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Western Oregon University

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Cómo Se What:
**The importance of the
reading/writing connection for
English Language Learners in the
middle school language arts
classroom**

By: Danielle Buffington-Tebon

**Honors Undergraduate Thesis
Western Oregon University**

**Advisors: Dr. Cornelia Paraskevas;
Dr. Karie Mize**

Cómo Se What: The importance of the reading/writing connection for English Language Learners in the middle school language arts classroom

Foreword:

If someone had told me four years ago that I would be writing an undergraduate thesis on the reading/writing connection for English Language Learners, I would have laughed and said, “You have the wrong girl.” Four years ago, I did not think I had the proper credentials to teach Language Arts, even though I enjoyed reading and writing, even at a young age. Nor did I believe that I was knowledgeable in any way to teach to students of other languages. Yes, I had taken four years of Spanish in high school, but those classes had taught me how to cheat the system--how to make it seem like I knew what I was writing/reading about, simply by using key phrases from the book or lecture. This cheating is what I believe a lot of our students now—especially our ELLs who are facing high stakes testing like the rest of our students, but with a language and communication challenge as well—are doing in order to perform the way they are supposed to in the classroom.

I knew I wanted to be a teacher since the third grade; however, the teacher I wanted to be was an elementary teacher, one that taught at a nice, suburban school, with very little diversity (a picturesque resemblance of the elementary school that I attended growing up). So how then did I get to this point in my life? Why then am I writing an undergraduate thesis on how connecting reading with writing in the middle school language arts classroom is more beneficial for English Language Learners, than by separating and confining the two subjects to simply themselves?

Why middle school?

Middle school is an age of experiences, of feelings and hormones, of drama, of new friendships, of chances unforeseen, of relationships that both fill the heart as well as break it, and of finding one's own self in the mass of using a locker for the first time, breaking free of the confined classroom, and having a health class that is, for the first time, not segregated by gender. When I entered Western Oregon University as a first-generation, nervous yet extremely excited freshman, I had to make a decision as to what authorization level I wanted as an education major. I knew I did not want the youngest grades—it seemed like babysitting, and lots of hugging. But I also knew I did not think I could handle teaching a classroom of young adults that were only four years younger than me. Therefore, an elementary/middle endorsement (grades 3-9) seemed like the perfect fit. I never thought I would actually teach middle school, nor did I think I would ever want to, but when I was placed in Houck Middle School (Salem, OR) for my three terms of student teaching, I gave it a chance (I had to). What I soon learned was that although the topics of discussion in the halls vastly differed (and were quite more provocative and racial) than my own experiences from middle school, a lot of the same themes, which I previously described, are still very common and present in the middle school environment.

Why Language Arts?

I had originally chosen a health endorsement as my focus area for my degree. Although it sounds very unrealistic in terms of getting a job post-graduation, I knew that middle school students had a lot going on, biologically and in terms of hormones, that

would be useful to be educated in. Although I had thought about focusing in language arts, I never thought I was good enough to actually teach it. I loved reading and writing, but did not do as well as I thought I should have in my English Honors courses in college my first year if I wanted to teach language arts. I also was not one of those individuals that could list ten classic novels off the top of their head and discuss their literary relevance for the twenty-first century, or discuss how the author's use of allusion led to an all-over imagery that is so unique for the time. That just wasn't me. After meeting an amazing professor two terms before I entered the College of Education my junior year at Western Oregon, I began to doubt my choice in health. This professor, a woman who taught Writing 440, a class that focused on teaching k-12 writing through the use of mentor texts, showed me how my own writing talents and love of reading could be beneficial in the classroom. I immediately began to feel excitement about teaching, something that I think I began to lose as I went through my classes, listening to classmates who said things like, "I don't need to spell this right on the board—it's not like I'm an English teacher," I immediately began to brainstorm all the wonderful possibilities of teaching language arts in the middle school classroom. That day, I changed my degree plan from health to language arts—and I haven't looked back since.

Why English Language Learners?

I am white. This is evident just by looking at me, no matter how much I tan (I know I shouldn't) or how much self-tanner I apply. I have always loved Spanish, though. Language learning came easy to me. Though taking Spanish classes in high school, I realized the instant gratification in each gain of using a new verb phrase or correct article.

In college, I knew I wanted to continue my Spanish as a tool I could use in the classroom. I placed in Spanish 203, but decided to take Spanish 202 and 203 my freshman year. Because of scheduling conflicts, I wanted to take more classes but couldn't. I therefore began to look into summer study abroad opportunities to enhance my language experiences. I studied abroad to Rosario, Argentina the summer between my sophomore and junior year of college. I hadn't planned on Argentina, but it fit so perfectly, and sounded so exotic.

As I was preparing my trip and budget, the E.S.O.L. (English Speakers of Other Languages) department at WOU contacted me. Dr. Karie Mize, the director of the department, noticed I had signed up for a Spanish-speaking location, and that I was an education major, and asked me if I was interested in being bilingual. I told her I dreamed of being bilingual, but never thought of it as a possibility, since I had such a long way to go. The E.S.O.L. Bilingual fellows sponsored my entire trip to Rosario, Argentina, where I was immersed in the Spanish language. The following summer, between my junior and senior year at WOU, I again studied abroad, but this time in Morelia, Michoacán (in Mexico). Although I would still not consider myself fluent in the Spanish language, I have used my Spanish in the classroom many times with my English Language Learners, and have fallen in love with the Spanish culture.

Through signing up for the E.S.O.L. endorsement, I have taken six E.S.O.L. classes, which have helped shape me, as an emerging educator, in looking at all the curriculum through a multicultural and linguistic eye. As you will read, I have used an immense amount of theory and strategies from these classes in both my work sample and every day teaching in the classroom. My study abroad experiences have both made me a

more fluent Spanish speaker, and given me the opportunity to see the challenges of learning a second language. I have the ability to empathize with my ELL students, and connect with them in very special ways. This is why I wanted my undergraduate thesis to focus specifically on this often over-looked subgroup--because they are the future demographics of our classrooms.

Preparing to Graduate

So here I am, my senior year at Western Oregon, four months until graduation, writing an undergraduate honors thesis on my experiences as a middle school language arts student teacher, and how connecting reading with writing benefits English Language Learners. You will find that everything I write and suggest as useful in the classroom has a theoretical basis. Theory is so important to the classroom environment, and is very beneficial to know for teaching English Language Learners. The following thesis outlines the theory I used and found beneficial in my own middle school teaching experiences with ELLs, with first defining common terms, discussing who exactly an ELL is, defining literacy and culture and its' impacts on ELLs in and outside of school, and then the reading/writing connecting in middle school. Finally, the thesis outlines common theorists and ELL theories which are then connected to how I used them in my own work sample in the middle school language arts classroom, through the use of different strategies.

Although I never thought I would see myself as I am now, loving middle school, wanting to work specifically with ELLs, and teaching language arts, I am so thankful for

each individual in my life that has shaped who I am now. I hope that through my teaching, I may have even the slightest same effect on one of my students in the future.

Definitions:

Reading/Writing Connection, Literacy, ELLs/LEP, Discourse

Reading/Writing Connection:

Carol Booth Olson (2007) states, “Using writing as a learning tool in reading instruction leads to better reading achievements” (p.14). The reading/writing connection should exist in every language arts classroom, but particularly in a classroom that contains a large number of English Language Learners. However, this is often not the case. Because prior knowledge concerning literacy differs greatly between ELLs and their English-only counterparts, it is important to ensure that literate activities that exist in the classroom, such as reading or writing, are combined with one another in order to enhance comprehension. It is also important to state that reading and writing, when connected, are most beneficial when used for authentic assignments and assessments (Booth-Olson 2007).

