Scaffolding Support for Second Language Learners

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Abstract

This study examined the use of systematic scaffolding techniques and its results intended for literacy acquisition amongst second language learners. This study consisted of the implementation of various scaffolding strategies that resulted in student artifacts, reflections, and observations. Existing research suggests that educators who deliver high quality instruction in the form of scaffolding enhance a second language learner’s ability to acquire a secondary discourse. Findings demonstrate that integrating culturally relevant materials, background knowledge, and relatable content are vital in the process of literacy acquisition. Implications suggest that scaffolded instruction needs to be continuous and relatable in order to be an effective tool for use with second language learners.
The ability to acquire a second language can be an intricate course of action. I state this with conviction given that I was a second language learner. The assortment of experiences throughout my academic career gave me the fundamental skills needed in order to acquire a second language. These experiences consisted of a variety of social and academic circumstances that I was placed in which resulted in the acquisition of English.

The means in which I acquired English was done by the use of a language immersion model in opposition to a model like a dual language program that integrates various scaffolding strategies or the language immersion model that is implemented in some classrooms today.

The language immersion model that I experienced was a model that increases the acquisition of the second language by totally immersing the student in the second language. Since my teacher was not capable of communicating with me given that there was a language barrier, she provided insignificant support that included labels for specific areas of our classroom for identification purposes. Unfortunately, I did not have adequate literacy proficiency in the second language; as a result, the labeling was an ineffective strategy. It is important to note, that I was the only second language learner and I attended a general education classroom where the second language was the object of instruction. In addition to my general education setting, I attended an ESOL (English as a Second Language) class three times per week. The rationale for the ESOL class was to assist in acquiring communicative and academic competence. Given that I experienced a language immersion model that excluded my primary discourse, this created a “sink or swim” circumstance. As a result, I had no other choice but to acquire the second language quickly.

I was able to acquire the second language through the language immersion model that I was exposed to. However, it was a lonely experience because I did not have the language
proficiency to connect with my fellow classmates. In addition to learning a new language, I learned unfamiliar rules from a culture that I could not relate to. Since my teacher was not familiar with my culture, she did not make culturally relevant connections or include culturally relevant materials to aid in my literacy acquisition of the second language.

On the contrary, students who are in a dual language model are exposed to various strategies that develop the proficiency in their primary and secondary languages. Currently, this is the model at the school that I teach in. The language immersion model that is implemented in classrooms today is a model that values the primary language and makes the second language a medium through which a majority of the school’s academic content is taught. In addition, a teacher has the ability to communicate effectively with their second language learners since they are native speakers or have become bilingual speakers.

Although, the dual language model has many supports for our second language learners, based on my personal teaching experience, I find that students are not acquiring the second language at an appropriate and effective pace. Also, there is usually regression of the second language given that students reside in environments that lack literacy events that support the acquisition of the second language.

It is important to note, that there is no such thing as a standard second language learner. Each second language learner enters the classroom with varying literacy abilities in their primary language. Moreover, many lack the foundational skills in their primary language. As a result, it becomes difficult to acquire a second language since they do not have the literacy foundational skills (background knowledge) to build from or they do not have a level of proficiency in their primary language.
Scaffolding Support for Literacy Acquisition of Second Language Learners

Literacy acquisition is dependent on oral language abilities and proficiency (Gee, 2001). The acquisition of academic literacy for second language learners is intrinsically difficult and complex (Gee, 2001). This is because second language learners are further challenged by having limited control over the second language, which represents an important linguistic resource and form of power. Second language learners enter classrooms with varying degrees of oral proficiency and literacy in their first language. If second language learners have limited literacy exposure and literacy achievement in their first language, they on average will struggle to acquire the fundamental skills that are needed to be proficient readers and writers in their second language.

Moreover, these students predominantly come from social groups whose identities (culture, language, religion, et cetera) have been devalued in normative society (Wolfram, 2000). Consequently, second language learners who fail to acquire the dominant discourse experience academic failures, which lead to the inability to access the dominant discourse that represents the right of entry to linguistic power. As a result, oral language and literacy acquisition is a dynamic process and is influenced by individual differences in general language proficiency, English oral proficiency, ones culture, prior learning, and the similarities and differences between the native language and English (Gee, 2001).

Literacy acquisition of the secondary discourse involves incorporating a culture that is unfamiliar to the second language learner. Therefore, literacy acquisition of the secondary discourse, which is considered the dominant discourse (Gee, 2001), requires that the second language learner gain an awareness and understanding of the cultures that utilize the dominant discourse. Once second language learners master the dominant discourse, they also have to
recognize the forms and uses of the dominant discourse, which reflects the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken in (McHatton et al 2007). As a result, literacy acquisition development is effective when its approach and delivery of instruction supports various scaffolding models, thus providing a broad range of socially situated contexts for learning development that supports an environment where second language learners are involved in situations where they collaboratively construct knowledge. This is very important because they are also responsible for acquiring the different variations of language used in the academic setting.

The development of academic language is vital to student success in the classroom, especially since each content area contains an exclusive and demanding technical language (Gee, 2001). It is important to note that second language learners are prepared with “contextualized language” (Gee 1996, 2005). Contextualized language is language that is effectively mastered by forms of speech, facial expressions, gestures, tone, social setting, shared knowledge, background, and culture (Gee 1996, 2005). This form of language is implemented in various capacities at home during “face-to-face communication” with parents, peers, and others (Gee 1996, 2005). Many students, including second language learners receive various opportunities in support of immersion regarding “contextualized language,” however; “decontextualized language” is a discourse predominately practiced in academic settings where such language can be best modeled, supported, and practiced (Gee 1996, 2005).

Second language learner’s ability to handle the rigor of academic language is reduced since “schools fail to create meaningful contexts” (Gee 1996, 2005). Moreover, familiar language that students encounter in other content areas can be used in completely different ways depending on dialogue, the situation, or context. This acquisition of the dominant discourse
becomes abstract and unfamiliar to the second language learner. Therefore, students learning academic subject matter in a discourse of unfamiliarity, face a number of challenges. It is vital that students are exposed to a model of scaffolding that emphasizes the interactive social nature of learning and the contingent collaborative nature of support and development. Like any other student acquiring a new and unfamiliar concept, second language learners need additional supports and a reliable learning environment to assist them through their development.

Scaffolding is an essential instructional tool since it supports student’s learning and various learning styles. This strategy helps students engage in a collaborative setting where they have the opportunity to teach others as well as learn from others. Second language learners need practice to actively construct knowledge, to make connections, and to build mental schemata (Walqui, 2006). Learning in a socially constructed environment leads to students taking responsibility for their own learning. When it comes to collaborative problem framing and solving situations, students whose learning is helped by scaffolding occurring in socially constructed environments will have an advantage in acquiring the dominant discourse versus students who do not (Walqui, 2006).

