Cultivating Close Reading in the Primary Grades: Helping ELL Students Tackle Complex Texts

Michelle Stencil

National University

**Abstract**

 This action research cycle proposal is centered around the topic of reading comprehension, specifically the instructional practice of close reading for English Language Learners (ELLs). The main research question this study seeks to evaluate is, “How can the development of close reading strategies, specifically peer annotating and student-initiated questioning, help enhance ELL students’ language acquisition and reading comprehension in kindergarten through second grade?” Specific sub-questions will also be addressed. These sub-questions revolve around how annotation strategies, more commonly found in high school and college settings, can be adapted to the lower elementary grades, what the role of text-dependent questions play in engaging ELL students in higher order thinking, and what the added benefits of peer-to-peer interaction during close reading is on ELLs’ comprehension. Chapter 1 of this research proposal includes an introduction and background to the topic, as well as the purpose and significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study, the exact research questions, and the definitions of key terms that will be used throughout this study. Chapter 2 is the review of literature associated with the topic, and Chapter 3 documents the methodology that would be used in the study. Overall, this proposed action research cycle seeks to address best instructional practices to improve the reading comprehension of ELL students.

**Table of Contents**

Chapter 1 ………………………………………………………………………………pgs. 4-15

Chapter 2 ………………………………………………………………………………pgs. 15-33

Chapter 3 ………………………………………………………………………………pgs. 33-45

Chapter 4 ………………………………………………………………………………pgs. 46-53

References …………………………………………………………………………….pgs. 54-57

**Chapter 1**

 The percentage of public-school students in the United States that are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) has been on a progressively growing trend since the early 2000s. Whereas ELL students comprised 8.1% of the total public-school student population in 2000, by 2015 ELL students made up 9.5% of the total public-school student population and continues to grow (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). As of Fall 2017, over 1,270,000 of these ELL students are enrolled in California public schools, which represents 20.4% of the total student enrollment (cde.ca.gov, 2018). More specifically, of these 1,270,000 ELL students in California public schools, most of them enter into our state’s school system as kindergarteners (Hill, 2012). In fact, over 13%, or 180,000 of California’s ELL students are kindergarteners (Hill, 2012). Seeing that proficiency in English is imperative for these students to prevent the “intergenerational transmission of low educational attainment and socioeconomic status,” and to help prepare them for greater success in higher education and the labor force, National and State policies have been designed to improve their English proficiency and corresponding academic performance (Hill, 2012).

 One such piece of federal legislation aimed at improving the number of students attaining fluency in English and subsequent improved academic performance was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001(Jepsen & Alth, 2005). Title III of the NCLB Act mandates that all ELLs receive quality instruction in both English language and grade-level academic content (Colorin Colorado, 2019). Thus, states were required to craft standards for English Language Proficiency that were connected to the state’s Academic Content Standards (Colorin Colorado, 2019). In addition, all ELLs’ English language proficiency must be tested yearly in order to ensure that schools and districts are held accountable for ELL student growth (Colorin Colorado, 2019). With a heightened focus on creating higher expectations for ELL students, stemming from this legislation, there has been a corresponding focus on maintaining greater accountability of mainstream teachers to provide superior instruction to these students (Colorin Colorado, 2019). Thus, it is essential to study effective teaching practices to meet the learning needs of this student demographic. It is specifically vital to study instruction in the domain of reading to meet ELLs’ specific learning needs, as reading is the precursor for success in all other content areas. While many ELL students learn to read at the same time as their non-ELL classmates, seeing as a large percentage of ELL students begin their educational journey in the U.S in kindergarten, they often need additional assistance to make connections between their native languages and English in order to truly comprehend what they read (Colorin Colorado, 2019). A study on effective reading instructional practices for ELL students in the primary grades (K-2) would not only help to improve the quality of education these teachers can provide, but would also set up ELL students for long-term academic success from their first day of school in the U.S public education system.

**Background**

 Since the 2014 implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), English Language arts has grown increasingly rigorous, aligning with college and career readiness and being internationally benchmarked (Lafond, 2012). Numerous key instructional shifts have since taken place in literacy instruction. For example, each grade level requires a “step” of growth on the text complexity staircase, meaning that complex texts should be read at every grade level and require progressively closer and deeper readings (Lafond, 2012). In addition, student discussions around these complex texts need to be “rich and rigorous” with answers that can be supported with evidence from the text (Lafond, 2012). Lastly, students need to be able to comprehend academic vocabulary in order to access these complex texts (Lafond, 2012). Therefore, the adoption of the CCSS has placed an increased focus on elementary students being able to conduct detailed readings on narrative and informational texts (Santori & Belfatti, 2017).

Current data shows that ELL students consistently fall behind their non-ELL peers in their reading performance of these complex narrative and informational texts (The Condition of Education, 2018). Benefits of close reading on improved reading performance in high school and college have been widely documented and are now garnering increased attention as a viable strategy at the elementary school level (Boyles, 2013). Close reading is an instructional strategy that requires that students critically examine the text, reread the text methodically, ask and answer text-dependent questions, develop persistence and stamina when faced with reading complex texts, annotate the text meaningfully, and read a text with minimal teacher frontloading (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). With the increase in literary rigor now standardized across elementary school classrooms in California, it is essential that ELL students’ needs are addressed when designing reading instruction so that they are on a more leveled playing field when it comes to accessing content and developing their language skills. A study conducted to specifically look at the implementation of close reading instruction performed in the early elementary grades (K-2) with ELL students would demonstrate the value that close reading techniques could contribute towards ELLs’ improved reading comprehension.

**Purpose**

The aim of the proposed qualitative study is to evaluate the impacts of close reading instruction, specifically the close reading strategies of peer-to-peer collaboration, modified annotation practices and critical text-dependent questioning, on ELLs’ reading comprehension of complex texts. This study will specifically follow K-2 ELL students’ reading progress in California public schools, through teacher interviews, classroom observations and data analysis. The ensuing research will be used to advance the instructional reading strategies that mainstream teachers can use to benefit ELLs’ reading comprehension.

**Significance**

 The research on the effects of close reading strategies on reading comprehension of ELL students is significant for three reasons: (1) it investigates how to adapt existing close reading strategies such as annotation, commonly performed in high school and college, to a developmental level appropriate for K-2 students; (2) it provides ELL students with strategies to tackle comprehending the complex texts that are now required by CCSS and that have been proven more difficult for them to comprehend than their non-ELL peers; and (3) it explores effective methods of reading instruction that mainstream teachers can implement during their ELA time to integrate English language development with rigorous reading standards.

 First, majority of close reading studies have been performed on high school and college students; however, the focus of the benefits of this reading instructional practice needs to be shifted to the early elementary grades where students are learning reading practices that predict success throughout their education. Many students learn at a young age that questions asked by the teacher about texts they read have only one right answer which will ultimately be provided by the teacher (Lafond, 2012). However, when students at a young age have opportunities to discover answers themselves by investigating texts closely, their comprehension of concepts is enhanced and they are prepared to continue this discovery process in reading throughout their education (Lafond, 2012).

 Secondly, with the increasingly rigorous texts that students need to be able to comprehend in order to access content across disciplines, ELL students need to be equipped with tools to support their language acquisition and comprehension. Scores on standardized English Language Arts (ELA) tests show that students classified as English Learners score significantly lower than other groups of students (Hill, 2012). However, students who were former English Learners and have reclassified actually score higher on ELA standardized tests than even English Only students (Hill, 2012). This data points to the need for strong support for English Learners in ELA so that their long-term academic performance is strengthened and so that they are prepared for more and more rigor in ELA as they advance in grade level.

 Finally, while many tend to relegate the instruction of ELL students to their ESL teachers, mainstream teachers hold a responsibility of providing supports during integrated ELD instruction and designated ELD instruction, so would benefit from training in effective reading instruction methods they can implement in class. Considering that about 25% of students live in households where a language other than English is spoken, many of the nation’s teachers will encounter a diverse range of students, including those who struggle with English (Samson & Collins, 2012). However, while ESL teachers and bilingual teachers have expertise and skills in meeting the unique needs of ELL students, many general education teachers do not (Samson & Collins, 2012). It is imperative that general education teachers also be equipped with specific knowledge and skills to help ELLs access the curriculum, an area of research that has had little attention thus far (Samson & Collins, 2012). When all teachers are prepared with instructional techniques for language support and cultural sensitivity to the unique needs of their students, like this study hopes to provide, outcomes for ELL students are subsequently improved (Samson & Collins, 2012).

