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## Reinforcing Literacy Instruction in an ELL context

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## **Abstract**

An analysis of the phonic method used for Literacy teaching in an ELL context, suggest that phonics instruction is essential but not enough in any effective Literacy program. Through phonics instruction children develop decoding skills, however, reading and writing require other important skills. The Whole Language Approach's principles refer to the use of context when reading, highlighting the importance of developing comprehension skills. A two-school comparison based in the Literacy skills required enables us to demonstrate that isolated phonics instruction is not sufficient. In this way, a proposal of improvements to reinforce Literacy instruction in an ELL context is presented in order to achieve a more effective teaching of reading and writing.

## **Key Words**

Literacy, Phonics approach, Whole Language approach, English learners (ELL), English native speakers (NESS), reading and writing skills.

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## 1. Introduction

Teaching children to read and write is considered one of the most valuable lessons taught in Primary school. Learning to read and write is a big step in the students' learning process and it settles one of the main tools for their future learning. Over the years, several studies have been done and different approaches have been presented trying to find the most effective method for teaching Literacy. Numerous methods have been studied in this area, being the Phonics approach the most recognized. Several researchers have proved the effectiveness of phonics instructions. Nevertheless, most of these researchers also recognize that phonics skills are just part of the skills required to success in the complex process of reading and writing. The Phonics approach has been defined as bottom-up approach in which phonics are decode and blended to form words. In contrast to those approaches, the top-down approaches, such as the Whole Language approach, defend the use of context to identify words. Raven (1997) in her article, examines the strengths of both approaches, presenting the benefits of a balanced approach that includes phonics instruction and a meaningful context in the process of Literacy learning.

In the present dissertation, the debate about which is the most effective teaching Literacy method, will be analyze in a Spanish context where English is taught as a second language. Over the years, the relevance of this topic has increased due to the desire of teachers and parents to provide their children with a more complete education. In this study, a comparison between an native English speakers (NESS) and a English Learners school (ELL) will help to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Spanish approach followed in Literacy instruction. In this way, an American school and an Spanish school were selected as the sample for this study. Following this analysis a set of improvements will be proposed to reinforce Literacy instruction in ELL schools.

## 1. Overview

Due to the big importance of successful learning in reading and writing, it is not surprising the big debate about which methods are more effective for teaching Literacy in Primary schools. Although there are different opinions concerning which is the best method, it has been clearly established that the connection language development and literacy instruction. Related to this, it is understandable that when talking about teaching Literacy to English Learners, the debate becomes even more intense.

Some researchers, such as Joyce Morris (1994), consider Synthetic Phonics the only valid method to teach Literacy. Synthetic Phonics is one of the most recognised methods for Literacy instruction and consequently, it is used in schools all over the world. The Phonics approach focuses on teaching students the correspondence between letters and sounds as well as how to blend those sounds and form words. In contrast to this approach, we can find others, such as the Whole Language approach, which focuses on meaning and on the use of context highlight the importance of developing comprehension skills (Rupp 1986). Other researchers, such as Dombey (2006) observe that a balanced approach that focuses in both phonics instruction and on establishing meaning is the key for any successful reading program.

When Spanish schools, where English is learnt as a second language, decided to start teaching Literacy in English they chose a Phonic approach. Even though, a specific program had not been established, most of the schools decided to follow the Jolly Phonics program. This Literacy program was born in England and it has been extended to many schools, especially in Europe. The success of this program comes from the use of a multi-sensory method in which each phoneme is associated to a gesture and introduced with a short story through a song. Multiple intelligences' ideas refer to developing distinct intelligences in the students to facilitate language acquisition.

There is no doubt of the beneficial effects of Phonic approaches which have been proved by several studies. Over the period 1960 to 2000 numerous reports were carried out in the United States, the results, published on the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) concluded that a systematic teaching of phonic was necessary. However, these reports also recognize that phonics instruction is only one aspect of a successful literacy program and that a rich language environment in which students can develop literacy skills is also needed to become successful readers and writers. This is supported by the notion that several skills are required in the reading and writing process: decoding and comprehension for reading and spelling and organization of ideas for writing (Juel, et. al , 1986).

This research tries to demonstrate the consequences of a systematic application of Phonics programs without establishing a context in English Learners schools. Methods used for teaching ELL need a special focus on establishing a meaningful context due to, out of the school these students are not constantly exposed to English language environment. When having an excessive focus on specific phonics instruction, other skills also needed in the reading and writing process are not developed having a negative impact in the students' learning process. In this way, it is need reinforcement in those programs that only focus of phonics instruction out of context. These non-taught skills may be developed by complementing the phonic method with some of the principles established by the Whole language approach, which focuses on comprehension and meaning, and in this way also in language development (Rupp 1987).

## 2. Aims

In the following section, the aims of this study are presented.

1. To analyze the Spanish Literacy instructional program by comparing it with a NESS where the phonic program is integrated with other teaching strategies that creates a meaningful environment in the process of reading and writing learning.
2. To reinforce a phonic program by introducing and adapting skills related with comprehension and language development, proposed by the Whole Language approach.
3. To elaborate a proposal for improvement by complementing the phonic program with some of the principals presented by the Whole Language Approach.

