What Administrators Should Know About a Research-Based Oral Language Development Intervention for English Language Learners: A Description of Story Retelling and Higher Order Thinking for English Language and Literacy Acquisition–STELLA*

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Abstract

Campus administrators need to have a good understanding of strategies that work with diverse populations they serve. In this paper, the authors share a research-based intervention from a longitudinal randomized trial study funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. The intervention is Story Retelling and Higher Order Thinking for English Language and Literacy Acquisition (STELLA) which combines the following components: (a) integrated ESL strategies, (b) higher order leveled questions, (c) academic vocabulary in the content area of science which was explicitly and implicitly taught, (d) opportunities for students to practice language through retelling, and (e) training for the teachers on a biweekly basis.

Introduction

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Campus administrators, the leaders of instruction with whom we worked in the study, were interested in best practices, particularly for the emerging population of English language learners (ELLs). As those school leaders observed in classrooms, they realized that language skills taught in isolation did not offer an authentic representation of the classroom environment. Often, we (our research team) observed in our study in control classrooms, little integration of language and content literacy skills during instructional time. Therefore, we determined the need to integrate language and content literacy skills in STELLA; we also emphasized training in the use of learning strategies assists ELLs academically. Teachers' training and ongoing professional development on structured story reading benefited ELLs in their learning of vocabulary, in their practice story retelling, and in their use story grammar for better comprehension and thought organization. The learning strategies we presented in STELLA also allowed students to become aware of their own learning process as we included leveled questions for reflection.

In our study, campus leaders were able to assess students' growth through STELLA (Irby et al.) with the use of retelling as a reliable measure of oral language progress in both languages. Retellings provide a reliable measure to be used not only to monitor students' oral language and comprehension progress with learning disabilities, but for all students, especially those students whose reading fluency does not equate to comprehension. This assessment tool is not limited to language or learning ability; it is a pedagogical tool that connects assessment and instruction.

Retelling assessments provided teachers with a clear picture of students' syntactical problems which transfer to students' writing. In addition, retelling, as suggested by Gutierrez-Clellen, Restrepo, Bedore, Peña, and Anderson (2000), provided information about grammatical or syntactic complexity used by the students in their progress towards language proficiency. Structured story reading with story retells addressed varied cognitive levels in the classroom. Additionally, this form of story reading addressed ELLs' need for exposure to diverse literature.

STELLA combined the following components: (a) integrated ESL strategies, (b) higher order leveled questions, (c) academic vocabulary in the content area of science which was explicitly and implicitly taught, (d) opportunities for students to practice language through retelling, and (e) training for the teachers on a biweekly basis. Quiros' (2008) found that when studying STELLA, due to the combined components that comprehension skills that are learned in one language transfer to the other when both languages are alphabetic in nature. STELLA, as a component of a structured ESL program, can be a viable tool for administrators to promote with their teachers of ELLs to improve ELLs' oral language development, particularly at the early years (Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes, & Kwok, 2008, in press).

Hispanic Population Demographics and English Language Learner Needs

The Hispanic population is growing at a consistent and accelerated rate in the United States; therefore, the need to address literacy among Hispanics is imperative. According to the US Census Bureau 2000, the Hispanic population increased by 57.9% in 2000, as compared to 13.2% of the total US Population. Table 1 illustrates the projected population by race in the US, as reported by the US Census Bureau (2004). According to the report, the growth of the Hispanic population has been 57.9% since 1990. It has also been reported that the Hispanic population increased from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000.

Table 1

U.S. Projected Population by Race: 2000-2050

Race	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
White	81.0	79.3	77.6	75.8	73.9	72.1
African-American	12.7	13.1	13.5	13.9	14.3	14.6
Hispanic (of any race)	12.6	15.5	17.8	20.1	22.3	24.4
Asian	3.8	4.6	5.4	6.2	7.1	8.0
Other races	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.1	4.7	5.3

Table 1

Note. From the US Census Bureau website report of 2004, http:www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/

Of concern, along with the increase in the Hispanic population in the US, is the dropout rate gap between Caucasians and African Americans and Caucasians and Hispanics. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2005), the dropout rate in 2005 (see Table 2) among Hispanics is about 22.4%, versus 9.4% among Caucasians. That is, 22.4% of students aged 16 to 24 and of Hispanic origin are more likely to drop out of school than their Caucasian counterparts. Besides low socioeconomic status, lack of print exposure contributes to the dropout rate.

Research by Krashen (1998) and Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) has indicated that children raised in low income environments have fewer literacy and language interactions at home. These children have less shared book reading and adult-child discussions. According to Lyon (2003), over 60% of fourth grade students living in poverty fail to meet literacy standards in reading. Some of these students were suggested to be failing in school because of poor oral language skills which are necessary for academic success.

