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# Dual Language and ENL Comprehension: A First Grade Study for Students at Risk for Delayed English Language Development

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# Dual Language and ENL Comprehension: A First Grade Study for Students at Risk for Delayed English Language Development

## **Abstract**

This research began by asking how dual language programming impacts English comprehension for ENL students. Research was conducted within one first grade dual language cohort with five bilingual students. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, utilizing historical comprehension data, observing read alouds, and assessing student comprehension. Findings revealed that comprehension in a participant's first language was positively related to English comprehension. However, individual student differences impacted the extent of the correlation. Furthermore, dual language teachers implemented common instructional practices to scaffold ENL student comprehension. Therefore, the data implied that native language instruction is integral, student backgrounds and differences need to be analyzed, and dual language educators need adequate professional development to best aid ENL comprehension.

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Dual Language and ENL Comprehension:  
A First Grade Study for Students at Risk For Delayed English Language Development

By

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### Abstract

This research began by asking how dual language programming impacts English comprehension for ENL students. Research was conducted within one first grade dual language cohort with five bilingual students. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, utilizing historical comprehension data, observing read alouds, and assessing student comprehension. Findings revealed that comprehension in a participant's first language was positively related to English comprehension. However, individual student differences impacted the extent of the correlation. Furthermore, dual language teachers implemented common instructional practices to scaffold ENL student comprehension. Therefore, the data implied that native language instruction is integral, student backgrounds and differences need to be analyzed, and dual language educators need adequate professional development to best aid ENL comprehension.

### **Dual Language Programming and ENL Students**

The topic that will be explored for the purpose of this study is that of dual language programming and the corresponding performance of ENL students, as specifically related to their English Language Development and reading comprehension skills. Being that the purpose of reading is to comprehend the material that we as readers interact with, it is imperative that comprehension is the specific aspect of language development that is delved into. This topic in general will be analyzed and dissected due to its importance to the current state of education. The demographic landscape of the United States is drastically changing. As revealed in the 2010 U.S. Census (2010), the percentage of non-English language speakers grew by 140 percent while the nation's overall population grew by only 34 percent. Building off of that, by the year 2050, it is estimated that approximately 24% of the population will be Latino. That being said, there are already shifts in education occurring as a result. In 1975, a Puerto Rican community successfully sued the New York City Department of Education, mandating the city to provide bilingual education or education in their native language, to its Spanish-speaking English Language Learners. After this precedent was set, it was amended across the country that public schools that have at least 15 students of the same language group in two contiguous grades must offer a bilingual education option (Conger, 2010).

Over the years, bilingual options have expanded to include English immersion, bilingual and also dual language programming. The main differences between these programming models is that dual language programming specifically requires ENL students as well as Native English speakers to be instructed in both English and the immersion language. As a result, these dual language programs allow a curriculum that embraces every student's culture and brings "their" literacy into the classroom on a daily basis. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to develop

both their native language and English contiguously therefore using what they already know to support new learning. Overall, these impending shifts in our student demographics and the mandating of new programming indicate a need for educators to understand how each specific program can impact these students' achievement, specifically in reading comprehension.

Researching and understanding the impacts of each program will help identify what is the best option for ENL students in a world where they are becoming more plentiful and expectations and the achievement gap are continuously increasing.

Comprehension instruction begins far before reading occurs in an elementary classroom. Comprehension includes not only reading comprehension, but also listening comprehension. Furthermore, once students begin reading, their ability to decode and read fluently impacts their overall comprehension or ability to process what they are reading as they are reading it. Fountas and Pinnell (2003) share that it is a teacher's responsibility to teach those "in-the-head" operations such as comprehension strategies to support comprehension understanding at a young age (p. 19). Not only do students need to demonstrate accurate and efficient word solving, monitoring and correcting, gathering, predicting, adjusting and fluency skills, but they also need to be able expand the meaning of the text. Being able to expand the meaning entails making connections, inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing and critiquing. Expanding meaning of texts that students read and listen to requires higher order thinking and therefore demands the modeling of these processes aloud. Ultimately, comprehension is complicated in that it is composed of many moving parts, all necessary on some level for successful understanding. By providing dual language students the opportunity to learn these comprehension strategies in both languages they are able to build higher level thinking skills by acquiring understanding in their dominant language and transferring that skill set to their second language.

If this research is not pursued then educators will be unaware of how and in what way dual language programming could impact their students. Although dual language programming may not be an option in every school community, if it is found that it has the potential to positively impact reading comprehension in English, and other programming does not provide the same outcomes, then it would be a disservice to continue other programming as it is. Regardless of specific programming, as a result of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the stakes for English Language Learners, their schools, and their teachers, have been significantly raised. ENL students are required to take academic exams in English reading/language arts and mathematics within three years after they enter school and the assessments rely heavily on content vocabulary and comprehension (Linton, 2004). Standardized testing is a large focus in today's educational system. Test results are used to inform instructional decisions, evaluate teacher performance, and guide student placement, especially as related to Special Education. Ultimately and unfortunately, these exams dictate in which direction or track an individual's educational career heads, which sets the foundation for the opportunities they encounter the remainder of their life.

As it is, ENL students are falling behind their English counterparts as they attempt to maintain their understanding of required academic content. When students never fully gain proficiency in English they are more apt to drop out of high school at higher rates. The dropout rate for Hispanics is higher than that for any other ethnic group except for Native Americans. The Latino dropout rate is 21% nationally while the college completion rate for Hispanics is only 11% as found by Lindholm-Leary and Block (2010). Furthermore, these individuals earn less than those who reach proficiency, and experience greater social isolation in comparison to those students who reach proficiency (Kim, Curby, & Winsler, 2014). There is much at stake for English Language Learners in today's educational world. Therefore, it is vital that research of

this topic be pursued in order to determine the link between dual language programming and reading comprehension. This understanding can help inform educators on whether or not dual language programming will be the best avenue for teaching these students and ultimately prepare them for the rest of their academic career and their lives beyond classroom walls.

The main question that I wanted to answer through my research is “how does dual language programming impact the reading comprehension of native Spanish speaking ENL students?” While designing my research I utilized the Cultural Historical and Interdependence theoretical framework as a lens. This overall framework took into account how culture needs to be valued and at the center of a student’s education as well as how the development of an individual’s primary language lends itself to the acquisition of a second language more readily. Prior to researching I looked in depth at the already published literature on dual language programming and the comprehension of Spanish-speaking ENL students. The current research highlighted that many language proficiencies transfer readily from language one to language two, but that comprehension is a more challenging proficiency to predict between languages as it is a more complex or an unconstrained skill. For these skills to transfer proficient educators and programs are a necessity. To help me research this question I conducted classroom observations of read aloud lessons where comprehension was assessed in both English and Spanish through comprehension conversations. In addition I conducted teacher and student interviews and utilized cumulative data including student cumulative folders, report cards and reading benchmarking assessments in both English and Spanish, as well as parent questionnaires. My findings include the positive correlation between English and Spanish comprehension; the significant impact of individual differences on comprehension achievement; and the presence and importance of specific comprehension strategies and collaboration. The implications are providing native

Spanish speaking students the opportunity to develop in their first language in comprehension, considering all student data when utilizing assessments and providing interventions, and providing professional development and collaborative planning opportunities for dual language teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will be guided by theories that delve into how literacy is defined and how diversity impacts literacy learning. The definition of literacy is historically and culturally constructed and as a result it is constantly changing in our postmodern society (Freebody & Luke, 1990). When reading and writing, every individual makes decisions depending on their own specific literacy and cultural beliefs, values, and experiences. Cultural differences greatly affect the process of acquiring language due to the fact that literacy itself is culturally defined (Bedard et al, 2007; Ferdman, 1990; Meier, 2003). According to Ferdman (1990), the idea of culture encompasses the behaviors, beliefs, values, and norms associated with a specific group in society. Therefore, different groups in society view literacy and the act of being literate in their own varying ways. Based on their own background they formulate what it means to be literate which in turn affects how they acquire language. Since children acquire literacy as they experience and participate in their own unique literacy events in their homes and in their communities, their language acquisition is directly influenced by their specific cultural environment and those who reside in it. Bedard, Van Horn, and Garcia (2007) demonstrate this understanding by identifying family influence as a way that culture affects literacy. Depending on their culture and family's attitude towards literacy, individuals can develop varying perceptions about language. Varying experiences can shape an individual's attitude towards literacy and what they perceive to be literacy.

Schools are not only imparting literacy skills, they are also teaching values that ground their mainstream definition of literacy. For the dominant population it is a relatively seamless transition, but for students whose primary discourse and definition of literacy is not represented in classroom instruction or assessment, it causes tension in their language acquisition (Mays, 2008). Often times this tension is present for ENL students, but dual language programming provides the opportunity for embedding their culture into their learning on a daily basis.

The extent that culture affects one's literacy development is directly related to the type of attachment they have to their cultural group (Ferdman, 1990). When looking at specific cultures, each person has a social identity, an ethnic identity, and a cultural identity. One's social and ethnic identity answers the question of "who am I?" relating back to their membership group. However, one's cultural identity truly looks at how one feels about their cultural features. If an individual finds conflict between their cultural definition of literacy and that that they are experiencing in the school environment, then depending on their affiliation with their group their cultural identity may shift in order to better fit into the expectations set by the dominant discourse. Ferdman believes that literacy can in turn change one's cultural identity.

Utilizing the definition of literacy and what is already known about ENL students and reading comprehension, this study has been informed by both the Cultural Historical Theory as well as the Interdependence theoretical framework. Ultimately, the Cultural Historical Theory argues that culture should be the center of an individual's education. Culture is inherent and as a result it should be recognized, understood, and incorporated on a daily basis in the classroom (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). It should be embedded in student learning, assessment, and both oral and written expression. By placing culture in the center of learning and welcoming it into classrooms, we eliminate the need to view it in the form of a deficit model. It is not something

that will impede learning, but rather it becomes a part of a repertoire that will enhance learning for ENL students as well as those learning around them. This theory connects to my topic directly since dual language programming allows culture to be at the center of learning for these ENL students. For a portion of everyday their learning and ability to show what they understand is able to be demonstrated through their native language. In addition, students are exposed to texts written in their native language revolving around content connected to their culture. Not only their native language present, but their cultural background is represented through the learning materials. This additive approach to teaching ENL students builds off of their strengths, specifically related to their culture, and provides them the opportunity to be the model for those learning and language other than their own.

In addition, the basis of dual language programming is based off of the Interdependence Theory as posited by Cummins as mentioned by Cortina et al (2015). This theory as related to English Language Learners looks more deeply at the connection between a child's L1 (native language) and L2 (second language). It is found that a child's language acquisition in their first language is directly related to the rate of their acquisition in their second language. When a child is lacking strong control over their primary language, it impacts their second language acquisition because they have less foundational concepts to build their new understandings upon. Cummins paints the picture that underlying both language bases is a reservoir that serves as the basin for the growth of both. When the reservoir is dry it makes it more challenging to achieve substantial and sustainable growth in their second language. This theory connects directly to my topic in that dual language students have the opportunity to develop in their primary language on a daily basis. They receive literacy instruction in Spanish with which they are building foundational concepts to increase the opportunity for the transfer of literacy skills to language

two. Furthermore, they are practicing listening comprehension through read alouds and questioning in two languages simultaneously. Through these experiences students have opportunities to build connections between content and languages and enhance their overall literacy development, including comprehension understanding.

In essence, literacy is greatly impacted by culture. Literacy and culture are inevitably interrelated and continually collide and collaborate throughout the process of language acquisition depending on the individual and their background, but especially for English Language Learners. Dual language programming takes this into account and therefore provides an opportunity for learning more about how specific programming can impact literacy development, specifically English comprehension.

### **Research Question**

Given that Cummins (2000) theorized that children's language acquisition in a new language depends on the development and foundation of their first language, how does dual language programming or learning content in both English and Spanish impact the reading comprehension of ENL students?

### **Literature Review**

Spanish speaking English Language Learners (ENLs) combined with language of instruction has been a topic of great controversy as public school demographics are drastically changing in the United States and bilingual programming is often required. The most significant debate revolving around this relevant topic is the use of English language learners' primary language for academic instruction. The literature presents data that supports the use of primary language in instruction with the understanding that development in one's primary language supports the development in a similar and second language. Although it is challenging to identify

how language one skills impact comprehension achievement due to the multiple facets that contribute to comprehension ability, there are many positive correlations between language one and language two development. Furthermore, although the effects do not appear to be significant in the short term, research shows that long term effects provide English language learners with the skills necessary to tackle Common Core State Standards, excel in high school exit exams, and be successful in a world where biliteracy is valued and considered an asset. Another theme that arose through the studies was related to the impact of programming and instructional decisions on student comprehension. Using the understanding about how language one may impact language two and understanding whether the interrelationships have positive or negative consequences for bilingual learners is vital for programming and instructional decisions. As a result, the classroom needs to contain explicit instruction in both language one and language two. Additional instructional practices that ENL students benefit from include, but are not limited to, instructional conversation, academic language instruction, instructional talk, and translanguaging. These programs and instructional practices need to be implemented by qualified educators who are dedicated to maintaining the fidelity needed to create a bilingual environment where varying language and linguistic capital is valued and utilized on a daily basis. Lastly, the literature on bilingual students and comprehension focused on the overarching theme that comprehension and student achievement in general can be impacted by varying factors due to varying contextual differences some of which include socio-economic status, home language, and individual student differences. These differences are critical for educators to be aware of so that they can best generalize implications for future instruction of ENL students as related to reading comprehension. Factors such as the surrounding community proved to have a more positive impact on language proficiency surprisingly while factors of socio-economic status

negatively impacted students, especially at a younger age. Ultimately, these factors are a part of a broader context that is challenging if not impossible to control. As educators we can only be aware that they exist and be cognizant of them by decontextualizing throughout our research. Only then can educators truly understand how to achieve optimum results in ENL comprehension achievement.