## 4. Theoretical framework: Whole Language Principles

Whole Language is an approach towards learning reading and writing through the use of language. This approach presents the connection between literacy learning and language development (Rupp, 1986). In her article, Hsu (1994) defines Whole Language as a constructivist learning theory and explains how, according to Yetta Goodman (1989) and Gursky (1991), the bases of whole language are supported by different educational movements' theories. There is reference to John Amos Comenius's concern for learner-centered pedagogy and to the idea of learning by doing by John Dewey's progressive education. It also includes psychological research from Piaget's understanding of children as active agents in their own learning process. Another contribution to Whole Language approach's development was Vygotsky's belief that children learn more efficiently when the learning is functional and relevant indicating that meaningful learning encourages understanding and pleasure of the written language (Stone 2007). Dewey's contribution to the Whole Language support his idea of learning coming from experience. In the same way,

whole language has been influenced by Lee and Larnoreaux's language experience approach which encourages teachers to use reading and writing materials created by the students.

Hsu (1994), claims that although there is not a clear definition of the whole language approach, all whole language researchers agree that there are a set of common principles that build the whole language approach. According to the statements provided by the researchers that study the Whole Language approach, the following principles have been established to carry this study.

Whole language understands language as a whole entity in which its components are taught together rather than broken into parts. This means, that we need to provide learners with opportunities to experiment with the language wholly, rather than analyzing its components separately (Brockman, 1994). Reading in Whole language is defined as a psycholinguistic process in which readers interact with the context (Hartse and Burke, 1977) while phonics theories defined reading as a process of converting letters into sounds. The former is related to a “top-down” processing model of reading that highlights the importance of the whole, in contrast to “bottom-up” processing models that believe that reading is achieved by developing a series of sub-skills (Ekwall and Shanker, 1989). Following the “top-down” processing model, whole language uses clues in the context to identify words, using decoding skills to be used when context clues are not enough. In this way, it has been agreed the importance of phonics instructions and the necessity of teaching them in a meaningful context (Pyor, 1990).

In whole language classes the four language skills are taught together. Speaking, listening, reading and writing are studied through interrelated activities (Rupp, 1986) understanding that the four modes of language are reciprocally supportive. Lamb and Best (1990) defended the importance of exposing the students to different forms of language to maximize language learning. Following the guessing game theory created by Goodman (1967), readers need to



learn to use semantic, syntactic and graphonic rules to obtain meaning from text, suggesting that context should be used to “guess” unfamiliar words.

Whole language is an authentic approach to reading based on real texts and real life experiences. In connection to this, Clark (1987) defended that it is necessary to encourage children through authentic reading and writing activities to experiment with language. In Whole Language classes, children have opportunities to interact with quality children literature and real life texts, such as newspapers, charts, or journals... These enable children to be engaged in the process of learning through meaningful literacy activities in which they understand the ultimate purpose of reading and writing (Goodman, 1967).

Similarly, the whole language is a comprehension-centered approach which focuses on meaning rather than on form. Goodman and Goodman (1981) believed that written language should be introduced to children as a system to establish meaningful communication with others. Tirney et al. (1990) highlighted also the importance of using functional and meaningful language inside a context when reading, explaining that language is learned best when acquires significance and value for the students. In order to do that it is a helpful tool of teaching the use of real life situations, as well as encourage children to use their background and own personal experiences. Learners need to find a purpose in their learning process, and it must be their purpose rather than the teacher's purpose (Brockman, 1994). In this way whole language emphasizes the purpose of communication in reading and writing rather than mechanical correctness (Hajek, 1984). In the same way, when learners understand any kind of language mode as a way of communication, they also recognize the purpose of a second language. In consequence, this is also one of the key principle in the Communicate approach for learning a second language.

Another principle of Whole Language is the understanding of learners as the main element that influences the learning process (Stahl and Miller, 1989). Learners are seen as

active agents in the learning process, which is summed up in the idea given by Goodman (1967) who defends that learning by doing is effective. In the Whole Language approach children are seen as authors, they create their own materials and write journals and books. Writing is based on the students' personal experiences and reading on what sparks their interest which motivates and helps them to find a purpose for doing it; and not only to please the teacher. This goes along with Rich's (1985) idea "the whole language proposition is that children construct their knowledge in relation to their previous experience".

Whole language principles also refer to learning as a social activity. Wagner (1989) points out that oral and writing language grows as language is used for real purposes in meaningful social interactions. In whole language classes children are given opportunities to interact and cooperate. Negotiating meaning is seen as a strategy to establish significance through interactions and cooperative reading and writing activities are used to learn from others. As whole language, understands reading and writing as a way of communicating, students are provided with plenty of opportunities to interact with the teacher and with peers but also with the text. From this way of understanding literacy, Rupp (1986) talks about the importance of encouraging children to experiment using the language and taking risks in its use to communicate

From the holistic perspective, teaching reading and writing in whole language classrooms includes development of a chain of skills that work together in the reading and writing process (Grace, 2007). Mchive, et al. (1987) indicate reading aloud to children, choral reading, silent reading and children writing books and journals as instructional techniques used in whole language classes. For his part, Rupp (1986) highlights the importance of teaching children to make hypothesis and inferences when reading. This last strategy also goes along with the idea of students using invented spelling that focus in the message rather than in the form. He also points out the idea of developing "self-monitoring" attitudes in the

students which leads to independent work. The whole idea is providing the students opportunities and experiences to develop students' motivation and supply them with tools to become successful readers and writers.