**Research Questions**

**Research Question:**  How can the development of close reading strategies, specifically peer annotating and student-initiated questioning, help enhance ELL students’ language acquisition and reading comprehension in kindergarten through second grade?

**Related Sub-Questions:**

Sub- Q 1: How can annotation strategies, more commonly found in high school and college settings, be adapted to the lower elementary grades in order to enhance ELLs’ reading comprehension?

 Sub- Q 2: What are the added benefits of peer-to-peer interaction during close reading, specifically the annotation process, on ELL students’ comprehension of texts?

**Assumptions**

Due to the topic of interest and chosen research method, there are a few foundational facets that are assumed to be true and serve as the basis for this research. The first assumption is that the ELL student population will continue to grow in United States public schools and that most mainstream teachers will encounter them in their classes. ELLs are the fastest growing student population in the country, growing 60% in the last decade nationwide (Breiseth, 2015). Specifically, in California, ELLs make up almost 1 in 4 of all K-12 students enrolled in a public school (Breiseth, 2015). Because of this rapidly increasing growth of the ELL student population, more and more mainstream teachers will encounter ELL students in their classes and will be held accountable for meeting their learning needs. In conjunction with this accountability, it is assumed that mainstream teachers have a desire to provide a fair and high-quality education for all of their students, so would be open to learning new instructional techniques to meet the needs of their ELL students. While new teachers in California have been required to receive special training on ELL instruction since 1999, only half have reported actually participating in one such training (Shreve, 2005). Because of this alarming reality, it is fair to assume that mainstream teachers are fairly underprepared to meet the needs of ELL students and would greatly benefit from sustained professional development in strategies to support their ELL learners, a growing percentage of their classrooms.

 Specifically, it can also be assumed that reading instructional practices need to be focused on by educators of ELL students, as proficient reading abilities are essential to the success of students in all other content areas. ELLs often have difficulty succeeding in science, math and social studies because these subjects now all rely on reading comprehension of complex texts, such as text books and articles with heavy academic language (Colorin Colorado, 2019). In addition, one of the biggest contributing reasons for why students leave college before completion is because the texts they encounter are too complex (Biancaniello, 2019). However, it has been shown that exemplary reading instruction beginning in the primary grades is the single most important preventative measure against reading failure (Penn, 2009). Therefore, mainstream teachers need to be equipped with effective reading instructional practices to promote lifelong reading success amongst their students, specifically their ELL students.

Finally, it is assumed that the qualitative nature of the study allows for richer data collection, based on observations of real classrooms and interviews with teachers who can express their attitudes, values and emotions in relation to reading instruction for their ELL students. Qualitative research values the human experience in light of facts and statistics, knowing that “unique experiences generate a different perspective of data” than we can see through numbers alone (Ayres, 2019). Thus, there will be a greater depth and complexity to the conclusions drawn at the end of the study, deriving from authentic human experiences with the population of students and teachers this research hopes to benefit.

**Limitations**

Considering the scale of this research project, there are several limitations that impact the generalizability of this study. First, the chosen population of research participants was selected from a purposeful sampling method, rather than gleaned from a random sampling method. This is due to location reasons and the time constraints under which the study is conducted. In relation to location, the specific school of interest is in a rural neighborhood in Southern California with over 65% of students classified as ELL and their first language being Spanish, and over 90% of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program. In relation to time constraints, this study would be conducted within one school year, so would not be conducive to displaying long term benefits of the proposed reading intervention. While these limitations prevent generalizability to the larger ELL population of the United States, which have over 50 different first languages, it has the potential to pave the way for more studies with similar aims performed in other sectors of the United States. In addition, the results of this study can be generalized to primary grade teachers in Southern California and ELL students with Spanish as their first language.

**Delimitations**

 With respects to delimitations, there are multiple boundaries I chose to draw to define the scope of my study. To begin with, I chose to narrow my research participants to students in the primary grades (K-2). While much research and professional developments occur for students and teachers in high school and college on the benefits of close reading, very limited research has been performed with students and teachers in the lower elementary grades in regards to close reading. In addition, if close reading can effectively be adapted to students in the primary grades, they will enter in to the upper grades with the foundational skills needed to interact with complex texts. Secondly, as noted above, I chose to focus solely on the instructional practice of close reading to build reading comprehension. Close reading has been shown to improve reading proficiency and comprehension when conducted, however has been traditionally relegated for older students. Yet, with the new CCSS emphasis on reading complex texts in all grade levels, close reading should be examined as a viable reading practice in the primary grades as well. Furthermore, while there are many components of reading aside from comprehension, such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and fluency, comprehension is imperative to study as it is necessary to understand all other content texts. Finally, I chose to perform my research with a theoretical framework composed of Essentialism and Existentialism, complimented by the modern work of Stephen Krashen, Jim Cummins, Kristina Robertson and Karen Ford. Together, these philosophies encourage ELL students to achieve common goals of high academic and linguistic rigor by drawing on their unique language, social and cultural backgrounds to obtain this crucial knowledge.

**Definitions**

**Close Reading:** Close reading is a reading practice aligned with CCSS and meant to help readers uncover layers of meaning, contributing to deeper comprehension of text (Boyles, 2013). Students engage with a short, but complex text that they read and reread thoroughly and with a purpose for each read (Boyles, 2013). Throughout different readings of the same text, students come to understand the central ideas by reflecting on the meanings of individual words and sentences, the order of the sentences and the development of ideas over the course of the text (Boyles, 2013). In addition, students typically engage in the practices of asking and responding to text-dependent questions, discussing the text with others and annotating the text (Burke, 2014). While there is no defined reading sequence of reading in the close read method, there have been three general reads proposed. The first read, which can be done independently, as a paired read or as a read aloud depending on the grade, has a focus of highlighting the key ideas and supporting details (Burke, 2014). The second read focuses on a portion of the text to discuss the author’s vocabulary choices and text structures (Burke, 2014). The third read helps students analyze and synthesize information from the text with other texts or their experiences to arrive at a deeper meaning (Burke, 2014).

**Annotation:** Annotation is one aspect involved in close reading. Annotating is often referred to as “reading with a pencil in hand,” and is typically characterized by underlining or highlighting key words and phrases, circling confusing words or phrases and making notes in the margins with connections or aspects that were surprising (Kain, 1998). Annotation keys or codes have been suggested to help students organize their annotations. One such key for elementary school students has students underlining key ideas, writing a question mark next to unclear information or words, circling key words and putting an exclamation point next to surprising information or information they can make a connection with (Lynch, 2018). Annotation at the lower elementary grades can be done as a whole class lesson and would include heavy scaffolding and modeling.

**Text-Dependent Questions:** Text-Dependent Questions are another integral component of close reading. These are questions that can only be answered by referring back to the text, however, they go beyond asking students to simply restate a potion of the text (Biancaniello, 2019). Rather, these questions ask students to find evidence from the text and then interpret that evidence and justify it as an answer (Biancaniello, 2019). These questions are crucial in preparing students for college and career readiness, where individuals are asked to use evidence from texts to present analyses and defend their claims (Biancaniello, 2019). In addition, students who have ample experience with performing text-dependent analyses on complex texts are more likely to continue with their education (Biancaniello, 2019). Therefore, these questions promote higher order thinking skills necessary for academic success.

**Academic Language:** Academic language is the oral, written, auditory and visual language proficiency needed to effectively learn in schools, and involves a knowledge of formal language skills (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). These formal language skills include vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, syntax and discipline specific terminology (Finley, 2014). Two specific kinds of academic language include instructional language (i.e. paraphrase, summarize, predict and justify), and content specific language (i.e. atom in science) that learners need to know in order to access a lesson and complete academic tasks (Finley, 2014).

**Collaborative Learning:** Collaborative learning is an approach to learning where groups of students work together to complete a task, create a product or solve a problem (National Institute for Science Education, 1997). Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learners benefit when exposed to differing opinions and peers from different backgrounds. In addition, it posits that learning is a naturally active and social process where learners must talk through information as opposed to simply independently memorizing facts (National Institute for Science Education, 1997). Collaborative learning can involve students working in pairs and small groups, and can also involve students and teachers working together (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

**Summary**

 In sum, this research is centered around the topic of effective reading instructional practices for ELL students in grades K-2. More narrowly, this study seeks to examine the benefits of adapted close reading strategies, with an emphasis on peer-to-peer collaboration, modified annotation practices and student-initiated text-dependent questions. This study will benefit mainstream teachers who are more increasingly encountering ELL students in their classrooms and who will need effective and tailored strategies to improve the reading abilities of these students. In addition, ELL students will benefit from this study which hopes to identify successful reading practices that they can utilize beginning in kindergarten to carry them through their educational journeys and promote strong reading habits needed to engage with complex texts, a key component of college and career readiness. Following this section, a review of current literature and research will be provided as a foundational basis for the areas that this study strives to address.