Scaffolding is a concept closely related to the idea of Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development captures the child’s cognitive skills that are in the process of maturing and can be accomplished only with the assistance of a more-skilled person. Thus, the Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between what a student can do with or without assistance. Therefore, scaffolding coupled with the Zone of Proximal Development ensures that a second language learner receive support for their development and learning of literacy acquisition (Vygotsky, 1982).
Theoretical Framework

Literacy is difficult to define because it is multifaceted and complex. Many individuals misinterpret the meaning of literacy and its significant functions. Most consider literacy to be a combination of foundational skills that are introduced in the mainstream education setting. Moreover, literacy has multiple components, each of which an individual must progress through in order to be considered literate and communicate effectively in society. These assumptions, held by many researchers and educators, concerning literacy, are accurate, but are only the foundation as to what many literacy researchers believe the whole definition of literacy to be.

It is apparent that conventional teaching techniques do not take into account children's natural tendency to make sense of their world, and to base new learning on what they already know. In addition, they are ineffective or even inhibitive of literacy acquisition (Vygotsky 1982). Therefore, literacy acquisition should be related to authentic functions of language that promote a classroom situation conducive to exploration and discovery of language, coupled with their initial experiences of oral language and discourse. According to Barton and Hamilton, “Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (as cited in Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 10). Literacy is defined as a societal construct. Literacy is constructed through verbal exchanges, social interactions, and a variety of settings. These variables influence oral language and literacy acquisition.

The acquisition of oral language and literacy as a social construct is coupled with the notion of discourse. Gee describes discourse as an “identity kit” (Gee, 2001, p. 526). Discourse
is divvied into subdivisions of primary and secondary discourse. Primary discourse is socialization in the midst of family and “home community” (Gee, 2001, p. 526). Gee (2001) states, “our primary discourse constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity,” and, this is the discourse that is first used “to make sense of the world and interaction with others” (Gee, 2001, p. 526). Secondary discourses involve social institutions beyond the familial component and are institutions in the public sphere.

The definition taken from Gee is from the Sociocultural Theory. This theory notes that literacy is learned through everyday experiences, which are embedded in one’s primary discourse. Therefore being literate is being able to use text for specific purposes within specific communities (Larson & Marsh, 2005). It is within one’s primary discourse one is introduced to language. Moreover, once one is introduced to language, one uses their primary discourse appropriately to interact with others. Therefore, the culture one associates themselves with is the culture one is familiar with; that is why it is imperative that educators familiarize themselves with the Sociocultural Theory and the effects it has on individuals and their acquisition of literacy.

According to the Sociocultural Theory, learning occurs through “participation in social, cultural and historic contexts that are mediated by interaction” (Larson et. al., 2005, p. 105). Therefore, a child’s literacy development is greatly influenced by their culture and it is through a child’s interaction with their community that they learn literacy. Educators need to be aware of these cultural variations and be mindful of the language differences amongst their students. It is imperative that educators “acknowledge, value, and build on the literacy experiences and knowledge that some children bring to the school setting” this in turn will provide each child the necessary support in literacy learning to ensure success for all students (Kucer, 2005, p. 284).
Therefore, according to Larson and Marsh (2005) and their interpretation of the Sociocultural Theory, children should be the key constructors in their learning process. Moreover, learning has to be a community event. The classroom needs to be student-centered and the teacher needs to provide students with multi-dimensional forms of acquisition. As discussed by researchers noted thus far, literacy is best when it is a social event.

Consequently, there are many ranges of discourse patterns and how they tie into norms, family, and social settings. These different patterns of discourse all play a role in acquisition and learning. As Gee (2001) states, “discourses are not mastered by overt instruction (even less so than languages, and hardly anyone ever fluently acquired a second language sitting in a classroom), but by enculturation (“apprenticeship”) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse” (p. 527). In order to acquire oral language and literacy one has to practice the discourse. Unfortunately, quantities of students lack the advantage of a balance amid discourses. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the student is not at a disadvantage because they lack a balance in discourses. Instead, it creates a disadvantage for the student since it places them in a situation of instability because their discourse differs from the secondary discourse that’s representative of the dominant discourse.

Delpit (1992) discusses two aspects of Gee’s notion of discourse that she finds problematic. Delpit’s first concern regarding discourse is that Gee (2001) states that those who are not born into dominant discourses “will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to acquire such a discourse (p. 546). Delpit highlights how discourse (per Gee, 2001) can merely be taught through enculturation and apprenticeship. Contrastingly, Delpit disagrees with Gee’s views of discourse because she feels that Gee’s notion of discourse mimics a hierarchal system
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that does not benefit non-mainstream students, such as second language learners. Delpit also
discusses her disagreements with Gee when he states that if one is born into a particular
discourse they will have a difficult time attempting to assimilate into another discourse,
specifically women and minorities (Delpit, 1992). This idea would suggest that students do not
have the ability to acquire another discourse and are hindered at best. To further support her
stance on Gee’s notion of discourse, Delpit gives an example of a doctoral student who struggled
throughout her academic career however; this student was able to develop into a successful
student by means of support and guidance.

As a result, it is imperative that educators value and incorporate a student’s primary
discourse as well as validate their discourse in the academic setting. Therefore, it is necessary to
value and acknowledge the injustice when it involves discourses and assumptions that are made
concerning discourses and a student’s academic abilities. Moreover, if educator’s value and
acknowledge discourses, they will not fall prey to the notion that some children (particularly
poor or minority students) cannot acquire dominant discourses (Delpit, 1992).

This disparity between discourses concerning non-mainstream students is also coupled
with cultural views and beliefs, by means of preserving one’s primary discourse, which is their
native oral language. Moreover, the predicament is not that non-mainstream student’s lack
exposure to oral language and literacy, rather it is the amount of exposure to literacy, and
consequently how this exposure is appreciated and appraised. This disparity in discourses leads
to their primary discourse being vastly different from the dominant mainstream discourse that
one would be exposed to in secondary discourse settings.

Unfortunately, many children are not exposed to different kinds of literacy, or the literacy
that they are exposed to does not match what they will encounter in an academic setting; as a
result, this insufficient exposure or lack thereof does not prepare the child for the mainstream classroom literacy setting. Being that literacy is learned through everyday experiences, it is appropriate to assume literacy is also acquired in a multitude of ways.

Heath (1982) discusses the amounts of exposure to literacy at home and how this exposure or lack thereof prepares the student for the classroom literacy setting. Heath defines culture by stating “that the culture children learn as they grow up, is in fact, ‘ways of taking’ meaning from the environment around them” (pg 73). Depending on how children are prepared for formal education relies heavily on their environments and exposure to literacy acquisition. Literacy experiences at home can determine a student’s success in school. This depends on the student’s primary discourse and understanding that not all children are exposed to environments at home that focus on literacy. Literacy events are an essential component for preparing children into mainstream educational settings.