### **Connections between Language 1 (L1) and Language 2 (L2) in Reading Comprehension**

The increasing diversity in communities around the nation mirrors that being represented in our schools and therefore our student populations. These significant shifts require educators to truly understand how native languages impact second language acquisition and overall literacy achievement (Baker, Park, Baker, Basaraba, Kame'enui, & Beck, 2012; Branum-Martin, Foorman, Francis, & Mehta, 2010; Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007; Doyle, Haring, Hartranft, Proctor, Silverman & Zelinke, 2015; Feinauer, Hall-Kenyon & Davison, 2013; Leider, Proctor, Silverman, & Haring, 2013). In dual language programming, ELL students are arriving with their own set of individual language and linguistic skills that have the potential to impact their literacy learning, both positively and negatively. As a result, the majority of the current research regarding ELL learners revolves around the connection and relationship between language one and language two development (Howard, Paez, August, Barr, Kenyon & Malabonga, 2014). Being that the reading and comprehension processes are complex, research looks to pinpoint specific components of both that will increase the rate at which language skills transfer in order for these diverse students to utilize their already enriched language toolbox. Ultimately, by identifying how these two language systems and their widespread skills are related educators can be made aware of what is the best way to promote not only English language reading comprehension, but also student biliteracy.

Whenever biliteracy and bilingualism are researched attention is drawn to the connection between language 1 and language 2. Promoting growth in English is typically a challenging task for educators, let alone growth in two languages and neither are an easy undertaking. As a result, there is a significant amount of research that looks closely at how L1 language development impacts L2 language development. The closest correlation is shown when transferring constrained (Feinauer, Hall-Kenyon, & Davison, 2013) skills or literacy proficiencies that are skilled based. These constrained skills can be found in the form of letter knowledge, letter-sound association, and phonological awareness. Therefore constrained skills often encompass word reading or decoding. Most studies show that these skills based literacy understandings transfer readily to L2. In 2007, 68 bilingual students in grades 1-5 were assessed in both Spanish and English to better understand the relationship between Spanish oral fluency and English reading outcomes for the end of the school year (Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). The results demonstrated that scores in both Spanish and English fluency improved across increasing grades suggesting that reading in both English and Spanish showed a mutual influence between first and second language development. This information is valuable in that as oral fluency and accuracy increases as a result of efficient decoding, an individual can free up their mind for the more cognitively demanding task of comprehending the content. This information is significant to English reading comprehension because comprehension relies on these literacy skills, specifically in early reading development which sets the foundation for overall reading comprehension.

However, fluency is not the only indicator of comprehension understanding. Uchikoshi and Maniates (2010) looked at the connection between vocabulary and decoding in English and Spanish and English comprehension. The bilingual students that were involved in this study

performed similarly to their monolingual peers although they had lower English vocabulary scores and performed significantly lower on oral English skills. However, they surpassed their monolingual counterparts in both English word reading and English decoding. On the Spanish assessments they had lower Spanish vocabulary, but above average decoding skills and average reading comprehension skills in Spanish. Ultimately, this study confirms that decoding and word reading skills can transfer to L2 and positively impact comprehension in the younger grades. However, it can also be deduced that vocabulary and oral language did not play as large a role on comprehension at a young age. August, Carlo, Proctor, and Snow (2006) built off of this understanding through their study which consisted of Spanish-English bilingual 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. They found that with later elementary students, English decoding and fluency were very similar for all participants. However, Spanish vocabulary ability was a stronger predictor for English oral language, fluency, and overall comprehension. Therefore, the effects shift throughout an individual's language development. Bilingual students rely more heavily on decoding and fluency in the beginning of their second language development and this shifts towards a reliance on vocabulary knowledge and oral language proficiency in order to better understand more complex texts and content as they progress through their second language acquisition and move towards biliteracy.

However, the research also demonstrates that it is more challenging to determine the relationship between L1 and L2 comprehension directly. While some language proficiencies are skills based, others are unconstrained or rather are meaning based. These meaning based proficiencies can be considered a larger problem space for bilingual learners especially as they interact with challenging vocabulary, syntax, and content in general. Furthermore, if students are at different levels of development with each strand of comprehension then it is challenging to

pinpoint how L1 and L2 connect separate from individual student skills and differences. It is already determined within a language that oral language proficiency positively impacts comprehension due to the need to decode and utilize syntactic comprehension. Proctor, August, Snow, and Barr (2010) studied this impact through assessing 4<sup>th</sup> graders in English and Spanish in several subsets necessary for adequate comprehension. There was a strong correlation between decoding and predicted reading comprehension in both English and Spanish. In addition, English comprehension was shown to be related to Spanish reading comprehension. However, this relationship was to a lesser degree compared to the decoding correlation. Ultimately, both oral language in Spanish and alphabetic knowledge are important in the comprehension process and by fourth grade, oral language skills are more predictive of comprehension than decoding. As oral language and syntactic comprehension become more challenging, bilingual students can rely on comprehension strategies taught and reinforced in their native language. Strategies transfer more easily as opposed to specific comprehension skills. Nakamoto, Lindsey, and Manis (2008) found similar results in their work with 3<sup>rd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> graders, but found the correlations more so within languages. They found in both languages that decoding and oral language were predictors of comprehension within the same language, with heavy reliance on oral language for 5<sup>th</sup> grade or later elementary years. Leider, Proctor, Silverman, and Haring (2013) discovered an important understanding while working with Spanish-English bilingual elementary students. In this case oral language and vocabulary were predictors, but more so than decoding. Furthermore, English language ability played a more dominant role in English comprehension as opposed to Spanish oral language. The combination of these two studies demonstrate that the rule bound nature of decoding and word identification provide strong indication of comprehension in early years, but

oral language is more complex and broad and as the content and reading become more complex, students need to rely more heavily on that broader knowledge to comprehend.

Moving beyond the word level of comprehension was looked at closely through the need for an understanding of syntax or sentence structure in L1. It is known that syntactic comprehension is a precursor to emergent literacy and this was confirmed in Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono, and Otheguy's (2009) study as it demonstrated that L1 syntactic comprehension was the stronger predictor of L2 listening comprehension. Going one step further, this theorizes that syntactic comprehension is not tied to a specific language and therefore can be transferred between languages in addition to those already discussed. Doyle, Haring, Hartranft, Proctor, Silverman, and Zelinke (2015) confirm this theory saying, "the role of syntax does not differ for monolinguals and bilinguals" (p. 1399). Additional findings included the lack of relationship between morphological awareness and reading comprehension for bilingual and monolingual readers. The majority of research around comprehension looks at whether comprehension transfers between L1 and L2 and to what extent. As a result, it is vital that educators move beyond the "simple view of reading," when assessing and researching reading comprehension with ENL students (Leider et al, 2013, p. 1482).

At risk bilingual students are of particular concern to educators. Although one may believe that explicit direct instruction in English would be the most beneficial, based on the interdependence theory, it has been shown that developing in both languages generates more success for these students (Baker, Park, Baker, Basaraba, Kame'enui & Beck, 2012). Ultimately, in a dual language setting these students are receiving double the language instruction. Despite receiving less English instruction than their monolingual peers, they demonstrated more growth in English oral reading fluency which also resulted in higher scores than those of similar needs in

English only programming. This further solidifies the idea that additive teaching in dual language classrooms allows students to develop a foundation that can support them through their struggles. Carlo, Barr, August, Calderon and Artzi (2014) studied 5<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual students and although it did not focus specifically on at-risk students, their findings also reinforced the benefits of double language instruction. Although the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were receiving less instruction in English overall, utilizing what is known about the Interdependence Theory, transfer occurred between languages and all students of all backgrounds and abilities experienced significant growth in English reading comprehension.

The majority of studies and data revolve around dual language instruction while students are first acquiring English Language skills. It is here that parents and educators worry about the students falling behind their monolingual peers, especially as the pressure of standardized testing sets in (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010). Standardized testing plays an important role in how instruction and resources are allocated in a classroom or a school district. With the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2001, it became that much more vital that students be integrated into the classroom and proficient in English (Conger, 2010). The rigor of these exams requires students to not only read them, but to comprehend them and show their level of understanding. However, more powerful data lies in the long term effects of learning and demonstrating understanding in L1 and L2 as opposed to teaching for and two these standardized tests. It was found that in a predominantly low SES community where Hispanic students participated in a dual language program, the 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders achieved comparably or significantly higher than their mainstream peers in tests of English reading/language arts and mathematics. Not only did they perform on par with their peers, but they also increased faster than their mainstream counterparts and have on grade level math skills which were not the same for their all of their peers. Lindholm-Leary

and Hernandez (2011) build on this idea through research surrounding 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders. The study not only looked at bilingual students as a group, but considered the various levels that bilingual students bring to the table. These designations included students who were native English speakers, native Spanish speakers who were classified as RFEP, or reclassified as fluent English proficient, and native Spanish speakers who are still considered English Language Learners (ENL). The study concluded that RFEP students outperformed their Latino English proficient peers and also English proficient peers in English mainstream classes. Furthermore, most current ENLs are likely on their way to achieving English Proficiency since 85%-87% of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were RFEP or advanced on the CELDT. It was found that students that participated in dual language programming performed superior to their peers on in many facets of their school career (Behseta, Contreras, Ellis, Martinez-Cruz, & Tran, 2015; Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011). First and foremost, these students developed a sense of resiliency and pride in their bilingualism. Their culture was the center of their education their entire lives and they were able to utilize their funds of knowledge to support their own learning and the learning of their peers around them. Furthermore, these students, both native Spanish and English speakers, outperformed their monolingual peers dramatically. They were able to take the advanced placement exam for Spanish and receive university credit. In addition, they also performed the same or better than their peers in reading, math and science. These students are particularly prepared to understand more complex content as a result of their ability to manipulate and solve linguistic problems. Furthermore, they are able to achieve high levels of success in both their native and second language due to years of developing their metalinguistic skills. The overwhelming success stories are attributed from the increased level of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness of both language systems for bilingual students. They have a more

advanced working knowledge of their native language and that helps facilitate the transfer of language processes and functions into English. Even though there are arguments that dual language cannot impact English comprehension immediately, it is evident that the long term effects far outweigh the potential lag as students juggle content and concepts in multiple languages. Behseta et al (2015) argues that bilingualism and biliteracy is the way of the modern world and the ability to not only converse in this manner, but also deal with the cognitive demands in today's society, they are more adequately prepared than their monolingual counterparts.

Most research is grounded in the theoretical work on Cummins (2000) and research continues to support both the Interdependence Theory as well as the Threshold Theory. Understanding and using the interrelationships between L1 and L2 will help promote bilingualism in ENL students. As a result, creating more students who can reap the long term effects of these programs.

### **Impacts of Programming and Instruction on Comprehension**

Although it is mandated by law to provide native language instruction, often to native Spanish speaking students, there is not one method of instruction that fits all needs. With the demanding expectations of the Common Core State Standards regarding comprehension, it is that much more vital that ENL students are provided with a program that is going to fit their needs and help them best achieve those expectations (Silverman, Proctor, Haring, Doyle, Mitchell & Meyer, 2013). There are numerous options when it comes to educating bilingual students, but some programming options and instruction create better opportunities for these often time disadvantaged students to outperform their monolingual peers in reading comprehension and not become another Latino failing to close the achievement gap. Therefore,

choosing programs and implementing them with fidelity is vital to supporting the learning and success of ENL students.

There are a variety of programs that districts and schools can choose from when determining what would be the best programming for their needs. Uchikoshi and Maniates (2010) discuss four types of bilingual programming available in American public schools. These different types range from newcomer, to transitional bilingual, to developmental bilingual, and lastly two way immersion or dual language programming. Another alternative is English Immersion if your population does not require a specific bilingual program. The most common programs include transitional bilingual education (TBE) as well as dual language (DL). TBE allows for instruction to be provided in L1 in all content areas and as control of L2 develops, instruction gradually shifts towards primary instruction in L2. On the other hand, DL is based on the idea that instruction should be split 50-50 between L1 and L2 and therefore the classroom community consists of a diverse population both culturally and socially. Depending on location, programming may be decided for the teacher by their district. Both programs have been proven to promote student achievement in reading and across content areas through the development of bilingualism and biliteracy. These programs emphasize the importance of strong first-language literacy skills for learning a second language. In addition, learning academic subjects in their native language makes the entire curriculum more accessible for ENL students. Furthermore, these classrooms and programs allow parents to become a part of the learning process regardless of language proficiency because schools are utilizing linguistic capital and fostering home school connections which is known to impact student learning outcomes. As Lindhold-Leary et al (2010) found, ENL students after 10 years in mainstream English classrooms have a probability of only 40% of being designated as fluent English speakers by the time they graduate. In

addition, English oral language impacts reading and also comprehension skills. Although there are many options, research has shown that quality and not labels is what determines good reading instruction and achievement for ENL students.

