

Brock Elementary School and J.L. Forster Secondary School

Collaborative Inquiry Team: Barbara White, Secondary Teacher Librarian; Marianne Brown, Elementary Classroom Teacher; Margaret Stanley, Secondary Classroom Teacher

Inquiry Question: How does the pairing of mainstream students with English Language Learners (ELL) impact on social, oral, and academic skills?

Setting the Stage

Multiculturally diverse, Brock Elementary School and J.L. Forster S.S. share similar population demographics. Brock has a student population of 306 students (185 families) between Junior Kindergarten and Grade 8. Over 22 different countries are represented in the student population, with 14 different languages, not including English, being represented. J.L. Forster S.S. has a student population of approximately 450 students (~250 families) between Grade 9 and Grade 12. Over 60 countries are represented and more than 50 languages are spoken other than English. In looking for ways to increase literacy levels and at the same time create a greater feeling of inclusion within the main student body by our ELL students, we had witnessed little quality interaction between the two groups of students. We believed that a book club would address these two needs by offering a shared social experience as well as an opportunity to read for pleasure.

Brock is a feeder school for Forster Secondary School. Although the number of ELL students at Brock is significantly less than the number of ELL students at Forster the challenges faced for developing English proficiency for social, oral, and academic skills are the same. We saw this project as one which would provide a bridge between ELL learners and native English speakers.

It was the goal of this team to create a 'literacy platform' that would foster an environment for ELL students to read texts and share their opinions about the texts with mainstream students. The hope was that this would then build confidence in the ELL students to extend their socialization with their mainstream peers outside of the classroom as well as improve overall academic scores in literacy. ELL students often do not understand many of the cultural and colloquial references in literature. It was our assertion that by discussing books in a one on one situation these students would be more willing to ask questions to clarify their understanding. Through increased exposure they would be able to transfer this confidence to reading. We also believed that the English speakers would benefit by gaining an increased awareness of the challenging task the ELL students were faced with but more importantly develop a more integration between the groups. In addition to this the project would serve as a transition opportunity for elementary students.

Description of Procedures and Implementation

The Brock Project

One fiction novel and five non-fiction graphic text were chosen for 6 pre-selected Grade 7 and 8 students. Text reading levels were chosen to meet the reading levels of the ELL students. The students were asked to commit to discussing/reading the texts using a 'literature circle' and 'elbow partner' format with specific goals and targets set for the students. The group met daily for 40 minutes over a twelve week period. The ELL students were provided with the opportunity to use their fiction novel text as part of their independent reading program. Students used Audacity, Bitstrips, and pencil-to-paper tasks (e.g., CASI type questions such as summary/main idea, journals) to record their responses.

The J.L. Forster S.S. Project

Eight ELL students and 8 English speakers were chosen to participate in a book buddy program. The ELL students were chosen on language acquisition level (Level C) and interest in improving their reading comprehension. The English speaking students volunteered after a short overview of how the program would run. Many of this group were involved in the library book club so were avid readers.

The program was implemented by the teacher-librarian and one ELL teacher over the course of 10 weeks.

Graphic novels were chosen because of their proven engagement for emerging readers. Ten different titles were offered in order for the students to be given a variety of choices. We believed that many of our ELL readers are familiar with the graphic novel format and would find it less threatening. It also would be a quicker read for the English language students than a strictly text based novel. We expected that any additional reading could only help to improve reading proficiency and understanding.

A book talk for each book was given and students chose the book they were most interested in. Partners were established by book choice as we had at least two copies of each title. We hoped that students would have an opportunity to read at least 3 of the graphic novels thereby increasing the input about each one. The partners remained the same throughout the study.

Students completed an initial survey to ascertain their reading habits and interests. An exit survey is set to determine if students felt that the experience was a positive one focusing on their attitude toward reading in general and the interaction of the two groups. A whole group discussion will provide more anecdotal information on the projects viability.