**Chapter 2**

 The following literature review will offer an overview of the complexities ELL students face with reading comprehension of detailed informational and fiction texts that are now standard instructional materials under the CCSS. Although the existing literature covers numerous challenges ELL students will face in the domain of reading, such as fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness and comprehension, this review will narrow in on the unique difficulties that are presented during reading comprehension. Specifically, this review will gather research together around the reading comprehension of complex texts, a crucial area of reading comprehension under the CCSS. The following thematic categorizations of the sources reviewed include: The Need for Close Reading for ELLs, The Role of Close Reading in the Elementary Grades, The Role of Questioning in Close Reading, and The Role of Annotation in Close Reading. Generally, the research demonstrates that ELL students face added challenges in their reading comprehension of complex texts in comparison to their non-ELL peers. Yet, research also shows that being able to comprehend these detailed and rigorous texts is needed to excel in every subject area, including math, science and social science, in addition to English Language Arts. This points to the need to develop effective reading instructional practices that provide ELL students with strategies to comprehend such texts. Close Reading has been a developing reading approach that has been shown to improve reading comprehension of complex texts, however it has been primarily implemented in high school and college. Some research has been conducted about the modifications necessary to implement close reading in the primary grades and is the specific area of focus for the study. In addition, three major aspects of close reading are detailed, including text-dependent questions, annotation, and peer-to-peer collaboration, all which challenge students to connect meaningfully with the text and to monitor their own comprehension. The benefits of close reading have not specifically been studied in relation to the ELL student population at the elementary school level. However, because of the benefits the research highlights for older ELL students and the benefits of close reading aspects, such as questioning and annotating which compel students to engage deeper with the texts at all grade levels, the conclusion is drawn that an incorporation of close reading strategies into the elementary school classroom would improve ELL reading comprehension.

**Review of Literature**

**The Need for Close Reading for ELLs**

 When the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed, new measures of “readability” recommendations accompanied them for each grade level, as announced in Paige Jaeger’s article, “Readability and Reading Fluency.” A “readability” score is generally the level of education someone will need to read a piece of text easily and corresponds to a grade level (Jaeger, 2013). The creators of CCSS analyzed the “readability,” or Lexile level, of college freshman textbooks and career manuals, which then became a “benchmark” for college and career readiness (Jaeger, 2013). With the Lexile level of these texts being 1450, grade level Lexiles were then scaffolded in reverse, and thus increased the “readability” recommendations for each subsequent grade level (Jaeger, 2013). Due to this heightened criterion of reading success, students need to develop the ability to closely read, examine, decode and comprehend material that is well above their fluency range. Without the concentration and stamina needed to do so, students will not be able to read these challenging texts and have been shown to read less in general (Jaeger, 2013). In addition, students will not be able to read intricate expository text in order to gain information, which is referred to as the skill of reading to learn (Jaeger, 2013). However, these challenging texts are part of curriculum across disciplines, not just English Language Arts (ELA), so it is crucial that students be able to access these texts in order to access the content.

As outlined above, based on the new “readability” recommendations from the CCSS, an English Language Learner’s success in all content areas, including math, science, and social science, hinges on their ability to comprehend what they read. In essence, they need to be able to read to learn. It is thus imperative to develop an ELL student’s close reading skills, beginning in the early elementary school grades, in order to help them interact with the complex texts found across disciplines. However, what research is demonstrating is that ELLs consistently fall behind their non-ELL peers in their reading performance. “Reading Performance” (2018) is a document put forth by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), in which reading performance scores are shown for students in grades 4, 8 and 12 from public and private schools across the nation. NAEP scores range from 0-500 (The Condition of Education, 2018). The most recent collection of scores published by the NAEP come from 2017, and were disaggregated by students’ English Language Learner status. The average score for a 4th grade ELL student was 189, while the average score for the non-ELL 4th grader was 226, presenting a 37 -point difference (The Condition of Education, 2018). The gap in reading performance scores between ELL students and their non-ELL peers widens to nearly 50 points by 12th grade, highlighting the increasing difficulty ELL students face when tackling complex texts in the higher grades (The Condition of Education, 2018).

 As the previous study exemplifies, reading is a complicated process that can be even more challenging for ELLs. Specific challenges that ELLs may face when reading are documented in the article, “Reading 101 for English Language Learners” (Robertson, 2019). Kristina Robertson (2019) articulates that there are five main components of reading, including Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension, all of which come with obstacles that ELLs might have to overcome before mastery. Comprehension is said to be perhaps the most difficult skill for ELLs to master, as it requires that children decode what they read, make connections between what they read and what they already know, and think deeply about what they have read (Robertson, 2019). Specifically influencing ELLs’ maximum level of reading comprehension is their oral “knowledge of words,” which allows them to comprehend the text found in printed material, books, assessments and content-area textbooks (Robertson, 2019). However, while the average native English speaker knows at least 5,000 words going in to kindergarten in English, the average ELL student may know very few words in English (Robertson, 2019). Without this necessary foundational vocabulary, ELLs will be trying to catch up, rather than learn new words, and will have a harder time understanding what they decode. Therefore, they will have limited access to the material they need to master (Robertson, 2019).

 Penn (2009) interviewed experienced Kindergarten teachers, who teach classes with at least 51% ELL students, to describe, analyze and interpret what reading strategies they believed were essential to instruct English Language Learners how to read. These interviews were conducted knowing that quality reading instruction in the primary grades is the “single best weapon against reading failure,” and realizing that ELL students have the added challenge of learning to read in a language that they might not have oral proficiency in (Penn, 2009). One of the main commonalities among the interviews was that best instructional practices for whole group instruction included shared reading (Penn, 2009). Shared reading was seen as essential in helping aid ELLs’ ability to read and comprehend what they read because of the ability to model specific reading skills (Penn, 2009). These skills include the need to reread a confusing part for clarity, how to predict what the book is about through picture walks, how to retell the story by focusing on the main ideas, and how to clarify new vocabulary (Penn, 2009). These are all skills emphasized in close reading.

Nancy Boyles (2013) suggests that close reading of complex texts is what is needed to help students gain this access to content material. Boyles (2013) makes the argument that “we can’t wait until middle school to teach students to read closely,” as the gap only widens in reading performance when students don’t obtain the ability to read complex texts in the lower elementary grades. Boyles (2013) posits that a substantial amount of research has linked the close reading of a complex text to significant advancements in reading proficiency and also finds that close reading is a key component of college and career readiness. If ELL students are to be able to enter into colleges and careers with an equal shot at success as their non-ELL counterparts, they need these integral and foundational skills, starting in the elementary grades. In Boyles’s words, close reading “needs to find its niche in kindergarten…if we mean to build the habits of mind that will lead all students to deep understanding of text” (Boyles, 2013). The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) defines this close analytic reading as reading a text with “sufficient complexity” to be able to examine “meaning thoroughly and methodically,” “reading and rereading deliberately,” “understanding the central ideas and key supporting details,” and “reflecting on the meanings of individual words” (Boyles, 2013). The idea of close reading as a useful strategy to enhance comprehension of texts and reading performance, especially for ELL students, is described in literature that will be reviewed below.

**The Role of Close Reading in the Elementary Grades**

 As just stated, close reading is a key requirement of the Common Core State Standards and is a critical analysis of a text that “focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text’s form, craft and meaning” (Burke, 2014). Close reading includes focusing directly on the text, rereading with a purpose, reading with a pencil (annotating), noticing confusing elements, discussing the text with peers and responding to text-dependent questions (Burke, 2014). Close reading relies on students’ ability to unpack Tier 2 vocabulary and domain-specific terminology, understand complex syntactical structures, analyze text structures, such as Compare and Contrast, and use Text Features to more deeply understand the text (Burke, 2014). Most often, close reading involves following a general outline of reading a text three times, each for a specific purpose. Burke (2014) outlines these three reads in general guidelines: the first read is a read with a focus on the key ideas and details; the second read is a reread of a portion of the text with a focus on vocabulary choices, text structure or text features to help students arrive at a deeper understanding of the text; finally, the third read should prompt students to integrate knowledge and ideas from other texts to provide the deepest level of understanding (Burke, 2014).