Extensive research of comprehension instruction indicates that utilizing specific instructional strategies and focusing on specific skill instruction increases ENL comprehension abilities. Building off of L1 and L2 relationship understandings, some instruction needs to take place in L1 to impact L2, especially for reading comprehension (Silverman et al, 2013). Even though it may not impact it directly, the cognitive skills allow for transfer to occur in indirect and specific ways. Furthermore, it is important to use research findings on connections between L1 and L2 to guide instruction and best meet student needs. Spanish reading instruction can help predict English reading skills, including comprehension (Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007).

Multiple studies suggest explicit instruction in both languages is necessary, especially for the successful transfer of reading skills (Proctor et al, 2010; Proctor & Mo, 2009; Carlo, Barr, August, Calderon, & Artzi, 2014; Howard, Paez, August, Barr, Kenyon & Malabonga, 2014). Although dual language programs allow for collaborative learning from those different from them, explicit teaching is still necessary. Even though students learning in Spanish grow despite having less English instruction, but they need explicit English instruction, most specifically for transfer (Silverman et al, 2013; Carlo et al, 2014). A study was conducted demonstrates this need. The study focused on the success of those students participated in direct cognate instruction seeing as how vocabulary understanding is a strand of overall comprehension. By alerting bilingual students to cognates and explicitly teaching the usefulness of cognates, bilingual students outperformed monolinguals in comprehension passages with cognates. It was

found that once these skills were taught and solidified, students in older grades relied on those developed strategies in their L1 (Proctor & Mo, 2009). Academic language is another aspect related to comprehension, specifically across content areas. Oftentimes bilingual students receive less exposure to academic English in order to optimize comprehension (Silverman et al, 2013). However, watering down this language is not going to help these students in the long run when the expectations incorporate this language. Academic language does not develop quickly without instruction even in one's native language (Cheung & Slavin, 2012). As a result, educators need to be made aware of the linguistic challenges presented in their curriculum. Instead of working around them they need to incorporate them in their plans and be proactive in how they will make the language more accessible for their students while maintaining rigor. Lucero (2012) found that while teachers were mindful of academic language and its importance they often times were not aware of the demands within their curriculum.

Besides explicit instruction, there are numerous other research proven instructional practices that bilingual educators should have in their repertoire in order to generate student comprehension. Silverman et al (2013) conducted a study that coded the interactions between teachers and bilingual students. One of the most powerful practices was instructional conversation. Instructional conversation requires teachers to use the student's zone of proximal development to guide their language questioning, modeling, and instruction. Some talk moves that educators can use include using varied vocabulary, using advanced linguistic structures, using strategic repetition, repeating students' utterances, extending discussion about topics, and engaging in cognitively rich topics of conversation. Furthermore, these can be included in interactive book reading. The purpose of this type of talk is that educators are providing bilingual students with the modeled language appropriate for their L2 development. It takes into account

student individual needs and community and family knowledge to generate engaging and culturally relevant conversations to increase comprehension. It was proven that the presence of this type of language can counteract or mitigate the effects of lack of L2 proficiency at home which can impact L2 development in general. This language use was found to increase reading comprehension in TBE (transitional bilingual) classrooms, but impacted dual language students to a lesser degree. It is thought that students in these classrooms receive these cognitive benefits through interactions with their peers who scaffold their L2 development in an authentic and culturally relevant way as well (Lopez, Scanlan, & Gorman, 2015). Along with instructional conversation, an educator working with bilingual students can participate in instructional talk. This instructional strategy differs in that it relates more specifically to direct instruction related to vocabulary and comprehension. When bilingual students were explicitly taught definitions and words relations it positively impacted their vocabulary development. When teachers taught specific comprehension strategies the use of these strategies increased for bilingual students, but not for monolingual students. It was found that even mentioning a comprehension strategy increased the use of it in bilingual students. Inferential comprehension was focused on through strategies such as questioning the author. These student led activities promoted growth in comprehension. However, questioning the author is one of the only student led strategies that accomplished that. It was found that when teachers led the focus on comprehension and vocabulary students were more successful than through inquiry based instruction. Another unrelated practice that these bilingual teachers utilized was alerting the students to the purpose for each lesson along with an objective (Silverman et al, 2013). Overall, this study generated many purposeful teacher driven practices that brought about student growth in comprehension.

Although much of the literature focused on the relationship of L1 and L2, few focused on using the languages interchangeably to promote and demonstrate student understanding. Dual language programming specifically splits instruction 50-50 which keeps instruction separate despite the end goal of using the funds of knowledge from other languages to grow and understand. Hopewell (2011) argues that since it is known that productive language abilities and receptive language abilities are often at different levels, then educators cannot expect students to demonstrate understanding in L2 all the time. This study demonstrated the effect of translanguaging in literature groups for high school students. Once the students were able to use L1 when communicating about what they read they were able to commit their cognitive processing to comprehension as opposed to oral language. Since students are encouraged to learn L1 and L2 simultaneously it should not be forgotten that they may be able to show their understanding more adequately through L1. That ability to demonstrate comprehension should not be missed or discounted. It is then that explicit instruction for transferring of strategies can be the most meaningful and beneficial. A study was conducted focusing on how linguistic capital impacts student comprehension (Uchikoshi & Maniates, 2010). The bilingual teachers in this study explicitly taught vocabulary and comprehension strategies, but they approached it differently than most other studies. Instead of just introducing the strategy in both languages, they created a schedule in order to encourage the transfer of comprehension strategies for each learner since it has been proven that strategies transfer more readily and benefit L2 comprehension. When a strategy was first introduced it would be taught in L1. Then, the strategy would be reviewed in English. Lastly, the strategy would be solidified by practicing it at home where parents can support their bilingual students in a language they are most often more proficient in. This process has proven successful for bilingual students in these programs and

confirms the idea that direct instruction of comprehension strategies, home school connections, and connecting L1 and L2 skills promotes student learning. Although there are not specific requirements for how to teach bilingual students, these studies demonstrate the importance of making sure that instruction is cognizant and flexible in relation to bilingual students' wealth of knowledge and strategies when expressing their understanding. Uchikoshi and Maniates (2010) are not alone in that thought, in that Proctor et al (2010) also believe that since languages are being practiced simultaneously they should not be compartmentalized, but rather represent hybrid language practices. This flexibility allows all students to use their complete linguistic tool kit and perform to their full potential. Ultimately, it has been found that the most effective classrooms use their strengths in either language to perform well (Branum-Martin, Foorman, Francis & Mehta, 2010).

Often times outside factors such as socioeconomic status and individual language proficiencies can impact student achievement. However, it was found that intense and explicit reading instruction in both Spanish and English mitigated the effects of poverty on comprehension ability (Howard et al, 2014). Furthermore, this occurred through the understanding of the importance of vocabulary on reading and reading comprehension. Therefore, emphasizing explicit vocabulary development benefitted these at risk students significantly. Baker et al (2012) connects to this research revolving around academically at risk students. They concluded that by simply participating in a dual language program and having the opportunity to learn extensively in their native language and English as well as double their language instruction significantly helps to mitigate outside factors for academically at risk students as related to their English language comprehension.

On the other hand, poor quality of instruction can also negatively impact comprehension of ENL students. The quality of instruction could be as a result of a lack of Spanish proficient teachers or not being able to adequately evaluate these teachers by administrators (Whitacre, 2015). Bilingual educators are necessary for instruction to be effective. A lack of proficient Spanish support and instruction diminishes the impact of L1 development and therefore the extent to which L2 skills can develop. Lack of L2 skills will prevent them from reaching the high potential that they are capable of and deserve. Often the first thing to go is instruction in subject areas since those are the more challenging concepts with more specific vocabulary necessary for comprehension. Administrators state that hiring, educating, and providing professional development for bilingual teachers is the hardest part of maintaining bilingual programming. When opportunities arise for professional development there are time constraints as such opportunities are often time consuming (Linton, 2004). Not only do teachers need to be qualified, but administrators need to be versed in a clear mission statement, effective teacher training, strong instructional and faculty leadership, well defined instructional practices as previously mentioned, and a parental and community involvement plan in order to see the best results from the program and best serve the student needs. Ultimately, it is the quality of instruction and attitude that is going to generate student achievement (Cheung & Slavin, 2012).

There are many factors that need to be considered when choosing programming and instructional practices for ENL learners and the choices that are made may impact overall comprehension achievement. Although research indicates that there are many choices for bilingual programs, ultimately, the most important thing to consider is how to maintain the fidelity of a program and how to staff the program with quality teachers. Bilingual programming is not a small undertaking, but it is required in many cases. Therefore, it is vital that those

administrators and teachers involved understand the best instructional practices and how to maximize student learning. When these practices are put in place and dedicated staff provide bilingual students with an avenue for utilizing everything they know to understand new learning that is when comprehension can exceed that in typical classrooms.

### **Broader Contexts that Impact Reading Comprehension**

Teachers and bilingual programming have the ability to impact reading comprehension in powerful ways. However, often times there are broader contexts that affect communities, programming, teachers, classrooms, students, and therefore their education, including reading comprehension (Branum-Martin, Foorman, Francis & Mehta, 2010, Feinauer, Hall-Kenyon, & Davison, 2013; Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono & Otheguy, 2009; Howard, Paez, August, Barr, Kenyon & Malabonga, 2014; Kim, Curby & Winsler, 2014; Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011). Specifically with research these varying contexts need to be decontextualized in order to identify what truly impacts student success. Only then can educators identify how to best teach these students.

When researchers study performance they have to take into account differences. Without accounting for differences they cannot generalize their findings and produce implications that are meaningful. When researching reading comprehension, Branum-Martin et al (2010) looked at some possible differences specific to bilingual classrooms. These differences include varying bilingual outcomes, classroom differences, and impact of instruction. Since bilingual classrooms do not necessarily operate on the same amount of L1 and L2 instruction in each setting and some goals are biliteracy as opposed to accelerated English language proficiency, these variances need to be taken into account. Classroom differences account for a diverse group of students in the classrooms. This includes students who enter the class late or leave early in addition to individual

student abilities and levels of understanding. As a result, these programs can have more or less stability depending on their classroom composition. The impacts of instruction are dependent upon the teachers in each room who teach their students in their own way and who come with their own backgrounds and literacy experiences that shape how they communicate and teach students every day. Whitacre (2015) went even further and looked beyond the classroom and focused on how the attitudinal perspectives of administration at the school and district level can also impact reading comprehension in the classroom indirectly. If programs lack adequate support then teachers may not be attracted to the program, they may not be provided with necessary professional development, they may not receive timely and integral feedback and therefore the program may not be implemented with fidelity. Ultimately, the potential of these inadequacies could negatively impact student achievement, including English comprehension. Therefore, even though two classrooms may be participating in the same kind of program, their instruction could look very different depending on the teacher and the group of students before them as well as the support available to the teacher and the school. As a result, the research and findings cannot necessarily be generalizable to all those participating in the same or a similar programming, but rather it indicates what those specific students in that specific program were able to demonstrate.

The community that a student, teacher, and school are a part of can directly impact how the student learns information and to what extent. The broader context relates to the factors that come along with the community, which are not controllable or changeable. Therefore, it is vital that educators understand what factors are working for and against students in order to best foster or counteract them. Research has shown that the broader context can have a positive impact, despite the common belief that it is exclusively negative. Proctor et al (2010) was investigating

the connection between oral language development and comprehension in three locations, El Paso, Boston, and Chicago. The results indicated that El Paso outperformed Boston and Chicago students on Spanish vocabulary and listening comprehension. The community most likely impacted these results in that students were in an environment that embraced and utilized Spanish not only in the classroom, but throughout the community consistently. This environment solidifies students' L1 oral language as well as L1 listening comprehension. These foundational skills then aid students when developing L2 because it strengthens their L1 proficiency so it can be a resource. Supporting this research is Kim, Curby and Winsler (2014) who studied kindergarten dual language learners who lived in Miami, FL. This study found that these bilingual students learned English rapidly as opposed to Spanish. However, it is inferred that since their Spanish language development was supported in their community that their L1 bank was prosperous and provided the possibility of transferring language knowledge at a young age for constrained skills. Lindholm and Block (2010) further looked at location as well as SES to test the common belief that impoverished areas and high ENL populations lead to poor academic performance. However, their research indicated that these ENL students performed on par with monolingual peers. As a result of this study it was determined that often times higher density and higher needs areas can lead to better trained staff to more adequately meet their diverse needs.