Once the child enters the mainstream setting, they are immersed into a discourse without training wheels. These children are expected to “learn” and not “acquire” the dominant discourse of oral language. It is essential for non-mainstream students to be exposed to authentic opportunities that will allow for acquisition of oral language and literacy. According to Heath (1983), children are expected to learn certain language skills at home and bring them into the classroom. These skills include using language to describe and label, recount and retell, follow directions from a variety of sources, sustain and maintain appropriate social interactions, obtain information from non-intimates outside of their immediate social and familial circle, and account for one's own unique experiences. Often, however, second language learners entering schools are neither linguistically nor culturally fluent in these different types of tasks.
Acquisition in opposition to learning is vital for these children. In stressing this statement, we can refer once again to Gee’s research. Gee, (2001) gives an example in his text that states that “reading class” promotes learning and not acquisition. Had it been the latter, educators would expose students to reading; which wouldn’t mean exposing them to a discourse called “reading class.” Therefore, children who are attempting at best to acquire the language learn best in an ordinary setting.

Literacy is mastered through acquisition and not just by merely learning (Larson and Marsh 2005). It requires contact with models that integrate a natural, significant student-centered setting. The way in which one interacts in secondary discourses relies heavily on one’s primary discourse; being that everyone’s primary discourse differs considering every family has different values, beliefs, attitudes, interactional styles (oral and written), and/or uses of language. Being able to control oneself and act appropriately in various discourses is what Gee (2001) defines literacy to be. Therefore, according to Gee, “literacy is always plural” because there are many literacies, hence many secondary discourses. Moreover, Gee defines literacy as “the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary discourse” (Gee, 2001, p. 529).

Most definitions claim literacy is developmental, therefore learned through everyday experiences, primarily through the interaction with others, both in and out of the academic setting. In addition, as noted in the Sociocultural Theory, students need to be active participants in their literacy events with the understanding that children are part of a community of learners who are constantly changing and where the knowledge that they are exposed to is constructed by “larger cultural systems” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 100). It is imperative to include a student’s discourse and to recognize them as valuable resources. Educators cannot isolate a child’s culture from literacy events in their secondary discourses.
Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development

This notion of including a child’s culture into the classroom benefits from Vygotsky’s (1982) Zone of Proximal Development, thus activating prior knowledge. The zone of proximal development is the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance. Educators need to scaffold and design activities that promote learning beyond the child’s development in order to move a child through his or her zone effectively.

As participants in the developmental process of literacy, one must understand that the acquisition of literacy begins with oral language. Learning language is an unconscious behavior that is developed over time, dependent on one’s primary discourse, and used as a communicative tool to create and express meaning in order to act on the world (Kucer, 2005). As long as literacy is “encountered and used in new or novel ways” throughout one’s life, literacy development will continue (Kucer, 2005, p. 250).

Research Question

Being that second language learners are at a disadvantage for acquiring the dominant discourse, it is vital that educators create a learning environment that exposes for second language learners to various forms of language acquisition methods, such as scaffolding strategies. Given that literacy is a social practice and learning occurs during social interaction, this action research project asks, how can one use scaffolding to support second language acquisition of second language learners (ELL) students.
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Review of Literature

Theoretical Perspective

The fundamental core of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the understanding of learning as a process of internalizing social experiences (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000). When considering instruction for second language learners, teachers must consider the zone of proximal development. Especially given that, this will aid in recognizing the students individual learning styles. It also enables the teacher to “define the students immediate needs and the shifting developmental status, which allows for what has already been achieved developmentally, and for what the student will be able to master in the future” (Vysgotsky, 1978).

Literacy acquisition and the delivery of academic instruction require that both be aimed at the zone of proximal development. However, this result can also be achieved when the ZPD is coupled with scaffolding literacy events, since “scaffolding is closely related to the ZPD” (Walqui, 2006). This will ensure that students experience maximum growth in both areas when instruction is carefully constructed to remain in the zone of proximal development (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000). Moreover, scaffolding refers to the detailed circumstances of such work in the zone of proximal development (Walqui, 2006).

Similarly, (Walqui, 2006) states, “education never takes place in a vacuum but is deeply embedded in a sociocultural milieu.” As a result, if educators deliver pedagogy of “rigor” and “hope,” then it would be achievable for second language learners to acquire “disciplinary knowledge” and participate in challenging academic activities (Walqui, 2006). This result can only be achieved if educators effectively support these learners pedagogically to reach their potential (Walqui, 2006). Walqui (2006) discusses how the social nature of learning has
consequences at many various levels. One level (which is significant to the second language learner’s ability to acquire literacy) includes the global level in which a second language learner explores the acceptance or rejection of their primary discourse within a classroom setting. If they perceive their primary discourse as socially unacceptable, this in turn will hinder their academic successes. While literacy acquisition of the dominant discourse is taking place, second language learners need to feel that their culture and language is appreciated and validated during the acquisition of the dominant discourse (Walqui, 2006).

Therefore, when discussing oral language and literacy acquisition coupled with discourse, it is important to further discuss what culture means. Since literacy is seen as a social construct we must take into account “that the culture children learn as they grow up, is in fact, ‘ways of taking’ meaning from the environment around them” (Heath, 1982, p. 73). Depending on how children are prepared for formal education relies heavily on their environments and exposure to literacy acquisition. Literacy experiences at home can determine a child’s success in school. This depends on the child’s primary discourse and understanding that not all children are exposed to environments at home that focus on literacy, or perhaps the literacy focus of home is not the same as that in secondary discourse settings, such as the academic setting. Literacy events are an essential component for preparing children into mainstream educational settings. Educators should be mindful and understand that each community has its own way of incorporating and sharing literacy events. Since children are entering the classroom setting with varying degrees of literacy acquisition, it is imperative that educators differentiate literacy instruction and its components to include a multi-dimensional learning environment that will target a variety of discourses. It is also important to note that not only do non-mainstream students have the obstacles of acquiring oral language and literacy; they have to deal with being
exposed to language variation, and dialects. Consequently, non-mainstream students (such as Latino or African American children) have their own variations in language and dialects. Therefore, we must build acceptance for such differences.

Oral language and literacy acquisition begin with enriched and multidimensional learning environments. These specific learning environments exemplify an advantageous educational atmosphere that promotes language acquisition through a student-centered understanding in opposition to a teacher-directed ambiance. Bernstein in (Larson and Marsh 2005), discusses specific classroom settings that support or do not support oral language and literacy acquisition. Moreover, Bernstein identifies these classrooms by means of encompassing visible and invisible literacy pedagogies. These literacy pedagogies either emphasize student centered learning or give emphasis to traditional modes of instruction. Visible pedagogies are classroom environments where the teacher exhibits and maintains control of the learning and the classroom environment. Whereas, invisible pedagogies encompass implicit control over the student, it exhibits student-centered learning where there is an inclusion of different learning styles (multiple intelligences), and there is authentic acquisition and learning occurring. This is the ideal environment for children who have an imbalance in discourses, such as second language learners. Whereas, an environment that has a visible pedagogy incorporates a traditional approach to teaching and learning literacy. Thus, allowing a diminutive opportunity for teacher and student autonomy. On the contrary, an invisible pedagogy embraces a focus on literacy as a social practice. As a result, literacy acquisition proceeds best when students are encouraged to take risks, experiment, and make mistakes (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000).