Table 2

Dropout Rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: October 2000–2005Year of Dropout

	Total	White,non-Hispanic	Black	Hispanic
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27.0
2002	10.5	6.5	11.3	25.7
2003	9.9	6.3	10.9	23.5
2004	10.3	6.8	11.8	23.8
2005	9.4	6.0	10.4	22.4

Table 2

NOTE: From Institute of Education Sciences report of 2005, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2007/section3/table.asp?ta

Literacy Research and ELLs

Any student identified as a slow learner, low achiever, or even as gifted and talented must have their needs met. An appropriate intervention and alternative assessment in the early childhood years will contribute to the reading success of ELLs with reading problems. According to the NCLB, every state receiving federal funds is accountable for its students' academic achievement. This statute also expects children to read at grade level by the third grade, but, in order to have all children succeed academically, it is important to address ELLs' needs in the classroom with a substantial emphasis on promoting second-language oral proficiency, which plays a crucial role in second-language reading process (Geva, 2006).

Jimerson and Kaufman (2003) indicated that research supports that learning to read and write is fundamental to academic progress. However, many children still experience difficulties in learning to read for lack of vocabulary, comprehension skills, and knowledge of the target language structure (Kame'enui, Adams, & Lyon, 1996). Literacy in monolingual English-speaking children has been intensively studied, but little has been done to address the academic needs of Hispanic bilingual students (Calderon et al., 2005). Both Garcia (2000) and Carrell (1989) affirmed the lack of literacy research concerned with bilingual and ELLs.

A pedagogical tool that has been used to monitor listening and reading comprehension is the retell of a passage of a story, either heard or read . A thorough review of the literature has revealed few studies measuring comprehension in populations of ELLs whose first language is Spanish, and little is known about the conditions under which this population acquires English (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). Considering that Hispanics represent the fastest growing population in elementary and secondary schools in this nation, English oral language development and reading research on this population is vital, and, although retelling has been recognized as an assessment tool effective to measure comprehension in students with learning disabilities (Alexander, 1985; Gardill, & Jitendra, 1999; Hensen, 1978; Wright & Newhoff, 2001) and to

monitor monolingual reading fluency and comprehension (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983; Roberts, Good & Corcoran, 2005), few studies (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Slavin & Madden, 2001) have been conducted on the use of retell to monitor listening and reading comprehension with ELLs who are considered at risk of falling behind native English speakers.

Among the most recent studies addressing the literacy and language acquisition of Hispanic students is Project ELLA (English Language and Literacy Acquisition) (Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Mathes, 2003), an on-going, five-year, federally-funded Institute for Educational Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education project (R305P030032) with approximately 470 native Spanish-speaking English language learners in an urban school district in Houston, Texas. The purpose of Project ELLA five-year longitudinal randomized trial study has been to implement an evaluation of alternative models of structured English immersion and transitional bilingual education for ELLS from kindergarten to the third grade, whose first language is Spanish. The intervention provided by ELLA has included structured ESL time comprised of oral language development, vocabulary knowledge, ESL strategies, a story-reading component called Story Retelling with Higher Order Thinking for English Literacy and Language Acquisition ([STELLA] Irby, Lara-Alecio, Quiros, Mathes, & Rodriguez, 2004), critical thinking, content integration, and listening and reading comprehension in English. It is the intervention, itself, STELLA, that we share in this article. Prior to sharing the intervention, we define story retell and report studies about story retell and ELLs.

Defining Story Retell

Active engagement is required of an individual telling or retelling the story. Such active engagement is observed in the definitions of story retell. Most definitions and uses of story retell include the reading of a story, discussing it in a reading group, summarizing the main points with a partner, or it may also take the form of an oral composition or text reconstruction of a story that has been read or heard. Further, retelling has been defined as post-reading and post-listening recalls used to express what was learned or remembered (Morrow, 1996). Structured story retelling involves story reading that is systematically planned and scripted to utilize research-based learning strategies (Lara-Alecio, Irby, & Mathes, 2006).

Over 30 years ago, Hansen (1978) noted that story retelling can provide an alternative to basic teacher questioning for assessing students' abilities "to retrieve and integrate information obtained through reading" (p. 62). Relating to partner work in the classroom, specifically, Slavin and Madden (1999) defined story retell as "After reading the story and discussing it in their reading groups, students summarize the main points of the story to their partners. The partners have a list of essential story elements that they use to check the completeness of the story summaries" (p. 26). Additionally, Saenz, Fuchs, and Fuchs (2005) defined story retell as a component of an intervention of peer-assisted instruction for ELLs in which a peer retells parts of the story in paired reading teams.