Students are a part of a community outside of school, but their more immediate environment where the majority of their early language and literacy experiences took place is their homes with their families. The home environment consists of the home language use as well as parent demographics and involvement. Both of these factors play a significant role in student achievement, specifically in promoting reading comprehension. When the relationship between the frequency of home language use and literacy achievement in the home language is

positive then there is a positive effect on student achievement. This relationship can occur in dual language classrooms when native speakers of English and Spanish both have the opportunity to share their learning with their families in their native and shared language at home. Typically students perform better in languages that they have more practice with at home, but research also indicates that enhanced language experiences, regardless of language, can promote school literacy development (Carlo et al, 2014). Therefore, quality and quantity of language experiences play a role at times. Dual language programs involve parents who otherwise may not have an avenue to communicate their needs to the school system (Cortina, Makar, & Mount-Cors, 2015). These programs can level the social playing field in such a way that Spanish speaking families feel empowered as a result of their home language being taught and appreciated in their child's classroom and school. Parent backgrounds also can contribute to student success. As previously mentioned, reclassified English proficient students typically had parents who had higher levels of formal education, but parent involvement and enhanced levels of literacy participation at home can also support English language proficiency (Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011).

Other student differences that are significant in reading comprehension include SES, home language, and initial levels of English language skills (Carlo et al, 2014). Since these are important predictors of English comprehension and it is known that there are correlations within languages, then these have to be controlled when researching. The economic status of children is dependent upon the adults that care for them and often the community that they are a part of. Although these circumstances are out of the control of bilingual students, it still has the potential to impact reading comprehension and student achievement. Research has proven that, children with lower socioeconomic status and those educated in schools with higher percentages of ENLs generally perform more poorly in reading comprehension than their more economically

advantaged counterparts. However, Howard et al (2014) also highlighted the importance of researching in context, specifically SES, and found that SES effects diminished after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade for bilingual students. For kindergarten students it was identified that SES and English and Spanish vocabulary were indicators of English word reading and again in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, SES, school language, and vocabulary knowledge impacted English comprehension. On the other hand, when students reached 5<sup>th</sup> grade their comprehension was predicted based on their home language, school language, and English vocabulary. It is evident that overtime the effects of poverty can be counteracted by L1 and L2 instruction. Intensive and explicit instruction and language modeling have been identified as practices for mitigating the adverse effects of poverty on reading comprehension (Baker et al, 2012).

Student differences in any classroom are extensive. Students are of different genders, come from different families, are of different ethnicities, and most importantly for bilingual students, they vary in their language experiences (Leider et al, 2013). That can be true for any student; however, bilingual students could have varied knowledge in L1 and L2. There is a need in research to desegregate Latino students to better understand language proficiency and academic achievement outcomes. When studies look specifically at Spanish speaking ENL students it shows an inaccurate depiction of the difference degrees of biliteracy. When Lindholm-Leary and Hernandez (2011) looked at different shades of bilingual students they grouped them as native English speakers who are English proficient, native Spanish speakers who entered school as ENLs but have developed proficiency in English and been reclassified as Fluent English proficient, and native Spanish speakers who were enrolled in school as ENLs and who continued to be classified as ENLs. By looking at bilingual students in these categories it takes into account prior achievement when generalizing findings. This study also found that

students who were reclassified as Fluent English proficient closed the achievement gap between themselves and their monolingual peers and it was determined that the majority of these students had parents with higher levels of formal education. In order to best help ENL, specifically Latino, students close the achievement gap it is vital that research focuses on groupings within ENL students. Identifying their differences and understanding their differences makes it possible to better understand why and how they perform comparatively. This understanding can provide educators with guidance to best generate more change within ENL student groups and their families.

The literature that revolves around ENL students and reading comprehension provides educators with valuable information regarding instruction as well as areas to continue pursuing in research. Research shows that there is a positive relationship between developing primary language skills in order to foster greater second language proficiency and in turn reading comprehension. The long term effects of being continually educated in one's primary language and second language simultaneously results in the development of high metacognitive skills necessary for comprehending complex content and concepts as addressed in the Common Core as well as in our postmodern society. However, the research also demonstrates that while some skill based language proficiencies transfer between L1 and L2 readily, other more complex proficiencies such as comprehension and vocabulary do not transfer consistently. It is inferred that this is as a result of broader contexts as well as the varying language components, such as syntactic comprehension, vocabulary, and oral language, which are necessary to demonstrate proficient comprehension skills. Most studies indicated that more research needs to be completed taking into account the broader context as well as analyzing comprehension skills beyond the "simple view of reading." By breaking down comprehension into more concrete and

measurable skills, research will be able to focus on what aspects of comprehension transfer between L1 and L2 and how to best aid that transfer of skills for ENL students and improve their comprehension. Furthermore, the research overwhelmingly suggested that the quality of programming and instruction far outweighs the label of the program when it comes to student achievement. Bilingual programs that are going to impact student achievement, specifically reading comprehension, are going to incorporate culture into authentic daily learning where language modeling and explicit instruction allow for students to develop a greater metacognitive facility as well as an enriched linguistic toolbox that not only supports their academic learning, but their social-emotional development. High quality Spanish speaking teachers are needed in order to provide these authentic and culturally responsive classroom environments where L1 instruction is a necessity per research findings. Furthermore, although there are often outside factors that impact student comprehension, research showed that early and intensive intervention like that provided in bilingual programming can counteract disadvantages that their monolingual peers may not encounter. In conclusion, the literature surrounding ENL students and reading comprehension provides valuable insights for educators as teachers and as researchers in a time where ENL students are a part of all school communities and comprehension expectations and academic demands are high.

## **Method**

### **Context**

The research for this study took place in a school located in a small urban area of upstate New York. It is a Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2 building that consists of approximately 500 students enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year. Of these 500 students, many ethnicities are represented included 46% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic or Latino, 13% multiracial, 10% Black or

African American, and 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Approximately 72% of students are economically disadvantaged and all students receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch. Within this school specific programs service English Language Learners which are 12% of the population as well as students with Special Education needs which represent 13% of the school population (NYSED, 2015).

This school is the only Prekindergarten through grade two building in the district. The rest of the district consists of one 3-5 building, one middle school, and one high school. Overall, the early elementary school employs 46 teachers. Of these 46 teachers there are four universal preschool teachers, nine kindergarten teachers, eight first-grade teachers, and nine second grade teachers. Within these grade levels classroom teachers teach specific clusters of students within integrated classrooms including pragmatic, special education, English as a new language (ENL), and dual language. Dual language Spanish specifically has two classrooms in kindergarten and first grade and one in second grade. Dual language Mandarin has one classroom in kindergarten and first grade and will be expanding to second grade in the 2016-2017 school year. There is one building Mandarin teacher. Besides classroom teachers, there are special subject area teachers. There is one art instructor, two music teachers, and two physical education teachers. There is one special education teacher at each grade level from kindergarten through second grade. There are two speech and language teachers, as well as five reading AIS instructors shared across grade levels, as well as one occupational therapist and one physical therapist. Two instructional coaches in ELA and one in math are present in the building. In addition, there is one school psychologist, one social worker, and one school counselor. Support staff are present in all kindergarten classrooms, and first and second grade classrooms that have either students with special needs or English Language Learners. Other support staff consist of three secretaries, four

recreation staff members, two nurse's office staff, and six cafeteria staff, and four custodial staff. Lastly, there are three administrators including one principal, one assistant principal, and one Head Start/UPK director.

The district is located in a small city closely surrounded by small rural communities in upstate New York. The school itself is situated within small neighborhoods from which many students walk to school each day. The remaining students are bussed in from downtown or the more rural outskirts of town. As of 2015, the population of this city was 13,062 people. Furthermore, the median income as of 2014 was \$40,248 with a poverty rate of 25.2% (Quick Facts, 2015).

The classroom that this study took place in is a first grade dual language classroom. In dual language classrooms the student population is split 50-50 between native Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speakers. This classroom has a teacher that only speaks English with one teaching assistant for half of the day while the other half of the day they have one teacher that speaks Spanish and English, but instructs in Spanish. She is also supported by one teaching assistant for half of the day. Two groups of students are taught in both of these classrooms by both of these teachers for half of the day each, but only one class will be included in this study. The class included in this study consists of 18 students. Of these 18 students there are nine girls and nine boys. Nine of these 18 students' native language is Spanish. Of these 18 students, five were included. However, the level of their Spanish proficiency and exposure varies as does their English proficiency. There are AIS and ENL services provided for these students, but AIS is only provided in English and not Spanish.

## **Participants**

### **Teacher**

Brittany (pseudonym) is a first year teacher teaching in the dual language program. She teaches the Spanish section of the dual language program and therefore teaches two different classes in one day, but both all in Spanish. She graduated with her Bachelor's degree in Childhood Special Education (1-6) and General Education (1-6). She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Spanish and is certified to teach Spanish grades 7-9. Brittany also studied abroad in Spain during her undergraduate studies, allowing her to be immersed in the Spanish language and culture for a prolonged period of time. She participates in co-planning with her English counterpart in the dual language program to create continuity between the two classrooms. Furthermore, she is actively involved in the dual language committee, attending conferences and professional development on new bilingual and dual language instructional findings and strategies. She is currently pursuing her certification in K-12 bilingual education. Brittany participated in a teacher interview as well as taught three observed read aloud lessons.

Mary (pseudonym) has been teaching for 27 years in this school. Furthermore, she has taught first grade each year here. However, this year is the first year that she has been a part of the dual language program, teaching the English section of the program. Mary received her master's degree in Education and is certified to teach grades one through six. Although she has been teaching first grade for many years in many forms, she has always been particularly passionate about working with ENL students. She is an active member of the school community as well as the greater community. In school she is a member of the RTI steering committee, the ELA steering committee, as well as keeping up with new dual language training obligations and opportunities. In addition, out of the classroom she is the varsity softball coach for the school district and has been for five years. Mary participated in a teacher interview as well as taught three observed read aloud lessons.

**Students**

This study included five bilingual students, all in first grade. All five of these students are participants in the dual language program. Of these five students, two are girls and three are boys. These students all came in with different levels of Spanish Language skills as well as English Language skills. All students will participated in informal interviews, the read aloud lessons, and a comprehension conversation after the lessons.

Andrew (pseudonym) is seven years old and a native Spanish speaker. He lives with his mother, father, older brother who is in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and younger sister. They all speak Spanish at home, except Andrew likes to speak English at home with his older brother and teach his younger sister. This is Andrew's second year in the dual language program and he is currently enrolled in AIS reading in English for reading below grade level in English. His favorite part of the day is listening to read alouds in English or Spanish. He is always eager to answer questions in class and participate in discussions.

Genevieve is also seven years old and a native Spanish speaker. She lives with her mom, dad, and sister. Only her father speaks a little English, but the rest of the family speaks primarily in Spanish. She is from Puerto Rico and still has family living there including her Grandmother. Genevieve received schooling in Puerto Rico before moving in Kindergarten. While in Puerto Rico she had an IEP for Speech and Language. These IEP's are dropped upon entering public schools in the United States. She has been a part of the dual language program for two years. She is currently receiving AIS services for reading in English. Genevieve is very shy and needs encouraging to participate in classroom discussions and learning.

Xavier is seven years old and moved to the United States from Puerto Rico in kindergarten. He lives with his mother and father who speak only Spanish and his brother who is

in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at the same school. They recently transferred into the district from a neighboring community and now live near extended family including cousins who also attend this school. Xavier has only been a part of the dual language program for four months. Xavier enjoys math, writing, and reading while in school. He is excited to participate in read aloud discussions, but has trouble focusing at times. He speaks quickly and is difficult to understand in both English and Spanish at times.

Jesse is a seven year old boy and this is his first year in the dual language program. He attended Head Start and Kindergarten at the same school, but was moved from an ENL classroom to the dual language classroom this year. He lives with his mom at home where they speak primarily in Spanish. Jesse loves to read and write, but struggles when explaining his ideas in math and understanding word problems. He is absent frequently from school and when he is present in school he is very quiet.

Yanellee is a seven year old girl who has been in the dual language program since Kindergarten. She lives with her mom, dad, and baby sister. They speak both English and Spanish at home, but they primarily speak Spanish. Yanellee was enrolled in AIS reading in kindergarten, but has since been dismissed. She enjoys learning all subjects in school and is actively engaged in both Spanish and English discussions and read alouds.

### **Researcher Stance**

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College seeking my Master's degree in Literacy Education from Birth through grade 12. I hold an undergraduate degree which is a Bachelor's of Science in Elementary Education, able to work with students birth-6<sup>th</sup> grade. My current position is at the school in which my study takes place. I am a second grade general education teacher who will be the English section of the second grade Mandarin dual language

program next year. My role in this research was as a passive participant, since I did not assume the role or responsibilities of a teacher during my research, but rather I focused exclusively on data collection (Mills, 2014). As a passive participant I gathered data through questionnaires, observations, conversations in the form of focus groups and interviews, as well as past student documentation and assessment. Being a passive participant allowed me to focus specifically on the data I am collecting and look at the big picture, but will also prevented me from directly generating change in student achievement.

### **Method**

For this study, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the impact of dual language programming on comprehension for ENL students. I looked specifically at how student language proficiency, teacher instruction, home language and support, and individual differences can influence academic success, specifically comprehension. Furthermore, I looked at the connection between student comprehension in Spanish, their primary language, and English, their second language.