According to Larson and Marsh (2005), “literacy knowledge is constructed through tools teachers and students use in everyday life, in and out of school” (p. 102). Therefore, educators
need to demonstrate to students “what people do with literacy in their everyday lives” and to actively use those practices in the classroom (Larson et. al., 2005, p. 103). Scaffolding could consist of activating prior knowledge and utilizing different forms of literacy that students are exposed to on an everyday basis. Being that we live in a “technology-rich environment,” it is critical teachers bring technology into the classroom to assist with literacy acquisition. This enables the students the “ability to decode, encode and make meaning using a range of modes of communication including print, still and moving image, sound and gesture, all mediated by new technologies” (Larson, et. al., 2005, p. 69). Like oral and written language, literacy technology is used as a communicative tool to create and express meaning in cultures throughout the world. As students are exposed to literacy technology in the classroom, they are given the opportunity to engage in roles similar to those relating to written and oral language, such as text designer, text bricoleur, text broker, and text jammer. Through these roles individuals evaluate, design, and analyze various sources that are incorporated in new literacies (Larson et. al., 2005, p 131).

However, if students lack basic fundamental skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, they will have a difficult time analyzing and utilizing information from any text; including new literacies.

Educators need to find inventive and captivating ways to engage our students in the acquisition process. If we as educators incorporate multi-dimensional forms of learning into our classrooms then the focus “is not individual accomplishment but rather than the emergence of a cultural context that supports widespread participation in the production and distribution of media” (Jenkins et. al., 2006, p.6). This type of learning takes the focus off the individual and allows the individual to be limitless. This also exhibits the opportunity for students to exercise autonomy and creativity, two critical components that are lacking in our classrooms today.
Moreover, it also focuses the shift of acquiring literacy on one’s own against a community involvement. This allows every child to express themselves through various forms of multidimensional assessments. It is very important in one’s classroom to build a sense of community through learning. Therefore, this concept of incorporating the media highlights that idea and allows students to express their learning styles in various ways and it permits students to be assessed in many different ways. It also steers clear from traditional conservative modes of teaching and embraces a culture that is often experimental and innovative. It is very valuable to offer a student, a multi-dimensional atmosphere that promotes acquisition in opposition to learning. In addition to multi-dimensional learning opportunities, it is imperative to integrate a model that promotes literacy acquisition. Literacy has to be well balanced, flexible and incorporate a catalog of practices such as the use of spoken language, print, and multimedia as discussed thus far.

Non-mainstream students have an enormous amount of variables that affect their acquisition of oral language and literacy. Therefore, in order to sustain the greatest amount of success, educators must ensure that students are not threatened with the acquisition and learning process. It is imperative as educators to understand that each student learns differently, therefore creating an enriched and diverse learning environment is essential to a student’s fundamental needs. This task becomes even more difficult when teaching students who lack the balance in discourses. These students have diverse backgrounds, and typically struggle to grasp the content.

In addition, teachers may find that they approach the content from very different perspectives. Drawing on student’s background knowledge and experiences can be an effective way to bridge those gaps and to make the content more accessible. Learning environments that
are authentic and multi-dimensional allow the teacher to assess a student’s oral language and literacy acquisition. This is vital when teaching students with gaps in discourses.

**Practice Based Literature**

Given that, there were few practice-based articles, which explored my research question; this section focuses on articles that highlight specific scaffolding strategies for second language learners. It is important to note, that the articles that were found consisted of similar conclusions and implications.

As noted in a study of a Dual Proficiency Program in an urban elementary school, which is located in a heavily populated immigrant section of Southern California, researchers highlighted the importance of obtaining ones culture when assimilating into an unfamiliar discourse. The Dual Proficiency Program embraces and consists of “thoughtful content-based instruction utilizing academic language connections between the students’ two dominant languages (Spanish and English) with explicit recognition of the contributions of additional heritage indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America” (Hayes, Rueda, & Chilton 2009). As a result, the inclusion of second language learners primary discourse “provides the scaffold to academic understanding for participating students” (Hayes, Rueda, & Chilton 2009).

The study of the Dual Proficiency Program takes place in two different classroom settings of second language learners. In the Dual Proficiency classroom, scaffolded instruction incorporated specific literacy acquisition strategies that reinforce scaffolded learning. Scaffolded instruction consisted of various vocabulary strategies that connect to the second language learner’s primary discourse. When students were taught new vocabulary words, or were introduced to them prior to reading, the teacher made sure to connect the word with a Latin root (if applicable), or translate the word into their primary discourse. This allowed the teacher to
make multiple familiar connections for the student. In addition to scaffolded vocabulary instruction, content-based instruction incorporated practicing and developing two languages (Spanish and English) simultaneously. The lessons were also culturally specific to imitate second language learner’s primary discourses, which include language and culture.

Thus, when discussing oral language and literacy acquisition coupled with discourse, it is important to further discuss what culture means. Since literacy is seen as a social construct we must take into account “that the culture children learn as they grow up, is in fact, ‘ways of taking’ meaning from the environment around them” (Heath, 1982, p. 73). Depending on how children are prepared for formal education relies heavily on their environments and exposure to literacy acquisition. Literacy experiences at home can determine a child’s success in school. This depends on the child’s primary discourse and understanding that not all children are exposed to environments at home that focus on literacy, or perhaps the literacy focus of home is not the same as that in secondary discourse settings, such as the academic setting. As noted by Hayes, Rueda, & Chilton 2009, “all children develop language skills before entering school in the contexts in which they live. These are valid, functional and useful skills that should be incorporated into scaffolded instruction. As noted by Hayes, Rueda, & Chilton 2009, these skills can and must be used as scaffolds to reach learning goals in second language learners classrooms. As a result, the Dual Proficiency Program was developed and practiced for the reason that it specifically shares and uses Spanish-English Latin based academic vocabulary to propel student progress.

Referring back to the study, it is important to note that the second language learners included in the research were primarily from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. This was a descriptive and observational study, which consisted of four cohort classrooms. Researchers in
the area of second language acquisition have suggested, “the use of cognates as a scaffold to language acquisition and comprehension is a useful and noted strategy. Teachers in each classroom, deliberately and systematically guided the students to “leverage their knowledge of Spanish to help comprehend English. The results were that these students thrived in this educational setting due to the acceptance of their cultural variations of language, activating prior knowledge (Zone of Proximal Development) and making relevant connections to student’s lives.