 In Lori Oczkus’s book, Reciprocal Teaching at Work, the concept of reading a text multiple times for different purposes during close reading is also explored. Oczkus (2018) proposes reading a text about four times using a reciprocal teaching model she terms the “Fab Four,” along with using the “Super Six” comprehension strategies. The “Fab Four” are broad categories for each focus of a different read of the same text and include, Predict, Question, Clarify and Summarize (Oczkus, 2018). The “Super Six” are more specific strategies that can be used together or on their own and include making connections, predicting/inferring, questioning, monitoring/clarifying, summarizing/synthesizing, evaluating (Oczkus, 2018). Oczkus (2018) articulates that repeated re-readings of a text with a focus on each of the “Fab Four” elements not only builds reading fluency, but also increases comprehension of informational and paired fiction readings. In order to reach younger students and ELL students, Oczkus (2018) suggests color coding annotations for each of the four strategies, using sentence frames for each of the strategies during discussions, creating gestures and visuals for the strategies, and using different reading techniques during each read, such as echo reading, partner reading and choral reading. Each of these strategies is needed in any close, evidence-based reading, which the CCSS are now calling for. In addition, the reciprocal nature of this model of close reading means that teachers and peers are supporting and scaffolding each other’s discussions (Oczkus, 2018). Because reciprocal teaching is a “discussion technique” many ELD standards such as speaking and listening are simultaneously being addressed, and ELL students have the opportunity to participate in discussions of texts that might be above their independent reading level (Oczkus, 2018). When her close-reading model was implemented, there was a significant positive growth in reading comprehension for ELLs, particularly accredited to the reciprocal, collaborative nature where learning opportunities were abundant with peers and cross-age tutors (Oczkus, 2018).

 However, while close reading is needed and proven to help readers gain proficiency in comprehending complex texts, it is more commonly performed in high school and college than in elementary schools (Frey & Fisher, 2012). Frey and Fisher (2012) followed a group of elementary school teachers who observed high school teachers using close reading and then constructed the modifications necessary to implement this reading style in elementary schools. When close reading is used in elementary schools several key features were either adopted or adapted from what was observed in the high school classrooms. First, just like in high school, the texts chosen for close reading in elementary schools need to be “complex,” meaning that they are at or above grade level, and thus worthy of extended discussion (Frey & Fisher, 2012). In addition, just like in high school, students should reread the text several times, with a new purpose for each read, and then be able to support their responses with evidence from the text (Frey & Fisher, 2012). However, unlike in high school, typically in the lower elementary grades (K-3) the teacher conducts the first read. This is done so that the students can be more focused on the ideas and finding evidence from the text, rather than struggling over more challenging words to decode (Frey & Fisher, 2012). In addition, some frontloading might be needed in elementary school, whereas students jump straight into the text in high school (Frey & Fischer, 2012). However, just as in high school, frontloading “should not take readers away from the text to their own experiences too soon” (Frey & Fischer, 2012). In addition, questions need to be text-dependent, meaning that the conversation hinges on reading the text (Frey & Fischer, 2012). Lastly, annotation of text was relegated to a whole class activity in grades Kindergarten and First, mainly focusing on underlining the main idea of the text. Annotating should get progressively more independent and detailed as the students’ grade level increases (Frey & Fischer, 2012).

 A similar article, “Building the Foundation for Close Reading with Developing Readers,” also contends that beginning elementary readers, not just readers in the secondary school group, can participate in close reading. By engaging with close reading of a complex text, students in the elementary grades will be taking on foundational practices that they will use for reading success throughout their education (Baker & McEnery, 2017). Close readings at the elementary level can be performed through shared readings, read-alouds by the teacher, literature discussion groups and guided reading groups, with heavy modeling from the teacher and a more collaborative nature than might be seen in the high school level (Baker & McEnery, 2017). For example, students might write or draw a thought about a related topic on a post-it- note that goes on a class poster, which can then be discussed with the whole class. By doing this simple annotating, students gain the foundation to be able to independently annotate and interact with texts at higher levels (Baker & McEnery, 2017). In addition, close readings at the elementary level can even be performed with wordless text, so long as it elicits strong emotions and touches on strong topics necessary for close reading (Baker & McEnery, 2017). Through these collaborative readings, re-readings, and text-dependent discussions and activities, elementary students can partake in the close reading goals of making connections, drawing on prior knowledge, analyzing what the author might have meant, and clarifying key vocabulary (Baker & McEnery, 2017).

 In relation to ELLs specifically, strategies such as close reading used in mainstream classrooms are a good “starting point” to build ELLs’ comprehension skills, only needing an additional emphasis placed on ELLs’ language and academic needs when implemented (Breiseth, 2010). Breiseth (2010) identifies three key components utilized during close reading that are a must when it comes to developing the comprehension skills of ELL students. These components are building background knowledge, teaching vocabulary explicitly, and checking comprehension frequently (Breiseth, 2010). While extensive personal connections to the text are typically saved until after the first read in close reading, ELL students greatly benefit from associating new content with their experiences (Breiseth, 2010). Allowing a brief brainstorming time to take a “picture walk” of the text and begin activating existing schemas of knowledge before beginning to read the text, even in their native language, aids in an ELL’s comprehension (Breiseth, 2010). In addition, teaching students to circle unknown words as part of annotating the text, allows the teacher to see which words her ELL students need clarification on, and thus which words those students need support in defining (Breiseth, 2010). Lastly, comprehension needs to be checked frequently, with text-dependent questions increasing in difficulty from a literal level to an interpretive level and finally to an applied level (Breiseth, 2010).

**The Role of Questioning in Close Reading**

 One of the most prominent guidelines for how to ask text-dependent questions that increase in rigor is Norman Webb’s Depth of Knowledge. Levels of questions are categorized based on the complexity of thinking required to answer them (Aungst, 2014). Level 1 questions are categorized as “Recall and Reproduction,” which ask students to recall facts, copy information or define terms (Aungst, 2014). Level 2 questions are categorized as “Skills and Concepts,” and typically include questions that ask students to compare, organize, summarize, predict and estimate (Aungst, 2014). Level 3 questions are categorized as “Strategic Thinking,” where students must plan and use evidence in their responses, such as analyzing characteristics of a genre (Aungst, 2014). Finally, level 4 questions are categorized as “Extended Thinking,” which requires students to synthesize information from multiple sources, or transfer knowledge from one domain to solve problems in another, often over an extended period of time (Aungst, 2014). All students, including lower elementary students and ELL students, are capable of this strategic and extended thinking, a way of thinking that is now a necessity with the CCSS emphasis on close reading (Aungst, 2014).

 “A Guide for Using Webb’s Depth of Knowledge with Common Core State Standards” was authored by Karin Hess in order to provide practical curricular activities and assessment tasks centered around each level of questioning. To begin with, for level 1, “Recall and Reproduction,” Hess (2013) suggests having students describe an event, character or setting in a story, draw a picture that illustrates a story, and use a dictionary to find word meanings. For level 2, “Skills and Concepts,” Hess (2013) proposes that students can use a timeline or cartoon strip to sequence a key chain of events, write a diary or blog entry for a character or historical figure from a reading, create a game with questions about the reading or key vocabulary and write an informational report of central ideas and supporting ideas. For level 3, “Strategic Thinking,” Hess (2013) recommends having students write a letter to the editor or author after evaluating a text, participate in a debate about a key issue in the text using textual evidence, write an essay or poem in response o a text, an explain abstract terms and concepts to real-world situations. Finally, for level 4, “Extended Thinking,” Hess (2013) advises that students can apply information across disciplines to solve ill-defined problems in novel or real-world situations, generate questions, formulate hypotheses, and write and produce their own scripts with peers. By crafting reading response activities in line with the four levels of questioning, students are engaged in higher-order thinking skills that are necessary to understand, analyze and evaluate complex informational and fiction texts (Hess, 2013).

 With these different and increasingly complex levels of questions, it is important to help students identify which type of question they are being asked, known as the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy. The QAR model similarly has four types of question-answer relationships, which can be aligned with Webb’s 4 levels of questions. The first level of questions would be considered, “Right There Questions,” whose answers can be found verbatim in the text (Reading Rockets, 2019). The second level of questions would be considered, “Think and Search Questions” where students are being asked to retell, identify causal relationships or compare and contrast, and would this need to craft and answer from several parts of the text to make meaning (Reading Rockets, 2019). The third level of questions would be considered, “Author and You Questions” where students are inferring answers, so need to find evidence from the text and relate it to their own experiences (Reading Rockets, 2019). The final and fourth level of questioning would be considered “On My Own Questions,” which are opinion questions and require that students use their background knowledge to answer the questions (Reading Rockets, 2019). Helping students identify which level of questioning they are engaging with can help them consider where and how they will craft and answer, strengthening their comprehension, metacognition and higher-order thinking skills (Reading Rockets, 2019).