In the first part of my data collection I utilized student data to understand who they are as individuals as well as students. Historical comprehension data was used through the form of Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments from the beginning of the year, as well as student report cards to understand each student baseline or at which level students entered the dual language program at. Student cumulative files also indicated student personality, family make up, as well as academic and social and emotional growth since the start of their educational career. To build off of this information I also conducted formal interviews (Appendix A) with both teachers in order to understand specific student backgrounds, student achievement and growth, and how they planned to support their ENL students during their daily read aloud

lessons. Furthermore, I also conducted an interview with each student prior to working with them (Appendix B). As a result, I had an understanding of who students are and where they have come from prior to partaking in literacy learning and demonstrating comprehension abilities.

During the next phase of data collection I observed read alouds in both Spanish and English where both teachers focused on the same skill, compare and contrast. I observed each teacher on three different occasions. During each read aloud I took field notes on questioning techniques, teaching of comprehension strategies and language modeling that is seen. After each observation I conducted focus groups with target students. In these small groups I asked questions formulated based on Fountas and Pinnell comprehension skills for first grade (Appendix C). Seeing as how Fountas and Pinnell is the beginning and ending of the year benchmarking assessment, this provided a connection between summative assessments and formative assessments. These questions stayed the same for each read aloud regardless of the text being read to demonstrate their ability to answer these developmentally and age appropriate questions. During these focus groups students also had the opportunity to discuss what their teachers and families do to promote their comprehension on a daily basis. Furthermore, after each read aloud I conducted an informal interview asking teachers what they did to support their students' understanding, specifically their ENL students.

The third and last phase of data collection included sending home questionnaires (Appendix D) to families to inquire more about the language spoken at home as well as the level of involvement of families in their students' education. This questionnaire will consist of 8 questions and also provided insight into the literacy experiences these students come to school with and whether they have the potential to impact literacy learning in the classroom environment. Lastly, I utilized end of the year benchmark assessments and report cards in

conjunction with the focus group responses to determine the level of comprehension and understanding at the end of a year in the dual language program.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

Mills (2014) shared that in order for a qualitative study to be deemed trustworthy it must possess the qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as studied by Guba (1981). Therefore, it is vital that this study be examined in depth through this context. As a result, it will be ensured that it represents quality research and trustworthy findings.

First, credibility revolves around the ability of the researcher to, “take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Mills, 2014, p 115). In other words, it is integral that researchers understand that studies are conducted in an environment that is not exempt of problems or error. As a result, I used multiple methods to ensure my credibility. I collected data in a variety of forms, including through observations in classrooms, interviews with teachers, focus groups with students, questionnaires for parents, and other historical data collected by classroom teachers throughout the year as well as in past years. Collecting a variety of data in multiples ways allowed me to practice triangulation (Mills, 2014). Furthermore, these forms of data are all “slices of life” and reinforce that data is needed from multiple perspectives and times to represent the complexities more clearly (p. 115).

According to Mills (2014), transferability is the “qualitative researchers’ belief that everything they study is context bound and the goal of their work is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people,” (p. 116). In other words, it cannot be assumed that the results of each study relates to all in similar populations. As a researcher I allowed for transferability by keeping detailed descriptive data specifically as related to context.

As a result, it can be understood that the results relate to specific participants within a context and only once that is understood can it truly be utilized in comparison with other populations.

Dependability is the third quality needed for trustworthiness in qualitative studies which Mills (2014) states, “refers to the stability of data,” (p.116). In order to ensure this in my study I overlapped methods to reinforce understandings. For example, not only did I use field notes for read aloud observations, but I also conducted informal interviews with teachers and focus groups with students regarding the observation. This overlapping allowed for a balanced understanding of what was understood and therefore the stability of the data collected.

Confirmability is the fourth and last quality of trustworthy studies. Mills (2014) refers to confirmability as “the neutrality or objectivity of the data collected,” (p. 116). In order to maintain objectivity I had to first be aware of any bias regarding the topic of research.

Understanding how I feel and what I believe regarding dual language programming was integral before conducting any research. Furthermore, I continued to triangulate data, collecting it through multiple avenues. The culmination of each of these forms of data allowed me to unveil specific understandings not to be clearly understood by only one form of data.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

In order to protect the rights of participants, I have received informed consent, permission, or assent from all participants of this study. For all of the students participating in this study I sent home signed permission forms in English or Spanish. These permission forms informed parents of the study that their child could participate in, including the potential benefits and the lack of risks. Once permission was received from the parent, I obtained verbal assent from the five students in order for them to participate in my research. This step was preceded by an age appropriate explanation of their proposed role in the study. Since these students are

younger than third grade it was not required to receive signed assent from the students. Furthermore, parents were also sent a consent form in order to answer the questionnaire regarding home language and support for their children. Lastly, I obtained signed consent from both teachers who will participated in observations and interviews. All names of participants, including the school in which the study took place, were replaced with pseudonyms or not mentioned at all during this study. Also, all recordings were transcribed and deleted and all student data was securely kept in a private location in order to protect the information and therefore the rights of those who participated in my study.

### **Data Collection**

In my research, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data as mentioned before through experiencing, enquiring, and examination or through three forms of data. As a passive observer I had the opportunity to observe the teacher and students as they participated in a read aloud for 30 minutes. During this time I took field notes to record the questioning, explicit teaching of comprehension strategies and skills, as well as specific language modeling utilized to support student overall comprehension of the content and/or text.

Furthermore, I enquired through formal interviews, student focus groups, and parent questionnaires. I conducted a formal interview with each teacher that consisted of eight questions regarding their read aloud that was observed, how they support their ENL students' comprehension, and to learn more about these specific students, their backgrounds, and literacy strengths, needs, and growth. In addition, I had a student focus group after each read aloud, therefore occurring in both English and Spanish. After each read aloud I worked with the group of five students who participated and using Fountas and Pinnell comprehension skills for first grade I asked general questions about the read aloud. Also during this time I asked students what

their teacher and families do to support their literacy learning, specifically comprehension.

Ultimately, I observed the students' ability to answer comprehension questions in the language in which the book and content was presented while also learning more about their literacy experiences and individual language support. I observed a total of three times during whole group instruction for each group of students. Lastly, I sent home a parent questionnaire inquiring about home language and their role in their child's education. This questionnaire consisted of eight questions and provides insight to how broader contexts impact student achievement, specifically comprehension.

For examination I collected and analyzed Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments from both the beginning and end of the school year in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, I used report cards from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year with their supporting rubrics to better understand the students in both their literacy development, but also math and social emotional development. Cumulative folders also provided information regarding student and family background information in addition to previously collected historical academic information.

### **Data Analysis**

After collecting the data necessary for addressing my research question I started my quest to analyze the various sources in search of commonalities and differences to begin formulating overarching themes as related to my original question. I first began with my quantitative data which required me to look in depth at student pre and post Fountas and Pinnell (F+P) Benchmark assessments in both English and Spanish. These scores were put into a table to indicate the students' reading levels as well as their ability to answer within text and beyond text comprehension questions while reading texts at their instructional reading level. Once these

tables were created I looked in depth at the correlation between English and Spanish growth as related to comprehension as well as the beginning to end of the year growth in comprehension for both languages. In addition to this data I also used student report cards in both English and Spanish for the beginning and end of the school year. Not only does it look at reading, but also shows skills related to behavior, math, and writing. This data was also put into a table to look at connections between English and Spanish understanding as well as to demonstrate progress from the beginning to the end of the year. I also compared this data to the F+P results to see if these biannual assessments accurately represented each individual student's ability. In addition to these cumulative forms of assessment I also utilized student cumulative folder records to look more in depth at family background, home language experiences and past educational experiences. I created a table to represent the kinds of previous experiences each individual student had that had the potential to help or hinder their comprehension development in the dual language program. These categories included parent language, parent education, as well as preschool and Kindergarten experience.

Next, I analyzed my qualitative data, looking specifically at student and teacher interviews. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Afterwards I analyzed the responses on three occasions. I went back and coded responses individually first. I labeled each response with categories related to dual language programming and literacy experiences. I then tallied the number of times each category was referenced by each individual to identify patterns for all parties. The second time I looked for similarities and differences between each individuals' responses. Lastly, I went back to look for underlying themes from a dual language participant's perspective. My next source of qualitative data to be dissected was classroom field notes. All observations were recorded as well as detailed field notes recording environmental

information as well as teacher and student interactions. I went back and looked in depth at how the teachers delivered the instruction and how the ENL target students responded to that specific instruction. I went back and coded the lessons in the same way as in the teacher interviews. I looked for categories related specifically to dual language programming and literacy experiences and then compared them between teachers before looking at what stuck out the most in their instruction and student demonstration of understanding. After each lesson I sat down with students and had a comprehension conversation regarding the text they had read aloud to them. These conversations were recorded and transcribed, but their ability to answer these within text and beyond text questions were recorded in a table, just like during their F+P assessments. Student responses were analyzed based on their ability to adequately meet the F+P comprehension expectations for first grade. I looked closely at how these results compared to the students' ability to answer these types of questions on their F+P assessment as one assessed reading comprehension while the other assessed listening comprehension. After the table was created I calculated the percentage of within text and beyond text questions the students answered adequately in English and then in Spanish to compare with the field notes and teacher instructional decisions.

My last piece of data was in the form of a parent questionnaire. Only one out of five parents returned this survey. This one questionnaire was analyzed to look at to what extent these dual language parents were able to participate in their child's education and their opinions regarding their child's growth and development in the program. This information was added to the table referring to student backgrounds and experiences.

Additional data was made available by one teacher as she assessed students on their comprehension through an exit slip after each read aloud. These pieces of data include a

sequencing activity as well as a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting two texts. I compared the student work to the corresponding comprehension conversations and observation field notes to see if there was any additional understandings demonstrated outside of previous classroom learning and discussions.

By examining all data I was able to look for overarching themes as related to dual language programming and to what extent it influences ENL comprehension in this study. As a result I was able to identify connections between literature I have already reviewed and indicate whether my findings support or refute what has already been discussed.

### **Findings and Discussion**

After analyzing all sources of data in depth several themes emerged as related to dual language programming and ENL comprehension. The first theme that arose across many forms of data is that there was a positive correlation between English and Spanish comprehension ability in this particular study. Furthermore, the second theme connects and exposes the idea that comprehension is impacted by individual student differences in a dual language classroom which either aid or inhibit a student's ability to "break the code" and be successful learners in both languages. Lastly, the final theme revolves around the presence of a variety of instructional strategies utilized by teachers in order to impact ENL reading comprehension. The data supports these three themes in at least three different specific examples as found throughout the data collection process. This section will demonstrate in depth how the data provides evidence for the validity of these themes as well as refute or support research already conducted in this area as previously mentioned in the literature review.

#### **Positive Correlation between English and Spanish Comprehension**

Since students in dual language classrooms have the opportunity to demonstrate comprehension of content in both their native language and in English, the connection or correlation between the two languages is of interest to researchers. In the students' Fountas and Pinnell (F+P) Benchmarking Assessments in both Spanish and English students were required to read content at their instructional level and answer questions that were both within the text inquiries as well as thinking beyond the text as a pre-assessment in September and a post-assessment in June. Through these comprehension questions each participant had the opportunity to earn three points for each type of comprehension understanding. Depending on the level, genre, and content of the text, the questions varied, but the type of question remained the same to generalize their overall understanding of a book that they could read independently and accurately. Table 1 displays the student results for the pre-assessment in Spanish.

Table 1

*F+P Benchmark Comprehension Scores*

<u>Student</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Percentage of Questions Answered Correctly</u>	
		<u>Within Text Comprehension</u>	<u>Beyond Text Comprehension</u>
Andrew	A	100	100
Xavier	A	100	100
Genevieve	A	100	67
Yanellee	B	100	100
Jesse	D	100	100

Andrew, Xavier, and Genevieve all read at a level A at the beginning of the school year in Spanish, their native language. Andrew and Xavier demonstrated the ability to answer 100%

of both within the text and beyond the text questions correctly. Meanwhile, Genevieve answered 100% of within text questions accurately, but 67% of beyond the text questions correctly.

Andrew may have performed this way in Spanish because it is his native language and he has strong oral language proficiency in Spanish. Since Xavier was assessed in March instead of September, this may have impacted his ability to answer these questions in comparison to his peers. Xavier also has a strong Spanish oral language base which could have impacted his ability to express his understanding efficiently. Proctor et al (2010) found that oral language was more predictive than the decoding process of reading comprehension achievement. Genevieve could have performed lower than her peers because her oral language proficiency is not as developed as Xavier and Andrew or because she did not have adequate enough background knowledge or practice to answer beyond the text questioning.

Yanellee and Jesse both answered 100% of both types of questions accurately during the pre-assessment in Spanish. Although both participants were reading at different levels their ability to answer both types of questions correctly could be as a result of their strong oral language base as mentioned by Proctor et al (2010), their strong background knowledge, or their enriched language experiences at home which include both English and Spanish. Lopez et al (2015) also discussed how students' individual backgrounds have the ability to aid in or hurt their comprehension of a text. Despite not being in the dual language program last year, Jesse could have assessed at a higher reading level therefore answering more challenging questions because of his above average English skills heading into first grade as well as his strong Spanish oral language base from home.