## **5. Legislative framework**

The principles used in this dissertation for implementing language skills follow Spanish Law, which regulates the schools where this method will be applied. According to the Spanish legislation (law or legislation?), the Orden de 9 de mayo de 2007, del Departamento de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, in its 23th article talks about the teaching of a second language in the Spanish schools in Aragón. This law, highlights the importance of educating student to become part of an international world “la enseñanza obligatoria debe preparar a alumnos y alumnas para vivir en un mundo progresivamente más internacional, pluricultural y plurilingüe.”

The ordinance establishes that language teaching should focus on the use of language: “El área de Lenguas extranjeras tiene como objeto formar personas que puedan utilizarlas para comprender, hablar y conversar, leer y escribir en la lengua o lenguas objeto de estudio, por lo que su uso debe ser el punto de partida desde el inicio del aprendizaje.” This goes along, with one of the main principles in the Whole Language Approach that refers to a meaningful and purposeful use of the language in the teaching of reading and writing (Tirney, Readence and Disher, 1990).

The ordinance also includes four areas that the students have to master when learning the target language: 1. Morpho-syntactic competence referring to the lexical, grammatical and phonological aspects of the language. 2. Pragmatic competence, referring to the use and purpose of the language. 3. Procedural competence, referring to the personal and social skills needed when processing the language. 4. Intercultural competence as knowledge related with

the culture of the target language. In this section, the Spanish law highlights the importance of developing in the students competences in the four language areas. In the same way, the Whole Language Approach defines language as a “whole entity” understanding the interrelation of these competences, and the need to develop them together.

Therefore, four blocks of contents are included in the regulation of teaching a second language: 1. Listening and speaking, 2. Reading and writing, 3. Knowledge of the language, 4. Cultural aspects. As all modes of language as “mutually supportive,” it is necessary to bring all these components together to our literacy classes, because the development of language is essential in the process of learning reading and writing.

## **6. Methodology**

Following the objective studied in this research (Literacy instruction in an ELL school), it is important to consider the relationship between Literacy instruction and second language instruction established by the context of the study. Due to the implications of learning a second language and the understanding its complex, this study follows a Systematic Approach. Following the idea presented by Hebert W. Seliger and Elana Shohamy in their book *Second language Methods*, this research conceptualizes second language learning as a complex system in which several sub-systems interact .

Due to the complexity and the enormous amount of variables that influence the process for Literacy learning for ELL, this study follows an analytic approach. This means that the study focuses in one of aspects that are part of the process of teaching and learning a second language, literacy instruction for ELL.

The present study is a Heuristic research which purpose of generating a hypothesis is based on observations in the context of a second language. This hypothesis is supported by

analysis and theories from other different studies and theorist that also investigated similar situations. This research tries to prove the necessity of making a change on the way English Literacy is taught in ELL schools.

The research is based on observations made in an American school and in a Spanish school. Observations and interactions with the teacher, who explained the methods used in class, provide real data used in this research. A checklist was designed with the purpose of comparing the skills taught in ELL and NESS schools and to to analyze those that are not being taught. The variables includes in the checklist were selected according to the Whole Language principles and to ideas proposed by recognized researchers concerning the development effective and necessary Literacy skills. The following paragraphs will present a brief description of the checklist designed.

The checklist used in this study (appendix 1), follows the Whole Language principles established in the theoretical framework of this study, integrating phonics instruction also as part of the method studied. Taking in account the context of an ELL school, where the research was carried out, the principles where selected and adapted to ELL characterises when elaborating the checklist. Moreover, the Spanish legislation has been also studied to justify the relevance of the analyzed aspects in relation to the competences established by the Spanish government when learning a second language.

The checklist is divided in four sections that collect information in relation to what happens in classrooms during the learning process and how it is developed. Information, that will be used to compare the two different systems and with the purpose of identifying the weaknesses of the ELL school to elaborate the proposal of improvements related with the teaching of Literacy

The first section refers to how the teacher interacts with the students and provides opportunities to interact with others. Encouraging interactions which benefit the learning process requires creating a safe environment in which students feel confident to participate. Recognizing students' effort rather than results, encouraging them to experiment with language, promoting cooperative and giving opportunities to share students' work are ways to encourage interactions in the classroom. Interactions also lead to an understanding of writing and reading as a communication system. It is important to realize that interactions in L2 classes are one of the most difficult barriers due to the lack of the target language development. However there are techniques that can be used by the teacher to provide support in the students' contributions (scaffolding). To find a purpose for Literacy learning reinforces students' motivation and self confidence which will lead to a better disposition for learning. The teacher's attitude also influences on how the students understand reading and writing as purposeful and enjoyable.

