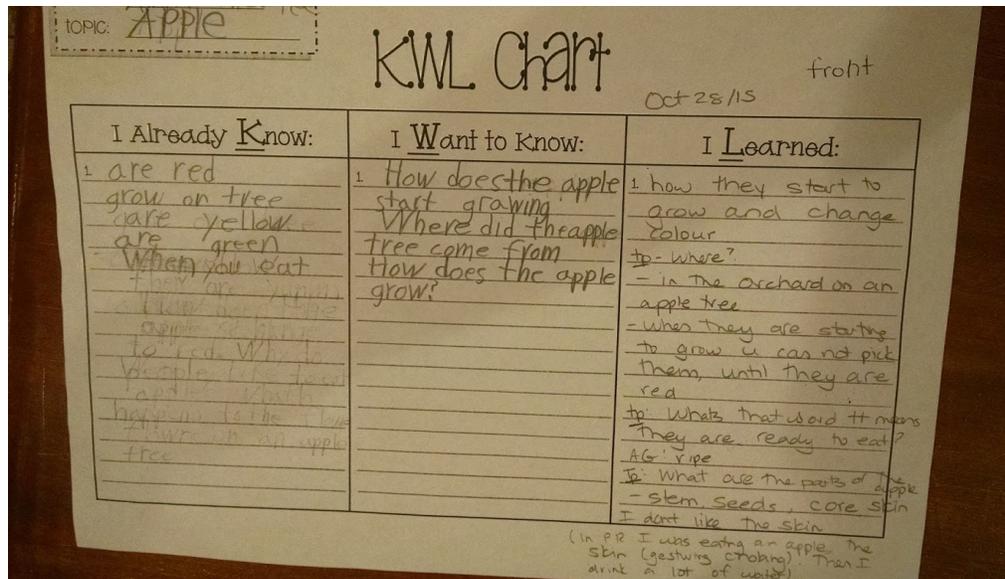


Figure 23. Adam's KWL (front) shows he learned many new terms and concepts.

In addition, high scores on the fall unit test indicate that students learned both vocabulary and content. Five of seven students scored 80% or more to questions about seasonal change, apples and pumpkins. Whereas previously students could not identify who Pilgrims were, at the end of the unit they skillfully compared their lives to lives of children in colonial times (Figure 18).

During a transition time, Denise admitted, “when I first came here I didn’t know any English. I didn’t even know the word ‘the’”. To which I replied, “and look at how many words you know now!” Students not only gained content-specific vocabulary, but general vocabulary as well, which together improved their knowledge of English as a whole.

Many general terms arose during our discussions of books, and social interactions during hands-on activities and playing of games. Students had to use English to figure out how to share carving supplies, save the seeds from falling of the edge of table, ensure playing the matching game was fair, and figure out who “did” and “did not have BINGO” during the Thanksgiving game. Nancy who had trouble explaining how the character David put his paint-covered hands on a girl’s hair, could describe how “the bees they carry the pollen from one tree to a different tree”. Most students improved their English oral communication skills, but also their reading.

Visual aids such as videos, pictures, and simple picture books help build up and activate student background knowledge, which makes the text more accessible.

Visual aids such as printed images and pictures in books, sparked discussions that helped build background knowledge. Although initially students only identified individual pictures in a *Picture Splash*, once they encountered this strategy repeatedly, they used it as it a springboard for discussion. Denise relied on the pictures to help her explain picking pumpkins with her grandfather in Puerto Rico. Nancy talked about carving pumpkins with relative and used the pictures I provided to describe one jack-o-lantern that was funny and another that was scary. While Adam was telling me all he knew about apples, he scanned the room looking for the anchor chart to verify his facts. Sarah and Barbara used the Thanksgiving Picture Splash to help them describe who the Pilgrims were, where they came from and why they emigrated.

Before reading more challenging texts I often read-aloud picture books to introduce key vocabulary and concepts in a simple and concise way. Picture books provided an authentic context that they could then transfer to other texts. A pre-reading Picture Walk of either fiction of nonfiction text stimulates background knowledge, reinforces vocabulary, and allows students to predict what the story will be about.

Surveys indicated that students learned to use pictures to help them with specific words and comprehension. Whereas two students listed looking at pictures as a strategy to help them with words they did not know before the study, four did at the end. By the end of the study, three times as many students (six versus two) had learned to skim the book and look at pictures to preview the book before reading. Despite these improvements, the number of students who listed “seeing pictures of what the word means” as a strategy remained the same at three. It could be that these answers reflect students’ preference for videos over still images in books. Students’ choice of strategies may be due in part to their enjoyment of the activity, e.g. coloring, rather than based solely on the actual effectiveness of the strategy.

Videos, too, can prepare students to read related texts. However, teachers must preview each video carefully to determine whether its content and linguistic complexity matches students’ abilities. While we watched the silent animation of how an apple seed evolved, students thought of what they knew and applied their own dialogue. Another video helped students visualize an orchard. Students watched clips of the Macy’s day parade to help them consolidate the word “parade”. Six students reported that watching a video helped them learn both new words and ideas (compared to four and three respectively at the beginning, Table 5).

With the exception of hands-on games and activities, no one single pre-reading emerged as a winner. As seen from the survey, students themselves recognized the merits of other strategies. What seems to work best is combining various strategies with hands-on games and activities, while at the same time positioning learning within a meaningful context. Yes, this requires a lot of planning and preparation on behalf of the teacher, but results in greater student engagement. Once students are engaged, they are more willing and likely to learn language skills and content. I felt proud when Nancy commented, “We have fun, but you make us work. We learn lots of stuff, too”.

Next Steps

Several months have passed since the conclusion of my study. Many of my English language learners have progressed to reading at DRA level 16/18 (as of March, 2016). However, a few remain at DRA level 8/10. To address their different needs, I plan to use more center-based learning to so that I can differentiate their instruction more precisely.

To help students with continued decoding challenges, I plan to extend my hands-on approach to increase their phonemic awareness and sight word recognition. I know that students loved the Roll-A-Dice game that reinforced the “CH” digraph, so I will seek out other similar games that teach sound recognition. Some other phonemic activities I wish to investigate include using Lego bricks to represent phonemes that come together and go apart, and other phonemic sorting

games in which students sort words into number of syllables, initial, medial or final sounds. I will continue and expand upon my use of *Making Words* (Cunningham & Hall) since it provides students with the visual and kinesthetic experience of moving letters to build words while focusing on specific vowel sounds and blends.