Literacy events are an essential component for preparing children into mainstream educational settings. Educators should be mindful and understand that each community has its own way of incorporating and sharing literacy events. Since children are entering the classroom setting with varying degrees of literacy acquisition, it is imperative that educators differentiate literacy instruction and its components to include a multi-dimensional learning environment that will target a variety of discourses. It is also important to note that not only do non-mainstream students have the obstacles of acquiring oral language and literacy; they have to deal with being exposed to language variation, and dialects. Consequently, non-mainstream students (such as Latino or African American children) have their own variations in language and dialects. Therefore, we must build acceptance for such differences.

Similarly, as discussed by Ehri and Roberts 2006; Saracho 1997, “parents can play a key role in fostering positive early learning opportunities that have an important impact on their child’s emergent literacy skill development prior to school entry.” As discussed earlier, scaffolding can also be done at home during literacy events. However, parents typically do not have the literacy knowledge in order to implement scaffolding techniques at home. In addition, second language learners come from homes that do not have the abilities to bridge the gap between their primary and secondary discourses.
To highlight this point, Neumann and Hood (2008) draw attention to a mother who scaffolded literacy events for her child from the time when he was two years of age. At home, the child’s mother immersed her son in literacy events by utilizing an informal approach that was spontaneously elicited by encounters with environmental print (Neumann and Hood 2008). In summary, this scaffolding approach that incorporated environmental print and a multi sensory approach that targets the multiple intelligences supported the child with the acquisition of the dominant discourse and bridged the gap between school literacies and home literacies. On the contrary it is imperative to mention that second language learners typically do not enter school with this knowledge, since their parents have not acquired the dominant discourse and lack the literacy skills needed in order to bridge the gap.

Similarly, Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan 2003, state that scaffolding is supported through a “high student engagement” that includes extensive modeling, a variety of examples and peer collaboration. As noted in the study of nine teachers, three of the nine teachers were considered highly engaging, consequently creating an environment that incorporated a highly engaging and scaffolded environment. These teachers created caring and positive environments that emphasized the academic and affective development of all students (Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan 2003). Furthermore, scaffolding is supported by incorporated aspects such as a positive learning environments, positive classroom management, monitoring and scaffolding, modeling problem solving and strategy use across all content areas, encouraging self regulation, increasing value for tasks and learning, and increasing expectancies for success (Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan 2003).

In contrast, the teachers that lacked engaging strategies did not do well with student performance. The environments that lacked highly engaging settings were classrooms with
traditional teaching methods and students were not informed of daily tasks; this was not a student centered environment. Although there needs to be more research on this topic as noted by the authors, “highly engaging teachers vary their motivational strategies depending on the situation and the student, they generally use similar strategies across contexts” (Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan 2003).

In contrast, students like those in the educationally disadvantaged and at-risk population (second language learners) that participated in the present study may need more or different kinds of support to develop the skills that students in more academically advantaged settings are able to develop merely through engagement and practice. This support would be achieved by scaffolding the learning environment.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that such students cannot develop them, given a suitable context, within a period not that different from the one in which we observe the same skills to develop in their more advantaged peers (Raphael, Pressley, and Mohan 2003).

**Methods**

In order to respond to the research question, research involved qualitative methods, including observation of students in scaffolded learning, observation of teachers in scaffolded instruction, as well as student reflections based from scaffolded lessons that I administered, and document collections from students.

**Context**

Alexander Street High School is currently serving approximately 1,200 students in grades 7 through 12. According to the most recent New York State Report Card Comprehensive Information Report, approximately 93.4% of the student population is of an ethnic or racial minority: 38.3% African American; 53.5% Hispanic; and 1.6% American Indian, Alaskan, Asian
or Pacific Islander. Of the total population, 22.9% of the students are identified as students with special needs and 26.7% are LEP. In grade 7, 60.2% of the students are LEP and in grade 8, 49.6% of the students are LEP. The January 2008 report from the NYS Child Nutrition Management System indicates that the free/reduced lunch rate is 87.4%. Due to low testing scores on state mandated tests, Alexander Street High School is considered at risk and inadequate by New York State and is currently on the Schools Under Registration Review List.

Participants

At present, I am a third year probationary teacher at Alexander Street High School. Alexander Street High School is part of the Rochester City School District and is located on 164 Alexander Street in Rochester, New York. The research was conducted with one group of second language learners coded as English 8 (Ell) students. This class meets on a rotating ABCD schedule at least twice a week for ninety minutes. The class consists of 18 students, 6 girls and 12 boys. Each student is of Puerto Rican descent. It is important to note that there are other Latino students of various descents currently attending Alexander Street High School. The placements of these students were not intentional; alternatively they were random and based on literacy proficiency, and classroom availability. Per their school schedules, they are currently enrolled in the Bilingual Program, and attend English Language Learner (ELL) classes coupled with English as a Second Language (ESOL). Classes are supported with Spanish modifications when needed, however; the delivery of classroom instruction is primarily delivered in English. Two teachers in the classroom implement a co-teaching model. A general education teacher and a special education teacher support students.
Researcher Stance

I have been working in the Rochester City School District for three years as a Bilingual English teacher. My role as an educator in the classroom is to facilitate student-centered learning while providing minimal modifications in the student’s primary language, which is Spanish. Spanish is my primary language and I identify as a Puerto Rican. I am fluent in English both conversationally and academically. I have an undergraduate degree from Nazareth College of Rochester, New York. My certification consist of a quad-certification (General Education 1-5, Special Education 1-5, English concentration 5-9, General Education 5-9, Special Education 5-9, and English 7-12).

I am a product of the Rochester City School District. As a result, my desire was to return to the district as an educator. I was given the opportunity to teach second language learners. Being a second language learner myself, I understand how difficult it can be to acquire a second language. Therefore, I felt confident to deliver instruction to second language learners since my experiences mirrored theirs.

The philosophy that I exercise in class is one that is student-centered and focuses on individual needs and involving students in the process of their learning. Every student has strengths and it is my duty to assist students in identifying these strengths and building upon them. It is important that my students become advocates for themselves and are active participants in their academic careers.

Method

Rationale

Students are currently exploring “challenges” and will address the concept of challenges in society. Students will explore how some challenges are forced upon us by society, and often
the decisions of brave individuals affect others as well as themselves. The activity presented will continue to help them formulate the answer to the essential questions for this unit, which are, who our heroes are and why they are heroic. In addition, the concept of Utopia and Dystopia will be explored in order to emphasize the unit’s rationale. The concepts are from a mandated curriculum that is used by the school district.