At the end of the school year the participants were all assessed using the same F+P benchmarking system once again based off of where they left off in their Spanish guided reading

instruction. The students' progress is demonstrated through their reading level and ability to answer comprehension questions at that level. Table 2 below represents those scores.

Table 2

*F+P Benchmark Comprehension Scores*

<u>Student</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Percentage of Questions Answered Correctly</u>	
		<u>Within Text Comprehension</u>	<u>Beyond Text Comprehension</u>
Andrew	B	100	67
Xavier	B	100	67
Genevieve	C	100	67
Yanellee	J	100	100
Jesse	F	67	67

During the F+P post-assessment in Spanish Andrew and Xavier read at the level B, both moving up a level and both answering 100% of their within text questions and 67% of their beyond text questions correctly. These results indicate a decrease from their ability in the pre-assessment in Spanish to answer 100% of the beyond the text questions accurately. This decrease may be as a result of limited background knowledge or fluency as related to decoding in a book at a slightly higher level. Xavier could have performed this way as a result of only having those few months between his pre-assessment and post-assessment as well as only receiving formal instruction in Spanish for those few months. Uchikoshi et al (2010) found that the more time spent in a language, the more improvement which could be the case for Xavier since he only just started in the program. Genevieve also moved up a level to a C and answered 100% of within text questions correctly in addition to 67% of beyond the text comprehension inquiries. These

results demonstrate that Genevieve continues to struggle with beyond the text questions which could be related to her decoding, her background knowledge, or her knowledge about genre structure. Feinauer et al (2013) found that constrained skills, such as the decoding process, transfers more readily than comprehension and Genevieve and Andrew struggle already with decoding. Jesse moved two reading levels from a D to an F, but his comprehension suffered. As opposed to the initial assessment where he answered 100% of his questions accurately, his post-assessment showed he answered 67% of both types of comprehension questions. These scores could be as a result of learning Spanish formally for the first time this school year. In addition, Jesse had excessive absences throughout the curricular year which could lead to gaps in understanding, specifically the daily direct instruction of comprehension strategies and his Spanish guided reading lessons. This again relates to how the amount of instruction impacts the amount of growth (Uchikoshi et al, 2010). Yanellee moved significantly from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment, going from a level B text to a level J which is “on grade level” for first grade in English. Furthermore, she also answered all questions accurately at this higher level text. Her growth could be due to extensive language base as well as strong home support in her native language. In addition, Yanellee’s attitude towards learning is very enthusiastic which could also impact her overall comprehension. Lindholm-Leary et al (2011) found that as students reached a certain threshold in their native language and English, they increase their level of metalinguistic skills and metacognition of both languages which positively impacts their academic achievement.

Table 3 represents the participants’ comprehension scores in English at the beginning of the school year. These texts are leveled through F+P just as with the Spanish version of the

assessment. Therefore comprehension questions and conversations were designed around the level of difficulty of the text. The results of the pre-assessments are shown below.

Table 3

*F+P Benchmark Comprehension Scores*

<u>Pre assessment English</u>		<u>Percentage of Questions Answered Correctly</u>	
<u>Student</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Within Text Comprehension</u>	<u>Beyond Text Comprehension</u>
Andrew	A	100	67
Xavier	A	100	100
Genevieve	A	100	67
Yanellee	B	100	67
Jesse	F	100	67

During the F+P pre-assessment in English Xavier was the only student who was able to answer 100% of both within text and beyond text comprehension questions correctly. Xavier may have answered both sets of questions correctly because his pre-assessment was taken in March when he transferred into this school and the dual language program. He could have been discussing and answering questions about grade level texts more in English by being in a mainstream English classroom in another district already. The increased amount of time in English instruction can lead to more improvement (Uchikoshi et al, 2010). Andrew, Genevieve, Yanellee, and Jesse all answered 100% of their within text questions correctly, but only 67% of their beyond the text questions correctly. Their ability to answer these questions could differ depending on their individual language experiences and skills. Andrew, Xavier, and Genevieve were all reading at a level A text in English, with the only easier text being the AA text.

Furthermore, the level of difficulty of this text is directly related to the difficulty of the comprehension questions of the book they were reading. As a result, these three participants were answering questions based on less text, more pictures, and the easier language structures utilized in the text. These easier texts may have impacted their ability to answer the questions accurately. In addition, Andrew and Genevieve also read another level A book in Kindergarten for the post assessment and therefore have practice answering questions at this level. Leider et al (2013) found that in order for students to transfer knowledge individuals need to achieve a threshold of native language ability which Andrew, Xavier, and Genevieve appear to not have met at this time. Yanellee and Javier performed the same as Andrew and Genevieve, but their texts were more advanced than her peers, especially for Javier. All students struggled with answering beyond the text questions except for Xavier. This discrepancy may be because when answering beyond the text questions students are required to rely more heavily on their background knowledge, their language experiences, as well as their knowledge of stories. If students lack some of this background it could impact their ability to answer the questions accurately and effectively. In addition, although they showed a common struggle with this type of question, Yanellee and Jesse were reading more challenging texts than the other three participants which therefore could have impacted their ability to answer this type of question more efficiently. Javier also could have performed at a higher level than his peers because this was his first year in the dual language program. He was in an English mainstream classroom with ENL support in preschool and kindergarten at the same school despite speaking Spanish at home. Being immersed in this type of environment could have influenced his reading accuracy and comprehension in that he studied English alone for the duration of his schooling as opposed to his new classmates who had been splitting time between the two languages.

Table 4 demonstrates the post assessment comprehension scores as related to the participant's instructional reading level at the end of the school year in English. This allows for a comparison of beginning and end of the year reading and comprehension skills. Table 4 represents the results for all participants below.

Table 4

*F+P Benchmark Comprehension Scores*

<u>Student</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Percentage of Questions Answered Correctly</u>	
		<u>Within Text Comprehension</u>	<u>Beyond Text Comprehension</u>
Andrew	A	100	67
Xavier	B	100	100
Genevieve	B	100	67
Yanellee	J	100	67
Jesse	K	100	67

The post assessment data in English demonstrates that Andrew was assessed at the same reading level that he started at in the beginning of the school year. His ability to answer each type of question has not changed throughout the course of the school year. He struggles more so with beyond text comprehension. Furthermore, he may be able to answer comprehension questions at higher text levels, but not as long as he is required to read the text independently first therefore connecting to Nakamoto et al (2008) who found that decoding impacts comprehension more so during early literacy development. These results may be because he struggles significantly in his native language and has made limited growth in that area as well. In addition, since Andrew needs to rely more on his personal experiences to answer beyond the text

questions, maybe his background knowledge and home experiences were limited as related to the content of the text he read just as Lopez et al (2015) identified the significance of background on comprehension. Xavier and Genevieve both moved one reading level in English, however due to Xavier's late arrival, he moved one reading level in a few months as opposed to Genevieve's progress spanned across the entire school year. Xavier demonstrated the ability to answer 100% of both within text comprehension questions and beyond text comprehension questions. These results could have occurred because he has a solid oral language base in Spanish as well as his late entry into the program allowed him to receive English only instruction up until this point in his education. He may have had more explicit instruction on comprehension strategies in his previous school district. Xavier showed quick growth in English in his time in the dual language program and that could have been as a result of being able to learn in both his native language as well as English. Genevieve only answer 67% of her beyond the text questions correctly and this could be that she had limited background knowledge on the topic of the book. Another possibility is because she is also progressing slowly in his first language which in turn can impact her second language development like Andrew. Yanellee and Jesse both grew significantly in their reading levels and both finished on grade level. Their comprehension ability was similar in that they both answered 100% of their within text questions correctly, but only answered 67% of their beyond the text questions correctly. Since the content of these texts is more complex and the stories are more involved, this could have impacted the participant's ability to answer the more challenging questions accurately. Furthermore, at the end of first grade the students are starting to be held accountable for understanding the choices that author's make, but they may have had limited instruction in this area which could affect their ability to answer these types of beyond the text questions. Yanellee could have grown this significantly

because of her success in comprehending in her first language while Jesse could have generated this large change as a result of entering above grade level in English and having strong English language experiences at home and throughout his schooling. These findings were also found by Carlo et al (2014) when they found that even though students are spending less time learning English, they are transferring because they have double the language instruction.

Across Tables 1-4, Andrew and Genevieve demonstrated equivalent percentages in both types of questions in the English and Spanish post-assessment, Xavier and Jesse performed slightly better in English in comprehension, and Yanellee demonstrated a slightly greater understanding in Spanish. Andrew and Genevieve could have shown these results as they both struggle learning in their native language, including decoding and reading fluently. Xavier and Jesse may have performed better in English because that is what their primary instruction was in prior to this school year while Yanellee has now been in the program for two years and has a strong Spanish language base at home and parent involvement in her Spanish learning. Holistically, the participants showed similarities between their ability to demonstrate comprehension in both languages by only differing by a point if at all. Furthermore, these tables indicate all the participants typically performed better when answering within the text questions in both languages and struggled more so with beyond the text questioning if they struggled at all. This could be because students need to rely more heavily on their background knowledge when answering beyond the text questions and do not have the ability to do this efficiently yet, especially with an unfamiliar topic like during an F+P assessment. Overall, these results are conducive with Proctor et al (2010) and Feinauer et al's (2013) understanding that even though most research indicates that comprehension in language one (L1) and language two (L2) are not necessarily correlated, if students have developed language proficiency and/or comprehension

strategies in L1 they can transfer these skills which can aid in L2 comprehension. Furthermore, if students were truly bilingual then they were more likely to easily transfer constrained and unconstrained skills as they have a well-developed understanding of how the nature of an alphabetic language and its syntax and context works.

With F+P data the level of difficulty of the comprehension questions were directly related to the level of the text. If students were not accurate readers then they were being asked to answer comprehension questions on texts that were below grade level and topics that students may have more background knowledge on. Furthermore, students may have had higher comprehension skills, but are unable to demonstrate that if their reading accuracy is weak. However, through the comprehension conversations after read alouds I was able to look more closely at how each participant was able to answer these same types of questions, within and beyond text, in response to children's literature, a higher language demand for ENL students. Table 5 indicates the students' ability to answer those types of questions after listening to texts specifically in English with Mary. Using the same format as the comprehension conversation in the F+P assessment the students had the opportunity to answer three questions for each type of comprehension understanding. Their score was then combined with their classmates in order to get an overall percentage to represent what types of questions they as a cohort excel in and struggle with as related to the language of instruction and teacher providing the instruction.

Table 5

*Percentage of questions answered correctly collectively from Comprehension Conversations*

English Texts	Percentages	
	Within Text	Beyond Text
Snow White (Day 1)	88%	63%

Snow White (Day 2)	88%	63%
The Three Little Pigs	88%	75%

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*Note:* Students had the opportunity to earn three points or accurately answer three questions for each type of understanding, within text and beyond text, just like during the F+P assessment.

The first text Mary read was *Snow White* and the students answered 88% of the within text questions as well as 63% of the beyond text questions accurately the first day. The second day they finished the reading of the text and they performed the same as related to their ability to answer each type of question. These scores are the same or lower than their individual comprehension scores as shown in the F+P results in Table 1-4. However, the within text understanding could be lower as a result of *Snow White* being a more complex text. This text required them to have a more advanced vocabulary base and the majority of questioning by the teacher revolved in modeling and scaffolding of answering higher level questions and tacking vocabulary. Lucero (2012) also saw educators of explicitly teaching vocabulary, especially academic language found in more complex literature for children. Furthermore, the reading of this text occurred in a whole group setting which allowed for the opportunity for students to drift in and out of attention which could have impacted their comprehension, especially their within text understanding which focuses on direct and specific information in the text. The third text read was *The Three Little Pigs* and the students again answered 88% of the within text questions correct along with 75% of the beyond the text questions. The beyond the text score could have been higher with this text as it is a familiar text for students and therefore they could have a greater background knowledge heading into the story and Uchikoshi et al (2010) found how this background can impact comprehension.

Table 6 below relates to the participants' overall comprehension of texts read in Spanish. Once again the students were asked six questions, three per question type, to accurately demonstrate their ability to fully understand the text they are being read. The students were asked the questions in Spanish and had the choice to respond in English or Spanish. All students chose to answer the comprehension questions in English.

Table 6

*Percentage Scores of Comprehension Conversations*

Spanish Texts	Percentages	
Title	Within Text	Beyond Text
El Cochinito Fugitivo	100%	90%
El Hombre de Pan de Jengibre	100%	70%
Todos Los Amigos	100%	75%

*Note:* Students had the opportunity to earn three points or accurately answer three questions for each type of understanding, within text and beyond text, just like during the F+P assessment.