The second section, methods and techniques is designed to examine the way the learning is presented in the classes and how the students are expected to achieve it. One of the main aspects reflected in this section refers to Whole Language principle that defines students as active learners. Moreover, this section refers to the idea of learning as a social process presenting different techniques in which students learn together from the teacher but also from each other. This block refers as well, to language been understood as a whole entity and to the importance of teaching reading and writing within a context and with a purpose.

The third section collects information about the materials used in class, considering selecting topic-based materials and materials that please the students' interest as an effective source for learning. The checklist reflects as well, the magnitude of using authentic materials and students being in a rich environment which will maximize the development of their

learning. Additionally, the use of children made- materials and students employing tools for independent work, are also registered.

The last section reflects those skills that are necessary to acquire in order to become a successful reader and writer. Phonics skills and comprehension skills, as well as other skills such as word recognition are included for being supportive strategies in the reading and writing process, also using background and personal experiences in facilitates writing. Finally, strategies of self- monitoring that allow students to reflect about their learning are also registered as considered important for the students analyzing their strengths and weakness with the purpose of making improvements.

## **6.1 Steps**

It was during my teaching experience in an American school as a student teacher when my curiosity for the complex process of reading and writing instruction started to grow and grow. I also started to wonder, which would be the best way to introduce Literacy programs designed for NESS but introduced in Spanish schools. In this way, and with the personal purpose of learning more about Literacy instruction in a ELL context, I started this research.

After my five-month experience in an American school, my first step was visiting different schools and interacting with different English teachers to understand the way Literacy was taught in ELL schools. The intention of selecting a school that had general characteristics was so that the results obtained from this study could be applied and adapted to other. The year selected for the study was first year of Primary school as it is the first year of school compulsory in both of the context. According to this, the schools participating in the research have the following characteristics:

- ELL school: It is a state Spanish school. It is a CILE school, which means that 20% of its classes are taught in English. In the school selected Literacy and Physical Education are taught in English. The school dedicates 3 hours a week to the teaching of Literacy (4 sessions of 45 minutes), and Literacy instructions follows the Phonic approach.

- NESS school: It is an American public school where students all the class in the native language, except for a weekly 45 minutes session dedicate to learn Chinese as a L2. This school dedicates 7.5 hours a week to the teaching of Literacy (1.5 hours a day). The school integrates a phonics program with other activities that

## **7. Results**

### **7.1 Outcomes:**

With the aim of this study of elaborating a proposal of improvements to in Literacy instruction for ELL class, we are going to present and analyze the results collected from the checklists applied to both the ELL(appendix 2) and the NESS (appendix 3)school.

As the results from the checklist show, in both classes participation is encouraged, where effort is recognized rather than results. Children are encouraged to experiment with the language through authentic activities, and mistakes are understood as part of the learning process. However, it was also found that sharing students work with the rest of the class is only encouraged in the ELL classroom. Also related with the interactions that happen in the class, the results show that while opportunities to interact and cooperate with others are provided in both classrooms, negotiating meaning does not happen in the ELL classroom. As the results indicate, in both classes reading and writing are presented as enjoyable and meaningful activities, however data collected also shows a lack in presenting communication as the ultimate purpose of written language in the ELL class.



In relation to the methods and teaching techniques, results show that both teachers consider students as active learners, following the idea that students learn by doing. Nevertheless, functional reading is only encouraged in the NESS classroom where students are also seen as authors (this is not promoted in the ELL class). As evidence show, reading aloud by the teacher and choral reading does occur in both classes, however cooperative reading and writing only happens in the NESS classroom. Results also indicate coincidences showing that both teachers emphasize the use of the four language modes (speaking, reading, writing and listening) and teach reading and writing through interrelated activities. In this section, differences can be found as invented spelling is only encourage in the NESS classroom which emphasize on the purpose of communicating when writing, rather than mechanical-correctness. In relation to phonics instruction, in both schools children use it as word analysis tool, but only in the NESS phonics instruction is developed in a meaningful context.

The results obtained in the Material and Sources section, indicate that both schools select part of their materials according to the students' interests or to a topic-based lesson. Besides, students are exposed to authentic children literatures both classrooms. The results also indicate that students' work is not used as material instructional materials in ELL schools. Nevertheless, both schools provide the students with tools to use for independent working.

Concerning to the skills and strategies expected during the learning process in the students, it can be observed that phonics skills are developed in both classes. While the evidence collected indicates ELL emphasize is in phonics skills, the data collected also points out the lack of development of comprehension related to making predictions and inferences from the stories. Other comprehension skills such as synthesizing, combining the use semantic, syntactic and graphic to gain meaning, making connections with previous

knowledge and using pictures and context when reading are developed in both schools. The results also collect information about other strategies developed in both classrooms such as word recognition for reading and the use of background and personal experiences in writing. The last skill registered refers to the students' ability to reflect about the learning process, which is developed in both of the classes involved in the research.

## **7.2 Analysis and proposal**

The following part will be an analysis of those skills that are not being taught in the ELL classroom and of the benefits of teaching them. According to those necessities identified, a series of proposals will be presented to reinforce Literacy instruction in ELL schools.