**Strategies**

There were many strategies used for the lesson. The strategies are but not limited to, activating prior knowledge, venn diagram, graphic organizers that include sentence starters, marking the text (chunking), teacher models, think-alouds, visualization, small-group work, whole-class instruction, and Jigsaw. These strategies were selected for this lesson because the students are familiar with these strategies and respond well to them. In addition, they offer an opportunity to scaffold the learning for second language learners. The essential questions for the lessons focused on the concept of Utopia versus a Dystopia and a prediction for the upcoming novel *The Giver* (Can I identify the difference between a Utopian and Dystopian society? I wonder if Jonas’s society in *The Giver* looks like a Utopia or a Dystopia). Students will activate prior knowledge by referring to the Book Walk in order to answer the latter. A Book Walk is where students preview the text with the assistance of a teacher. It allows for students to predict, skim and scan, as well as complete a K-W-L graphic organizer (what you know, what you want to know, what you learned). It also helps to assess their background knowledge.

**Anticipatory Set**

Students will be supplied with a set of specific words and pictures that show a relationship with a Utopian society versus a Dystopian Society. They will then use the pictures and words to infer what the lesson is going to consist of.
Lesson

Students will be given various color strips and they will associate the colors with a feeling/mood or an event. As a whole class, we will brainstorm with student’s colors and associations (this will prepare them or guide them for the next activity – finger painting to song lyrics). The focus for the brainstorm is to “see beyond” what is there. This concept of “seeing beyond” is explored in *The Giver* and is associated with Utopian/Dystopian events in this society. Once they have completed the color strip activity, students will choose the appropriate colors to finger-paint while listening to the lyrics of a song that presents elements of Utopia (“What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong). They will repeat this activity to the lyrics of a song that presents elements of Dystopia (“The Unforgiven” by Metallica).

Students will display the finger paintings in the classroom and will brainstorm adjectives that correlate to the pictures. It is important to note, that students will have access to a word wall of adjectives (silent teacher). We will discuss why they chose certain colors and their representations. Also, we will identify specific moments or phrases in the songs that are demonstrated in their paintings.

Application

Students will complete a Venn Diagram using the adjectives or thoughts that they came up with from the previous activity to relate specific Utopian/Dystopian elements to Jonas’s society versus our society.

Small-group and modeling

Students will pair into four groups of four students. They will then use the teacher model and small-group strategy to complete the My Perfect World graphic organizer.
Closure

Once completed, each group will have the opportunity to present their perfect world (Jigsaw). This activity will prepare students for the upcoming Embedded Assessment: Creating their Perfect World. Students will gather for a whole-class discussion concerning the essential questions of the day, which are, can I identify the difference between a Utopian and Dystopian society? In addition, I wonder if Jonas’s society in The Giver looks like a Utopia or a Dystopia.

Individual Assessment

Students will individually answer the essential questions of the day, as well as define in their own words the difference between Utopia and Dystopia. They can utilize the pictures from the first activity in the Anticipatory Set to distinguish the differences between the two concepts.

Data Collection

The data that was collected for the lesson included active observation, artifacts that included finger paintings and worksheets, as well as student and teacher reflections on the lesson.

Credibility

While conducting this lesson, it was important for the students to trust in the integrity of the process via the various aspects of the lesson. As defined in Mills (2007), credibility refers to “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained.” In order to ensure that the research would be credible it was important to consistently observe the class, and it was also helpful to debrief with the special education teacher that was a participant in the classroom environment.

Transferability

As defined in Mills (2007), transferability refers to “the researcher’s belief that everything is context-bound.” As suggested in Mills, it is important to collect detailed
descriptive data and develop detailed descriptions of the context. This was completed by utilizing information from the New York State Education Department and my personal experiences within Alexander Street High School.

**Dependability**

As defined in Mills (2007), dependability is the “stability of the data.” In order to ensure dependability it was important to implement various “overlapping methods” such as, student reflections and interviews. Also, allowing a second party to review the artifacts collected and my analysis of the lesson’s findings allowed for stability of the data to occur.

**Confirmability**

As defined in Mills (2007), confirmability is defined as “the neutrality or objectivity of the data collected.” Mills suggests cross-checking data using a variety of data sources and different methods. This was done by means of data collection, student reflections, and observations. Also, it is important to practice reflexivity. I need to become aware and be forthcoming of any biases that may cause me to formulate or present my findings in a specific manner. For these intended purposes, I intentionally kept a journal of my personal reflections concerning my delivery of instruction and student outcomes.

**Findings and Discussion**

**The Importance of Scaffolded Instruction**

In order to support literacy acquisition amongst second language learners, the classroom environment must integrate culturally relatable materials where concepts can be revisited and extended upon for further relevancy in an assortment of ways. This includes varying degrees of scaffolded support for literacy acquisition amongst second language learners that targets students and their varying degrees of literacy acquisition and abilities.
In my research, it was established that second language learners with varying literacy abilities benefited immensely from instruction that was systematically scaffolded. This conclusion was supported by theory, personal knowledge of what I identify literacy acquisition to be, and an assortment of data collection that included student artifacts, reflections, and a variety of summative and formative assessments which confirmed my findings. My students excelled when their learning environment was consistent and incorporated differentiated instruction that was carefully scaffolded.

Alternatively, on rare occasions when teaching lacked sufficient amounts of scaffolded instruction, students reported an inability to activate prior knowledge by utilizing their background or personal experiences in order to make connections and grasp concepts. These findings were identified using student artifacts, teacher observations and student reflections.

It is important to note, that many second language learners lack the background knowledge in order to participate in a variety of learning opportunities, this results in a disparity amongst discourses (Gee, 2001). It has been my experience as an educator that second language learners do best when learning is scaffolded, thus bridging the gaps amid discourses and are supported through their zone of proximal development.

**Distinguish Learning Tasks and Materials for Second Language Learners**

When teaching second language learners, it is important to distinguish learning tasks and materials. In distinguishing learning tasks, it is vital that the learning task is intentional, as opposed to unsystematic learning; as a result, learning tasks should have predetermined purposes. In addition, from start to finish, the learning tasks need to be systematically organized. In turn, this will assist the student to exhibit organizational skills when moving through their transfer of learning, which includes activating background knowledge, messages and ideas.
received from organized and relevant materials, as well as a multitude of strategies that will aid in their learning experience. It is very important that the intention of learning is formulated before starting any activity by the teacher or students. This is crucial in moving through the zone of proximal development for second language learners. Therefore, in order for learning to be organized it has to be planned in a pattern or sequence that includes a series of models, outlines, guides and examples with explicit or implicit gains.

It is also very important to distinguish materials that are culturally relevant for second language learners that provide support to their learning and build upon student’s personal linguistic and cultural resources. I find that my students learn best when they are encouraged or able to use their primary discourses purposefully during student centered activities that transfer into small group work. Consequently, this allows them to utilize their linguistic resources and construct verbal communication while using the secondary discourse.