To further students' sight word recognition, I have already started experimenting having students build sight words with various materials: clay, Playdoh, and waxy "wiki" sticks. I also introduced "rainbow writing" of sight words using multicolored dry eraser markers and having students pass their board around the circle for repeated reading and writing. Noticing how much students enjoyed and benefitted from the Thanksgiving Bingo, I plan to increase my use of Bingo games to teach both specific vocabulary as well as sight words.

In addition, I would like to expand my use of music as an instructional scaffold. Since many of my students have learning disabilities and/or receive speech therapy, using music served as an ideal way to present content information. Music can be used to aid in the development of receptive and expressive speech and language skills. Since words or phrases are often repeated, it helps students develop an understanding of the patterns of language. Music provides predictability and repetition, which facilitates students' understanding of key concepts. Research supports the strategic use of music as an effective teaching strategy, particularly for students like Joe, who have autism (Carnahan,

Musti-Rao & Bailey, 2009). For my students, music increased their focus and motivation.

Ultimately, there is no one single pre-reading panacea that will increase background and vocabulary knowledge for all students equally and at the same rate. Based on my limited study, providing hands-on activities and games that engage reluctant learners and are placed in meaningful context, appear to be one of the most effective strategies for my particular group of students. However, hands-on activities and games need to be thoughtfully and selectively combined with other pre-reading strategies, including direct vocabulary instruction and visual aids. Like a master carpenter guiding an apprentice, teachers must anticipate the task to be learned and determine which tools are needed (Dutro & Moran, 2003, p.232). The teacher builds schema and word knowledge one brick or book at a time to create the larger “house” of reading comprehension.

No one builds a house alone. Each tradesperson relies on the knowledge and skills of others. Although, I cannot claim that I have all of the answers, just as my colleagues have so willingly shared their expertise with me, it is my turn to share my research findings with them through grade level and faculty meetings. Sharing effective pre-reading strategies with my colleagues will benefit, not just English language learners, but all students.

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Appendix

Appendix A: HSIRB Proposal

2014-2015 HUMAN SUBJECTS INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD (HSIRB) PROPOSAL FORM

This form must be completed for any research activity involving human participants. All researchers should review the Moravian College Human Subjects Research Policy found at <p:\hsirb\MoravianCollegeHSIRBPolicy.doc> before designing and submitting their proposals.

When you have provided all of the information required in the proposal form below, please follow the submission instructions below. ***Please be aware that incomplete proposals will be returned to the proposer until they are complete.*** Failure to submit all documentation will delay the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) review of your research proposal.

Proposal Review Timetable: Please note that during the standard academic year when the committee meets regularly, it typically takes a minimum of two weeks (14 days) for the committee to review and respond to completed proposals. Most proposals require some modifications before we grant full approval and the revision process typically adds an additional week to the review process.

Submit **all** of the following:

1. This completed Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) Proposal Form. Please make sure all required information is complete. We encourage completion of this proposal form as a Word document.
2. A copy of your Informed Consent form and/or other evidence of Informed Consent to voluntary participation [See HSIRB proposed Policy #MC.116 & MC.117. The policy statement can be viewed at [Public/hsirb/.](Public/hsirb/)] You can also find helpful informed consent guidelines at <public/hsirb>.
3. A copy of all of your instruments (surveys, tests, etc.). If you are showing pictures or videos, a copy of these need to be submitted as well. You may provide links if the material will be accessible online.

Submit ***electronic copies*** of complete proposals to:

hsirb@moravian.edu

You have the option of either combining the various documents in one file or submitting separate files as email attachments, but **please make sure that the file name clearly indicates the section of the overall proposal package and the author**. So, for example, please call your document something along the lines of "johnson.proposal.docx" and "johnson.informedconsent.docx." The preferred format for all materials is Word (doc/docx) or PDF. We understand that some materials may only be available in other formats, but please make every effort to send files in one of those two formats. At the end of the approval process, we will collect **electronic signatures** from proposers and their faculty sponsors (if applicable).

Questions: contact

Dr. Sarah Johnson, Chair HSIRB
Department of Psychology
skjohnson@moravian.edu
(610) 625-7013

Part I: RESEARCHER

1. Proposer: Irene Paxton	2. Department: Masters of Education
3. Mailing address: 3885 Post Drive Bethlehem, PA 18017	4. Phone:
5. E-mail address: ipaxton@basdschools.org	
6. This is a (please check): New Proposal	7. Research Start/End Dates: Start: September, 2015 End: December, 2015
7. Title of Proposal: Reading Comprehension and Second Language Learners	

8. Faculty Advisor: Dr. R. Grove

Part II: PROPOSAL TYPE

1. This research involves **ONLY** the use of **educational tests** (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude or achievement).

No

2. This research collects interviews or surveys **ONLY** of **elected or appointed public officials** or candidates for such.

No

3. This research involves **ONLY** observations of **public behavior**.

No

4. This research involves **ONLY existing data, documents, records or specimens**.

No

5. List the **research funding sources**, if any.

Not applicable

6. The results of this research will be published.

Yes

If you marked "yes" or "uncertain", please provide a brief description of the possible forum of publication (for example, peer-reviewed journal, conference presentation, etc.)

Description of publication forum:

Research will be published in the on-line Moravian College Masters of Education thesis database

In this next section, you will provide extensive details about the research project. Please make sure that your explanations/descriptions are clearly written and grammatically correct so that the committee can accurately follow and assess your proposal.

Part III. DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. In this section, you have the option of either addressing each of the following subheadings individually or together (since there may be some overlap) in your proposal narrative. If providing a narrative, please make sure that each of the following topics is clearly identified in the narrative.
 - a. **Objectives:** The researcher will investigate the observed and reported experiences of third grade ESOL students when implementing pre-reading comprehension strategies. Students will also become familiar with how expository text may be organized e.g. cause and effect, compare and contrast, and use this knowledge to help them better understand what they are reading. Students will read a variety of non-fiction text at their instructional level, centered on a fall theme.
 - b. **Design:** Over the course of approximately 10 weeks, the researcher embeds pre-reading activities into the regular curriculum during Guided Reading and Core ESOL classes.

Researcher collects 4 forms of data and engages in on-going reflection and analysis of the data collected.