1. As the results show, negotiating meaning does not happen in the ELL classroom. Negotiating meaning is promoted by interactions among children, with the text and with the teacher. Wagner (1989) reveals that the development of language needed for writing and reading is empowered by meaningful social interactions. However, it is realistic to say that interactions among ELL are more complicated due to the lack of the L2 language development but this does not mean that just because they are more complicated, they do not have to be promoted. In contrary, this implies that strategies for establishing meaning are even more important in a L2 class than in L1 classroom. The strategy for establishing meaning through interactions is more unlikely to happen in L2 classrooms, especially in the first years where students usually ask for translations. However, in this situation, it is important to avoid translation from one language to another and to address the situation in the target language. My proposal goes along with the concept of "scaffolding" used by Willis (1996) in which teachers have the role of guiding students through the learning process. My proposal is to use a system of

questions purposefully elaborated and that goes from more general to more specific to help students to progressively get closer to the meaning. For example, if a student does not understand the sentence “the cat is in the yard” because “yard” is an unfamiliar word for the student, the teacher would ask questions such as “is the cat inside the house or outside the house?” through these questions and also helped by the context the students will get closer to the meaning when reading, rather than finding the exactly translation in their mother tongue.

2. As data collected show, communication is not presented as the main purpose of reading and writing. Rupp (1986) emphasizes communication as one of the ten components when he describes Literacy. He also highlights that Literacy should be treated with a meaning and purpose. Communications gives meaning and a purpose to the reading and writing process, it is essential that the students understand this purpose so they will find a motivation to learning it. My proposal is providing real-life examples through literacy in which the goal of written language communications is clear for the students can understand this purpose. For example, the teacher using simple morning messages, with the purpose of transmitting a message to the students would help them to understand the communicating purpose with a real situation. “Good morning students, today we will learn a lot!” would be a clear example of a simple morning message.
3. Functional writing was not encouraged in ELL classrooms, it is necessary to refer to Vigosky’s idea that children learn best when what is to be learned is functional and relevant. In this way it is essential to present activities in which students can find a real function in writing rather than a simple school task. My proposal is establishing a weekly routine in which children write a letter to their parents telling them something about class. This could be related with the proposal of the

teacher using morning messages. Students could use similar structures to write to their homes. An example of a simple letter would be “Hi dad, today in class I learn a lot!. At the end of the semester, students could write an invitation to their parents to ask them to come and see how they learn in class.

4. According to the results, students do not see themselves as authors in the ELL classroom. Grace (2007) highlights the importance of using authentic reading and writing activities that will engage children in the process of writing. Encouraging the students to write their own gives the student the opportunity to get involved in an authentic writing activity which will motivate them in the process of learning. Writing a book can be a big challenge for ELL, however I maintain that if we provide them with necessary tools the students will be able to accomplish the challenge. Once again, it is all about knowing the students’ instructional level. Knowing the students will help the teacher to adapt the lessons his/her students’ necessities and to provide them appropriate level of challenge. For a 1<sup>st</sup> year classroom children picture books that follow a repetitive structure would be suitable. Children following the structure of the story and changing some elements will create their own version of the story. For example, if we work with the book *If you give a mouse a cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeron. Students can make their own version just by changing the main character, students can choose any other animal that they know and write their own version of the book. We can also talk with the students about how authors write different versions of the same story and we then can propose a role-play activity in which some students will be presented as authors to the “audience” and they will share his /her book with the rest of the class.

5. Data from collected show that cooperative reading and writing does not happen in ELL classrooms. Tompkins (2010) in his book *Literacy in the early grades: A successful start for Prek-4 readers and writers*, talks about cooperative reading as a way of supporting students' reading in the first stages of their learning process. In these cases reading is seen as a "shared" activity rather than individual, which gives less pressure to the students. Cooperative reading can go through different stages, beginning from when the student is asked to read just some words to those stages when the student is mainly reading and the teacher just give support with some words. However, cooperative reading can also happen among students. In the same way, cooperative writing can happen, either with the teacher or with other student. My proposal is including a system in which, once a week, students work in small groups to accomplish either a reading or writing task. An example of a cooperative writing activity working with descriptions would be giving each group a picture and a pencil. There should be not more than one pencil in per group and the children will take turns, writing words of sentences for the group task. The will be monitoring the students, taking part of the cooperative writing when the students need extra support.
6. Evidence from the data collected show that invented spelling is not encouraged in ELL classrooms. Hajek (1984) talks about invented spelling used as a writing strategy. Invented spelling, means that the sounding out the words when writing and focus on the content of the message rather than in the form. This technique avoids the students that the students stop writing just because they do not know how to correctly spell a word. At the beginning, ELL students may try to sound out the word using the Spanish phonic system. That is a reason why L1 language should be always avoided when learning a L2. To always have in mind the "non-

mother tongue rule” I propose designing a poster with two doors. In the 1<sup>st</sup> door the words “Clase de Español” will be written with the children writing. In the same way, the 2<sup>nd</sup> door will have the words “English class” will be written. Every day, when the English class starts, the “English classroom door” will be opened and Spanish will not be allowed. The when sounding out words, if the children use the Spanish phonic principles, the teacher by pointing the poster will make the children understand that that is not the rule. In this way spellings such as “wtr” in which the students indentify some of the sounds in the word “water” would be accepted emphasizing communication rather than mechanical correctness when writing. Hajek (1984)

7. Although phonics instructional is taught in L2 classrooms, results show that they are usually not taught in a meaningful context. A meaningful context means that the student use their phonics skills with a real purpose rather that just to read isolated words. Pyor (1990) presents the idea of phonics taught in a meaningful context, also supported by Bergeron (1990) adds that meaningful and functional context develops students’ motivation and interest in the process of writing. My proposal is to work phonics through games and riddles. Games and riddles symbolize real situations in which children can find a purpose, they are also fun which makes students get engage with the activity. An example of an activity if were working with the sound /p/ we could present to the students a problem like this: “Peter is going on a trip with his parents. He cannot remember which things he needs to take but he suddenly got a clue! He remembered that everything he needed to take had the sound /p/, Could you help him to make his luggage?”. Students will have to read the words looking for those ones that have the sound /p/ to solve the problem.

8. Results collected report that Students' work is not used as materials. Dorris Lee and Lillian Larnoreaux's presented the idea of students creating their own materials. If students create their own they are not only learning by doing but they are also creating materials according to their necessities. Student can create materials for the whole class or for individual purposes that will help them to keep learning. These materials are especially created with the purpose of students revising those things that they have been learning and at the same time keep record is a way to keep record of what they have been learning. My proposal is for the students creating their own phonics book. In this way students can record the sounds that they have been learning every week, and they can use it as a tool for revising phonics. Before finishing every class, students will write and illustrate a word beginning with the sound worked in that class. For example if the students worked with the sound /s/ some students will write the word snake while others will decide to write the word snail, choosing that word that they like the most and that is more representative for them. Those words can be also written in a poster, in which two students will write everyday their words in the poster. These words will be used by the whole class to review phonics every day, rather than using flashcards.
9. The lack of some comprehension skills such as making predictions and inferences from the story are revealed by the data. Comprehension is considered one of the keys of the Whole Language approach (Rupp 1986). When students understand what they read, the purpose of Literacy makes sense to them. Comprehension is also, one of the keys for motivation. When students understand and enjoy reading, their desires for keep learning increase which have big benefits in the learning process. When the students learn to make perditions and

inferences, they can understand better the structure of story comprehension is easily achieved. Using familiar and predictable stories skills help the students to make inferences and predictions. My proposal is “making silly” familiar stories that the children have heard before by changing some of the characters or introducing new elements on the stories. In this way students do not always here the same stories but by keeping the same structure we help them to make predictions and inferences.

## 1. Limitations

After making the study and before exposing the conclusion, it is important to presents the limitations of this study.

The limitation of this study, can be found in the data collected to analyze the development of certain skills in the ELL students. However, the study of this research does not reflect the skills that are being developped in the Spanish class. As presented by Surendranath P. et al. In their article *Effect of synthetic phonics instruction on literacy skills in an ESL setting* there are some similarities between Spanish and English language. In this way some of the skills developed in the Spanish class could be applied to English Literacy. However, this study understands that in the same way that those skills could be applied from Spanish to English, the skills developed in the English Literacy class will be beneficial for the Spanish process of reading and writing. Meaning that the common skills learn in both classes should reinforce each other rather than not be developed in one of them.

## 2. Conclusions

This research about writing and reading teaching in an English context where the students are not native speakers, is consider to be valid. A deep review of the literature about



Literacy instruction, as well as an analysis of several investigations in this area, give a theoretical support to this research. In the same way, the method used, as well as the data collected from observations in real educational situations is considered to be valid and follows a rigorous system. In consequence, the results obtained could be used for educational purposes and the method followed could be used for future research in this area. The proposal provided in this research can be also applied in other contexts, when making the correspondent adaptations.

The first purpose of this research was to analyze the Literacy method used to teach Literacy in Spanish schools according to a Phonic approach. With this purpose an ELL school and NESS school, where phonics instruction is integrated with activities and strategies in which reading and writing are also supported by context, as the Whole Language approach proposed. That is why, the checklist used for the comparison was based in principles that define the Whole Language approach, as well as theories and other studies taken by different researchers. The outcomes obtained by filling out the checklist from observations in both classrooms, present the weakness and strengths of the method used in the ELL classroom selected for this research. However, only the weakness of the ELL method were examined, considering that the ultimate purpose of this research was to establish a series of proposals to reinforce Literacy instruction in ELL classrooms. These proposals have been designed using a combination of the knowledge acquired during my university formation as a future teacher and also from my five-month experience in an American school as a student teacher. By understanding the necessities of characteristics of ELL, some of the teaching techniques developed during my teaching experience in the NESS were adapted to the ELL classrooms.

It is also important to understand that the purpose of this research is not to establish a new method to apply in ELL schools, the real purpose is to present a series of improvements to implement the method that is already being used. This research does not deny the

effectiveness of Phonics approach. However, it does claim the necessity of making some changes when taking it into an ELL context. There is nothing bad about the phonic approach, at last the effectiveness of a phonic program depends on how it is applied and on the understanding that only focusing on phonics instructions is not enough for an effective Literacy program. As presented in the research, it is an automatic teaching instruction, in which phonics are mainly used to decode isolated words out of context, which can have some negative implications in the students learning process, considering that in those cases not all the needed skills are developed. As a consequence, this research presents a serie of proposal to reinforce the Literacy instruction by providing strategies to develop those skills. In this way, it is necessary to say that it is the teacher who, by the strategies used, and proving meaningful opportunities to his/her students can really make a difference in achieving an effective Literacy instruction. It is important also to define an effective Literacy instruction, as the one that develops in the students the skills needed to become success readers and writers, providing the students with opportunities in which they can enjoy reading and writing. The ultimate purpose of this study is to provide teachers with some strategies that can be used as tools to implement the students' reading and writing skills. In this way it is also important to determinate, that although the comparison is establish between ELL and NESS, understanding the difference among those group of students and its circumstances, the expectations are not the same for both parts. The skills needed to be developed will be always the same, but the learning time cannot be the same in an ELL school which comparing to the NESS school dedicates half of the time to Literacy sessions. In relation to these, it is important to say that the focus of this research goes on the necessity of developing those skills, rather than in the time taken to be developed.

It should be also said that in the same way, that the educational system in American schools has been used as a reference to evaluate and to establish a serial of improvements, the

Spanish educational systems has also important strengths that would help to develop some important improvements in the American educational system. It is also necessary to recognize that the area studied in this approach, as it is Literacy instruction for ELL, it is a new innovation in Spanish schools. Most of the public schools are in the process of moving for a traditional Second Language, where classes were given in the students' mother tongue, to a bilingual education. This means that more research and more evidence is required to establish the implications of using different programs in the Spanish education. It could be said that this is an area of the education of the Spanish system still have to experiment and grow.

Not only Literacy instruction but also the teaching of a second language is essential in the area of education. There have been several positive changes in the history of second language education. Every year, second language teaching acquires more importance in the schools who try to look for more innovating techniques and strategies seeking to achieve a bilingual education. The ultimate goal in education, would be to achieve a bilingual education in which students could thought in both languages. This means that English would not be taught as a second language any more, it would be treat in the same way as a first language so the students could naturally by acquire it by being in a rich L2 environment.

Personally the realization of this study has been another step in my formation as a future teacher. I have developed a critical thinking and it has helped me to get closer and understand the Spanish system of teaching Literacy, to analyze those aspects that I will dealing with in my future performance as an English teacher. Learning about other theories, has also made me realize that there is not an only valid method, it is the combination of several approach and the teachers' ability to apply them to in their classes makes an effective and successful teaching.

To conclude, it is important to say that even though this research it is a small step in the education, the relevance of it can resides on every teachers' goal of implementing and maximizing the benefits of education.

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#### 4. Appendix

Checklist

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>TEACHERS- STUDENTS INTERACTION</b>	
- Participation in class is encouraged and recognized	
-Effort during the process is recognized rather than results	
- Children are encouraged to experiment with language through authentic reading and writing	
- Teacher encourages children to take risks (mistakes are seen as part of the learning process)	
- Students are given opportunities to share their work	
- Teacher provides opportunities to interact and cooperate among students with the purpose of helping each other in the learning process	
- Teacher provides opportunities to negotiate meaning (Teacher guides the students to establish meaning through formulating purposefully questions)	
-Teacher presents reading and writing as an enjoyable and meaningful activity	
- Teacher presents communication as the main purpose of reading and writing	
<b>METHODS AND TECNIQUES</b>	
- Students learn by doing (active learners)	
- Children are seen as authors (children- made books, journals...)	
- Funtional writing is encouraged (letters, invitations,...)	
- Teacher reads aloud to the students	
- Use of choral reading as a whole group activity	
- Use of cooperative reading and writing with the teacher or with peers	
- Emphasis on the four language modes (speaking, reading, writing and listening) as they are mutually supportive.	
- Writing and reading are taught through interrelated activities	
- Invented spelling is encourage (children sound out words focusing on the purpose of writing as use of language rather than on its form )	
- Phonics are taught in a meaningful context as a tool for word analysis	
<b>MATERIALS &amp; SOURCES</b>	
- Materials are selected according to a topic (topic-based lessons)	
- Materials are selected according to students´ interest	
- Use of authentic children literature - Use of a variety of text that encourages	

vocabulary growth	
- Students work is used as material (posters, books...)	
- Students have and learn to use tools (word charts, dictionaries...) to work independently	
<b>SKILLS AND STRATEGIES DEVELOPED</b>	
<i>Teacher works to develop the following skills and strategies in the students:</i>	
<i>Phonic skills</i>	
- Phonemic awareness (hear and identify the different sounds)	
- Decoding skills (alphabet principle)-	
-Blending sounds to make words	
- Segmenting words into sounds	
<i>Comprehension skills</i>	
- Making predictions and hypothesis	
- Making inferences from the story	
- Combining the use semantic, syntactic and graphic to gain meaning when reading	
- Use previous knowledge and experiences as a reading and writing strategy	
- Use of pictures and context to support reading	
<i>Others</i>	
- Word recognition	
- Use of background and personal experiences in writing	
- Self- monitoring (Students <u>r</u> eflect about their own learning process)	



**Appendix (2)**

## Checklist

Grade: \_\_\_\_1st Grade of Primary education\_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ELL \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHERS- STUDENTS INTERACTION	
- Participation in class is encouraged and recognized	X
-Effort during the process is recognized rather than results	x
- Children are encouraged to experiment with language through authentic reading and writing	x
- Teacher encourages children to take risks (mistakes are seen as part of the learning process)	x
- Students are given opportunities to share their work	x
- Teacher provides opportunities to interact and cooperate among students with the purpose of helping each other in the learning process	x
- Teacher provides opportunities to negotiate meaning (Teacher guides the students to establish meaning through formulating purposefully questions)	
-Teacher presents reading and writing as an enjoyable and meaningful activity	X
- Teacher presents communication as the main purpose of reading and writing	
METHODS AND TECNIQUES	
- Students learn by doing (active learners)	x
- Children are seen as authors (children- made books, journals...)	
- Funtional writing is encouraged (letters, invitations,...)	
- Teacher reads aloud to the students	X
- Use of choral reading as a whole group activity	x
- Use of cooperative reading and writing with the teacher or with peers	
- Emphasis on the four language modes (speaking, reading, writing and listening) as they are mutually supportive.	x
- Writing and reading are taught through interrelated activities	x
- Invented spelling is encourage (children sound out words focusing on the purpose of writing as use of language rather than on its form )	
- Phonics are taught in a meaningful context as a tool for word analysis	
MATERIALS & SOURCES	
- Materials are selected according to a topic (topic-based lessons)	x
- Materials are selected according to students´ interest	x
- Use of authentic children literature - Use of a variety of text that encourages vocabulary growth	
- Students´ work is used as material (posters, books...)	

- Students have and learn to use tools (word charts, dictionaries...) to work independently	X
<b>SKILLS AND STRATEGIES DEVELOPED</b>	
<i>Teacher works to develop the following skills and strategies in the students:</i>	
<i>Phonic skills</i>	
- Phonemic awareness (hear and identify the different sounds)	X
- Decoding skills (alphabet principle)	X
- Blending sounds to make words	X
- Segmenting words into sounds	X
<i>Comprehension skills</i>	
- Making predictions and hypothesis	
- Making inferences from the story	
- Combining the use semantic, syntactic and graphic to gain meaning when reading	X
- Use previous knowledge and experiences as a reading and writing strategy	X
- Use of pictures and context to support reading	X
<i>Others</i>	
- Word recognition	X
- Use of background and personal experiences in writing	X
- Self- monitoring (Students reflect about their own learning process)	X

**Appendix (3)**

## Checklist

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> Grade \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ NESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHERS- STUDENTS INTERACTION	
- Participation in class is encouraged and recognized	X
-Effort during the process is recognized rather than results	X
- Children are encouraged to experiment with language through authentic reading and writing	X
- Teacher encourages children to take risks (mistakes are seen as part of the learning process)	X
- Students are given opportunities to share their work	
- Teacher provides opportunities to interact and cooperate among students with the purpose of helping each other in the learning process	X
- Teacher provides opportunities to negotiate meaning (Teacher guides the students to establish meaning through formulating purposefully questions)	X
-Teacher presents reading and writing as an enjoyable and meaningful activity	X
- Teacher presents communication as the main purpose of reading and writing	X
METHODS AND TECHNIQUES	
- Students learn by doing (active learners)	X
- Children are seen as authors (children- made books, journals...)	X
- Functional writing is encouraged (letters, invitations,...)	X
- Teacher reads aloud to the students	X
- Use of choral reading as a whole group activity	X
- Use of cooperative reading and writing with the teacher or with peers	X
- Emphasis on the four language modes (speaking, reading, writing and listening) as they are mutually supportive.	X
- Writing and reading are taught through interrelated activities	X
- Invented spelling is encourage (children sound out words focusing on the purpose of writing as use of language rather than on its form )	X
- Phonics are taught in a meaningful context as a tool for word analysis	X
MATERIALS & SOURCES	
- Materials are selected according to a topic (topic-based lessons)	
- Materials are selected according to students´ interest	
- Use of authentic children literature	
- Students work is used as material (posters, books...)	X

- Students have and learn to use tools (word charts, dictionaries...) to work independently	X
<b>SKILLS AND STRATEGIES DEVELOPED</b>	
<i>Teacher works to develop the following skills and strategies in the students:</i>	
<i>Phonic skills</i>	
- Phonemic awareness (hear and identify the different sounds)	X
- Decoding skills (alphabet principle)-	X
-Blending sounds to make words	X
- Segmenting words into sounds	X
<i>Comprehension skills</i>	
- Making predictions and hypothesis	X
- Making inferences from the story	X
- Combining the use semantic, syntactic and graphic to gain meaning when reading	X
- Use previous knowledge and experiences as a reading and writing strategy	X
- Use of pictures and context to support reading	X
<i>Others</i>	
- Word recognition	X
- Use of background and personal experiences in writing	X
- Self- monitoring (Students reflect about their own learning process)	X