



# Classroom Learning for English Language Learners in Elementary Schools of West Virginia

Mo, Wen Juan Ph.D. student in Educational Theory and Practice doctoral program [wm0018@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:wm0018@mix.wvu.edu)  
West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV



## Abstract

By reviewing literature written about classroom learning for English language learners (ELLs), this research aims to explore the effectiveness and various implications of the summer reading program guided by sociocultural theory at elementary schools in West Virginia. A proposal will be presented detailing the process of this research. An experimental pattern will be used for this research design including a pre-survey, a post-survey, classroom observations, and interviews with instructors, selected ELL students, and their parents. This experimental study is expected to be carried out among 15 students, three to four instructors, five to six volunteer parents, and one school coordinator at an elementary school in Monongalia County, WV. The duration of this research will be about six weeks. This reading program will be using children's literature to engage ELL students to learn English and subjects at the same time while taking into consideration their socio-cultural background. It is anticipated that the ELL students in this program will be able to build their self-identity while improving their language proficiency and subject learning ability. The findings will suggest that educators should acknowledge sociocultural theory and help students to have a sense of belonging in the classroom.

## Research Questions

- How can we design a reading program to engage the ELL students to learn English and subject content at the same time while taking into consideration their socio-cultural background?
- How can the reading program help ELL students to build their identities and sense of belonging in the classroom learning community?

## Positionality

- I worked in elementary schools both in China and the United States for 17 years. Additionally, I learned and then taught English as a second language for more than 30 years. I am familiar with ELL students in elementary schools and have an affinity for their challenges and strengths.
- When I first arrived in the United States, the English language was one of the biggest challenges for me.
- The other difficulty I met was lacking a sense of belonging as I identified myself as an outsider in this country.
- ELL students have unique perspectives and are beneficial for both their home country and the English-speaking country.
- When I was a Chinese guest teacher at Ridgedale Elementary School in Morgantown, WV, I succeeded in immersing students in another culture and broadening their viewpoints.

## Literature Reviews

### The Federal Definition of ELLs

- Age 3-21
- Limited English proficient
- Native language is other than English
- Have difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English

### ELL Program

- It is mainly operated by the standard "English-based pullout models"
- The ELLs are called out of class by English Second language(ESL) instructors during the normal class time
- ESL instruction is about an hour per day, 5 days a week

### ELLs Identification

Table 1 Home Language Survey

Date:	School:
Grade:	Birth date:
Student Name:	

1. What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?
2. What is the language most often spoken by the student?
3. What is the language that the student first acquired?

### Current situation of ELLs

- Most of ELLs are not successful in academic achievement (LeClair et al., 2009; Cardoza & Brown,2011, Sheng et al.,2011).
- They are more likely to drop out of schools (Sheng et al.,2011).
- They have low self-esteem due to their family socioeconomic status (LeClair et al., 2009)
- They have a cultural gulf between home and school (Cardoza & Brown, 2011; Sheng et al., 2009).

### Research about Classroom Learning for ELLs

- Second language acquisition
- Comprehensive input (Krashen,1982)
- Dual-language instruction (Cardoza & Brown, 2011)
- Integrated language-based instruction(Kim,2008)

## Theoretical Framework

### Power theory

- Classroom learning is not equal to everyone, power exists everywhere through repeated discourse surroundings.
- Shah & Leonardo (2016) wrote "learning environments are not neutral spaces. As post-structural theory reveals, learning environments are sites where power is exercised through the deployment and reproduction of discourses" (p.66).
- Language mediates people's thoughts and behaviors. It also acts as an artifact and wields power in various ways (Esmonde & Booker, 2016).
- In the United States, English is the dominant language and has power over other languages. It determines which people are in the authoritative group, which are not. In the classroom, ELL students not only learn the subject content but also comprehend English at the same time (Cardoza & Brown,2011).

Individual cognitive perspective

Sociocultural perspective  
By Lev Vygotsky

### Communities of Practice Theory

- Wenger (2009) points out that "we all belong to communities of practice" and it happens everywhere (p.212).
- We engage with different communities depending on where we are located.
- In sociocultural theory, learning is a process of participation in a specific community. As learners, we participate in activities within the community while learning and being impacted by others.
- The learners aim to become the center members of that community and engage with others. In the classroom, "learning is not only about taking on new knowledge structures, but it is about personal transformation – about becoming" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p.467).

## Methods

### Research design

The summer reading program will be located at an elementary school in Monongalia County. It will be held six hours per day, five days per week, and over the length of six weeks. The study is interested in working with ELL students from Kindergarten to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. The ideal number of ELL students will be around five to eight. Other non-ELL students will be welcome to join this program. This program's group will be no more than 15 students. The reading program will incorporate math, science, English, and developing self-identity by using children's literature.

### Surveys

- Pre-survey and post-survey will be carried out with all the student participants. They aim to assess students' proficiency levels in English, math, science, and their evaluation of self-identity before and after the reading program.

### Observations

- The classroom observation time will be approximately 2 hours per day, 10 hours per week, for a total of 60 hours. Field notes will be taken by the researcher during the observation.

### Interviews

- 30' interviews will be conducted before and after the program with the instructors, selected ELLs, and their parents.

## Analysis

### Plan for Data Analysis

This study will mainly use qualitative approaches for data analysis, which comprise classroom observations, pre-interviews, and post-interviews with the instructors, selected ELL students, and their parents. It will also apply the quantitative approach as a supplement, including a pre-survey and a post-survey. Videography will be used to analyze the classroom observations. Comparisons will be made between the pre-survey and the post-survey among all the student participants. Data will be obtained through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to calculate the statistics.

## Selected Children's Literature



## Discussion

### Expected findings

- ELL students in this program will be able to build their self-identity while improving their language proficiency and subject learning ability.
- ELL students will gain insight into the various communities around them and behave appropriately.
- The reading program will create a valuable booklist for children on developing their self-identity from a sociocultural perspective.

### Suggestions for Further Research & Action

- ELL students' home knowledge should be considered valuable rather than "a deficit and an obstacle to learning"( Bernal,2002,p.112)
- Educators should acknowledge sociocultural theory and help students to have a sense of belonging in the classroom learning community.
- ELL students need support from teachers, peers, and school systems. The teachers should welcome different thoughts and encourage students to share their culture and ideas openly. The peers should respect each other and value their identities. Most importantly, school systems should work out better policies to support ELL students.

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