1. Observations of small group and partner discussions during Guided Reading and Core ESOL classes, written up in the form of a double entry journal.
2. Rubrics – Non-fiction reading comprehension
3. Student Surveys & Interviews – Reading Attitude, Reading Comprehension Strategy Use, One-to-one interviews to follow up on survey responses
4. Student Artifacts:
 - Pre-reading graphic organizers (e.g. Frayer model, variations of KWL, anticipation guides, Vocabulary knowledge rating)
 - Reading Response journals – students respond to a specific prompt
 - Comprehension and vocabulary quizzes
 - Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) nonfiction texts only
 - WrAP test (Writing and Reading Assessment Profile) nonfiction texts only
 - Running records – teacher indicates accurate reading with a checkmark and notes any errors/miscues about the target word
 - Oral retells

Researcher analyzes data using coding process and creates theme bins.

- c. Procedures (makes sure you clearly describe what is required of subjects):**
Students will read a variety of non-fiction texts related to an autumn theme over the course of twelve weeks. They will engage in a variety of pre-reading activities and learn strategies to help them acquire vocabulary and increase comprehension of expository text.

Procedures for the study will take place over a 12 week period.

FALL THEME UNIT PLAN

Week 1 - School

Teacher conducts initial reading assessments (DRAs -Developmental Reading Assessment and WrAPs – Writing and Reading Assessment Profile, Primary level)
<http://www.teaching.com.au/catalogue?catalogue=MTA&category=MTA-ENGLISH-READING-ASSESS>

Students complete Reading Attitude and Comprehension Monitoring surveys.
Teacher reads fictional picture books related to the beginning of school.
Students compare and contrast the texts using a Venn diagram.

Week 2 - School

Teacher models “picture walk” pre-reading activity and pre-teaches vocabulary.
Students read non-fiction text related to the start of the school year.
Teacher compares and contrasts fiction and non-fiction text features.
Teacher conducts one-to-one interviews to follow up on or clarify students’ answers from surveys administered in week 1.

Week 3 – Apples

Students record what they already know about apples using a KWL chart (what you know, want to learn, learned).
Teacher pre-teaches vocabulary and models “questioning” strategy during reading.
Students read non-fiction texts related to apples.
Students practice the comprehension skill of sequencing and demonstrate comprehension of the text, by drawing and labeling a picture of the life cycle of an apple tree.

Week 4 – Apples cont’d

Teacher pre-teaches vocabulary related to making apple cider.
Students watch various video excerpts about how cider is made to build up background knowledge.
Teacher reads aloud a picture book about apple cider making.

Students orally retell one of the apple-themed books. Students demonstrate newly acquired knowledge by completing what they have “Learned” on a KWL chart.

Week 5 – Changing Leaves

Students complete vocabulary knowledge rating before reading.

Direct instruction of vocabulary prior to reading of text, continues.

Teacher continues to guide students in identifying non-fiction text features and text organization.

Teacher collects running records while students read aloud simple non-fiction text about leaves changing color.

Week 6 – Changing Leaves cont’d

Students visit and read information on a website to further build up background knowledge <http://sciencemadesimple.com/leaves.html>.

Teacher reads aloud a more challenging text about changing leaves.

Teacher continues to guide students in identifying non-fiction text features and text organization.

Students synthesize information and explain why leaves turn color in their reading response journals.

Week 7 – Pumpkins

Teacher reviews a “picture walk”, models making predictions and helps students build background knowledge about pumpkins through a read-aloud.

Students create a vocabulary flip-book with key words from the upcoming text.

Students read non-fiction text about pumpkins. Teacher continues to collect running records.

Week 8 – Pumpkins cont’d & Bats

Students complete a graphic organizer showing the main idea and details of the pumpkin text.

Students orally retell the life cycle of a pumpkin.

Teacher helps students build up background knowledge of bats by reading aloud realistic fiction.

Students read information about bats from this website

<http://www.kidzone.ws/animals/bats/facts.htm>

Students complete an “anticipation guide” that shows their thinking before and after reading a text about bats.

Week 9 – Bats

Teacher introduces author’s purpose and students find evidence that the author is trying to persuade readers of the helpful nature of bats.

Teacher continues to help identify and explain non-fiction text features e.g. photographs, captions.
Students compare and contrast bats and birds to show understanding of the texts.

Week 10 – Animals Preparing for Winter

Students show prior knowledge by creating a mind map about animals in fall.
Students watch various video clips about how animals prepare for winter.
Teacher pre-teaches vocabulary related to hibernation.
Students first read a simple text, then a more complex text about animals in winter.
Teacher continues to record student reading using running records.

Week 11 – Thanksgiving break

Week 12 – Conclusion

Students complete Hibernation comprehension quiz.
Teacher conducts final assessment of students’ reading levels using the DRA &/or WrAP tests.
Teacher administers post-study *Reading Attitude & Comprehension Monitoring* survey.
Culminating project: students create a poster and with the help of a concept web as a planning tool, write what they know about fall.

d. Outline procedures/steps to reduce risks to subjects:

Subjects’ names will not appear in written reports of the research. Pseudonyms will be used.
The pseudonym key as well as any written data will be stored electronically on a password-protected computer to which I only have access. Any hard copies of these documents will be stored in my private home in a locked filing cabinet.
The pseudonym key, field notes and other research materials will be deleted/destroyed upon conclusion of the study.
Participants will be permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and will be made aware of this right through the consent letter.

2. This research involves the following GROUP(S) vulnerable to risk. Check all that apply.

Subjects under the age of 18
Students with mental, cognitive, intellectual, or physical disabilities

Research Design Note: *If you are asking for volunteer participants, you will not necessarily know whether or not your participants are under 18, pregnant and/or disabled. In fact, your volunteers may themselves not know whether they fall into one of these categories. Therefore, if you are asking for volunteer participants, you need to think carefully about whether or not your research project could adversely affect someone in any of these categories, and if so, how you might try to either screen out these individuals and/or design the project so that the risk to these individuals is minimized.*

2a. If you checked any or all of the groups identified above, explain why you need to use the group and the methods you will use to minimize risk. If your research design proposes no special risks to these vulnerable individuals even if they happen to be included in your sample, please state why:

My students are in third grade, and so consist of 8 and 9 year olds. To minimize risk, I will not use subjects' names in written reports of the research; instead, pseudonyms will be used. The pseudonym key as well as any other field notes/data will be stored in a password-protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet in my private home. All research materials will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the study. Finally, subjects retain the right to withdraw by means of an informed consent letter.

3. This research might affect people with special vulnerabilities (for example, pregnant women, people with allergies, people taking some medications, people with cognitive impairments such as ADHD, etc.)