Brittany first read the students *El Cochinito* which is a Spanish variation on *The Gingerbread Man* and the students were able to answer 100% of the within text questions correctly and 90% of the beyond text questions. These percentages represent an increase in comparison to read alouds in English and could be related to the fact that the story is being presented in their native language so they are more engaged. Cortina et al (2015) found how a strong commitment to a students' native language can increase learning for ENL students. In addition, *The Gingerbread Man* is a story that they had previously read which provides them with a strong background heading into the reading of this text and could have positively

impacted their ability to answer more challenging questions about it. Next, *El Hombre de Pan de Jengibre* was read and was once again another variation on the original Gingerbread story. The students once again answered 100% of the within text questions accurately and 70% of the beyond text questions. The beyond the text questions could have been more challenging because they were confusing the different versions of the story. They could have continued to do well answering questions about the text because they had a strong background knowledge reading all of the different versions and in addition, Brittany showed a brief video as an activating strategy that could have resonated with them and provided them with additional background information. Lastly, the participants read a poem called *Todos Los Amigos*. They answered 100% of the within the text questions correct which could have been as a result of frequent turning and talking to summarize as they read through the poem and actions to go along with the reading of the poem. Silverman et al (2013) also found the importance of discussion in order to promote literal and inferential comprehension. They answered 75% of the beyond the text questions correctly which continues to demonstrate their collective struggle to consistently answer these types of questions. This weakness could have occurred because the majority of instruction focused on inquiring about and answering within the text questions.

Overall native Spanish speakers demonstrated a stronger understanding when listening to a text in their native language, especially when answering the within the text questions. However, in both languages the students tended to perform better answering within text questions and struggle equally when thinking beyond the text regardless of the language the text is presented in which connects to the F+P results. High Spanish comprehension could be occurring because all participants are above program expectations in their oral expression and actively respond to the text throughout the lesson with the teacher to rehearse their understanding

(Report Card, 2016). These results could also be connected to how the teacher presents the texts to the students and what instructional strategies they utilize to support and scaffold their learning in these more advanced content books. Furthermore, teachers provide many opportunities to review and summarize so that students can free their mind for analyzing and critiquing the text which would therefore positively influence within text comprehension. Kim et al (2014) indicated that oral language in language one (L1) aids in literal comprehension and is also a strong indicator of later elementary comprehension or essentially beyond the text questioning.

The teacher interviews provided insight to the use of student background knowledge and its impact on overall comprehension. Mary (pseudonym) stated that, “What was interesting is whatever was frontloaded first, you could see the positive effect when with the other teacher” (Teacher Interview, 2016). Furthermore, in the Teacher Interview (2016) Brittany (pseudonym) agreed saying:

They use their background knowledge all the time and I think that is the goal -to have them come in with an understanding and build upon it. I focus a lot on vocabulary so that they can focus on other things in English. My students always say, “We learned about that in Mrs. Mary’s room. The goal of the program is to constantly make those connections between the two languages. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

If students are learning about the same content in both languages then they may be able to rely on prior knowledge and experiences to adequately understand texts and new concepts in their second language. Research conducted by August et al (2006) also discusses the importance of introducing vocabulary in students native language and building connections in order to free up the brain for cross transfer when they encounter the content in their second language. Then, they

can dedicate their cognitive energy towards implementing meaning making strategies for the entirety of the content.

### **Comprehension Understanding Impacted by Individual Differences**

Although as a cohort these native Spanish speakers demonstrated a strong ability to answer within the text questions as opposed to beyond the text, each individual student's ability to do this is impacted by who they are as an individual and student. Each participant has varied comprehension skills depending on their language experiences, background, attendance and demeanor. They represent a complex learner in that many factors had the potential to play a role in the extent of their comprehension abilities.

For example, the dual language program was available at the kindergarten level for native Spanish speaking students. However, not every participant was a part of this program last year. Although all students are native Spanish speakers, their Spanish academic abilities, including comprehension, are a culmination of their experiences thus far, including those in their past school and also home environment. According to Brittany:

We also had students who were new to the program and hadn't been in dual language last year. For me that was one of my greatest challenges. I had such a wide variety of levels in my classroom. I had about 20 students who had not been in dual language last year so some of them had absolutely no Spanish experience. They had never heard Spanish, no one in their family spoke Spanish, and they didn't know anything about it. It was like starting in preschool with them all over again. Then, I had students who had been in the dual language program in kindergarten and were native Spanish speakers. I had this continuum of 40 different students with 40 different sets of abilities and trying to differentiate a program where some of it had to be prek and kindergarten and some of it

had to be first grade and trying to mix it together to meet all of their needs was very challenging. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

In addition, Brittany had two English speaking students who were new to the program and therefore did not have any Spanish speaking experience. This wide range of instructional needs could have influenced some participants in that they have many of the foundational skills already and a large focus is on explicit questioning and comprehension, something they already have control of. However, reviewing these fundamental skills could have also positively impacted students as they had the opportunity to be leaders for their monolingual peers. Leider et al (2013) discussed how bilingual and dual language settings are inevitably consumed with deep within group variation as well which needs to be understood in order to implement the program effectively and do it justice.

In addition, Bethany had students enter and leave the program throughout the course of the year. Xavier entered the dual language program in March from another school district (Cumulative Folder, 2016). By entering the program late Xavier did not have formal education in Spanish for the duration of the year which could have impacted his comprehension understanding in English and Spanish. Branum-Martin et al (2010) looked at contextual effects of bilingual programs and varying outcomes set by programs can impact student comprehension comparatively and Xavier came from a classroom where the outcomes were different. However, as demonstrated in Table 2 and 4, he showed slight growth in both English and Spanish as well as adequate comprehension in both languages. This growth could have been as a result of being able to learn in his native language for the first time and his excitement for learning. Brittany stated:

In my opinion he has made excellent progress in Spanish for the time he has been here. He has a lot of background knowledge and language proficiency in Spanish. He had a lot of practice coming into it whereas in English he has less experience. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Whitacre (2015) also identified the student coming and going as a challenge in a dual language programming that ultimately impacts the fidelity of the program as it has to be constantly shifting and changing.

Two of the native Spanish speaking students had very different backgrounds and demeanors and this was shown through in their academic and comprehension progress in the dual language classroom during this study. Brittany shared about Genevieve that:

In the English language I think she has to be absolutely sure what she is going to say or she is not going to say it. When talking to her mom at parent teacher conferences she said after coming from Puerto Rico she would not even ask to use the bathroom until spring of last year because she wasn't sure how to say it correctly so she would just wait. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

This demeanor could impact her ability to accurately share what she knows. Mary added, "Genevieve is not a risk taker at all and she has made very little gains in English. She doesn't participate in whole group discussions even when I call on her and scaffold questions" (Teacher, Interview, 2016, pg. 8). While observing her during whole group read alouds and classroom discussions she did not raise her hand once. This lack of participation confirms what was shared by both of her teachers as well as her mother. If Genevieve is not actively participating in her learning she may not be attending to what is being discussed or taught or not able to attend to modeling of how to understand the content that is being presented to her. When called upon once

during a read aloud of *Snow White* she sat quietly and thought and Mary prompted her three times, scaffolding her understanding, before modeling the correct thinking aloud (Field Notes, June 2016). Genevieve was able to see the internal process of how to comprehend the text through Mary, but she herself may not have followed that process or internalized how to go through that thinking another time independently. Silverman et al (2013) found that using instructional talk and talking through comprehension increases student achievement, but Genevieve is not interacting in the instructional talk. When discussing the text *The 3 Little Pigs* with me Genevieve responded to two beyond the text questions with, “I don’t know” (Comprehension Conversation, June 2016). Genevieve may have had some information to share, but by not giving any information it appears that she has not understanding. Her lack of confidence can not only impact her teachers understanding what she knows, but it also could impact the services provided for her and the track she will be on moving forward. As demonstrated in Table 1, Genevieve made slight progress in her language understanding, as well as with her comprehension. This could be as a result of her demeanor or her oral language or processing skills.

On the other hand, Yanellee is a student who participated in English reading AIS in Kindergarten and has since finished on grade level in reading and comprehension by the end of her second year in the dual language program (Report Card, June 2015; Table 1). This could be due to many factors. During our informal student interview Yanellee stated, “I like learning because I want to read in English and Spanish.” Yanellee’s enthusiasm and goal setting could have positively impacted her progress in both languages. Furthermore, Yanellee’s family was the only family to return the family questionnaire regarding their involvement in her schooling and supporting her learning at home (Family Questionnaire, June 2016). Her mother shared in the

questionnaire (2016), “We read together and I help her when I can.” Additional family support could aid her language development in that they could support her in her homework or developing her oral language proficiency which could positively affect her overall biliteracy. Brittany agreed saying, “She has a dedicated family where education is very important,” (Teacher Interview, 2016). This dedication could have impacted Yanellee’s mentality towards learning as well as her goal setting which has allowed her to succeed. Linholm-Leary (2011) found that bilingual Latino students demonstrated higher language proficiency when parents have higher level of formal education. However, Yanellee’s mother only attended school until fourth grade. However, this research does align with Uchikoshi (2010) in that the dual language program allows for parents to support their child in their native language by supervising their homework and therefore fostering a home school connection and appreciation for education.

Jesse made significant growth throughout his first grade year, especially for it being his first year in the program. Tables 1-4 demonstrated that he made growth in reading levels in English, moving from a F to a K, and in Spanish, moving from a D to an F. He also answered at least 67% of both types of questions at these higher level texts. He came in from an ENL cluster classroom in which he received push in ENL services, but all instruction was presented in English. However, Jesse struggled with comprehension, especially beyond the text questioning both in English and Spanish. According to his cumulative folder (2016) Jesse was absent more than 40 days this school year. In the time that I observed in the classroom Jesse was only present for three out of the six observations, one time missing the first half of a text that was finished when he returned the next day (Field Notes). By missing the first part of the text Jesse could have missed integral background knowledge for comprehending the overall text. In addition, he could have missed the direct modeling and teaching of a comprehension strategy through a think

aloud which therefore could not be a resource for him while comprehending independently.

Lopez et al (2015) found that modeling was the greatest indicator of ENL reading achievement which includes comprehension. When discussing individual students during the teacher interviews (2016), Mary stated:

He missed a lot of new teaching so he didn't have the background to build on. You ask for an opinion and he wants to run away. He just doesn't have the practice. I'm really worried about him because that background knowledge is going to run out and he is going to run out of gas. He has a lot of potential. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

If background knowledge significantly impacts the ability for students to transfer understandings then Xavier may not have shown as great comprehension understanding because he was lacking that foundational base as found by Lopez et al (2015). Brittany expressed her concern sharing:

He missed so much school and he's new to dual language too so this is his first year reading. His comprehension and his word attack skills in Spanish were significantly decreased. He just didn't have the chance to practice that. He needed consistent practice and guidance. I think I read three books with him because he missed so much school. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Xavier's lower Spanish skills could have been as a result of missing school excessively and therefore the practice needed to retain new skills and information. Kim et al (2014) looks in depth at factors that impact English language development, including attendance. Even though each of these participants have background in Spanish and English, their ability to understand in both languages is impacted by their unique individual experiences and therefore those factors need to be taken into account when assessing and understanding these students' skills and abilities.

### **Presence and Importance of Specific Instructional Strategies**

When observing in both the English and Spanish classroom I was able to see a variety of instructional strategies implemented during each visit in order to best aid student understanding. Some strategies were more prevalent in the Spanish lessons, while others were more predominant in the English classroom. However, several strategies were consistent across the two classrooms and teachers and the students were familiar with these instructional strategies and aware of how they helped them understand the content. Of all of the strategies utilized, the most frequent in the Spanish classroom were translanguaging, as well as collaborative pairs through which they summarized the text as well as scaffolded each other's understanding of the text. By using their complete linguistic toolbox the participants could have demonstrated better overall comprehension and felt more comfortable taking academic risks. Hopewell (2011) also found the positives of allowing students to show knowledge whatever way possible. Prior to observing a lesson Brittany explained translanguaging saying,

It's the next frontier in dual language teaching. That's when they make the connections very explicit between English and Spanish. I did a lesson on cognates and the kids picked out the connections instantly. So it's bridging the two languages! I think only teaching in the one language is a detriment to the students. Students should be able to share what they know however possible. They have two languages going on in their head and they have the understanding between them so I don't care if they use English the overall goal is comprehension. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Utilizing translanguaging in turn allows educators to help build connections instantaneously between the two languages which could positively impact the transfer between the two languages, including comprehension strategies. I also observed this strategy during a lesson

when Brittany used Spanish and English interchangeably to best meet the needs of her diverse classroom. Brittany asked the students to recall what happened in the last gingerbread book they read with their collaborative pair who spoke a different language and also stated, “If you need to explain in English first I can help you after,” (Field Notes, 2016). By utilizing this language she gave the participants the opportunity to explain in Spanish to an English speaking peer as well as make connections between the English and Spanish explanation which could strengthen their comprehension of the content. Ultimately, the positive outcome of the use of these strategies was shown during the comprehension conversation percentages in which the participants answered 100% of the within text questions correctly as shown in Table 6. Hopewell (2011) discussed in depth the importance of using one’s entire linguistic toolbox when demonstrating understanding as opposed to compartmentalizing language and linguistic skills.