While it is shown across many models of close reading that text-dependent questions are crucial to thorough analyses of complex texts, it has been debated whether these questions need to be pre-scripted from the teacher or genuinely crafted from the students. Diane Santori and Monica Belfatti (2017) conducted a study that sought to demonstrate how text-dependent questions in close reading can be student generated. The premise is that student generated questions put student voices front and center in collaborative discussions that seek to construct meaning of complex texts (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). They realized that many elementary teachers might fear that young students would “veer off topic” or would discuss aspects of the text that are insignificant; however, they maintained that students having the opportunity to generate their own critical thinking questions is imperative in them becoming independent readers who can analyze texts closely (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). Both authors met with groups of third and fourth graders over the course of the year to help facilitate text-based dialogic discussions, for information and narrative text, where the students were given considerable agency in determining topics for discussion (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). Students independently annotated their text during their first read, making note of any questions, observations, unknown words or comments they had (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). These annotated texts were the springboard for discussions. What they found was that students were “incredibly proficient” at constructing their own text-dependent questions, with the teacher helping to facilitate student discussions and modeling his/her own thinking when students became frustrated or confused (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). In addition, this approach to generating text-dependent questions communicated the value and purpose of close reading to students as they asked personally relevant questions and unearthed multiple layers of meaning (Santori & Belfatti, 2017).

With any method of questioning, whether that be teacher-directed, student-directed, or a blend of both, it is important to accommodate an ELLs’ need for time to process their thoughts when generating a response. Often, ELLs are processing the question and their response in two languages, trying to merge language and content concepts all at once (Robertson, 2019). With the average wait time for teacher questions being only 1 second, an ELL has barely had any time to process the first question before the teacher has asked two new questions and taken responses (Robertson, 2019). In addition, with more and more cognitively taxing questions being asked, especially as is the nature of close reading questions, using strategies to allow more time for ELLs to process their thoughts is a necessity for them to access the dialogue and content. Robertson (2019) proposes two strategies to help give ELLs more time to process the question and their thoughts, including the “Think-Pair-Share” and the “Circle Chat.” In the “Think-Pair-Share” method, a thought-provoking question is asked, students silently think of a response, students share their initial thoughts with a partner, and then students are called upon to share their thoughts with the whole class (Robertson, 2019). In the “Circle Chat” method, students form two concentric circles that face each other. Partners are formed with one student from the inner circler and one student from the outer circle, which then rotate as new questions are asked (Robertson, 2019). Both of these methods of questioning benefit ELL students as they are given adequate time to process language and content, are provided with a safe space to “check- out” their answers with another partner, have the opportunity to gather more information from their partner’s response, and are allowed to listen to a native English speaker as a model for how to construct their response (Robertson, 2019). By giving ELL students an opportunity to collaborate with their peers before responding, ELL students gain practice using English and learning content, which is integral to their success as critical readers and students.

**The Role of Annotation in Close Reading**

 One specific aspect of close reading that is often not applied in elementary schools, but can be very beneficial when modified to their developmental level is the act of annotating. Annotating is often referred to as “marking up the text,” or leaving your thoughts in the margins of the page (Kain, 1998). The process of annotating is often associated with underlining or highlighting key words and phrases, circling words or phrases that are confusing, and making notes in the margins (Kain, 1998). Annotating is a practice that helps students “self-monitor” and repair any comprehension issues they might have (Cummins, 2013). This “self-monitoring” is necessary when students need to meet the Common Core State Standards requiring that they be able to analyze a complex text for a particular purpose (Cummins, 2013). In other words, students need to take an active role in realizing when they have comprehended a text and when they need to take steps to better comprehend a text that is more challenging. Cummins (2013) makes the point that teachers should first engage students in a conversation about how annotating a text will aid in their comprehension of challenging texts. Sharing with students that even proficient readers sometimes get lost in a text when their mind wanders, or find words or phrases confusing, can be “liberating” and will enhance student participation in techniques to help them repair meaning when it breaks down (Cummins, 2013). Modeling a coding method for students to keep track of their thoughts and performing this annotation as a class will help students see how annotating a text can improve their comprehension (Cummins, 2013).

 Erin Lynch (2018), a teacher herself, also stresses the importance of annotating strategies to enrich close reading. She sites numerous benefits of annotating a text including keeping track of main ideas, helping to craft questions that lead to deeper understanding, fostering the analysis of texts, and allowing the reader to efficiently refer back to the text when supporting their claims in discussions (Lynch, 2018). She also suggests a coding method, where students use symbols to help them annotate with a purpose. She suggests that students underline key ideas and major points, write a question mark next to any unclear words or information, circle key words, and put an exclamation point next to surprising information or information they have a connection to (Lynch, 2018). She cautions that over-annotating will be more confusing, so this skill should be modeled heavily when students are first introduced to this instructional practice (Lynch, 2018). However, when done to help readers monitor their reading comprehension, it is a key practice to help students draw conclusions and make inferences on a deeper level about a text when close reading (Lynch, 2018).

 Another key practice to implement when instructing students on annotating texts is to provide the purpose of annotation, so that students not only know what they should be marking up, but why they should be noticing these pieces of information (Smekens Education Solutions, 2017). In an article entitled, “Introduce the Purpose of Annotation,” it is suggested that students should understand annotation as the “documentation of the *Thinking Voice*, the voice in their minds that produce thoughts as they read (Smekens Education Solutions, 2017). An analogy was provided that compares students’ annotations with tracks in the snow; when students are done reading, they can look back at the journey of their thoughts, helping them to recall information after they are finished reading the text (Smekens Education Solutions, 2017). Students must connect their annotations (i.e. underlining, circling, highlighting, etc.) with their thoughts and understand what words prompted their thoughts (Smekens Education Solutions, 2017). By making note of their thoughts that prompted the annotation, students can be more actively engaged in the annotation process, and metacognitive about their thinking and comprehension strategies.

 In relation to ELL students, Yujia Huang (2018) conducted a study to discover whether peer annotation, or the sharing of one’s personal annotations with their peers, along with guidance on annotation strategies, was more effective than personal strategies in promoting reading comprehension in a second language. The premise for peer annotating came from arguments from social constructivist and social cognitivist theories that articulate that social practices enhance personal development (Huang, 2018). Thus, the idea was that sharing one’s personal text annotations can help their peers see different perspectives about the same text, fostering deeper understanding of the text (Huang, 2018). In addition, collaboratively constructing shared understanding about words, phrases and sentences through receiving and giving peer feedback is helpful for learning a second language (Huang, 2018). The premise for guided annotation came from the notion that students learning a second language need scaffolding for how to encode and decode information in a new language, in addition to how to connect new information with existing schemas (Huang, 2018). University students learning Chinese were given a reading comprehension pre-test of a Chinese text, before being randomly assigned to a group where they were guided through annotation strategies or were left to use their own annotation strategies. Within each of these groups, students were randomly assigned to either a peer annotating environment or an individual annotating environment (Huang, 2018). Following the intervention sessions, students then took a reading comprehension post-test of a Chinese text. The results of his study revealed that students in the annotation sharing environments scored significantly higher on the post-test of reading comprehension of a Chinese text (Huang, 2018). In addition, these students had higher quality annotations, were able to provide feedback on their peers’ annotations to help clarify meaning, and showed that they used strategies modeled by their peers that they found useful and meaningful (Huang, 2018). In terms of whether guided annotation was helpful, students who received guided annotation strategies scored higher in comprehension, though not significantly, than students who used personal annotation strategies (Huang, 2018). Huang (2018) recognized that this difference would probably have been significant if there was continual, target and deep guidance on annotation strategies, rather than just one session, and also suggested the benefit of teacher modeling and feedback on their annotations. The results of this study point to the benefits of collaborative annotation on reading comprehension of complex texts.