Literacy:

Literacy involves four dimensions—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Both National and Oregon State Language Arts Standards recognize these four dimensions as constituting literacy. Lauren Meeks (2003) sees literacy as the following: “A literacy learning environment describes classrooms that focus on the study and practice of literacy in a way that makes learning accessible to students” (p. 17). Meeks and Austin focus on the literacy learning environment—an environment that is rich with

text production, replication, and investigation. Peregoy & Boyle (2008), two well-known E.S.O.L. researchers say, “Individuals possess a reservoir of general language knowledge that is brought into play during any act of listening, speaking, reading, or writing” (p. 395). Although Peregoy and Boyle (2008) were specifically talking about non-native English speakers, I think this holds true for both ELLs and their English-only counterparts. The diversity of experiences and cultural backgrounds that many students, and specifically English Language Learners, bring to the classroom is heightened when listening, speaking, reading and writing are intertwined, such as through activities that allow students to read, think pair share with a partner, and then write reflectively in connection with their own experiences. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on the middle school language arts classroom as one example of a literacy-learning environment with an additional focus in how the middle school language arts classroom assists English Language Learners through being a literacy-learning environment.

Meeks and Austin (2003) also discuss the literacy environment in the context of ‘acquisition’ of language, a term that is widely used when discussing how language is learned. They write, “As students learn literacy skills and strategies, they acquire the linguistic tools they need to become successful users of language” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 18). Acquisition is defined by Stephen Krashen, a well known second-language theorist as “a natural language development process that occurs when the target language is used in meaningful interactions with native speakers, in a manner similar to first language acquisition” (as cited in Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 53). Language development, for both native and second-language speakers, is a topic of high debate. Stephen Krashen, who is known for his Acquisition Hypothesis, discusses learning as a

formal process in which the teacher or the student breaks down knowledge into parts that might be consciously learned” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 2). Many theorists have found reasoning that shows acquisition is how a native learns his/her language, such as an infant who eventually progresses to be able to speak, listen, read, and write in the language; this is in comparison to a second language learner, who is learning how the second or additional language works through formal instruction.

Although many professionals focus specifically on reading when referring to the term —literacy,” it is important to include the other three aspects previously mentioned, since they are intertwined. Many times reading is the main target of a literacy curriculum, with writing accompanied only to display what the writer learned from the reading, rather than using the writing as —a tool for learning,” meaning that students only write a response to a question after reading a text in comparison to looking deeper at the author’s word choice, use of descriptive details, etc to develop their own writing (Booth-Olson, 2007, p. 194). This also may be the case due to low motivation for writing. Booth Olson (2007) states that —as students progress up the grade levels, their enthusiasm for writing diminishes” (Booth-Olson, 2007, p. 195). This is known as the —great divide“ and oftentimes is due to a change in the writing prompts/activities we, as educators, ask of our students (imaginary in elementary school to personal narrative in middle, to the five-paragraph essay in high school). It is important, therefore, to make the literacy-learning environment to incorporate the four dimensions of literacy in a motivating way.

The first step in motivating students to write, since this is often the most challenging concept to effectively change the —affect“ of writing in students, is to motivate them to become personally invested in what they have to say. This can be done

through an activity called freewrites, which is one strategy that will be discussed later in this thesis. Secondly, teachers should build students' knowledge in what experienced writers do, and develop opportunities to write, and show when to engage in the writing process" (Booth Olson, 2007, p. 196). One way to show students what experienced writers do is to write yourself, and to show students your writing (Kittle, 2008, p. 7). It is also motivating for students to see how other authors have begun writing, and/or how they begin their writing ideas. Beginning a writing project is one of the most challenging concepts of writing for students. As Kittle (2008) states, "Organization leads struggling writers to competence" (p. 8). It is important, therefore, to provide students with many opportunities to organize their freewrites and brainstorm. One way to do this is to provide graphic organizers and/or modelings in how to group and organize like thoughts. It is important to note, however, that graphic organizers can feel limiting to some students, especially those that are more advanced in their writing capabilities, since it limits the structure of the writing, and should therefore be chosen at appropriate times with appropriate audiences. Graphic organizers and modeling will both be discussed in further detail later in this thesis.

Another way that we can motivate our students to read and write, especially our middle school ELLS, is through having them reflect and make connections with their own culture, and the strengths and weaknesses they bring from their previous educational experiences. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) state, "We are in a position to acknowledge and build on the strengths, while providing instruction to meet the student's learning needs" (p. 395). It is important that, as teachers of reading and writing, when we focus on connecting these two areas of literacy, we know specifics about *who* are students are and

what they need in order to be successful learners. In a middle school language arts classroom, it is especially beneficial to use the students' personal cultures and experiences as examples and motivation. Kittle (2008) writes, "A writing that soars begins with something to say. It doesn't begin with an assignment" (p.19). Furthermore, Kittle (2008) discusses what often happens in a writing classroom by saying, "We assign topics and students respond by going-through-the-motions writing instead of from-the-heart writing that drives them to write well" (p. 39). One way to assist with from-the-heart writing is to provide some choices for the students on what to write, and to provide a wide variety of examples (through the use of mentor texts) to both connect reading with writing and scaffold the language for English Language Learners. Don Graves writes, "Unlimited choice is no choice at all" (Kittle, 2008, p. 33). Students need to be taught how to make powerful and appropriate writing choices, as well as how to write from the choices that they make.

One way choice can be taught --and that is readily accessible to all students, regardless of readiness levels due to language proficiency--is through providing students effective writing and reading opportunities that are interesting and appropriate to their level of emotional and personal maturity. This allows students to reflect on their own emotions and experiences, as well as their personal and physical cultures, since "emotion is the engine of the intellect; [and therefore,] we write more powerfully, when it is from the center of who we are" (Kittle, 2008, p.39). One writing assignment that can easily lend itself to using mentor texts and connecting reading to writing with an "affective" stance is using heart mapping to brainstorm important affective experiences that can later be transformed into a personal narrative or other genre of writing.

English Language Learners/Limited English Proficiency:

Meeks and Austin (2003) state, “A literacy learning environment encourages students to use whatever language will help them succeed in whatever discourse community they find themselves” (p. 22). Creating a welcoming multilingual learning environment for students of other languages who are learning English, otherwise known as English Language Learners (ELLs) or “students who speak English as a non-native language”, in turn promotes and creates students that are adaptable to the different discourses (formal and informal language learning environments) they experiences throughout life (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 3). Meeks and Austin (2003) describe this discourse theory in detail in the following excerpt:

When students are empowered language users, they are able to switch dialects, genres, discourses, and languages to fit their purpose and audience. In doing so, students understand that rather than turning their backs on their home or primary discourses, they are using rhetorical strategies that will enable them to succeed in the dominant discourse. (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 22)

Using both languages allows students to be more flexible in adjusting to the different discourses and eventually provides a better opportunity for them to succeed. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) state that “Spanish is by far the most prevalent primary language, spoken by 80% of ELLs” in the United States” (p. 3).

Discourse:

James Paul Gee is the theorist to credit for Discourse Matching Theory. Discourse Matching Theory states that the primary discourse is “our first social identity ‘...a person’s initial identity of what and who he or she [is]... [It] originates with culture, family, friends, and language” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.11). Secondary

Discourse, in comparison to primary discourse, is the ~~o~~rganizations (literacy communities) such as churches, political parties, gangs, schools, offices, jobs, professions, clubs, fraternities, athletic teams, cliques, hobby groups, leagues, or in his words, any local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.11).

How do secondary and primary discourses affect ELLs in a middle school language arts classroom? The distance/difference between secondary and primary discourse affects the student’s difficulty in learning. Meeks and Austin (2003) indicate, ~~M~~any students become deeply conflicted when school discourse contradicts their primary discourse” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.13). It is also important to note the following since many of our ELLs, in particular our Mexican ELLs, oftentimes face discourse confliction:

When the discourse of school requires students to make a choice between primary and secondary discourses, or when students think they must leave one discourse to embrace another, students often opt to stay in the primary discourse. (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.14)

Support for our students in both their primary and secondary languages is crucial: we can do this through lowering the affective filter in the classroom environment by embracing a multicultural education, connecting reading with writing, providing authentic assessments in both the primary and secondary language, and be a patient educator with the language learning process.

Allowing both native languages (other than English) and the English language in Oregon classrooms, however, is a widely debated topic, specifically when concerning the teaching of the Native language in conjunction with the teaching of English (Guerrero-Huston, 2008). In November 2008, Oregon voters were asked to decide on an initiative

that “would limit the amount of time English-Language learners can be taught in their native tongue” (Guerrero-Huston, 2008, p.1). The language debate has become very political, especially due to the growing demand of high-stakes testing, specifically on English Language Learners. Kimball, an interviewee of Guerrero-Huston (2008) and an advocate of second language learning said, “I believe all students learn differently, and we need different ways for non-English speaking students to learn English... Focusing on one single way to accomplish that does a disservice to a percentage of students who perhaps cannot learn English by that method” (p. 3). This is why high-stakes testing provides a disservice for our ELLs, because it puts the focus on meeting state objectives in one way versus providing authentic assessments to show accomplishments.

Many English-Only advocates are those that do not support the use of the native language in the learning environment. The current federal mandate, titled No Child Left Behind, requires all states to set proficiency levels for reading and math in order to determine the students’ at grade level performance and for all students to reach proficiency by 2014 (Crawford, 2004). Some taxpayers advocate for English-only education due to the fact that No Child Left Behind sets standards regardless of the level of proficiency or the length of time the student has known English. This mandate provides little room to include native language instruction, due to the high stakes testing that No Child Left Behind encourages.

The next part of this thesis uses my own experiences in connecting arts classroom reading with writing to assist my ELLs in a more successful literacy experience in the middle school language. First, however, I must define culture, and its effects in the classroom.

Culture in the Classroom

—Culture may be defined as the shared beliefs, values, and rule-governed patterns of behavior, including language that define a group and are required for group membership” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 8). Culture plays a very important role in the classroom, and is an important aspect of the individual that creates the classroom; therefore, it should not be ignored. Meeks and Austin (2003) claim that the goal of education is to make students culturally intelligent (p. 22). One way to do this is through integrating the students’ own cultures with the classroom culture. —The discourse of school can be taught explicitly through creating a classroom literacy learning environment in which students become aware of and learn how to negotiate the secondary discourse of school” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.16). Problems specifically occur in the classroom when the school or classroom discourse does not properly align with the students’ personal or cultural discourse. Teachers can prevent this misalignment by being culturally responsive to students’ needs and wants, which can be done through providing culturally-sound texts and assignments. —We create new solutions to the changes we see in our student population—we have to” (Kittle, 2008, p.15). As teachers create these solutions, they should look for the ways in which the students respond to the new discourse and scaffold this process as much as possible by providing affective instruction, whereby students can reflect on their own cultures and feelings, and compare them to that of the school’s.

For those English Language Learners in our classrooms that are particularly from Latino/a origin, and even more specifically from Mexico, the border is one particular aspect of their culture that may provide a misalignment in the discourse of school,

language, and home culture and expectations. Bigelow (2006) states, “The Border Patrol’s world is one of clean lines that divide us from them, legal from illegal, right from wrong” (p. 9).

Although as a teacher of language arts, I do not purposefully teach about the border to my students, a lot of the issues that English Language Learners face concerning legal rights, housing, and their presence at the school or in their particular city, are evident even to them at the middle level age. As one teacher from Portland, Oregon points out in the following excerpt:

...the border between our state, Oregon, and Washington to the north is much more naturally substantial—marked by the enormous Columbia River—than most of the border between Mexico and the United States; that there is no meaningful natural distinction between Tijuana and San Diego. (as cited in Bigelow, 2006, p. 11)

It is evident to students that the border is not only a physical distinction of the separation of where they previously lived to where they currently are, but also is a mental and emotional line that separates who they are told to be, versus who they think they should be.

English Language Learners with opportunities to write about their mixed feelings on the border, or their own migration across the border are oftentimes faced with feelings of confusion, sadness, anger and happiness. Students who may not have personally experienced the border may write of what they hear or have read about those who travel there.

As with any assignment where students write about other people’s lives, especially those from other countries or cultures, the papers contained inaccuracies, even stereotypes. These are not fatal. They offer us a chance to teach to those misunderstandings.... (Bigelow, 2006, p.17)

It is important for teachers, especially those who teach language arts, to allow for students to acknowledge these feelings, point out these inaccuracies or stereotypes, and then investigate how these inaccuracies might have occurred. This type of reflection allows English Language Learners in particular the ability to view many different people's views on the border, immigrants, and documented versus undocumented residency status. Allowing students the ability to read and write about their personal stories/experiences also has many benefits. —Personal stories remind students that beneath every category—immigrant,” migration,” border,” etc.—lies a human reality. But ultimately students need to consider why things happen, not merely examine their side effects...” (Bigelow, 2006, p.18).

After the teacher allows the students to write and read issues about cultural discourses, students need to be motivated to confront these discourses and successfully write about them. The teacher should, according to Kittle (2008), expect everyone to write well, collaborate, study elements of craft, listen and teach how to listen to own writing, and to make writing flexible, without formulas. It is through providing multilingual/cultural mentor texts that students will be able to read and write within and outside of the school discourse, yet still be able to connect to and succeed through a culturally responsive education.

The Literacy Environment

It is important to note that when teachers and students learn they all play important roles in the literacy learning environment, the student, and thus the literacy itself succeeds (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 17). When teachers use students' primary

discourse in the classroom literacy-learning environment, it creates opportunities to succeed for the student, because literacy is around them all the time. Through using the primary discourse in the classroom, students learn how to use/engage in school discourse (Meeks & Austin, 2003). School discourse can also be identified as CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), or the academic language that oftentimes is the most challenging for English Language Learners to learn (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 63).

Literacy, therefore, is important in not only the students' future motivation for reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities in the educational environment but also in establishing the future attitudes towards any discourse that includes literacy.

Reading/Writing Connection

The reading/writing connection is not a new phenomenon. In fact, many professionals have written about creating curriculum that intertwines the two literacy components. One way that is very straightforward in connecting reading with writing is through the use of mentor texts, also known as author/touchstone texts. These texts are ones that the teachers feel have something specific about them that models the writing curriculum they are pursuing to teach their students. As the students take notice of the specific parts/components of the text, the teacher should have the students ask themselves the following: what moves with words, sentences, punctuation and how does this provide a vision for the student as a writer? How can this writing here work with my text as well? (Wood Ray, 2002, p 65). Depending on the curriculum or specific text that the teacher is focusing on, the teacher may also ask the following questions of his/her students: What's the piece about? What is the approach to writing? Is there more than

one form operating? What do you think is the author's intention? How is this piece focused? (Wood-Ray, 2002, p. 94). Asking students to not just think about the content of the text, but rather focus on the author's intention, and the author him/herself as a writer helps the student contextualize how to create a writing piece.

One important aspect of the reading/writing connection is the content in accordance with who students are as individuals, as well as pairing the curriculum to the audience (students) to ensure that the curriculum, including specific texts are emotionally and culturally appropriate for the students. —My students are my curriculum. I want to nurture that uniqueness, not standardize my classroom so that the students become more and more alike, their only aim to pass minimum competency tests” (Rief, 1992, p. 8). The reading/writing connection supports literacy as a whole, as Rief (1992) writes, —Neither can I separate reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They are integrated processes finely woven into a tapestry of literacy” (p. 10). The reading/writing connection provides a whole, meaningful curriculum where the teachers are readers and writers, and the students are asked to —read as writers and write as readers” (Rief, 1992, p. 16).

Middle school in particular is an important age group to establish a reading/writing connected curriculum. Using effective learning-based strategies based on emotions with a reading and writing connected unit allows for a more thorough understanding of the material and a greater chance of being motivated to continue reading and writing. —The students come to the middle school with a much deeper understanding of their own processes as learners. They are readers and writers, and they expect to continue reading and writing” (Rief, 1992, p. 55). Teachers of language arts must model both the reading and writing themselves. —[I see myself] immersing myself in writing and reading and

sharing it with my students. I trust students to read and write in their own voices, to teach me what they know, and to come up with writing that is worthy of the refrigerator” (Rief, 1992, p. 174).

With middle school students, it is extremely important to point out the writing and reading processes, to show the importance of the journey instead of focusing on just the end product. Kittle (2008) writes, —Teaching writing is not as much about what the writer ends up producing as about the process of getting there” (p. 39). Through writing, students, particularly those that are having issues adapting to discourses unlike their own cultural ones, as well as those whom are dealing with many emotional issues, can face their issues head on. —Some students need help...writing may be the safest way they can find to let you know” (Kittle, 2008, p. 42).

One way to help create motivated readers and writers is to make both activities a daily occurrence. Don Murray says —habit makes writing easy” (Kittle, 2008, p. 29). Regular scheduling is an ELL strategy that leads to better academic success. Providing free writes or quick writes, which can be defined as —the daily practice of craft [that] sharpens the writer’s vision and tunes the writer’s voice” has no grade attached, which in turn leads to a more intrinsic motivated activity that lowers the affective filter of the language learner (Kittle, 2008, p. 31).

Theories on English Language Learners

The Affective Filter:

The affective filter, which Stephen Krashen is known for, could also be called “the academic comfort zone”; it is especially important concerning English Language

Learners since, if the ELLs are not comfortable in the academic setting, they will not take chances with the challenging CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) language that needs to be practiced in authentic settings, like school. A low affective filter is the ultimate goal for any classroom with ELLs: since it provides the necessary environment for students to feel confident in taking chances with the academic and social material of schooling. –Helping students find their comfort zone for expressing themselves appropriately in class will pay off in learning, self-esteem, and social relationships” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 12). A low affective filter in English Language Learning provides students with the necessary atmosphere to experiment and try out new possibilities with the language. This is especially important with the four dimensions of literacy that are taught in the middle school language arts classroom. –Another important element of a literacy learning environment is the risk-free atmosphere in which students feel comfortable making mistakes without fear or retribution in the form of a bad grade” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.102). Anyone who has studied or learned a second language can empathize with the importance of reducing students’ affective filters, so that they are comfortable at taking risks with the language. For example, learning Spanish as a second language learner was not only challenging, but scary due to being afraid to make mistakes in front of my peers. These English Language Learners need an environment where they will not feel scared to practice authentic communication.

Because grades are an obvious extrinsic motivation that is a large part of our education system, it is important for students, especially English Language Learners to be immersed in an inviting learning environment free of judgment and free of receiving a

bad grade for trying out new ways with the language. This can be done through providing a participation grade versus a grade based on language proficiency, especially in the beginning. When connecting reading with writing, using authentic assessments, such as providing appropriate projects and activities that are tangible, and in the real world, and pairing these with a respectful and welcoming classroom for the ELLs, this provides a lowered affective filter environment that is conducive to language learning and practice.

Multicultural Education:

Providing a multicultural education that also establishes a low affective environment for students is necessary for a successful reading/writing connected program for English Language Learners' success. Multicultural education is one that provides experiences and attitudes of diverse cultures. It is especially important to include a multicultural curriculum in literacy activities. "Literacy knowledge not only stems from prior schooling but also from experiences with the ways reading and writing are used in the home and community" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 13). A multicultural education can begin from where the student comes from but also needs to include a wide variety of diverse ideas and examples that are all equally accepted and embraced.

If there are a lot of English Language Learners in a specific classroom that have migrated from another country or region in the United States, I might use these experiences of these students for a unit on migration found in literature. Tying in the students' personal experiences and feelings makes the literacy activities more meaningful and more motivating.

It is fairly well known that when a student has developed literacy skills in their first language (L1), they are more likely to develop literacy skills in their second language (L2) at a faster and more successful rate. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) write, —.Students who are older when they immigrate often bring substantial experience and skill in reading and writing in their home language. These experiences and skills provide a good foundation for learning to read and write in English” (p. 14).

A big part in establishing a multicultural education is to be multiculturally responsive as an educator. This includes providing reading and writing material in the students’ native languages, as well as providing the support the students need in their native languages as well. Scheduling charts are an integral part of a consistent school routine that is often overlooked as something that is helpful, both in terms of second language acquisition (if needed for the proficiency level of the student) and for ELLs to know what to expect throughout the day. This helps lower the affective filter of ELLs and helps them build more similarities with their English counterpart. —As they learn English and begin to fit into school routines, they embark on a personal journey toward a new cultural identity” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 3). It is important to note, however, that when students are part of a multicultural education, they do not change into English-only individuals. Support of both the L1 and the L2 helps acknowledge to the student that the teacher supports their home culture and language and wants to help them succeed in both languages.

Bilingual books can be found in a variety of genres and are a great resource in the middle school language arts classroom. If bilingual books are not supported by the school’s literacy curriculum, bilingual poems, texts with code-switching (going back-

and-forth between two or more languages), books with other languages embedded in the text, or books with references to certain cultures also create great connections with the students and are in a variety of languages, Spanish being the most predominant in circulation. Novels such as *Esperanza Rising*, *The House on Mango Street*, or *Red Hawk Sparrow* are all novels that have English editions, yet still give reference to Mexican heritage, which is very common one in my demographic area. It is also common to find picture books that include both English and the foreign language in the text, which adds a different sense of culture to the novel/text as a whole.

Literacy in Primary Language:

Although this was referred to previously, literacy in the L1 (native language) is crucial to knowing how successful the student may be in learning and becoming fluent in the L2 (second language). As a second language learner, I used my knowledge in written English sentence structures to aid in writing sentences in Spanish. (Although not exactly alike, they are very similar). My knowledge of written English helped me with writing Spanish. Cummins, a renowned second-language theorist, states —“Students who read in their home language already know that print bears a systematic relationship to spoken language, that print carries meaning, and that reading and writing can be used for many purposes” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 14). When students are asked to connect reading with writing in authentic ways, the ELLs that have the literacy in their L1 can see the connections of the two languages in these authentic examples, versus teaching an individual reading as a confined subject with no authentic purpose, or writing with no

authentic purpose. The two complement each other and lend themselves to further building on the prior L1 literacy.

Stephen Krashen, another well-known second language theorist, has developed five hypotheses to explain second language learning. The first is his Acquisition-Learning hypothesis. You may have noticed that I never mentioned that an ELL acquires English in the classroom. This is because Krashen notes that acquisition ~~is~~ a natural language development process that occurs when the target language is used in meaningful interactions with native speakers, in a manner similar to first language acquisition” while language learning ~~refers~~ to the formal and conscious study of language forms and functions as explicitly taught in foreign language classrooms” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 53). In the average academic classroom--and in this case, the middle school language arts classroom-- the second language learner learns English, and does not acquire it, just as I learned Spanish and did not acquire it. When I studied abroad, however, I was immersed in the language and culture, and took classes where I formally studied the language, but then was able to apply the language and learn more outside of the classroom as well.

Although acquiring a language is usually a more natural process, learning can be a positive process, especially when the learner’s affective filter is low, when they have literacy experiences in the L1 (native language), and when they are assessed authentically. Meeks and Austin (2003) state that ~~both~~ learning and acquisition are necessary to create a classroom environment in which students gain knowledge that empowers them” (p. 3).

Another of Krashen's hypotheses, also known as the input hypothesis, states that the acquisition of a second language is the direct result of a learner's understanding of the target language in natural communication situations. To make something comprehensible to the ELL, the input language must be comprehensible, which is why scaffolding is such an important aspect of a successful classroom with English Language Learners. One way that an educator can encourage making input comprehensible for ELLs, is to allow free choice reading to interest students. This is a good way for students to learn and a natural way for them to acquire vocabulary and other aspects of the written language (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 54).

One common misconception is when a teacher assumes (s) he does not need to explicitly teach English because his/her students are acquiring the language. Krashen states that learning is —“a formal process in which the teacher or the student breaks down knowledge into parts that might be consciously learned” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 2). To support our students' learning, we, as educators, must —“believe that students need to be explicitly taught what and how to learn” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 2). The *how* part is especially important and often overlooked in the classroom. We can teach students how to learn through performing think alouds, modeling how a proficient reader or writer brainstorms or reads through a challenging text. We can also use mentor texts and mentor memoirs to discuss how authors arrive at published texts, since many students, especially those with lower language proficiencies, often have the misconception that authors are godly individuals that arrive at a finished product the moment they finish writing their first draft.

Motivation is also key to providing a low affective filter and positive learning environment for ELLs. Brian Cambourne, a second-language theorist, told Meeks and Austin (2003) that learners are more likely to ~~u~~engage deeply with demonstrations if they believe that they are capable of ultimately learning or doing whatever is being demonstrated; believe that learning whatever is being demonstrated has some potential value, purpose, and use for them; are free from anxiety...’’ (p. 4). This also supports the prior discussion on authentic assessment, where each assignment and activity that the students are asked to complete are of value and have purpose. Lauren Resnick, who theorizes about principles of learning, notes, ~~st~~students that are treated as if they are intelligent, actually become so’’ (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 2). The teacher’s attitude and demeanor towards the tasks and activities he/she gives the students, therefore, motivates the students.

Techniques:

My Work Sample and the Ways I Integrated all of the Above

Principles

The Anticipatory Sets in a work sample, or any lesson in a middle school language arts classroom, needs to be one that is exciting and provides a hook that is persuasive enough to reel in even the most unmotivated readers and writers. This is especially true because middle school is a time in many adolescents’ lives where there becomes a detachment in interest for reading and writing activities. In addition, the most unmotivated students are those with the lowest levels of English proficiency. This may

be due to the fact that many educators make the mistake to clump English Language Learners who do not have equal proficiency in the English language as their English counterparts into lower-level learners, even though it is their language that is not up to par, not their cognitive abilities.

Free writing:

One way to really incorporate all language abilities and provide an interesting introduction into a language arts lesson is to provide free writing or other reflective writing that lowers the affective filter of ELLs by having uninterrupted, non-graded writing time before orally responding in front of the entire class. Booth-Olson (2007) defines free writing as the act of ~~giv~~[ing] 2 minutes to do expressive writing to respond to questions before asking for a discussion (p. 267). This expressive writing can also be done in the middle of a lesson, or at the end, as a reflective exit-ticket to respond to the objectives of the lesson. I used exit-tickets frequently as a way for students to demonstrate what they learned from the lesson through expressing what stood out to them the most.

Free writing provides students the opportunity to write whatever is on their mind, and for middle school students, especially those who may not be fully proficient in the English Language, the uninterrupted, uninhibited writing time that free writing promotes is inviting and welcomed by many students who are now faced with high-stakes testing for the majority of their schooling careers. Free writing is something that should be incorporated into any lesson, for any subject, but should explicitly exist within the language arts classroom, especially during the middle school age and for ELLs.

Tea Party:

Tea Party is a strategy that Kyleene Beers (2002) discusses in her book, *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. A tea party is a strategy where the teacher copies certain phrases or sentences directly from the text onto note cards. The teacher then hands one note card out to each student. They then will read their note card, discuss their note card with a partner and try to make a prediction as to how the two note cards are connected to the bigger picture of the upcoming text (which they know very little about). Then, the students —mingle” with one another sharing their note cards within a small timeframe. They then practice making predictions, trying to recall all the different details about the text that they received through mingling with their peers. Tea party is a great activity to do with a unit at the beginning, when students are naturally making predictions and their curiosity is heightened. Tea party is where students practice —planning, goal setting, tapping prior knowledge, [and] ask questions/make predictions (Booth-Olson, 2007, p. 8). The tea party provides a preview to what students can expect in the upcoming unit. —Previewing helps students generate a more positive attitude toward reading, that activating prior knowledge influences comprehension” (Booth Olson, 2007, p. 44). Previewing is very important for English Language Learners because it helps set the tone for what they will see.

In my work sample in an eighth grade language arts classroom, I performed a tea party for the unit for *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry. This unit really lent itself to performing a tea party because of the amount of characters, vocabulary, setting, and context that is found within the first couple chapters of *The Giver*. When I decided to do a tea party for the first lesson, I chose to take phrases and sentences from the first two chapters of the

novel only, since any more than that might give away certain contexts that are built off of the prior chapter's happenings. This worked very effectively because the students performed the Tea Party, and then made their predictions using a sentence frame, such as "I predict ____ because _____." Sentence frames are a good tool to use with English Language Learners because they provide an outline for the appropriate use of academic language. This helps transition ELLs from using BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills, also known as "playground talk") to CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency, also known as "school language").

Scaffolding Language:

Scaffolding language is key to any successful lesson plan or unit that involves English Language Learners, and was an aspect of the learning process that I included in my own work sample. Scaffolding can involve many different strategies and tools, but the main goal is to make the process of learning and using language to become more comprehensible in the form of small steps. One way to scaffold language is to perform a discussion before reading and writing. This can be done through a tea party (like previously discussed), but it can also be done in other ways. It is important to note however, that incorporating BICS and then moving into CALP, through reading and writing, is often the most successful, since ELLs are most comfortable with BICS. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) states that "competence in reading and writing, on the other hand, is a much later development and one not universally achieved. Thus, oral language development occurs earlier and more fully than written language development" (p. 118). Many successful ELL friendly lessons and units begin with some sort of classroom

discussion, to get students to begin thinking about the subject material in a conversational way.

Discourse Theory (using discourses as a tool for learning):

Discourse Theory, as previously mentioned, is important to all classrooms, but especially when discussing middle school classrooms with ELLs. It is relevant in our ELL students' classrooms when it comes to scaffolding language, and is important to note in the scaffolding process. This is because, as Meeks and Austin (2003) discuss, students come with the outlook on literacy that their primary discourse holds:

_The language of school is typically explicit, the middle class has a great advantage in school, and the working class has a great disadvantage'...students from working-class backgrounds feel little need to elaborate because their discourse community shares assumptions and a restricted code based on a central authority figure. (p.12)

Oftentimes, English Language Learners have not been "immersed in the discourse of school like their middle-class counterparts" which gives them an unfair disadvantage that they face on top of language challenges (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.14). It is important, therefore, to inform our students that schooling is a learning process, and that we must make mistakes and learn from them in order to be more fluent in the language of schooling.

Modeling:

As Linda Rief (1992) states, "kids need to be given the same opportunities to write terribly as they search for the good writing" (, p. 32). This is true for both the ELLs in the classroom as well. It is also important for them to understand that "... You have to

do a lot of bad writing to get the good writing” (Rief, 1992, p. 46). One way that students will be able to see this is through showing them the process that authors and experienced writers take when tackling a writing project. Many low readers and writers often hold false assumptions about what good readers and writers do to tackle a difficult text or writing.

Using mentor texts in the classroom to provide authentic learning material where students can see the process from an experienced reader or writer is one way to make students aware that struggling is part of the learning process. Mentor texts help scaffold language for ELLs by making the process seem realistic through small steps. They also provide realia into the learning experience.

In my own work sample, I referred to Lois Lowry’s own motivation and life experiences that helped stem *The Giver*, through reading her Newberry Award Acceptance Speech. This scaffolded the concepts of the language for the readers. The students found a lot of connections between the novel and Lowry’s own personal life growing up in Japan. They realized that even fiction, in a society that seems so controlling and unimaginable, can stem from real life events. Using *The Giver*, the students thought about life experiences that they could potentially write off of, and create fiction from. This is one way that mentor texts can be paired with scaffolding a writing assignment, and how connecting reading with writing is successful in scaffolding the language for ELLs.

CD/Reading of Novel (Guided Reading):

One way that I really wanted to get my students involved in the reading process, and not dread each class period due to the fact that the students were already unmotivated to read anything, was to have a CD of the novel be played as the students followed along in the text. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) discuss the importance of read alouds:

Reading aloud is beneficial for students of all ages. When you read aloud to your students, you involve them in the pleasure function of print, you model the reading process, and you develop general knowledge and literary notions about story plots and characters. (p. 180)

The CD (Rifkin, 2001) provided an actor that used voice intonation changes to signal the change from the narrator to a character dialogue, which is especially important for ELLs to hear. The CD also provided students a specific pace to follow along with the novel. To ensure that following along with the text actually occurred, however, I, as the teacher, walked around the room, gazing at page numbers and reader responsiveness.

Following along with a CD can also be known as what Meeks and Austin (2003) state as guided reading. –Guided reading as we define it is a combination of direct and indirect instruction as well as shared reading” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.80). The students were directed to the words by the sound of the speaker’s voice, but were indirectly assisted in the fluency that the text took on as the speaker went through the chapter. It was also considered guided because there were certain instances, like when a specific vocabulary word was used, or when a new character trait was revealed, that I would pause the CD and ask questions or take comments from the students about the reading. This was to also ensure that reading was taking place. Meeks and Austin (2003) state that ~~in~~ order for readers to claim they have read something, they need to be able to retell it in their own words, and it needs to make sense to them” (p.81). This was not,

however, just done through question and answer sessions during and after the text was written, but was also done through formative assessments.

Read Alouds/Think Alouds:

Some days, during the teaching of *The Giver* unit, I did not have the students listen to the novel on CD. Instead, I would have them group read, or I would read to them. When I would read to them, I would perform a strategy known as a “think aloud”, which is a modeling of how an experienced reader works through a difficult text. “The teacher or another expert reader guides the students through the selected text in order to model strategies for making meaning and to show students how to explore features of language” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 84). Some of the examples of think alouds that I would perform include rereading over a section that I did not understand, ask a student for help, take notes (and model these notes on the DOC camera, or make connections/predictions).

Students that are considered to be struggling readers oftentimes are not educated as to what good readers and writers do, especially when they themselves are struggling. Booth-Olson (2004) states that good readers and writers go back and revisit and/or reread, question, and may exaggerate. They do these to generate new ideas, clarify, and refine their thinking (p. 20).

One way that teachers can promote questioning and other strategies that good readers and writers do for the struggling readers in the classroom, is by performing read alouds, think alouds, and modeling to our students. In my work sample, the students

were observing how I did these things before I asked them to try one of them for that day's lesson.

Word Wall:

Another strategy that I used in my work sample was creating a word wall. This is a great strategy to use with English Language Learners because it incorporates CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency--the academic, school language) through looking at specific vocabulary in the reading/writing that is being looked at currently, and it involves different multiple intelligences for your students. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) define a word wall as a "word wall dictionary on which you post words for students to learn and review...Next to each word, you may post a short definition, or picture to convey meaning" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 214). Meeks and Austin (2003), also discuss word walls through a similar definition, however, they refer to it as wall text, and includes a more inclusive array of text that bears significance to the reading/writing:

Wall text is any writing that bears a direct relationship to the current topic of study, is written by the students, and is displayed in the classroom. Wall text introduces, clarifies, reviews, or summarizes the topic of study, and it can be written as notes, outlines, illustrations, or pictures. (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 64)

In my work sample, I had students choose their own vocabulary words that they did not know the meaning of before reading this text. Most of the words that the students chose were contextual (words specific to this text), but some were words that are oftentimes found in academic language, specifically using CALP (academic, school language) as a foundation. I had the students choose their word, include a pictorial illustration or symbol of the word in its context in the novel, and take a quote from the novel that used

that word (with the page number). Then, I had them write the definition of the word also on their word wall poster; this was so that it was evident the students had interpreted the word in the text correctly, using contextual and morphological clues for assistance.

Word walls, however, can all look very different. Some are teacher created, and used as a review for the students, and others are fully student-led. One thing is for sure, however; “Students use wall text to explore; share information; study characters and their relationships, ideas, and themes; or learn more mundane yet necessary information such as definitions of vocabulary words” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 65-67).

It is also important to note that Tom Romano, an English language theorist, told Meeks and Austin (2003) that wall text does the following:

[It] points out that students, through repeated demonstrations and immersion in text, absorb text features unconsciously. Students who create wall text and then use it as a study aid also seem more likely to see the value of taking notes, outlining, or drawing maps to help them make sense of something they have read” (p.69).

I observed this study aid use of the wall text firsthand during my post assessment administration for my work sample. Some of the words that were part of the word wall included ‘_apprehensive’, ‘_demeanor’, ‘_chastisement’, ‘_dwelling’, and ‘_transgression’. The students had created the word wall, and I had put them up on the back wall of our classroom. For the post-assessment, I had taken down the word wall. During the administration of the test, when students saw the words that we had used in the word wall on the test, they immediately shot their heads up to the spot on the wall where that text had been, and seemed to be trying to visualize the picture, or the definition, which was written on the piece of paper that was recently posted there. It was surprising how many students do this, and how many, after grading the assessments, got the answers correct.