On the other side of the wall in the English classroom I witnessed extensive explicit language modeling, especially when thinking about and answering beyond the text questions. Before even opening the book *Snow White* Mary asked her students when they thought the story took place and stated, “I can use the illustration to help me find evidence of when this story took place” (Field Notes). This modeling could have helped the students who could not process these questions independently yet and allow them the opportunity to practice this processing to move towards independence and this was also found by Lopez et al (2015). Furthermore, when making a prediction about what the King would do after his wife died she prompted them to first consider what other characters whose wives die do before making a prediction because, “readers think about what they already know before making a prediction,” (Field Notes, 2016, pg.1). During our teacher interview Mary gave insight into her explicit language modeling and use saying that, “Linguistically we often teach way above the standard and with the language

learning students being concise, explicit, and providing them with the tools to do it themselves only benefits them” (Teacher Interview, 2016). With this mindset Mary is thinking about the students’ needs and focusing on giving them the modeling they need to develop independence in their comprehension processing. When I interviewed Yanellee she shared, “My teachers help me know what is normal and not normal like how to tell when a book is fiction or nonfiction,” (Student Interview, 2016). This metacognition and thinking about how to answer those beyond the text questions effectively better prepares them to respond to them in English or Spanish. Lopez et al (2015) again found this as well as their study found that when teachers utilized language modeling and think alouds it generated higher order thinking skills and increased overall reading achievement.

In addition, several strategies were utilized by both teachers including within and beyond text questioning, providing a purpose and revisiting this purpose, reviewing prior content and building background knowledge, utilizing graphic organizers, visuals, movement, and unpacking complex vocabulary and language (Field Notes). The consistency of these strategies provides the participants with accessible tools for understanding content and the opportunity to practice using them efficiently and internalize them. Brittany and Mary attribute these common instructional strategies to their constant collaboration surrounding the curriculum, their students, and teaching to their individual needs. Mary shared, “We only had a 120 minutes to deliver our instruction. We spend lots of time afterschool together talking about what it needs to look like,” (Teacher Interview, 2016). This constant collaboration keeps them focused on ever changing students’ needs and how they can make transfer easier for students and increase their overall understanding. Previous research indicates positive effects when implementing vocabulary instruction, attention to higher order thinking questions, and discussing the purpose of each

lesson and revisiting it at the end (Lopez et al, 2015, Silverman et al, 2013, Cheung, 2012).

However, all additional strategies could be implemented to promote the comprehension of any child. These interactive strategies keep students actively engaged in their learning and provide them support that will only enhance their comprehension as shown in the figure below.

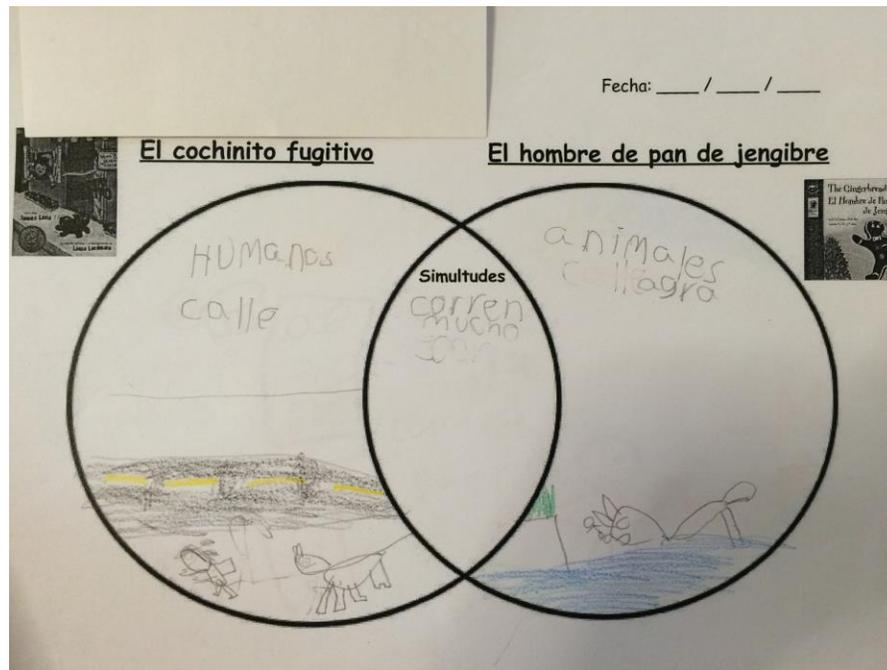


Figure 1 Graphic organizer to support compare and contrast comprehension

Prior to my observation in Brittany's room, Mary had read *The Gingerbread Man* in English to the students. When Brittany introduced two Spanish versions of the story during my observation I was able to see the students carry the story format into their understanding of the new texts and then analyze the two texts through a Venn Diagram (Field Notes). She first utilized a Venn diagram on the smart board in which the students could practice the comprehension skills, then provided hula hoops and sentence strips related to the texts in the appropriate space, and lastly had the students demonstrate their overall understanding through their own Venn diagram as shown above (Field Notes). This continuity between the two

classrooms as well as the use of movement, graphic organizers, and explicitly teaching comprehension strategies allowed for overall greater comprehension as all five participants were able to share one similarity and a difference for each story. Uchikoshi et al (2010) found that introducing and using strategies across and between languages increases student achievement and overall comprehension.

Overall, the various sources of data collected allowed for several important findings. It was found in this study that there is a positive relationship between comprehension in language one and language two, but that comprehension is also impacted by individual student differences, including varying language proficiencies and backgrounds. Lastly, it was found that teachers utilized common instructional strategies to create continuity and generate academic success for these dual language learners. These findings and their understandings can be utilized to better prepare educators to increase comprehension for ENL students.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

Based on the findings above there are many implications for educators regarding the comprehension achievement of native Spanish speaking students who are often considered at-risk students. Since there is a positive correlation between Spanish comprehension and English comprehension students have to be provided the opportunity to develop in their first language and discuss content and concepts in this manner as well. Furthermore, after finding that individual differences play a large role in student achievement, specifically levels of language proficiency, it is vital that educators utilize culturally responsive assessments to provide interventions to develop language one skills. Lastly, since specific instructional strategies were utilized and effective while working with the ENL students within this study, it demonstrates that

adequate professional development is necessary in order to prepare teachers how to best educate native Spanish-speaking students and increase their overall comprehension.

Since this study found that there was a positive correlation between comprehension skills in language one and language two, it is vital that native Spanish-speaking students have the daily opportunity to practice asking and answering questions revolving around varying content in their native language as well as English. This opportunity should be available through the type of programming as well as the instruction occurring within this programming. Proctor et al (2010) found these results as well when working with fourth grade bilingual students. Their findings suggested that oral language in Spanish was indicative of comprehension processing in English. By providing students with the opportunity to practice expressing their understanding by using their complete linguistic toolbox they are able to transfer their understanding between the two languages and develop their overall comprehension. In fact, Carlo et al (2014) also found that students who had the opportunity to develop first in Spanish comprehension grew faster than those students without initial strong comprehension skills. Therefore, ENL students need to be allowed the opportunity to hear and read content in their primary language to support their understanding in English which is the overall goal of reading.

Next, this study demonstrated that individual differences, including students' native language experiences and proficiencies, impacted their comprehension growth throughout the course of their time in the dual language program. As a result, educators need to take into consideration where students are coming from linguistically and employ their understanding of language acquisition as they make instructional decisions. This connects to Kim et al's (2014) findings in that students come from diverse backgrounds and child and family factors will influence dual language learners' development of English. Therefore students from differing

backgrounds may need additional resources in order to become fully proficient. Furthermore, knowing students' Spanish skills can serve as an indicator for difficulty in a second language and should be utilized for students at risk for difficulty learning to read in a second language according to Dominguez et al (2007). It is important for educators to remember that some students require intensive support in their native language alongside their English language instruction due to their lack of native language instruction prior to school.

Lastly, since this study found that native Spanish-speaking students benefitted in their comprehension development while specific instructional strategies were consistently utilized by their teachers, there is a need for dual language teachers to be provided with adequate professional developments on effective instructional practices for students of new languages as well as the time to collaborate with those practicing in the same environment, especially when sharing the same students. Silverman et al (2013) also found that teachers need to truly understand the relationship between instruction and vocabulary and comprehension specifically when they studied third to fifth grade teachers' instruction and its impact on student achievement. By understanding the connection between them educators can better explicitly teach these connections to ENL students for transfer of comprehension skills. However, in order for teachers to do this they need to be allotted the time and the ongoing support to continually improve and connect their learning their practice.

The main question that I wanted to answer through my research is "how does dual language programming impact the reading comprehension of native Spanish speaking ENL students?" While designing my research I utilized the Cultural Historical and Interdependence theoretical framework as a lens. This overall framework took into account how culture needs to be valued and at the center of a student's education as well as how the development of an

individual's primary language lends itself to the acquisition of a second language more readily. Prior to researching I looked in depth at the already published literature on dual language programming and the comprehension of Spanish-speaking ENL students. The current research highlighted that many language proficiencies transfer readily from language one to language two, but that comprehension is a more challenging proficiency to predict between languages as it is a more complex or constrained skill. For these skills to transfer proficient educators and programs are a necessity. To help me research this question I conducted classroom observations of read alouds lessons where comprehension was assessed in both English and Spanish through comprehension conversations. In addition I conducted teacher and student interviews and utilized cumulative data including student cumulative folders, report cards and reading benchmarking assessments in both English and Spanish, as well as parent questionnaires. My findings include the positive correlation between English and Spanish comprehension, the significant impact of individual differences on comprehension achievement, and the presence and importance of specific comprehension strategies and collaboration. The implications are providing native Spanish speaking students the opportunity to develop in their first language in comprehension, considering all student data when utilizing assessments and providing interventions, and providing professional development and collaborative planning opportunities for dual language teachers.

There were a few limitations in this study to be considered for future research endeavors. One limitation in particular revolved around the time of the year. Even though I was able to collect observational and anecdotal records of end of the year performance, I could only rely on teacher interviews and student assessments to form a beginning of the year benchmark for student comprehension skills and abilities. Although conducting the research at the end of the

year was beneficial to track a year's worth of growth, at this time of the year there were also interferences with scheduling revolving around end of the year festivities. The last week of school was all half days and was also a change in routine and schedule. That being said, additionally observations at times changed the classroom routines slightly as well. Lastly, this study only looked at a small portion of students in one cohort and did not compare the results to ENL students who did not participate in dual language programming. In this school there are few native Spanish-speaking students in other programming since it was started in order to better serve this population as mandated by law. However, the absence of Spanish ENL students in other programs eliminates the opportunity to provide comparison data and truly judge its effectiveness. Therefore, in the future I would extend my study to encompass a control group and an experimental group and work with them over a longer period of time to better identify the overall growth and more clearly see the impact of the dual language programming.

After completing the research I felt there were several areas that could lead to further inquiry in the future. As mentioned previously, it would be beneficial in future studies to compare the effects of dual language programming to that of mainstream classrooms with ENL push in support and reading instruction. Furthermore this study provided evidence for growth over one year in the dual language program and some students only made limited growth. However, most research indicates that by <sup>fifth</sup> grade students perform on par with their monolingual peers and demonstrate these skills in their native language as well. Therefore, further study should be considered in following the same cohort of students across multiple years starting from the beginning reading and comprehension level. The continuity of this study will help demystify whether certain struggling students were the students struggling from the

beginning or if the programming compensates for that along the way and differing language proficiencies or changes in educational programming impacts overall student comprehension.

In conclusion, although this study provides evidence of how dual language programming can possible impact reading comprehension of ENL students, further research will give more insight into its impact among different and larger groups of students as well as the extent of its impact depending on programming and individual student differences.

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## Appendix A

**Teacher Name:** \_\_\_\_\_**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_**Teacher questions:**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What was your journey to becoming a teacher?
3. How did you come to be a part of the dual language program?
4. What are the rewards and/or challenges of teaching in the dual language program?
5. Describe your students.
6. How have your students grown this year?
7. What have you learned through professional development regarding dual language programming?
8. What strategies do you implement to support your ELL students' learning?
9. What changes will you make in planning next year to better meet your students' comprehension needs?

Appendix B

**Student Informal Interview Questions:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Participants:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How do you feel about learning in both English and Spanish?
3. What is your favorite part?
4. What is the hardest part?
5. What does your teacher do to help you understand what you are reading?
6. What do your families do to support your learning of English/Spanish?

Appendix C

**Comprehension Conversation Questions:**

Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>Fiction</u></b>	
<b><u>Within the text</u></b>	<b><u>Additional Understandings</u></b>
<p>1. Recount most of the important events</p> <p>What happened at the beginning?</p> <p>What happened next?</p> <p>What happened at the end?</p>	
<b><u>Beyond the text</u></b>	<b><u>What did your teacher do to help you understand the book?</u></b>
<p>1. Open ended question</p> <p>2. Inferential Question</p> <p>3. Drawing conclusions</p>	

Appendix D

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre de su niño: \_\_\_\_\_

Gracias por tocando el tiempo para completar este cuestionario. Yo quiero comprender como la familia puede impactar y ayudar los estudiantes en la programa de dual lenguaje.

Que lenguaje es su lenguaje primero? Espanol o ingles?

Que lenguaje usa en su casa con su estudiante? Porque?

Como ayuda o participa en la educación de su niño?

Como su hijo/hija crecio este ano en la programa de dual lenguaje?

Por qué usted quiere su niño en la programa de dual lenguaje?