Research Design Note: *Think carefully here again about whether or not your research design could negatively affect people with special vulnerabilities. For example, does your research design require so much concentration and/or computation that it might result in considerable stress for someone with a cognitive impairment? Are people completing your instrument in solitude or in a group setting? Might comparative performance result in excessive stress?*

Yes

If you checked "Yes", explain the methods you will use to minimize risk to these people.

My research project may include student participants who have IEPs or 504 plans. To minimize risk to these students, I will make sure to follow all accommodations specified on their plans.

4. Describe your subject pool including:

- a. the intended number of subjects
- b. subject characteristics/demographics

a. The number of subjects included in the study will fall between 5 and 15, depending on the number of ESOL students deemed to require instructional support for that academic year.

b. Characteristics of subjects:

Grade 3 ESOL students from an inner-city school

Predominantly Hispanic

Mostly living in poverty

Mix of male and female

5. Describe in detail the methods you will use to recruit your subjects.

Subjects will consist of students assigned to me for Guided Reading and Core ESOL instruction based on their English language proficiency and reading ability. My building principal will assign students to me for the 2015-6 school year.

6. This research involves **deception** of subjects.

No

If you checked “Yes”, describe the nature of the deception and your debriefing procedure. You will need to provide the debriefing statement with the full proposal submission. Even if the debriefing will be done orally, you need to submit the text of the verbal statement that will be read to participants.

7. Explain by whom and how the subjects will be informed of the purposes of this research project. (*Remember to provide a copy of the informed consent form with this proposal form.*)

As their classroom teacher, I will explain the purpose of my research project to all subjects. All subjects will also receive a consent form drafted in kid-friendly language, which outlines the purpose of the project, the procedures used to minimize risk and the option to participate or withdraw from the study. Since the subjects are minors, parents will also receive a consent form by which they may choose to grant permission for their child to participate in my research project or decline. Lastly, my building principal will also receive a consent letter. I will secure the principal’s permission before initiating my research. Consent forms given to subjects and their parents will be written in English

and Spanish. Translation will be made by staff at the Bethlehem Area School district Center for Language Acquisition (CLA office).

8. This research collects information, which (check all that apply)

No – does not deal with sensitive aspects

Yes - identifies the subject by **name** or **number codes**.

Research Design Note: *Think carefully about whether or not your research deals with topics that may be sensitive from the participant's point of view. Sometimes it is not obvious to the researcher that the subject of their research may be a sensitive topic for others.*

Some of my students may not be aware that they are reading far below the grade-level of their English speaking-peers. Some subjects will be English language learners and have special needs. I will inform students of their DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) level privately and encourage them to make progress based on their individual goals. All data, including reading levels, tests, quizzes, etc. will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and/or be stored in a password protected computer. Data will be considered confidential and, with the exception of my Moravian thesis advisor, will not be shared with anyone.

Should subjects or their parents have any concerns, contact information will be made readily available. Subjects and their parents will be informed of how to contact myself, my Moravian College faculty advisor and principal by means of the consent letters.

To protect subjects' privacy, all students will be referred to by pseudonyms in written reports of the research. Risk to subjects will be further minimized by storing research materials in secure locations, and destroying all written materials/field notes upon the conclusion of the study.

Appendix B: Principal Consent

Authorization to Conduct Action Research

Dear Dr. XXXXX,

As you are aware, many ESOL students struggle with reading comprehension. As students move up in the grades, not only must they decode, but read to understand and learn new content. As a graduate student at Moravian College, I wish to conduct action research to strengthen my reading instruction. For my study, I would like to investigate the importance of pre-reading activities. I will examine how direct vocabulary instruction and building up of background knowledge *before* reading, impact grade 3 ESOL students' reading comprehension of non-fiction text.

I plan to collect various forms of data. To begin, I will conduct DRAs to determine students' baseline reading level. In addition, I will administer student reading attitude surveys and conduct follow up interviews. During my study, I will gauge students' pre and post levels of content and vocabulary knowledge on specific topics. I plan to examine a variety of student artifacts, such as KWL charts, tests and quizzes. My data will include running records. I will also assess students' oral retells by using a nonfiction reading comprehension rubric. At the conclusion of my study, I will administer another DRA test to determine if students' reading levels have increased. I will also re-administer the reading attitude survey to investigate whether students' feelings towards reading have changed over time.

My study will remain a regular part of my guided reading and core ESOL instruction. Parents will be informed of my research and will decide whether or not they will allow me to use their children's data. Students themselves will be informed of the study and asked if they willingly consent to be included. A student or their parent(s) may choose to end participation at any time, without penalty. All participants will be provided with pseudonyms. My research materials will be kept in a secure, locked location outside of the classroom and will be shredded a year after the completion of the study. My research findings will be shared with fellow teachers.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research, please feel free to contact me at 610-XXX-XXXX or ipaxton@basdschools.org. You may also contact my Moravian College professor Dr. Joseph Shosh at 610-861-1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Irene Paxton
ESOL teacher

- I give permission for the teacher to conduct the action research study described above with her students.
- I do **not** give permission for the teacher to conduct the action research study described above with her students.

Principal's signature

Date

Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Permission - English

Dear Parents,

My name is Mrs. Paxton. I am the grade 3 ESOL teacher. Although I have several years of teaching experience, I am always looking for ways to improve my instruction. I am currently working on my Master's degree at Moravian College. My research is based on the question: does spending more time engaging students in pre-reading activities result in better understanding of the text after reading? For my study, I will examine how direct vocabulary instruction and building up of background knowledge *before* reading, affect students' reading comprehension of non-fiction text.

I plan to collect various forms of data. To begin, I will conduct reading assessments to determine students' reading level at the start of the study. I will ask students to complete reading attitude surveys both at the beginning and end of the study to see if how they feel about reading changes over time. I will examine how much a student knows about a topic and their vocabulary knowledge both before and after reading a new book. I plan to examine a variety of student work, such as tests, quizzes and notes made while students read and discuss the story. At the conclusion of my study, I will administer another DRA test to determine if students' reading levels have increased.

My study will remain a regular part of my instruction. As usual, I will continue work with your child in a small group to help them read. The only difference is my shift towards spending more time preparing to read a new book, before the reading begins. You may choose to withdraw your child from the study at any time. Participation is voluntary. Your child's name will not appear anywhere in my data. His or her identity will remain confidential. All participants will be given pseudonyms. The results of my research will be shared with other teachers. Research materials will be kept locked and will be shredded a year after the study ends.