When conducting my research for the findings section of this Capstone, I reflected on various components of the lesson. It was important that the activities served as segues that demonstrated and elaborated the concepts of utopia and dystopia. Moreover, these activities gave my students a variety of ways to explore utopia and dystopia throughout the lesson. From the onset of the lesson, students were asked to attach an assortment of colors to an emotion or feeling that would relate to a utopian or dystopian society while referring to a silent teacher, an adjectives word wall. Next, they were asked to complete a set of graphic organizers that included an assortment of pictures that demonstrated utopian or dystopian qualities. Then, they were to use colors that represented elements or characteristics of different songs that presented elements of a utopian or dystopian society. Students completed a close read of “What a Wonderful World,” by Louis Armstrong where they highlighted words or phrases that exhibited
utopian and dystopian qualities. These led into a comparison and contrast using our society and the societies presented in the song.

It is important to note, that I allowed students to suggest lyrics that they were familiar with to highlight the above concepts and check for understanding. Students chose various songs from the popular reggaeton artist, Daddy Yankee. Although, they were able to grasp the concepts by using the songs I had chosen for them, they noted in their reflections that they enjoyed contributing to the lesson. One student stated, “Missy, it was nice when you let us play Daddy Yankee, he has good songs.” Another student stated that she “felt like she was in Puerto Rico again and that it “reminded her of her barrio.” Lastly, in small groups, students were asked to create their own perfect world by using a specific outline that included sentence starters to aid their writing. They were also allowed to search for pictures that represented their perfect world. Many students attached pictures of Puerto Rico like piragua’s, which is flavored ice, coqui’s (frogs that sing), and palm trees. The above activities would in turn assist students with abstract concepts in the book The Giver, by Lois Lowry.

For that reason, curriculum should be organized, involve authentic literacy experiences, and provide textual choices that incorporate meaningful content that is relatable to student’s lives. This is why educators need to be aware of their student’s background knowledge and personal experiences, along with their prior literacy experiences from home and literacy knowledge.

When this is done in my classroom, students formulate connections between new concepts and their own funds of knowledge to develop literacy acquisition. In my classroom, students are encouraged to use their primary discourses when learning or attempting to understand new concepts, or while acquiring the secondary discourse. This helps second
language learners acquire the dominant discourse, thus promoting literacy acquisition. As a result, their work demonstrates a variety of connections. However, in order to achieve these results, I integrate an assortment of texts that are applicable, and depending on the tasks lyrics in their primary discourse, as well as prominent Latino figures that they find relatable. These scaffolding strategies provide critical links between prior knowledge and new knowledge.

On the contrary, if students learning tasks are not distinguished and lack culturally relevant materials, they report difficulty and frustration with new concepts, especially if they are unable to relate to any materials presented. Consequently, they have a very difficult time grasping concepts and retaining information. The result is regression and a feeling of insecurity. Overall, learning needs to be purposeful, organized, and students need to feel like their culture and way of living is incorporated and celebrated in their learning.

**Variety of Verbal and Academic Supports**

When teaching second language learners (or any learner for that matter) the “one size fits all” approach of teaching should not apply. The ability to maximize student learning by creating scaffolded lessons that include multiple intelligences targets any learner including second language learners. Allowing second language learners the ability to choose how they learn best is an inevitable form of security and allows the student to comfortably move through their zone of proximal development. Therefore, integrating opportunities for multiple intelligences expands an educator’s pedagogical catalog to accommodate linguistically and culturally diverse students, such as second language learners.

In reviewing my research, students were given opportunities to explore multiple intelligences throughout a carefully scaffolded lesson. From the onset of the lesson, students were given a mixture of scaffolded supports that incorporated multiple intelligences, such as
graphic organizers and activities. The following multiple intelligences were used to assess student’s abilities in understanding the concepts presented in the lesson. The multiple intelligences included verbal/linguistic (word walls), visual/spatial (use of images that reflect utopian or dystopian characteristics), bodily/kinesthetic (finger painting activity/small group - creating their perfect world), musical/rhythmic (analyzing different lyrics), interpersonal (interpreting lyrics through other perspectives, and intrapersonal intelligence (ability to reflect on my delivery of instruction and their learning or outcome of lesson via a ticket out the door).

In reviewing student work, many students successfully completed the lesson by demonstrating their knowledge of utopia and dystopia. In reviewing student work concerning the color strips activity, students successfully supplied appropriate adjectives, words/phrases or events. If additional support was required, an adjectives word wall (silent teacher) was available for students with limited proficiency in the secondary discourse. Many students used relevant words or phrases to describe colors. For example, when reviewing the responses for the color red many students used the word “anger” or “love.” For the color blue, one student wrote, “the ocean that reminds me of Puerto Rico” or “calm.” For the color green, many students wrote “money” and one student wrote, “That’s when the Missy says she can feel sick like I feel green.” It was evidently clear that along with utilizing the silent teacher, and modeling the activity, students had a grasp on the activity and successfully completed it.

This activity served as a transition for the finger painting activity. Students were asked to use colors that represented their feelings while listening to various lyrics. For the first song, “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong, students used colors such as white, blue, green, pink, and yellow. For the second song, “The Unforgiven” by Metallica, students used colors such as black, brown, red, dark purple, and orange. Once the finger painting activity was done,
students had the opportunity to discuss their representations and their choice of colors along with making connections to utopian or dystopian elements. This activity allowed me to continue to check for understanding and I was able to assess their learning progress.

When reflecting on the finger paintings, one student stated that she used the colors (blue and yellow) for “What a Wonderful World” because “the song made me happy and it was like calm too.” Another student referred specifically to text in the song. He stated, “my colors were nice colors. I picked them because he see trees, rainbows, and blue skies.” Some students stated that when finger painting for “The Unforgiven” by Metallica, they felt “hyped,” “upset,” “scared,” “nervous,” and “angry.” During the class discussion, many students referred to the word unforgiven as “scary.” One student asked, “Missy, eso es como no perdonar? (Missy, is that like not forgiving?)

Once the discussion concluded, students were shown the videos to the songs in order to assess their visual representations. I directed them to pull specific images from the videos in order to show a relationship to the colors they had chosen for their finger paintings. After viewing the video “The Unforgiven” one student stated that the little boy seemed scared and that he was scared for him. The student stated in his reflection, “he was trapped Missy, like a dog Missy.

Based on theory, my research and student artifacts, these various activities demonstrated that students understood the difference between a utopia and dystopia. Moreover, students also made connections to their own society in Puerto Rico and were able to identify utopia and dystopia. These connections proved that they were able to distinguish between utopian and dystopian characteristics. Many students made reference to the ocean, food, and neighborhood
ghettos. In reflecting on the student artifacts, which include student work and reflections, I am confident that my students understood the objectives that I set forth for the lesson.

The ability to activate prior knowledge and scaffold instruction is imperative for second language learners to grasp concepts because it determines what they know and identifies their gaps in discourses. Therefore, it is important to activate what prior knowledge exists and apply it to lessons or explicitly build background knowledge for second language learners. Activating prior knowledge supports second language learners and facilitates the construction of meaning and knowledge.