Retelling requires organization of thoughts (Pappas & Pettegrew, 1991) providing the teacher valuable information regarding students' oral composition, use of wording and strategies to organize the text in the reconstruction process. According to Roberts, Good, and Corcoran (2005) story retell is preferred over other comprehension-like formats (e.g., cloze and question-response) for several reasons (see also Fuchs et al., 2001). First, production-type responses potentially increase the variability in a set of scores.... A second reason for preferring retell is its time efficiency.... Finally, retell fluency as a measure of reading comprehension is more easily linked to instruction than question-response and cloze formats. Retelling can be taught, modeled, and practiced more easily than cloze and question-response tasks. Retell may also fit more readily into an instructional sequence. If one assumes that higher-level comprehension skills rely on more basic abilities, being able to retell what one has read may represent a critical gateway to more sophisticated levels of text comprehension. (p. 308-309)

Therefore, oral retelling could be a valuable tool to enhance, monitor and measure ELLs comprehension progress.

Studies with Story Retell and ELLs

Hispanic ELLs need to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in both English and Spanish because these skills are necessary to achieve the goal of reading comprehension. In particular, listening and speaking provide the foundation for literacy skills. Biemiller (1999) has stated "... oral language development sets a limit on reading comprehension" (p. 30); however, comprehension may be difficult to measure

in the classroom. Students do not comprehend by just reading the text. Comprehension is a very complex a task, and it must be monitored to address the needs of those students whose oral fluency does not reflect an understanding of the text-acquired information. This is why norm-referenced tests provide little information to teachers who are making instructional decisions (Roberts, Good & Corcoran, 2005). For ELLs, a curriculum-based assessment is more valuable to a teacher (Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007) than a norm-referenced test, for the reason that it will allow for closer and continuous monitoring of comprehension. One way of assessing students' story comprehension is through the use of story retell, as a curriculum–based measurement. Acknowledging that story retelling practice increases the recall of discourse comprehension (Gambrell et al.,1991; Gambrell, Pfeiffer & Wilson, 1985), retelling can be used as a screening instrument to assess oral language development of ELLs.

Story retelling has been defined as post-reading and post-listening recalls used to express what was learned or remembered (Morrow, 1996). According to Goodman (2001), retellings provide much information about the comprehension process Another definition for retelling is a post reading or post listening recall in which readers or listeners tell what they remember either orally, in writing, or by illustrations. This appeared to be a viable way of assessing a bilingual child because it offered the teacher a way to observe the student's growth in both language and comprehension.

Gambrell, Pfeiffer and Wilson (1985) investigated retelling and its effect on the comprehension and recall of text information. The two treatment strategies selected for this study were retelling and illustrating. Both strategies identified by Gambrell et al., (1985) aligned with Wittrock's (1974) generative model of learning, which is that the reader must engage in constructing meaningful relationships between text information and prior knowledge as further supported by Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz (1977). Wittrock's model focused on attention, motivation, knowledge and preconceptions, and generation. The generative component is important due to this is the time when learners generate meaning and contextualize that meaning. The participants for Gambrell et al., (1985) study were 93 fourth graders in public elementary school, all of whom were native speakers of English. They were assigned randomly to one of the two instructional strategies, retelling and illustrating. An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to determine any significant difference between treatments. The IQ scores were used as covariate for this study. They found statistical significance difference between immediate and delayed recall for the illustrating treatment, $F\ (1,90) = 5.48$, $p < .05$. They obtained no statistical significant difference between immediate and delayed recall for the retelling treatment, F (1,90) 5.48, $p > .05$. However, on the two day delayed recall, the retelling group showed statistically significant results, $F\ (1,90) = 1.06$, $p < .05$.

In another study, Gambrell, Koskinen and Kapinus (1991) stated that children should to be exposed to all types of good literature and prose, especially since teachers do most of the talking in the classroom. In their study, they emphasized how retelling makes the reader focus on the story as a whole and considered that this focus on centering on the nature of the story provides a framework to improve comprehension, therefore encouraging elaboration. These researchers acknowledged that one way to engage students in participating orally is through the use of retellings, but unfortunately, this instructional strategy has been used frequently as an assessment and not as a strategy to enhance comprehension. With 48 fourth grade participants (of whom 24 were identified as proficient readers and 24 as less proficient readers by the scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test), Gambrell et al. (1991) investigated the effects of practice in retelling on reading comprehension, on both the proficient and the less proficient readers. They selected eight narrative stories, four of which were at the second grade level for less-proficient readers, and four were at the fourth grade level for proficient readers. Participants read a story silently, the retelling was recorded, and the researcher administered oral comprehension questions about the story read by the student. They followed the same procedure for both the less proficient and the proficient readers. The only modification in the study was that the less proficient readers used a story appropriate for their reading level. The researchers used the Fry Readability formula to determine the equal reading level. In four sessions, the students' reading improved significantly. Their findings showed a statistically significant main effect on proficient readers with $p < .05$, with a 15% gain in story structure elements, while the less proficient readers showed an 18% gain. On the two dependent variables, implicit and explicit questions, they found that the Pearson correlation was not significant; therefore, they conducted a t-test and found statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in both