Principal XXX has approved my research plans. If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research, please feel free to contact me at 610-XXX-XXXX ext. # 16212 or ipaxton@XXXXschools.org. You may also contact my Moravian College professor Dr. Joseph Shosh at 610-861-1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Paxton
ESOL teacher

-
- I give permission for my child's data to be included in this study.
 - I do **not** give permission for my child's data to be included in this study.

Student's name

Parent/Guardian's signature

Date

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Permission - Spanish

Estimados padres de familia,

Mi nombre es Sra. Paxton. Yo soy la maestra de ESOL del tercer grado. Aunque tengo varios años de experiencia en la enseñanza, siempre estoy buscando maneras de mejorar mi instrucción. Actualmente estoy trabajando en mi maestría en el Colegio de Moravian. Para mi clase, examinaré como la instrucción y el desarrollo en el vocabulario de conocimiento de fondo de antes de leer, afectan la comprensión de la lectura de los alumnos en los texto de no ficción. Mi investigación se basa en la pregunta: ¿El pasar más tiempo involucrando a los estudiantes en actividades de prelectura da lugar a una mejor comprensión del texto después de leer?

Planeo recopilar diversas formas de datos. Para empezar, voy a llevar a cabo evaluaciones de lectura para determinar el nivel de lectura de los estudiantes al inicio del estudio. Voy a pedir a los estudiantes que completen encuestas de actitudes de lectura tanto al inicio como al final del estudio para ver cómo se sienten acerca del cambio de la lectura con el tiempo. Voy a examinar cuanto el estudiante sabe acerca de un tema y sus conocimientos del vocabulario, tanto antes como después de leer un nuevo libro. Voy a examinar el trabajo del estudiante, tales como exámenes, pruebas y notas que hago mientras que los estudiantes leen y discuten la historia. Al final de mi estudio, voy a administrar otra prueba de lectura para determinar si los niveles de comprensión de los estudiantes han aumentado.

Mi estudio seguirá siendo una parte regular de mi instrucción. Como de costumbre, voy a seguir trabajando con su hijo en pequeños grupos para ayudarles a leer. La única diferencia es que mi cambio hacia pasar más tiempo en la preparación de leer un nuevo libro, antes de que comience la lectura. La participación es voluntaria. Usted puede optar por retirar a su hijo del estudio en cualquier momento, mediante el envío de una nota a mí o a un mensaje de correo electrónico (dirección abajo). El nombre de su hijo no va a aparecer en mis datos. Su identidad se mantendrá confidencial. Los resultados de mi investigación serán compartidos con mi asesor en Moravia, otros profesores de mi clase, y en un formato de tesis publicado usando seudónimos estudiantiles. Los materiales de investigación se mantendrán cerradas y serán triturados un año después de que el estudio termina.

La directora XX ha aprobado los planes de mi investigación. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o duda sobre mi investigación, no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo por teléfono o correo electrónico, que aparece a continuación. También puede ponerse en contacto con mi profesor de Moravia Colegio Dr. Shosh al 610-861-1482 o por correo electrónico a shoshj@moravian.edu. Gracias por su apoyo.

Atentamente,

La señora Paxton 610-XXX- XXX ext. # XXXX

Nombre del Estudiante

Doy permiso para que los datos de mi hijo sean incluidos en este estudio.

No doy permiso para que los datos de mi hijo sean incluidos en este estudio.

Firma Padre / Encargado

Fecha

Appendix E: Student Consent

Student Consent Form

Student Name _____ Date _____

Please circle the face to show your choice:



Yes, I agree to participate in Mrs. Paxton's research project. I give her permission to observe me in class, and use my regular classwork, tests and quizzes as part of her study. My name will not be shared with anyone. I know I can stop participating at any time, and my grade in class will not change.



No, I do not agree to participate in Mrs. Paxton's research project. I understand that this will not change my grades (report card) in any way. I will receive the same instruction (teaching) as all of the other students.

If you have any questions, you or your parents can call or email me.

Thank you,
Mrs. Paxton
610-XXX-XXXX x 16212

Appendix F: Reading Attitude & Comprehension Survey (revised)

Name _____ Date _____

1. Do you like to read?
I *love* to read I like to read most of the time I don't like reading
2. Do you prefer reading **fiction** or **non-fiction**?
fiction non-fiction
both neither
3. When I read a book that is **fiction**, I understand what I read:
always sometimes never
4. When I read a book that is **non-fiction**, I understand what I read:
always sometimes never
5. What do you do when you come across a word you don't know?

Before I read a new book, I ...

6. Predict what the book will be about
always sometimes never
7. Preview/skim the book and look at the pictures
always sometimes never
8. Think about what I already know, and make a text-to-self connection.

Text Title: _____

<p>Text to Self</p>  <p>Connect what you are reading to something from your life. reminds me of something that ended to me... because... experience I have had like that is like that character when... because...</p>	<p>Text to Text</p>  <p>Connect what you are reading to another story you have read. • This reminds me of a book I read... because... • This character is like another character... because... • The author's style of writing is like another author's because...</p>	<p>Text to World</p>  <p>Connect what you are reading to something from the world. • This reminds me of something I hear about... because... • This text connects to something my friend told me about because...</p>
--	--	---

always sometimes never

9. Think of other books, videos, or songs, and make a text-to-text connection.

17. How much did you learn about fall?

I learned a lot I learned some new information

I learned a little I did not learn anything

Appendix H: WIDA Can Do Descriptors



Can Do Descriptors: Grade Level Cluster 3-5

For the given level of English language proficiency and with visual, graphic, or interactive support through Level 4, English language learners can process or produce the **language** needed to:

	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging
READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match icons or diagrams with words/concepts Identify cognates from first language, as applicable Make sound/symbol/word relations Match illustrated words/phrases in differing contexts (e.g., on the board, in a book) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify facts and explicit messages from illustrated text Find changes to root words in context Identify elements of story grammar (e.g., characters, setting) Follow visually supported written directions (e.g., "Draw a star in the sky.") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret information or data from charts and graphs Identify main ideas and some details Sequence events in stories or content-based processes Use context clues and illustrations to determine meaning of words/phrases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify features of various genres of text (e.g., "and they lived happily ever after"—fairy tales) Match graphic organizers to different texts (e.g., compare/contrast with Venn diagram) Find details that support main ideas Differentiate between fact and opinion in narrative and expository text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize information from multiple related sources Answer analytical questions about grade-level text Identify, explain, and give examples of figures of speech Draw conclusions from explicit and implicit text at or near grade level
WRITING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Label objects, pictures, or diagrams from word/phrase banks Communicate ideas by drawing Copy words, phrases, and short sentences Answer oral questions with single words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make lists from labels or with peers Complete/produce sentences from word/phrase banks or walls Fill in graphic organizers, charts, and tables Make comparisons using real-life or visually-supported materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce simple expository or narrative text String related sentences together Compare/contrast content-based information Describe events, people, processes, procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take notes using graphic organizers Summarize content-based information Author multiple forms of writing (e.g., expository, narrative, persuasive) from models Explain strategies or use of information in solving problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce extended responses of original text approaching grade level Apply content-based information to new contexts Connect or integrate personal experiences with literature/content Create grade-level stories or reports

Level 6 - Reaching

https://www.wida.us/standards/CAN_DOs/

Appendix I: Back To School Texts

Text	Reading level DRA/ Fountas & Pinnell	Method of reading	Key Vocabulary	Themes/Concepts Objectives
<i>David Goes to School</i> by David Shannon from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	G/12	Read-aloud	Explicit: school, recess Implicit (implied from images): rules, trouble, attention, paint, cafeteria, desk, clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce theme • Trigger and build background related to school • Build oral vocabulary during picture walk • Help establish school/class rules
<i>It is School Time</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	B/2	Guided and independent	breakfast, reading, recess, school, science, time, bus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build up background knowledge • Increase reading confidence
<i>Carlos and His Teacher/ Carlos y Su Maestra</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	B/2	Guided and independent	Explicit: add, clean, paint, share, teacher, write Implicit: teacher, student, vocabulary related to classroom setting and school supplies e.g. blackboard, backpack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce cognate use • Practice transferring knowledge from first language to second language • Making connections to earlier school related texts
<i>*Getting Ready for School</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	E/8	Guided Reading	school, backpack, breakfast everywhere, friends, paper, pencils, children, bus, recess, science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw on previous texts as background • Make personal connections to own preparations for school • Introduce non-fiction text features • Integrate Math (interpret data from a bar graph) • Main Idea/details

Appendix J: Fall And Changing Leaves Texts

Text	Reading level DRA/ Fountas & Pinnell	Method of reading	Key Vocabulary	Themes/Concepts Objectives
<i>Fall</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	C/3-4	Guided Reading	Explicit: corn, frost, grass, leaves, moon, pumpkins color words: orange, yellow, red, brown, white Implicit: scarecrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce fall • Review color words: orange, yellow, red • Build up background re: seasonal change and how apples, leaves and pumpkins change color
<i>Clifford The Big Red Dog; The Big Leaf Pile</i> Adapted by Josephine Page	I/16	Read- aloud	leaf/leaves, pile, wind, together, friends color words: orange, yellow, red, brown, gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build background knowledge re: changing leaves and fall activities, e.g. jumping in a leaf pile • Review color words
<i>The Four Seasons</i>	E/8	Guided Reading	colder, fall, seasons, longer, shorter, snow, wind winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain weather, daylight, and temperature changes for each season • Describe fun seasonal activities e.g. carving a pumpkin and building a snowman • Helps students make text-to-text and text-to-self connections
* <i>Why Do Leaves Change Color?</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	G/12	Guided Reading	change, different, color, fall, food, leaves, trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborate on seasonal change in daylight and temperature • Introduce science content re: how plants make food • Cause and Effect text structure • Review color words

* = target text which, students ability to read text independently and comprehend it are assessed

Appendix K: Apple Related Texts

Text	Reading level DRA/ Fountas & Pinnell	Method of reading	Key Vocabulary	Themes/Concepts Objectives
<i>Apple Tree Life Cycle Animation</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chNwmpqSa78	Preschool	Silent video	Oral vocabulary generated by students to match animation of the apple life cycle	Assess students' prior word and concept knowledge Introduce life cycle
<i>Life Cycle of an Apple (video)</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40k9rXrnPSc	Preschool + up	Video Mostly wordless, sequenced images	apple, life cycle, seeds, sprout, tree, fruit	Add specific terminology to apple life cycle For students to view key terms written on the screen
<i>Caillou Goes Apple Picking</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VRPuigitLI	Kindergarten/ Grade 1	Video	orchard, leaves	How apples and leaves change color, learn about varieties of apples, how to pick a good apple, link to our apple tasting (characters also vote for favorite apple)
<i>Let's Visit an Apple Orchard</i> by Melissa G. Daly	K-2	Read-aloud	Fall, school, orchard, ripe	Apples grow on a tree, on a farm or orchard
<i>Life Cycle of an Apple</i> by PA Apples https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgeclDLSh9I	Gr. 2-6 Estimated	Video	Orchard, bushel, climate, photosynthesis, varieties, harvest, crop, limb, graft, irrigate, compost, blossom, pollination, sepal	Origins of apples Importance of apples to early colonists State production of apples Orchard maintenance: grafting, trimming, fertilizing Significance of bees and pollination
<i>Here We Go Round the Apple Tree</i> http://www.alphabet-soup.net/dir2/applesong.html	K-2	Song	Trees, seeds, sprout, blossom	Describes the life cycle of an apple with hand motions for each stage, Build phonemic recognition of rhyming words
<i>Apples for Everyone</i> by Jill Esbaum	I/16	Read-aloud	Bloom, blossom, petal, juice, Johnny Appleseed	Varieties of apples, how colonists brought seeds
<i>A Day at the Apple Orchard</i>	N/30	Read-aloud,	Pollen, nectar, orchard, ripen, pollination,	Plant requirements, Harvest time, How apples grow, best

By Megan Faulkner & Adam Krawesky		Paraphrased	harvest	way to pick them
<i>How do Apples Grow?</i> by Betsy Maestro	N/30	Read-aloud, Paraphrased	Juicy, bare, bud, pollen, ripe	Parts of a flower, pollination, fertilization, ripening of apple
<i>Apple Life Cycle booklet</i> https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Apple-Life-Cycle-2060647	Estimated Gr.1-2	Guided reading	Pollinate, blossoms, grow, seeds, spring, sapling, bud, reveal	More scientific content about pollination
* <i>My Apple Tree</i> http://www.makinglearningfun.com/themepages/AppleLifeCycleEmergentReader.htm	Estimated Kindergarten-Gr. 1	Guided reading	bare, blossoms, appear	How seasonal change affects the apple tree

Appendix L: Pumpkin Texts

Text	Reading level DRA/ Fountas & Pinnell	Method of reading	Key Vocabulary	Themes/Concepts Objectives
<i>Apples and Pumpkins</i> by Anne Rockwell	I/16	Read-aloud	apples, pumpkins, leaves, orchard, vine, carve, jack-o-lantern	Transition from apples to pumpkins, compare and contrast the two
<i>How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?</i> by Margaret McNamara	K/20 approximate (Gr. 2-3)	Read-aloud	smallest, tallest scoop, messy stem, vine, seeds, pulp stringy, count	Links to students counting pumpkin seeds Build text-to-self-connection Ridges equal rows of seeds
<i>It's Pumpkin Time</i> by Zoe Hall	D/6	Guided Reading	seeds, soil, sprout, roots, patch, vines, jack-o-lantern, blossom	Requirements for pumpkin growth
<i>Seed, Sprout, Pumpkin Pie</i> by Jill Esbaum	I/16	Read-aloud, paraphrase (linguistically complex due to rhyming pattern)	blossoms, sprout, nutrient, pulp, pollen, pollination, squash, gourd	Pumpkin life cycle Pollination Types of squash Pumpkin products and uses Contains many Tier 2 terms (general academic language)
<i>Let's Carve a Pumpkin</i> From <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	E/8 (119 words)	Guided Reading	carve, draw, light, pumpkin, scoop, seed	Steps involved in carving a pumpkin Sequencing events
<i>*From Pumpkin Seed to Jack-o-Lantern</i> from <i>ReadingAtoZ</i>	G/12	Guided Reading	soil, water stem, sprout, vine, buds, bloom, decorate	Life cycle of the pumpkin Pumpkin parts
<i>Too Many Pumpkins</i> by Linda White	K/20	Read aloud	sprout, vine, autumn, harvest	Fun read-aloud Pumpkin products

Appendix M: Thanksgiving Texts

Text	Reading level DRA/ Fountas & Pinnell	Method of reading	Key Vocabulary	Themes/Concepts Objectives
<i>The Story of Thanksgiving</i> by Nancy J. Skarmear	Easy/ (Kindergarten)	Video read-Aloud	Thanksgiving, Pilgrims Native Americans, England, church, ocean, Mayflower squash, feast, turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Thanksgiving • Build background and vocabulary with simple text
<i>This First Thanksgiving Day: A Counting Story</i> by Laura Krauss Melmed	I/16	Read-aloud	Thanksgiving, gather hunt, Squanto, turnip autumn, harvest chore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional detail about Pilgrims' food sources: vegetable gardens, hunting and fishing • Provide description of both Pilgrim and Native American children's daily lives • Build concept knowledge for students to create own Then/Now Venn diagram
<i>The Story of the Pilgrims</i> by Katharine Ross	Unknown Estimated 16+	Read-aloud	Pilgrims, autumn harvest Mayflower Plymouth Celebrate, feast Indians, Squanto Thanksgiving squash, together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply additional detail about the length and conditions of the voyage, challenges of surviving the first winter, interactions with Natives
* <i>The First Thanksgiving: A Mini-Book</i> http://educationtothecore.com/2013/10/thanksgiving-literacy-activity-and/	Estimated grade 2 reading level	Guided reading	Thanksgiving celebrate Pilgrims Indians Plymouth Mayflower survive gather prepare together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the historical origin of Thanksgiving, Pilgrim relations with Natives and traditional foods served

Appendix N: Main Idea & Details Graphic Organizer

Big Idea

→ Getting Ready	Details
→ Time to Get Up	Details
	Details

Appendix O: Vocabulary Quiz – *Getting Ready For School*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. People eat breakfast in the _____.
Ⓐ morning
Ⓑ afternoon
Ⓒ evening</p> <p>2. Paper is made from _____.
Ⓐ animals
Ⓑ rocks
Ⓒ plants</p> <p>3. People do not use a pencil to _____.
Ⓐ write
Ⓑ paint
Ⓒ draw</p> | <p>4. <u>Early</u> is the same as _____.
Ⓐ on time
Ⓑ ahead of time
Ⓒ late</p> <p>5. You would not _____ your friend.
Ⓐ play with
Ⓑ share with
Ⓒ hurt</p> <p>6. A backpack is a kind of _____.
Ⓐ bag
Ⓑ furniture
Ⓒ clothing</p> |
|---|--|

Appendix P: Vocabulary Quiz – *Why Do Leaves Change Color?*

1. I use my _____ to sense color.
 - (a) ears
 - (b) eyes
 - (c) nose

2. _____ is another name for fall.
 - (a) Winter
 - (b) Autumn
 - (c) Spring

3. A tree has one main _____.
 - (a) trunk
 - (b) branch
 - (c) leaf

4. Most leaves are _____.
 - (a) thick and round
 - (b) under the ground
 - (c) flat

5. The opposite of change is _____.
 - (a) sit down
 - (b) stay the same
 - (c) turn into something else

6. All _____ need some kind of food to survive.
 - (a) living things
 - (b) animals
 - (c) plants

Appendix Q: Comprehension Quiz – *Getting Ready For School*

1. Which one would you take to school?
Ⓐ a book
Ⓑ a tent
Ⓒ a bird
2. Why do children go to bed early on Sunday?
Ⓐ They can sleep in the next day.
Ⓑ They won't be tired on the first day of school.
Ⓒ They worked too hard on Sunday.
3. Which is the most popular way to go to school in the neighborhood in the book?
Ⓐ car
Ⓑ walk
Ⓒ bus
4. What is one thing that children do to get ready for school?
Ⓐ meet old friends
Ⓑ get paper, pencils, and backpacks
Ⓒ watch TV on Sunday night
5. Which of the following words is a compound word made up of two smaller words?
Ⓐ Monday
Ⓑ paper
Ⓒ backpack
6. **Extended Response:** Have the student write why the author included the bar graph on page 11, and what the bar graph shows.