**Continuity**

Learning has to be organized and uninterrupted. Students have to feel a sense of stability and security; as a result, they feel their needs have been met. My students know that prior to introducing a new concept, I will activate prior knowledge by bridging the gaps in discourses. If I fail to do so, my students will tell me. Together, we have created an environment where my students are active learners and are a vital part of their learning. They have learned to advocate for themselves by developing a voice and expressing their need for development and clarification. Since my instruction follows a systematic routine, they expect various activities that include brainstorming, visualizations, connections and reflections. The most important piece of information I gather from my students are their reflections. They help me reflect on my delivery of instruction and maintain an environment where learning is continuous and connected.

**Implications**

In reflecting upon this process, as well as my pedagogy, I found that my students benefited greatly from scaffolded instruction that targets the multiple intelligences. My students consistently demonstrated the ability to grasp concepts when systematic scaffolded instruction
was integrated into lessons. Along with scaffolding, the delivery of instruction required that it have a concise focus, it was continuous, culturally relevant, and relatable.

As a result, the findings of this study suggest that in order for scaffolding instruction to be effective, educators must deliver meaningful curriculum that reinforces a second language learner’s primary discourse by providing them with a variety of scaffolded strategies that guide them through the zone of proximal development (Walqui, 2006). Since “language and thought are socially constructed” (Vygotsky, 1987) it is necessary for second language learners to have numerous opportunities to experiment with literacy acquisition in meaningful ways.

Prior to delivering instruction, it is imperative that educators evaluate their student’s background knowledge. If there is a gap in discourses and students require the background knowledge considered necessary to move through the zone of proximal development, educators need to bridge these gaps by making the background knowledge accessible by means of including culturally relevant materials, personal experiences, or connections (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000).

Scaffolded instruction should include an assortment of effective instructional strategies. These effective instructional strategies should explicitly link concepts to student’s backgrounds and personal experiences. In addition, when incorporating vocabulary into instruction, vocabulary acquisition needs to be accompanied with visualizations and provide connections. The use of language objectives is also an effective strategy for second language learners since it emphasizes vocabulary acquisition as well. It is important to note that educators need to modify their language while delivering instruction so that it is appropriate for their student’s level of proficiency. It is also important to permit students to make use of their native language for reinforcement purposes, clarification or when attempting to make sense of concepts with their
peers. Consequently, “language learning proceeds best when children use language for meaningful purposes” (Au, 1998). Along with the noted above, instruction should include student-centered activities, which segue into small group work that serves as a reinforcement of literacy acquisition.

Moreover, classroom materials should include an assortment of reading and writing graphic organizers that are concise and include visualizations, pre, during, and after reading and writing activities that allow for teachers to assess the student and check for understanding, sentence starters, and alternative assessments that target the multiple intelligences since second language learners vary in their literacy proficiency (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000).

Creating a student-centered environment in the classroom, along with explicit instruction on specific strategies provide students with supports that will help them become proficient readers and writers. There are many ways that teachers can use scaffolding to support literacy acquisition amongst second language learners.

**Limitations**

In delivering my lesson, various aspects were systematically scaffolded to fit the needs of my students that have varying degrees of literacy proficiency. I understand the effects scaffolding or lack thereof has on second language learners, therefore, I consistently provide opportunities for my students to excel in their learning environments. This resulted in the lessons objectives being met and students demonstrating their abilities via student artifacts, student reflections and teacher observation.

My initial interests when conducting my Capstone research were to find studies that displayed the effects of scaffolding or how the absence or limitations of scaffolding effected literacy acquisition for second language learners. Unfortunately, I had a very difficult time
finding relevant literature that included practice based findings. Therefore, I had to approach the Capstone from a theoretical perspective coupled with limited practice based literature that had similar conclusions and findings. As a result, I had to rely on my students, their personal reflections, and my own personal experiences in the classroom as a second language learner and educator.

**Conclusion**

Similar to theory and research, my study adds support to the notion that systematic scaffolded instruction results in literacy acquisition of a secondary discourse for second language learners. Therefore, it is vital that educators create a learning environment that exposes second language learners to various forms of language acquisition methods, such as effective scaffolding strategies. This learning environment requires the integration of one’s primary literacy skills, background knowledge, and the ability to construct meaning (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2000).

My findings and research have demonstrated that although literacy acquisition is complex and is affected by many interrelated factors, if second language learners receive high quality scaffolded instruction they can acquire literacy and excel in their academic careers. Therefore, educators need to be mindful of the “one size fits all” approach to teaching as suggested in the findings and discussion section.

Second language learners have enormous amounts of variables that affect their acquisition of oral language and literacy as noted throughout the theory presented, research and findings. According to Wells (1995), “language learning proceeds best when children are encouraged to take risks, experiment, and make mistakes” (p. 97) therefore, in order to sustain the greatest amount of success, educators must ensure that students are not threatened with literacy acquisition and progression of learning. Educators need to create a classroom
environment where students feel included in the education process and learning as well as exercise the ability to advocate for themselves.

As noted earlier, this topic was of great interest to me since I was a second language learner. I acquired English by the use of a language immersion model in opposition to a model that integrates various scaffolding strategies that is implemented in classrooms today, similar to mine. As a result, I was immersed in the second language and did not receive scaffolded instruction, however; it is safe to assume that although my instruction was not scaffolded the results were that I acquired a second language via high quality instruction.

When comparing my experience as a second language learner to my students, I was the only second language learner in my classroom. In addition to this, my teacher was not a native speaker of Spanish therefore; she lacked the skills to create an enriching environment that was suitable to my needs and incorporated my primary discourse. Consequently, I acquired the dominant discourse and became highly proficient. However, in order to do this successfully I had to disregard parts of my culture and language. Although, my proficiency in my first language was the vehicle that assisted me in acquiring the dominant discourse, I was not trained to toggle between the two discourses. I also did not have a peer support group, which would give me the linguistic reinforcements I needed in order to avoid regression in my first language. This was in part because my educational experience lacked the incorporation and celebration of my culture and first language.

Even though I lost some proficiency in my first language, I question if a model, which is presented, in classrooms today would have the same results. As an educator, I understand how important it is to incorporate my student’s background and to make meaningful and relevant connections for them.
In reflecting upon this project, I began by attempting to explore which model best supports the acquisition of a second language. Literacy acquisition is extremely complex, however; I must feel confident in saying that if literacy acquisition is “encountered and used in new or novel ways” throughout one’s life, literacy development will continue (Kucer, 2005, p. 250). My initial research question focused on the supports of scaffolding and its results of second language literacy acquisition, however; my research and findings have led me to explore how quality instruction looks like for second language learners and as a result, quality instruction includes systematic scaffolded instruction.
References