groups. In this study, retelling was used as a tool to help students reflect on the text, organize their ideas as they thought about the story sequence, and consider the message intended by the author, as well as the illustrator. The researchers reiterated the direct relationship between oral language and reading proficiency. Their research showed that proficient readers and non-proficient readers who practice retellings recalled more propositions, recalled more of the story structure, and increased their number of correct answers to cued recall questions. The Gambrell et al. (1991) study also supported Wittrock's (1974) model of generative learning as did Gambrell et al. (1985) study. The 1991 study showed that with practice in retelling, both proficient and less proficient readers improved in both their free and cued recall retelling. As a result, Gambrell et al. (1991) stated that there is a strong relationship between oral language and reading comprehension.

In 1996, Karweit and Wasik reviewed 10 studies on the effects of story reading or retell on language development and achievement among four and five-year olds. These studies were dated up to 1995. Some dealt with disadvantaged children; however, none were associated with ELLs. One study on ELLs concerning the production of narratives in both English and Spanish was found, conducted by Fiestas and Peña (2004). A small sample of 12 children was utilized, with ages ranging from 4 to 6. In this study, retellings were stimulated in two ways: using a wordless picture and a static picture. Both stories were scored for complexity of story grammar. Retellings were analyzed by measuring the total number of words, the number of clause units (or C units) and the mean length of C units. Their findings showed a statistically significant main effect of [U+F068]2 = .48 for narrative elements and a statistically significant measurement between language and narrative element interaction, [U+F068]2 =.18. Previous studies had shown that children compose narratives in both English and Spanish in a comparable way. But the researchers, Fiesta and Peña, found differences when they compared the story elements of the narratives in both languages. When using the wordless picture book, Fiestas and Peña found that more initiating events were produced in Spanish narratives, as compared to English. However, more consequence events were found in the English narratives for the same task. On a static picture task, the researchers found mixed results. Overall, they found that students used more story elements in their native language, Spanish. Fiestas and Peña concluded that for this reason the language and narrative tasks for ELLs should be considered when they are tested.

It has been noted that students who have good comprehension use strategies to assist them successfully recall the text. Students use these strategies to assist them in organizing and retrieving information from the text, allowing them to have a better understanding of the story or text. Story retelling provides students with a scaffold or a model of language which they can imitate (Isbell et al., 2004). Retelling provides the student the opportunity to reconstruct the story (Snow, 2002), and this is a challenging process.

Of course, in story retelling, listening is critical; however, listening is a complex process, as well as an active one. The listener must differentiate phonemes, identify and know the meaning of words, and understand the grammatical structure (Vandergrift, 1999) of the target language. In addition, "the listener has to interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered..." (Vandergrift, p. 168) and base his or her interpretation of the information acquired on the socio-cultural context. Retelling allows the child to play an important role in the process of oral or writing text reconstruction (Gambrell et al., 1991; Goodman, 2001).

In 2002, Gutierrez-Clellen conducted a study on 33 fluent bilingual children, mostly Mexican descendant, ages ranging from seven to eight-years-old, drawn from a larger study, on story recall and story comprehension in English (L2) and Spanish (L1). Five of the students received English-only instruction and the remaining received instruction in both languages, English and Spanish. She used frog story picture books that were age appropriate to assess story recall and used factual questions to assess story comprehension. Using a pair t-test for each task, a statistically significant difference was found for story recall in English than in Spanish with an effect size of d = 0.72. Her study showed statistically significant differences between spontaneous narrative production and story recall. Students performed better in English spontaneous narrative and comprehension than in Spanish. However, when comparing English and Spanish performance, a greater variability within participants, was observed in the Spanish tasks demonstrating different levels of narrative proficiency in L1 and L2. Gutierrez-Clellen concluded that students demonstrating low English performance may benefit from increased instruction provided in the target language, English.

It has been determined that culture plays an important role in providing students with prior experience that has an important role in the comprehension of texts. