Teaching reading to middle school English-language learners with learning disabilities in reading: teacher beliefs, experiences, and practices

Abstract
Teachers of English-language learners who struggle to read should be knowledgeable about the processes and manifestation of second language acquisition, the relationship between L1 and L2, and the ways in which culture influences teaching and learning so as to be able to draw on that knowledge in planning effective reading instruction. While recent research suggests that critical features of effective reading instruction for native English-speakers are also effective for EL learners (Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005), additional emphasis on language development is needed (Fitzgerald, 1995; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004) for students learning in their second language. The goals of this investigation were to explore teachers' beliefs about effective reading instruction for middle school English language learners, to uncover teachers' thinking in regards to modifying their reading instruction for EL learners with LD, to chronicle the content and methods implemented by the different participants as either noted in my observations or described by teachers, and to identify the challenges and successes these teachers had experienced.

Given the goals of the investigation, the methods most suitable for approaching and carrying out this endeavor were qualitative in nature. Hypotheses suggested that teachers lacked knowledge about instructional practices that address the language needs of EL learners with LD, and had only a basic awareness of how to scaffold for these students. Teachers did not seek out this knowledge, and the result was minimal differentiation and accommodations for EL learners. Participants engaged in minimal lesson planning, thus missing out on an opportunity to reflect on their students' needs and characteristics, given the nature and scope of their selected curriculum. Teachers' classroom instruction was shaped by the particular reading program in place and influenced by the nature of teachers' preparation program; if the program de-emphasized components such as fluency or vocabulary, there was a corresponding de-emphasis in attention to these skills in teachers' instruction. Teachers conceptually enveloped (Shanahan, 2001) the EL learners in their class with native English-speakers, and appeared ambivalent about their responsibilities for this group of students. Participants demonstrated a one-size-fits-all approach to their instruction, which may be an artifact of their teacher education programs and district initiatives.
Reading out loud to middle level students might seem like an elementary level idea; however, when they read aloud to older students, teachers model the process of reading for ELLs. Calderón (2007) stated, “In secondary schools, teachers read aloud to model reading fluency and comprehension skills—not to read for the students” (p. 52). Further, teachers can provide ELLs with authentic opportunities to practice English and communicate with their peers about literacy by incorporating technology into the reading classroom, such as online discussions, recording oral reading, and blogging (Aguilar, Fu, & Jago, 2007). Teaching reading in middle school: A strategic approach to teaching reading that improves comprehension and thinking. New York, NY: Scholastic.