There is no, of course, factual indication that they indeed did remember through visualizing the word wall, but from my personal observations, it seemed like the word wall did help with remembering the definitions.

KWL Charts:

K-W-L charts, which stand for what I ~~know~~” what I ~~want~~” to know, and what I ~~learned~~”, are charts that can be used as anticipatory guides, summative assessments, and reflective reviews before the final exam. They gauge how much the student knows prior to the material being taught; it questions what they want to know after reading or getting a small snapshot for what is to come; and it has them reflect back on what they learned at the end. K-W-L charts allow students to be realistic in their learning by making predictions that some times are not correct. It is important for the students to write these predictions down, and then to revisit them and put the correct, factual information in the ~~learned~~” category. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) says that ~~K-W-L~~ is such a strategy...The K-W-L strategy helps students become responsible for their learning, assists them with becoming active learners, and provides them with a strategy they many use independently with practice” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 376).

In my work sample, I had a K-W-L chart for each class period. This was especially important for middle school because it allowed students to take ownership in their progress of learning. I had students do a K-W-L chart after the Tea Party, and then again after the reading of the first two chapters of *The Giver*. This was a great time to do the K-W-L chart because students had made their predictions after performing the Tea Party, and had a slight idea of what the novel was going to be about. They then got to see

if their immediate predictions were correct, slightly correct, or not correct at all after reading the first two chapters. They then could correct their misconceptions about the novel on their K-W-L charts before moving onto the third chapter in the novel.

Compare/Contrast Charts:

Compare and Contrast charts are especially important to incorporate in an ELL-majority classroom, and is a great addition to a middle school classroom. With high-stakes testing currently focusing on non-fiction, expository texts and chart reading, it is important for students to see authentic ways to use these to help with reading and writing. I incorporated compare/contrast charts when comparing Jonas's society in *The Giver*, to our own society. This was important to do since students who have not read the novel prior to the class discussion usually are awed by how controlling and systematic the society is compared to our own. Booth-Olson (2007) states that using pre-writing/planning activities as resources helps students connect reading through writing by providing a writing state (p. 46). Using these charts also provides an opportunity to use the English Language Proficiency function, compare and contrast, and to provide sentence frames where students use language like, _____ is like _____, but not like _____.

ABC Chart/Group Work:

An ABC chart is an E.S.O.L. friendly strategy that helps students, especially those with a lesser proficiency in English, to organize important information in a sequential form. ABC Charts are easily paired with cooperative grouping. Each member of the

group could be responsible for a word from each letter, or for a certain number of letters. Meeks and Austin (2003) state that “Collaboration helps students practice verbal and written language in a variety of settings for a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes—a variety of discourses” (p.41). Group work is also “essential in creating a literacy learning environment” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p. 42). Group work, such as ABC Charts, also lends themselves for students to practice the language in authentic environments, and use both BICS and CALP. It also lends itself to reciprocal teaching because the students teach their peers through group activities. Meeks and Austin (2003) state the following concerning group work and its‘ importance in the classroom:

Collaborative groups also foster students‘ social skills by preparing them to work with a variety of people under a variety of different circumstances—social skills that are essential to getting along in the world of work or in families. (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.61)

Collaborative grouping aligns with Discourse Theory in the fact that it allows students to use social skills that come from their primary discourse with the school setting from the secondary discourse. I used collaborative grouping in my work sample unit when the students worked on completing charts, and for their final projects. This allowed them to use their social language skills (BICS) with the academic language (CALP), and practice using the academic language in authentic settings.

Class Discussion:

Middle School students, especially those that are English Language Learners, have a hard time getting motivated and in “class mode”, and would rather, or so it seems, gossip and discuss the latest dating issues or other “relevant” information that they are currently facing. One way to get middle school students interested in the material is

through oral discussion. This is especially important to English Language Learners, whose primary language is Spanish, since these learners tend to be more conversational, and learn through discussion. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) say “oral discussion prior to writing, which obviously requires some oral English abilities, represents one kind of scaffold to literacy” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 246). Oral discussion can also, however, be used in reference to literature, through story discussion. With English Language Learners especially, it is important to continually offer story discussion, once it is introduced. This routine will allow the students to become more comfortable with using CALP in reference to literature. “As story discussion becomes routine, English Learners will become familiar with ways of talking about literature, as will their first language counterparts. The oral discussions thus provide opportunities for comprehensible input” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 292-293). Making information comprehensible for all students raises motivation and interest in the subject material. Through discussion, students can directly be taught the material, and investigate their own personal connections with the material.

Direct Instruction:

Direct instruction, defined by Peregoy and Boyle (2008) as the “explicit teaching of a particular skill or strategy aimed at improving a student’s reading or writing and often includes teacher modeling of the skill or strategy” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 395). Teaching strategies through read alouds and think alouds are examples of direct instruction. Another way that direct instruction is tangible in a middle school classroom, with lots of different leveled learners (such as in a language arts classroom, where there

are different reading and writing levels), is through teaching mini-lessons instead of full class period lessons. Atwell (1998) suggests that teachers, especially language arts teachers, use mini-lessons, since they establish group dynamics, is theory building (because you can discuss theories with your students) and be able to reach two or more readers/writers at a time while providing a frame of reference.

One way that literacy should be incorporated in the classroom, through direct instruction, should be by giving the students many opportunities to read and write, and to make these opportunities as connected, and as authentic as possible. The teacher, through setting up reader's and writer's workshops, allows the students to go through both processes like a professional author or writer. These experiences are important in the middle school classroom, because it allows students the opportunity to understand that the process (brainstorming, drafting) is more important than simply the final product/outcome (i.e. the paper). It also allows the students to find what interests them, also an important aspect of the searching adolescent so often found in middle school.

Rief (1992) writes about her own experiences as a classroom language arts teacher:

I am always trying to get reading in three different ways reading aloud, individual choice, and reading with the students. Writing is similar: writing to the students (as feedback and response), individual writing, and writing with the students (pieces I ask them to try, I try). (p. 61)

Rief's last statement, about trying what you ask of your students, is very important. In my own work sample unit, I wrote when I asked the students to write. I read when I asked the students to read. And I would model for them my expectations, and change or alter the assignment if I found it too challenging, or thought the assignment was unnecessary for the learning process.

Writing Journals:

Writing journals are a great way to incorporate writing with reading in the middle school language arts classroom. For English Language Learners, this is very beneficial because it is an informal response to what was read, what was felt from the reading, or other responsive activities. It is also an organized place to allow students to jot down important information, such as copying the KWL chart, and then responding, possibly in sentence frames to aid with fluency, to what was known, and what the class wanted to know prior before reading. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) defined literature response journals as “personal notebooks in which students write informal comments about the stories that are reading, including their feelings and reactions to characters, setting, plot, and other aspects of the story” (p. 312). These journals can also be used for free writing, which, as already discussed, is a great writing strategy that can be paired with reading to help make concrete connections between texts/ideas. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) comments on the productivity of incorporating free writing into an ELL populated classroom:

Free writing is a strategy developed by Peter Elbow in which writers let their words flow freely onto the page without concern for form, coherence, or correctness...The free writing helps develop writing fluency by allowing writers to concentrate on getting as many words on the page as possible. (p. 254).