Teacher Reflections

The Brock Project

Initially, the mainstream students appeared to have a higher level of confidence in their participation in the reading of the fiction novel. They willingly volunteered to read aloud text passages in addition to taking on the roles of questioner, summarizer, and word analyzer. The ELL students preferred to take on the role of Illustrator during the reading of the fiction text, drawing a visual scene based on what was read aloud. As the weeks progressed and with encouragement from their mainstream peers, the ELL students began to volunteer to read aloud passages from the fiction novel as well as take on the various roles of questioner, summarizer, and word analyzer.

The students learned from and motivated each other. The mainstream students were observed to provide verbal support to the ELL students during the reading of the fiction text. Assistance was provided for the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words along with provision of word meaning. All students were actively engaged in conversations about the novel as evidenced by their by the content of their discussions. As a result, the ELL began to demonstrate increased proficiency and confidence in the fluency of their oral communication skills. The ELL students began to volunteer to be the first to read aloud, summarize what was being read, or take on the role of questioner.

During the reading of the non-fiction graphic text, the same pattern was noted with respect to the mainstream students volunteering to read the text aloud or participate in group discussions. Again, as the ELL students began to become more comfortable with their English skills and with the mainstream students, their participation in the reading of the text passages and participation in discussions increased. While using Audacity and Bitstrips to record their responses to questions based on the text, all students were engaged in conversations about the text.

As in the case of all group work discussions, engagement in off task, social conversations were also observed. During the first two weeks, it was noted that the ELL students were somewhat reserved in socializing with the mainstream students. For example, while mainstream students were discussing what they had done on the weekend or after school, the ELL students were noticeably quiet. As the weeks progressed and the students became more familiar with each other, it was observed that the ELL students began to participate in off task social conversations. It was also observed that during Nutrition Breaks the ELL students began to socialize with their mainstream peers in both the cafeteria and outside during recess.

Analysis of the written portion of the tasks provided (e.g. journal response, CASI type questions, Bitstrips) revealed an overall improvement in reading comprehension scores and vocabulary building. For example, the reading comprehension scores of two of the ELL students improved by one grade level.

The J.L. Forster S.S. Project

Initially we encountered some unexpected difficulties:

We quickly realized that students - especially ELL students – did not always listen to or hear the morning announcements where our meeting times were broadcast, resulting in students not attending meetings. One time we had only the ELL students in attendance and another only the English language speakers. We rectified this problem by sending a reminder note to each student to their homeroom the morning of the meeting. Lunch time meetings were sometimes difficult for everyone to attend with any regularity because of other obligations. We initially met at lunch but soon found that it was easier for each pair to meet on their own with a group meeting every other week. This seemed to result in better attendance. While most students did not have long individual meetings they indicated that most lasted over 20 minutes.

The students developed a friendly rapport and conversation between groups often developed. As more novels were read these conversations increased perhaps because they had an even larger shared body of knowledge. We noticed that the students were more integrated in their sitting arrangement as the meetings continued with English and ELL students sitting together as one group rather than two separate ones.

The ELL students seemed to be more comfortable coming to the library at lunch and after school.

Student Reflections

Both groups had similar findings with the overall conclusion that it was a worthwhile and beneficial project.

The Brock Project

Surveys and anecdotal observations showed that the students appreciated the opportunity to work with each other and that the overall experience was a positive one. One student, who was very reluctant to speak English in front of her peers stated, "I'm really happy now. I have friends and I'm okay to talk to anybody in English." The ELL students also self-reported having a higher confidence level when attempting to use their oral English language skills during both class discussions and social conversations with their peers.

J.L. Forster S.S. Project

When asked if they felt less separate in the school population, the ELL students all said they felt more comfortable talking about books and did not feel as self conscious when they were not sure of something. The mainstream students said they felt they made more of an effort to include ELL students and had become more aware of their situation. One student said she had never realized how isolating the language barrier could be. Most mainstream students share

classes with ELL students who are entering the mainstream classroom. While their English may not be perfect, it is understandable she had never realized how difficult the process really was. It gave her a new found admiration for them.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The study was very broad in focus and the organizational difficulties made our data weak.

We believe there is merit in this idea but feel that another year is needed to fully explore hypothesis. We hope to initiate the book buddy program at the beginning of the year September 2012 and develop a collaborative project between the schools.