 A study entitled, “Perceived Usefulness of a Strategy-Based Peer Annotation System for Improving Academic Reading Comprehension,” also sought to examine the enhancing impact of peer annotation of the academic reading of English texts by nonnative English- speaking graduate students (Chen & Chen, 2016). Annotation was chosen as the reading strategy because of its power to enhance recollection of concepts, and its metacognitive function where readers evaluate their reading comprehension (Chen & Chen, 2016). The study likewise concluded that students who were able to annotate with peers attained boosted reading comprehension, gained an awareness of new effective reading strategies, and had lowered negative emotions when tackling complex texts because of a perceived mutually supportive environment (Chen & Chen, 2016). Essentially, social strategies are effective reading strategies for ELLs as they serve as a means of peer cooperation, questioning, correction of errors and feedback (Chen & Chen, 2016).

**Conclusion**

 In sum, the literature reviewed above suggests that close reading has become an integral component of reading instruction that can be specifically beneficial to improving the reading proficiency and comprehension of ELL students. ELL students have demonstrated a need for tailored reading instruction that helps bridge the gap between their native language, and what they can comprehend and express in English. This need has been shown across standardized reading proficiency scores, where ELL students score progressively lower than their non-ELL peers as their grade level increases. Therefore, students learning English need to be equipped with strategies and skills to help them comprehend increasingly complex texts, extending beyond simple regurgitation of statements made in the text. In order to read at a deeper level, students need to be able to analyze and synthesize information to engage in text-dependent discussions. However, in order to perform these tasks, ELL students need to be taught what to notice when reading through modeled and peer annotation, and need to be able to ask and answer higher order thinking questions. Thus, beginning targeted close reading instruction, with peer-to-peer collaboration, modified annotation practices and critical text-dependent questioning, would seem to be beneficial ways to promote lifelong reading success in ELL students. A study conducted to specifically look at the implementation of close reading instruction performed in the early elementary grades (K-2) with ELL students would demonstrate the value these techniques contribute towards ELLs’ improved reading comprehension.

**Chapter 3**

**Introduction**

The following methodology section will detail a proposed study to investigate the implementation of close reading instruction, specifically the four-read method, on primary grade ELL students’ reading comprehension of complex texts. As documented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, students who are classified as English Language Learners score significantly behind their non-ELL peers in reading comprehension performance assessments (The Condition of Education, 2018). However, majority of California’s ELL students enter the California Public Schools in kindergarten, meaning that support is need in the primary grades to prevent these students from falling behind their non-ELL peers in reading comprehension and to equip these students with the lifelong reading skills needed to read the complex texts required of them for college and career success (Hill, 2012). In order to examine the specific research question based on this dilemma, which states, “How can the development of close reading strategies, specifically peer annotating and student-initiated questioning, help enhance ELL students’ language acquisition and reading comprehension in kindergarten through second grade?”, a qualitative study will be now outlined.

**Participants**

 The target population for this study are K-2 English Language Learning students in Southern California. I will specifically be looking at an elementary school in Vista, CA. This rural school has a student population of over 65% of their students classified as ELL and over 90% of their students participating in the free and reduced lunch program. In addition, the home language of the ELL students at this school is primarily Spanish. This school site was purposefully chosen to be studied because its ELL population is representative of majority of California’s ELL students. 82% of California’s ELL students have a home language of Spanish, and 3/5 of these ELL students come from families whose income falls 185 percent below the federal poverty line (California Department of Education, 2018; Grant Makers in Education, 2013). Therefore, choosing a school site with majority of the ELLs’ home language being Spanish, and coming from low-income households makes this site representative of California’s ELL students. From this school site, a class of kindergartners, a class of first graders and a class of second graders will be chosen to participate in this study, in order to see the impacts of close reading strategies on reading comprehension for ELL students across the primary grades. Overall, this sample represents a maximum variation sample, a type of purposeful sampling method in which the participants are thoughtfully chosen because they have a variety of characteristics of interest and can maximize the diversity of relevant information. Thus, this school site was chosen as variables such as ethnicity, home language, socio-economic status and grade level can all contribute to the further application of this research.

**Choice of Methodology**

This qualitative research study will be a case study in order to gather multiple sources of rich data collection, in which attitudes, values and emotions can be expressed. Qualitative research has the benefit of putting the human experience at the center of the research, allowing the researcher to study unique experiences in light of facts and statistics (Ayres, 2019). Thus, a greater depth and complexity will be attached to the conclusions drawn, as they will be generated from candid human experiences. The specific form of qualitative research being conducted is the Triangulation method, in which multiple forms of data are collected in order to increase validity and confirm findings through numerous mediums (ChrisFlipp, 2014). Three forms of data will be collected, including focus group interviews, document review and observations.

Focus group interviews will be held with the group of teachers implementing the close reading program and also with ELL students in their classes. The teachers will be interviewed before they begin the close reading method prescribed below to garner their attitudes towards teaching reading comprehension to their ELL students and their initial thoughts about what improvements they feel are needed in their reading curriculum. These same teachers will be interviewed as a group during the semester to discover their feelings so far towards the close reading program, and what changes, if any, they are seeing in their ELL students’ reading comprehension. In addition, any feedback they might have to incorporate into the remainder of the close reading lessons will be documented and taken into account. Finally, these teachers will be interviewed as a group at the end of the study to garner their final opinions on the close reading method they implemented over the semester and to document any perceived progress their ELL students made. Certain ELL students across the classes will also be interviewed in a group, before, during and after the study to record their attitudes towards reading comprehension, their goals for reading comprehension for the semester, their attitudes towards the new close reading methods they are learning, and any progress they feel they’ve made at the end of the study. All of the interviews done for this research project will be focus group interviews for the benefits of gathering information about several people in one session, to help calm the nerves of especially the youngest participants, and to hear a diversity of perspectives in each interview (ChrisFlipp, 2014).

The second form of data collection that will be implemented during this study is reviewing documents. Specifically, I will collect the close reading texts that students and their teachers use throughout the study to examine whether the annotations, questions, and answers to text-dependent questions become more thorough and deeper as they get more and more practice with these close reading methods. Reviewing these documents across grade levels and across the course of the study will allow me to see any emerging patterns in the way ELL students approach comprehending a complex text, what types of questions they have, and what connections and conclusions they are able to make. In addition, I will be able to note any changes or improvements in their close reading skills as they become more and more comfortable with the close reading method.

Lastly, I will be observing each kindergarten, 1st grade and 2nd grade class participating in the study. I will observe the teachers and students during their reading instruction time, specifically when they are engaging in the close reading method. I will be documenting the conversations that arise during their close reading to analyze the depth of their comprehension, any points needing clarification and the level of participation from the ELL students. I will take on the role of an Observer as Participant, so that I can take on a more objective observer role. Because I will have brief interactions with teachers and students while I observe, I can witness more authentic and honest moments between the teachers and students, while avoiding the ethical dilemma of deceiving the participants (ChrissFlipp, 2014).

**Data Collection/Instrumentation**

 Based on the methodology section described above, there will be multiple forms of data collection that correspond with the different research methods employed, including for the field group interviews of teachers and students, document review and observations. To begin with, the field group interviews of the participating teachers and students will be video-taped or audio-taped, depending on the participants comfortability and consent. Having the interviews video or audio taped will allow me to focus on the genuine interactions that occur during the interviews, while being able to transcribe what was said after based on the recordings. In terms of the document review, students’ close reading texts with their annotations will be collected at the beginning of the study, in the middle of the study and at the end of the study, to evaluate the progression of their comprehension with the close reading intervention. Finally, during the observations of the close reading lessons, field notes will be taken to transcribe the ensuing conversations. These notes will be evaluated at the beginning of the study, in the middle of the study and at the end of the study in order to analyze the complexity of the text discussions over time, as they become more comfortable with the four-read close reading model that is prescribed as the intervention.