I used free writing in my work sample through incorporating it during the anticipatory sets of some of my lessons to reflect on prior knowledge, or to make predictions about a conflict or character dilemma. This allowed my ELLs wait time to sort out their thoughts on paper, before being called upon to share with their group orally. This lowered the affective filter of my ELLs, and I also found that my ELLs, as well as the English-only

students in my class, performed more productive group and classroom discussions because they had been given a couple of minutes to think about what I was asking them, write down their thoughts and feelings, and then share. Their ideas were also more developed, and a lot of the students, I found, went back into the text, and used textual evidence to support their opinions/feelings/predictions.

Free writing is also a great strategy to use in the middle school language arts classroom because it allows the students to write, as was previously mentioned in the strategies section, in response to the reading, without giving students a concrete, fill-in-the-blank response that is mostly teacher generated. A lot of times, especially in middle school, students are not given the opportunities to express themselves and their new and ever-changing feelings in writing (other than through notes passing between class periods). Therefore, this type of writing is also an outlet to these students emotionally.

“I am From” Poems:

In my work sample unit, I had the students use their compare/contrast charts, where they compared Jonas’s society to our own society, and write an “I am from” poem from Jonas’s point of view. Since this poem outline is fairly formulated, I wanted to provide my students with an outline of what the poem looked like. I did this through providing sentence frames and models. “Sentence models help intermediate-level writers move from a few simple sentence structures to more complex structures, building confidence that students need to make the transition from beginning to intermediate phases, and beyond” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 260). Using forms and functions in assisting what sentence frames were expected per each language proficiency level that

was evident in my language arts classroom was also an important aspect of using sentence models and frames. After writing out the sentence frames for the students, I always modeled the frame with one example of my own before letting the students loose. I think this really helps set the students, especially those with limited English proficiency, up for success.

The “I am From” poems and the culminating activity (R.A.F.T.) for the unit, were both teacher prompted, but the R.A.F.T. (Role Audience Format Topic), was student selected, and included authentic pieces of work such as designing a newspaper, writing journal entries from a character’s point of view, and developing a board game on behalf of the novel. It is important to have a good balance between the teacher prompted and student selected, so that the students find ownership in the authentic assessments that they take part in. This is especially important to balance in the middle school language arts classroom because it sets the tone for future literacy endeavors, and future motivation towards literacy activities. ELLs also need these choices, since modeling good decision making, based on academic and language competencies is an important part of the schooling process as a second-language learner (Booth Olson, 2004, p. 203).

Jigsaw reading:

Jigsaw reading is a strategy that is great for differentiation in a lesson and really assists English Language Learners in breaking down the reading as a whole, and scaffolds the text’s form and its language. Jigsaw learning can also be referred to as expert reading groups, since students are separated into reading groups and assigned certain sections of the reading to become “experts” on, and then report back to their original group, which consists of individuals of other expert groups. It is a cooperative

technique where ~~one~~ segment of a learning task is assigned to each group member, who then works to become an ~~expert~~ in that area... [and the] groups become responsible for their own learning and smooth functioning” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 92). This also provides what Vygotsky, a well-known second language theorist, refers to as having the students reach their zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development allows students a specific range of appropriate challenging distance above and beyond their already comfortable range of known material (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 99).

Writing Projects (Culminating Activity): R.A.F.T. (Role Audience Format Topic)

The culminating activity is one of the most important activities of the entire unit. For my culminating activity for *The Giver* unit, I had students choose one of the six options for the R.A.F.T. project. This project could be considered a post-reading activity, since it had students to go back into the text to explore it more analytically’ (Booth-Olson, 2007, p. 44).

The R.A.F.T. project included a form of guided writing through using an outline to write a letter to the author, Lois Lowry. ~~Another~~ variation of a guided writing lesson uses only the form of a text rather than the form and the content” (Meeks & Austin, 2003, p.120). The R.A.F.T. project during my work sample gave the students the option of choosing one out of five possible assignments, including writing a letter to the author, constructing a newspaper from *The Giver*’s society, constructing journal entries from a character’s point of view, inventing a game board for the novel, or creating a book cover with analysis and review of the novel on the back.

All of these assignments were guided writing through providing a checklist of requirements, a rubric of assessment criteria, and a teacher-provided example for modeling. All of these assignments can also be considered authentic assignments, because they can be found in real life. —. We are not teaching five paragraph essays to explain or show understanding of a subject...we want students to demonstrate argument the way it is written in newspapers and magazines” (Kittle, 2008, p.14-15). These authentic assignments are great for ELLs because they provide purpose and modeling that scaffolds the language learning process through examples. A R.A.F.T. is a great way to incorporate purposeful and enjoyable activities in the middle school language arts classroom that is effective in assessing if the student met the objective criteria.

Final Thoughts

Like Kittle (2008) writes, —teach students to read like writers, to study model texts, and to experiment with forms in imitation” it is important to connect writing with reading, and to use authentic materials to model the strategy or process that is being taught (Kittle, 2008, p.12). It is important to connect reading with writing in the middle school language arts classroom for a variety of reasons. One reason is that reading and writing complement each other and lend themselves to a variety of authentic assessment possibilities that lead to an overall effective curriculum. This is because when students read, they are looking at written text. When they are writing, they are producing written text. When reading and writing are connected, the assignments and activities that accompany the literacy is more thorough and a higher cognitively demanding task.

The middle school classroom is the ideal environment to connect reading and writing since motivation and interest in writing and reading tends to be lower. When connecting the two components, students have the ability to respond with an affective stance, a very important aspect of the middle school student's interests/needs. As Louise Rosenblatt (2005) states, "despite all the important differences notes above, speech, writing, and reading share the same basic process—transactions through a text" (p. 6). There also tends to be a more explicit purpose to the assignments when the two components of literacy are connected, which is important for middle school students. They need to see the "why" for the assignment/activity. Finally, combining reading with writing lends itself to providing more realistic, authentic assignments which are important for middle school students to identify the purpose and learning objective, as well as model other authentic texts. Students also have the ability to look at mentor texts and investigate how the author arrived at the completed text, seeing reading and writing as both a process and a finished product, instead of simply the latter.

Connecting reading and writing in the middle school language arts classroom is especially important for a classroom that contains English Language Learners (ELLs). This is because ELLs need authentic assessments in order to see the purpose of the language in authentic settings and use these authentic texts as models for scaffolding the CALP language. Connecting reading with writing lends itself to using cooperative grouping, affective writing in the form of free writing (as one example), provide scaffolding of the language through using sentence frames that align with the forms and functions of the standards. It also allows students to reach their $i + 1$ through challenging students in their zone of proximal development, while also lowering their affective filters

and allowing them to practice the four dimensions of literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) using both BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency).

As a teacher in a middle school language arts classroom with a large number of ELLs, it is important to ensure that the community of learners is provided with a multicultural, culturally responsive curriculum that lends itself to the various cultures both in the classroom and around the world. Teaching students various strategies for their learner's toolboxes provide all students, but especially ELLs, with the resources to succeed in meeting objectives. Such strategies include oral discussion, think pair share, free writing, graphic organizers, charts, jigsaw reading, read alouds, think alouds, teacher modeling, and R.A.F.T. projects.

Through my presence as a student teacher in the middle school language arts classroom, I learned the importance of personally connecting with all of your students, including those from different cultures and language backgrounds, and to use these connections in the learning process. Through teaching *The Giver* unit for my teacher work sample, I received valuable feedback on the importance of pairing reading and writing activities with language scaffolding techniques in order to have the most success with my students in meeting the standards and lesson objectives. Although I never imagined myself in a middle school language arts classroom, I found myself enjoying the experience immensely and reflecting on the importance and success of connecting reading with writing for English Language Learners in the middle school language arts classroom.

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