

OVERVIEW: This study examined the instruction of middle school teachers who worked with Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) and were nominated as “exemplary.” Sixty reading lessons were analyzed for rigor of instruction, range/variation of supports provided, and quantity/quality of students’ oral responses. Findings indicate that interactive supports (i.e., oral feedback, rephrasing in academic language appeared to be more crucial than pre-planned supportive structures (i.e., vocabulary lists, graphic organizers) in helping EBs carry out cognitively challenging tasks. Additionally, teachers who expressed the most confidence in their ability to provide high challenge/high support instruction attributed their success to positive experience in professional development that focused directly on reading instruction for EBs. These teachers also expressed the interest in more resources on how to offer interactive, “in-the-moment” support to EBs.

MOTIVATION

With the arrival of the Common Core Standards, teachers are expected to deliver rigorous instruction to Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) and to provide necessary scaffolds to help these students achieve. Yet, most teachers know little about which supports to provide and how to provide them. **This study examines how teachers nominated as “exemplary” balance the need for rigorous, yet supported instruction (i.e. “high challenge/high support” instruction).** It also describes how teachers are implementing and reflecting on the district’s core English Language Development (ELD) curriculum and standards to MLs. A secondary purpose is to describe how students in these classes demonstrate growth in English Language Arts (ELA) and English Language Proficiency.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study answers the following questions: 1) What do teachers nominated as exemplary ask EBs to do in reading and discussing text, and what is the level of rigor of work required? 2) In what ways do these teachers provide EBs supports for comprehension and conversation about text?, and 3) How do students respond orally to supported instruction, in terms of quantity and quality of talk?

METHODS

Classroom observations and interviews were conducted in the 2014-2015 school year with six middle school English and English Language Development (ELD) teachers across four SFUSD schools serving a high percentage of EBs. Nominated teachers matched at least six of seven characteristics that pertained to teachers’ knowledge and understanding of ELA content and instructional strategies, the view of their teaching held by colleagues, and their teaching credentials, awards, and experience. Ten nominations were received and six teachers were selected: three ELD teachers and three teachers who taught an English core class with an “English Learner-focus.”

Five consecutive or connected lessons were observed in the fall/winter and five in the winter/spring, for a total of 60 reading lessons. Initial interviews were conducted to learn more about the teachers’ classroom contexts, goals for instruction, and thinking about how to best support EBs in their classroom. In each observation cycle, open-ended interviews with teachers were conducted in which short video clips from the lesson were discussed. These interviews provided context to interpret how teachers were using supports in their reading instruction, particularly given their sense of

the demands of the tasks. Finally, to examine students' reading and English language growth over the school year, pre-/post-reading tests were collected. Future analysis will also include students' reading (SRI) and English language development (CELDT) data.

A preliminary analysis of all video recorded lessons provides an overview of each teacher's instruction, including all central activities (i.e. pre-teaching vocabulary, close reading), student grouping structures (i.e., independent work, pair-work) and all supportive structures that the teachers or students used. Evidence of supportive structures included teachers' prompting students to use study guides or complete graphic organizers. The level of rigor for each lesson activity was analyzed for cognitive demand and the complexity of assigned texts. Evidence of instruction aligning to a pre-selected subset of the district's 3 Goals and 8 Talk Moves was recorded for each lesson.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The six teachers varied in the complexity of the texts they assigned students to read, the rigor of the reading tasks they assigned, and the type of questions that they asked. While some teachers appeared to have consistently delivered instruction that was high challenge, other teachers' instruction was more uneven. For instance, one teacher required students to read and respond to complex texts but tended to ask low-level questions that did not require analysis. This suggests that teachers may need more preparation in having **access to a range of ways to challenge EBs in reading** and that professional development could focus on ways to promote higher-order thinking skills required by the new standards.

Teachers' use of supports often depended on the type of reading activity underway. For instance, teachers tended to rely heavily on pre-planned structural supports during pre-reading activities but then used more interactive, "in-the-moment" supports with students during whole-class reading. **Across both reading activities, when teachers relied more on interactive supports than structural supports, students' talk tended to include more higher-order thinking than when teachers primarily used structural supports.** This suggests the value of interactive supports in helping EBs complete cognitively-challenging tasks.

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In interviews, teachers described the difficult task of providing high challenge/high support instruction. In both pre-lesson planning and in-the-moment instructional decision-making, they often **struggled to identify the most pressing linguistic needs within a classroom of diverse learners.** For instance, while teaching a lesson they had to quickly assess which students needed help with vocabulary, complex sentence structure, or oral discussion skills. This was particularly difficult when working with students with a range of English language proficiency skills or in classrooms with both EBs and native-English speakers. After assessing students' needs, the teacher then had to offer supports that still required students to engage in high-level comprehension and discussion of text.

Those teachers who expressed the most confidence in their ability to provide high challenge/high support instruction **attribute their success to positive experience in professional development that focused directly on reading instruction for EBs.**

They also suggested that while they were comfortable using a range of pre-planned supportive structures for instruction, they wanted more professional development on how to offer, interactive support to EBs.

IMPLICATIONS & PLANNED UTILIZATION OF FINDINGS

This study can inform the preparation and ongoing development of teachers in providing rigorous and appropriately-supported reading instruction to EBs. Because “exemplary” teachers were identified to participate, SFUSD could use this study to build teacher leadership by empowering the teacher participants to share findings across the district. Through the identification and naming of key strategies, teachers and coaches are able to more fluently articulate these best practices.