**Procedure**

This study will be conducted in the following steps:

1. The three teachers, representing grades Kindergarten, first-grade and second-grade, will participate in an initial focus group interview. Open-ended questions will be asked to gather their perspectives on teaching reading comprehension to their ELL students, what improvements they feel are necessary in their reading instruction to better assist their ELL students, and their initial understandings of close reading in the primary grades.
2. The three teachers will then receive two 1- hour trainings on how to implement close reading in the primary grades, including steps in the four-read method that will be implemented, and the rationale behind close reading as an effective instructional practice. In addition, teachers will be guided through a four -read to model how to instruct this reading comprehension method. They will be instructed to perform a four-read close reading practice with their students every other week on a selected text appropriate to their grade-level.
	1. The following steps represent the four-read close reading model that will be used as the intervention. It is based off of close reading models and lessons found in the book, Reciprocal Teaching at Work: Powerful Strategies and Lessons for Improving Reading Comprehension, by Lori Oczkus and in the article, “A Close Look at Close Reading,” by Beth Burke.
		1. First Read: This read will be done whole group. In K-2, the teacher will conduct the first reading so as to have the students focus more on the main ideas, rather than spending too much mental energy on decoding (Frey&Fisher, 2012). Before the first read, the teacher will briefly perform a picture walk and take a few predictions on what the text will be about. Throughout the first read and after the first read, the teacher will ask Level 1 and Level 2 questions from Norman Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Questions, mainly asking for students to recall the events and main ideas of the text.
		2. Second Read: The second read will be performed in small groups, potentially their guided reading groups that are already formed. In this read, only a portion of the text will be read closely with the purpose of analyzing vocabulary, text-structure, text-features, and asking/answering text-dependent questions (Burke, 2014). The teacher will model how to use the annotation key to read closely, as well as explain the purpose of annotation. In week 1, the teacher will model underlining key ideas and have students try this in partners. In week 2, the teacher will model putting a question mark by unclear words or information and have students try this in partners. In week 3, the teacher will model circling key words or phrases and have students try this in partners. In week 4, the teacher will model putting an exclamation point next to surprising information or information that connects with their knowledge and have students try this in partners. By spending a week focusing on each of the annotation markings, students in the primary grades will be able to focus on acquiring the annotation key in a slower, more focused and collaborative pace. In addition, this will all be modeled and guided before students will try annotating with a partner, as this is a new procedure for these students.
		3. Third Read: The third read will be done in small groups, where students choral read, echo read or partner read the text. Students will clarify any questions that they and their teacher generated during the annotation process of the second read and discuss important or new vocabulary.
		4. Fourth Read: In the fourth session, students will work to synthesize and analyze the text by integrating the text with background knowledge and other texts. Teachers will guide the discussion and/or activities using Level 3 and 4 questions/activities from Norman Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Questions. The purpose of the fourth and final session is to bring closure to the close reading process by gaining a deeper understanding of the complex text.
3. During the 18- week semester, these teachers will implement 9 four-read close reading lessons, every other week. They and their students will be interviewed at the half way point, as well as at the end of the semester, to document their attitudes towards close reading and the progress they feel they have achieved in their reading comprehension.

**Research Design**

 This study will begin in the Fall semester of the 2019-2020 school year. The following chart proposes a timeline that could be used for this research study.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Activity** |
| Week 1-4 (pre-intervention) | * Teachers participating in the study will be interviewed in a focus group, prior to receiving a training on new instructional methods.
* Students will be interviewed in a focus group to understand their attitudes towards reading comprehension.
* Teachers and students will be observed during their reading instruction to document their current reading instruction practices.
 |
| INTERVENTION | * Teachers will be trained on how to conduct a four-read close reading method that is developmentally appropriate for their grade level. This will be done through two 1-hour trainings.
* The following weeks of intervention will be conducted every other week of their semester. Teachers and students will be observed during their reading blocks for the remainder of the semester.
 |
| Week 1 | * Teachers will conduct their first four-read close reading cycle, which will span 4 days.
* Teachers will focus on having students underline the main idea during the annotation read.
 |
| Week 2 | * Teachers will conduct their second four-read close reading cycle, which will span 4 days.
* Teachers will focus on having students place a ‘?’ next to words or phrases they do not understand during the annotation read.
 |
| Week 3 | * Teachers will conduct their third four-read close reading cycle, which will span 4 days.
* Teachers will focus on having students circle key words or phrases during the annotation read.
 |
| Week 4 | * Teachers will conduct their fourth four-read close reading cyle, which will span 4 days.
* Teachers will focus on having students place an ‘!’ next to parts of the text that are surprising or that they have a connection to during the annotation.
* Teachers and students will participate in focus group interviews to detail how they feel about the close reading method and how they feel their reading comprehension is improving or not improving. In addition, any questions or concerns about the method can be addressed for the remainder of the study.
 |
| Week 5-9 | * Teachers will continue to conduct four-read close reading cycles with their students.
* Students will become more comfortable using the annotation key in its entirety but will still perform annotation with a small group or partner under teacher guidance.
* Teachers and students will participate in final focus group interviews to record their feelings and opinions regarding the close reading method they participated in and their views about the improvement or lack of improvement in their reading comprehension.
 |

**Data Analysis**

 As outlined above, interview and observation notes will be reviewed, as well as documents will be collected, at the beginning of the study, the midpoint of the study and at the close of the study to be analyzed. In terms of the interview notes and observation notes, these transcripts will be analyzed to see patterns of thoughts and global themes that emerge. By identifying common thought and behavior patterns across the duration of the study, I will be able to detect any changes over time in regards to the instruction of and mastery of reading comprehension for ELL students, and attitudes of their teachers towards the new close reading method. This will be put into a chart attached below. Table 1 represents the teacher focus group interview chart that will be used at the beginning of the study, in the middle of the study and at the end of the study. Table 2 represents the student focus group interview chart, and Table 3 represents the observation field notes chart that will both be used in the same manner as Table 1. In terms of the document collection, which will also occur at the beginning, midpoint and close of the study, students’ close reading texts with their annotations and responses to text-dependent questions will be analyzed to see patterns of student work. In addition, I will be able to see if there is a greater depth and clarity to their responses over time as they become more familiar with the four-read close reading model. This table, table 4, will also be attached below.

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| Table 1: Global Themes from Teacher Interviews |

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| Theme | Evidence |
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| Table 2: Global Themes from Student Interviews |

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| Theme | Evidence |
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| Table 3: Global Themes from Observations |

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| --- | --- |
| Theme | Evidence |
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| Table 4: Patterns from Student Work |

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| --- | --- |
| Pattern | Evidence |
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**Reaction to Networking Tools**

 Networking is a crucial aspect of “gaining access” to the desired location for any field work based research study (Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Therefore, drawing on networks that have been previously built is an advantage in presenting oneself as a trustworthy researcher with good intentions. In my previous experience seeking to conduct observations and interviews with other teachers at my previous school site, I have been well-received and welcomed into their classrooms. The notion that they can give back to future teachers and learn more about their own teaching practices to better their students has been a common thread in the proposal conversations I have had. Already having a respectful, honest and mutually beneficial relationship with teachers and the school site plays a large role in gaining such a welcoming entrance into their classrooms. I am always honored to be invited in to their spaces, so I find the process of natural networking very beneficial for being able to conduct research studies with the desired population.

**Ethical Considerations**

 When this proposed study is carried out, numerous ethical considerations will be addressed in order to ensure the safety, agency and well-being of all participants. Among the aspects involved in ethical considerations of qualitative research, consent and confidentiality rank high in priority for carefully planning out. In regards to acquiring consent, all schools and teachers will be asked if they desire to participate in the study, giving them free-agency to consent to participating or decline their participation in the study. Once granted approval from the school and specific K-2 teachers, permission slips will be provided to each student’s family, so that students also have the opportunity to consent to their participation. Once consent is granted from all participating parties, confidentiality will be implemented throughout the study to protect their identities and information. For example, student names on the documents collected for review will be whited out, and teacher names will be changed in the discussion of their interviews. Furthermore, any documents collected and video tapes with interviews will be kept on a password protected computer to further ensure privacy of the participants. Finally, I will take extra steps to ensure that each of my interactions with teachers, students and other campus faculty are professional, respectful and ensure their psychological, social and emotional safety. My main goal as a researcher would be to protect my participants’ well-beings while maximizing the benefits of this study for them.

**Summary**

 In overview, the proposed study to investigate the use of close reading in the primary grades to benefit ELLs’ reading comprehension of complex texts will be a qualitative research study. Data would be triangulated, by collecting documents of student annotation work, interviewing teachers and students in focus groups and observing the close reading lessons throughout the study to note any patterns of change in reading comprehension. Using multiple methods of data collection would help to confirm any findings about the implications of the specific close reading method chosen on the reading performance of ELL students in the primary grades. Before the study even begins and throughout the duration of the study, ethical considerations will be taken into account to ensure the well-being, agency and values of the school community, teachers and students participating. The goal of this research study is to hopefully provide an effective model of close reading instruction designed to further deepen ELLs’ comprehension so their needs and interests will be respected first and foremost. A further look into ethical considerations, specifically the negations that will be taken between myself and the participating school, will be further explained in Chapter 4, as well as an overall reflection about the proposed study and its implications.