Appendix R: Comprehension quiz – *Why do Leaves Change Color?*

1. Why do leaves change colors in the fall?
Ⓐ They collect less sunlight.
Ⓑ They are making more food.
Ⓒ They are growing new leaves.
2. What is the effect of trees receiving less sunlight?
Ⓐ Trees make less food.
Ⓑ Trees drop their leaves.
Ⓒ Trees grow new leaves.
3. What does the picture on page 5 help readers to understand about how a leaf makes food?
Ⓐ It shows how a leaf changes color in the fall.
Ⓑ It shows the amount of food a leaf makes in a year.
Ⓒ It shows how the leaf collects sunlight, water, and air.
4. Why did the author write this book?
Ⓐ to entertain
Ⓑ to inform
Ⓒ to persuade
5. Listen to this sentence: *The leaves **change** color in the fall.* The word **change** means to become _____.
Ⓐ different
Ⓑ green
Ⓒ smarter
6. **Extended Response:** Have the student write (or dictate) two details from the book that are facts and an explanation of how the facts could be proved. Then, have the student write (or dictate) one opinion about trees or leaves, and explain how he or she knows it is an opinion. (Question 6 omitted)

Appendix S: Nonfiction Oral Retell Rubric

Nonfiction Retelling Rubric

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Book Title _____ Level of text _____

Comprehension	Intervention	Instructional	Independent	Advanced	Comments
Key Ideas & Facts	Includes at least 1 idea/fact from text	Includes at least 2-3 ideas/facts from text	Includes most ideas/facts from text	Includes all ideas/facts from text	
Details	Includes at least 1 detail; may include incorrect information	Includes at least 2 details; may include mis-interpretation	Includes some important details	Includes most important details	
Vocabulary Key terms:	Uses general terms or labels; limited understanding of key words/ concepts	Uses some language/ vocabulary from the text; some understanding of key words/ concepts	Uses language from the text; basic understanding of most key words/concepts	Uses important language/ vocabulary from the text; good understanding of key words/concepts	
Level of Prompting	Requires many questions or prompts (5+)	Requires 4 or 5 questions or prompts	Requires 2 or 3 questions or prompts	Requires 1 or no questions or prompts	
Reflection - Making Connections What does this book remind you of?	Unable to make a connection	Makes a <i>very limited</i> connection to another text, world or self	Makes <i>adequate</i> connection to another text, world or self	Makes an <i>insightful, rich</i> connection to another text, world or self	

Appendix T. Life Cycle of An Apple Tree Quiz

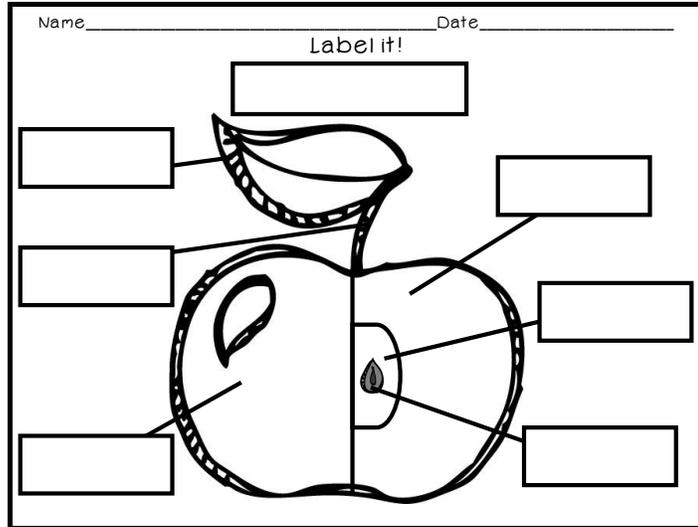
Life Cycle of an Apple Tree - revised

Name _____ Date _____ /12

1. First you plant apple _____ in the soil.
2. Next, the seeds grow. A very small _____ comes out of the soil.
3. The sprout grows into a young tree called a _____.
4. In the spring, you can see small green _____ on the branches. They will open and become the leaves.
5. After that, you can see small pink flowers called _____.
6. _____ carry the pollen from one blossom to a blossom on another tree.
7. When the blossoms fall off, small apples grow. They keep grow bigger and bigger in the _____.
8. At last, when it is _____ time, the apples are _____, which means they are ready to eat.
9. Many apples grow in rows in a place called an _____.
10. Many students in our class like apple juice, but do not like to drink apple _____.
11. When I eat an apple, I do not eat the _____ in the middle that holds all of the seeds.

fall cider ripe sprout
seeds sapling blossoms core
bees orchard buds summer

Appendix U: Label Parts of the Apple Quiz



Appendix V: End of unit test

All About Fall - Test

_____ /25
Name _____ Date _____

1. What season comes after summer?
 - a. August
 - b. winter
 - c. fall
 - d. spring
2. Another word for "fall" is"
 - a. crops
 - b. autumn
 - c. summer
3. How long does fall last?
 - a. 1 month
 - b. 12 months
 - c. about 3 months

4. In the fall, days
 - a. get longer
 - b. get shorter
 - c. stay the same

5. In the fall, the temperature
 - a. gets warmer
 - b. gets hotter
 - c. gets cooler

6. Name 3 things that change color in fall
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

7. When apples are ready to eat, they are
 - a. ripe
 - b. rotten
 - c. bruised

8. Pick the correct order of the apple life cycle
 - a. seed, sapling, adult tree, blossom, fruit
 - b. sapling, seed, sprout, blossom, fruit
 - c. blossom, adult tree, sapling, fruit

9. Parts of a pumpkin include:
 - a. roots
 - b. stem
 - c. stem and seeds
 - d. stem, seed and pulp

10. The stringy, mushy inside part of the pumpkin is called the
 - a. shell
 - b. stem
 - c. pope
 - d. pulp

11. You can find many pumpkins growing at the
 - a. orchard
 - b. patch
 - c. store

12. The flower where the pumpkin or apple grows is called

- a. a rose
- b. a blossom
- c. a weed

13. The stem of the pumpkin is attached to a long, green

- a. tangle
- b. vine
- c. grass

14. Which is the correct order of the pumpkin life cycle?

- a. jack-o-lantern, seed, sprout, pumpkin, blossom
- b. seed, sprout, blossom, green pumpkin, orange pumpkin
- c. sprout, seed, jack-o-lantern, orange pumpkin, green pumpkin

15. A pumpkin is a fruit. True or false?

- a. true
- b. false

16. Name 2 things a seed needs to grow

17. When you cut something carefully into the shape you want, the word is...

- a. scoop
- b. knife
- c. carve

18. Name 2 things you can make from a pumpkin

19. This part of the tree makes food...

- a. stem
- b. branches
- c. leaves

20. To become different, means to ...

- a. stay the same
- b. change
- c. move

21. In the fall, leaves change color because they are

- a. making less food
- b. are dead
- c. making more food