We would also like to collect some data on the academic performance of the ELL students by including their classroom teachers.

Appendix A

Pre-Survey (Brock Elementary School)

Question 1: Do you speak English at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 2: Do you speak another language at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 3: Do you read English at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 4: Do you write English at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 5: Do you read in another language at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 6: Do you write in another language at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 7: If English is your second language, do you feel confident reading English at school or at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 8: If English is your second language, do you feel confident speaking English at school or at home?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 9: If English is your second language, do you socialize with peers who speak your first language?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 10: If English is your second language, do you socialize with peers who speak English?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Post-Survey (Brock Elementary School)

Question 1: Do you speak more English at home or school since participating in the Book Talk?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 2: Do you read more English at home or school since participating in the Book Talk?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 3: Have you increased your English Language writing skills at home or school since participating in the Book Talk?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 7: If English is your second language, do you feel more confident reading English at school or at home since participating in the Book Talk?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 8: If English is your second language, do you feel more confident socializing with peers in English since participating in the BookTalk?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

Question 9: Was your participation in the Book Talk a positive experience for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Question 10: Would you like to participate in future Book Talks?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Pre-Survey (J.L. Forster Secondary School)

English Language Learner

English First Language

1. Please tell us your gender

male

female

2. How many books have you finished reading in the last 6 months?

1 2 3 4 5+

3. Where do you read the most often?

At school

At home

At the public library

On the bus

Other

4. Do you ever talk to your friends or family about what you are reading?

Never

Sometimes

Always

5. How many hours do you spend reading different mediums each day?

	books / journals for pleasure	books / journals for school	online blogs and journals	social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter,etc.)
0				
1-2				
3-4				
5+				

6. What kind of books do you like to read for fun? Check all that apply.

Mystery

Adventure

Horror

True Stories

Fantasy

Science Fiction

Romance

Sports

Books about your hobbies or collecting

Biography/Autobiography
Factual books, like a book about dinosaurs or space
How-to books
Other
None

7. What is the last book you read? Write "not applicable" if you have not read a book in the last 6 months.

8. What makes a book appeal to you?

It is about real people
It takes me into another world
It can teach me a lesson
It has an interesting format (poetry, journal, graphics)
I do not read books

9. I read because...

Rate the following in order of your preferences.(4 being the most like you and 1 being the least like you)

	1	2	3	4
Just for the fun of it				
Because I have to for school				
Because I get bored and have nothing else to do				
I can learn new things on my own				
I don't really read much				
Because my parents encourage me to				
I do not read.				

10. Which of the following do you read? Check all that apply.

Books assigned for class
Books I read outside of class for pleasure
Newspapers
Fashion/Beauty magazines
Cereal boxes, instructional pamphlets and other product packaging
Music/Computers/Entertainment magazines
School papers or other newsletters
Sports magazines
Online websites or webzines
Puzzles/Games/Humor magazines
Comic books or graphic novels
News magazines
Magazines about video games
Computer manuals or other electronic equipment manuals
None of the above

1. Please tell us your gender

English Language Learner
male
female

English First Language

2. How many of the book club books have you read this semester?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. How many other books - other than book club books and NOT school related - have you read this semester?

1 2 3 4 5+

4. Did your experience at the book club make you enjoy talking about books?

Yes No
Comments

5. How many hours do you spend reading different mediums each day?

	books / journals for pleasure	books / journals for school	online blogs and journals	social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter,etc.)
0				
1-2				
3-4				
5+				

6. Would you be more likely to choose a graphic novel than before joining the book club?

Very Likely Somewhat Likely _Not at All

7. What was the most enjoyable part of the book club?

8. Would you join another book club?

Yes No _Maybe

9. I read

Rate the following in order of your preferences.(4 being the most like you and 1 being the least like you)

I read	1	2	3	4
Just for the fun of it				
Because I have to for school				
Because I get bored and have nothing else to do				
To learn new things on my own				
I don't really read much				
Because my parents encourage me to				
I do not read.				

10. Please let us know how you would improve our book club