**Chapter 4**

**Introduction**

 As introduced in Chapter 3, the following section will delve into measures taken to ensure the safety of and well-being of the participants for this proposed study. In order to gain access to the desired field location for the research, I will contact school administrators at the specific elementary school in Vista, CA and district officials. They will be provided with a letter that seeks their approval of the research project. In this letter, I will first begin by underscoring the previous connections I have with the school, as I taught preschool at the elementary school for two years with Teach for America. I will emphasize that I am strongly connected to the community and desire to be back in this community for my research. In addition, this letter will contain an overview of the purpose of the study and the literature review to demonstrate to them the potential benefits this study could have on the reading comprehension of their ELL students. They will subsequently be promised a copy of the results of the study, taking an approach of reciprocity and demonstrating good intentions on my behalf to serve their student population with the outcomes of the research study (Shenton & Hayter, 2004).

 If this study is approved by the district and specific school, I will provide formal consent slips to the parents of the students participating in the study. In this formal consent slip will be a brief explanation of the nature of the study, the reasons for choosing their particular school, and the ways in which the researcher will guarantee the least possible disruption to their schooling (Shenton & Hayes, 2004). In addition, these consent forms will be provided in the home language of each family to allow the families to fully understand what they are consenting to.

 Lastly, even after the required permission has been obtained, it will still be important for me to periodically meet with the school administrators to update them on the progress of the study and maintain a trustworthy relationship with them. In addition, involving myself in the community, with students, families and teachers will continue a positive relationship with them and demonstrate openness and good will from myself.

**Analysis of Existing Research and Literature**

 To review, the proposed study and the corresponding negotiations that would ensue in order to conduct the case study, are justified by the literature already published on this topic. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the NAEP released reading proficiency scores in 2018 for 4th graders, 8th graders and 12th graders. By 4th grade, students who are classified as ELL students scored 37 points lower in reading than their non-ELL peers, with the score differential only widening as they increased in grade level (The Condition of Education, 2018). However, majority of California’s ELL students enter into the California Public School system in kindergarten, meaning that targeted reading instruction unique to an ELL’s needs should be happening in the primary grades (Hill, 2012). With the CCSS imposing higher readability marks for each grade, requiring the reading of complex texts in all grade levels, the skill of close reading needs to be implemented in the primary grades, where our ELL students begin their educational journey and where these students can be set up with lifelong reading skills (Jaeger, 2013). Several researchers and teachers have proposed modified close reading models for the primary grades, making use of proven effective techniques to improve ELL reading comprehension. These such techniques include reading a text multiple times with different purposes, increasing the level of questioning with each read, annotating the text to make meaning of the text, studying complex vocabulary associated with each text, and utilizing peer-to-peer collaboration throughout close reading. One specific model of close reading in the primary grades that incorporates these strategies has been termed the “Fab Four” and is the model proposed to be explored in this case study. Thus, a study to specifically evaluate this close reading model in the primary grades as an effective instructional strategy to improve ELL students’ reading comprehension would be beneficial.

**Implications for Practice and Teaching**

 This proposed case study would have numerous implications for practice and teaching, with the overarching goal of being able to provide primary grade instructors with an effective close reading method that will improve the reading comprehension of their ELL students. One of the main impacts that it would have on teaching is continuing the exploration into how to adapt close reading, commonly performed in high school and college, for students in the primary grades. Students are encountering increasingly complex texts in all subject areas starting in kindergarten, so teachers need to be able to instruct students effectively and in a developmentally appropriate manner on how to carefully and closely read these texts. In addition, students would be provided with strategies they will eventually be able to implement independently when they are trying to comprehend complex texts. Research has shown that when young students are provided with opportunities to investigate texts closely, their comprehension of concepts is enhanced and they gain reading skills that support them throughout their education (Lafond, 2012). Because students will ultimately need to be able to comprehend technical, complex texts for success in college and career, equipping students with strategies that they can use would have lifelong positive impacts. Finally, mainstream teachers would be provided with specific tailored support for reading instruction of their ELL students, meeting a need of general education teachers not largely or uniformly met yet. In a survey among general education teachers, majority of general education teachers reported feeling underprepared and undertrained to meet the needs of an increasingly growing population of ELL students (Samson & Collins, 2012). Being able to provide general education teachers with a model that targets ELL reading comprehension to enhance their instruction would hopefully begin to alleviate these feelings of incompetency and under preparedness in their instruction of their ELL students in the domain of reading comprehension.

**Implications for Further Research and Inquiry**

 Upon the completion of this action research cycle, it would be beneficial to embark on a more long-term research cycle with the same close reading model. This study’s duration is one semester and examines a kindergarten class, a first-grade class and a second-grade class using modified four-read close-reading models to enhance their reading comprehension. However, what would be interesting to research would be the continued and long-term effects of such a program when begun in Kindergarten. As mentioned in the literature review, many high school and college instructors have noticed that their students are not sufficiently prepared to tackle complex texts. These complex texts are now making their way into the elementary grades with the onset of CCSS, and are used as assessment tools beginning in third grade on standardized tests. It would be interesting to evaluate whether ELL students who begin performing foundational close-reading strategies in kindergarten perform better in their reading comprehension of complex texts by the time they reach third grade for standardized testing. Thus, following the same group of students from kindergarten through third grade, and perhaps beyond, would be a fascinating research cycle to analyze the potential long-term benefits of learning close reading skills in the primary grades.

**Critical Friend**

A critical friend is defined by Costa and Kallick as a “trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend” (Wrigley, 2017). I was assigned a critical friend at the beginning of this program and we both grew to rely on each other for support, advice and encouragement throughout the past three months. When we first met, we served as sounding boards for each other, brainstorming potential research topics, providing feedback on these ideas and ultimately helping each other more narrowly and specifically construct a research question. We were able to use our previous teaching experiences to offer insight into potential topics, giving each other articles that related to each other’s topics and potential areas of interest within each topic. It was helpful that we both wanted our research questions to be narrowed into the primary grades as we could offer resources and valuable perspectives when crafting our research questions and literature reviews. As the program continued and we delved deeper into the research cycle, we helped keep each other accountable, setting timeline goals for when we wanted to finish each section and clarifying what components needed to be addressed in each section. Towards the end of the program we would check in about once a week with any questions we had about the project which was helpful to know that I had someone I could go to for any little piece of clarification. Overall, I appreciated the critical friend aspect of this research cycle for the accountability, insight, support and encouragement it provided and would greatly recommend that others beginning this program invest in their relationship with their critical friend.

**Summary**

 In sum, throughout this research study there are numerous aspects about the reading comprehension of ELL students that I hope to learn. To begin with, I hope to discover teacher attitudes towards instructing ELL students in the domain of reading comprehension. Uncovering any biases, frustrations or hopes that the teachers have in regards to ELL reading comprehension instruction will be crucial in informing myself and other researchers what needs to be addressed in trainings and instruction practices for these teachers. In addition, this will allow me to see any unhelpful strategies currently being used in order to see what aspect of their reading instruction needs to be changed or made better to best assist their ELL students. In conjunction with understanding teacher attitudes towards reading instruction of their ELL students, I am seeking to discover whether close reading models such as the four-read can actually be implemented and modified in order to meet the needs of elementary ELL readers. Ultimately, the goal of this research would be to provide a close-reading model to early elementary teachers so that they can effectively aid their ELL students in reading comprehension, helping to close the significant gap in their reading proficiency scores on National assessments and improving their reading comprehension.

 Questions that could arise during the study or after the study that might remain include:

1. What aspects of the four-read close reading model are necessary in any reading instruction in order to improve the reading comprehension of ELL students?
2. Do early elementary school teachers feel that it is feasible to use a modified close reading approach in their reading instruction? Why or why not?
3. If students begin using a close-reading model in Kindergarten, will this be of benefit to their reading long-term? In essence, should close reading be started, even foundationally, in Kindergarten in order to set readers up for the complex reading they are now being required to perform in elementary school?
4. If this four-read close reading model seems to be effective, how should this instructional practice be incorporated into reading curriculum already being used?

This study, it’s potential impacts to highlight an effective close reading model for ELL students in the primary grades, and the questions that could arise during the study would bring about deserved attention towards best reading instructional practices. The ultimate outcome would be to better enhance an ELLs’ ability to comprehend the increasingly complex texts required by the Common Core Sate Standards and that are necessary for success in all content areas.

**Supporting Documents**

 **Example of Annotation Key**



**Example of Depth of Knowledge Questions**

 **Example of the Fab Four**

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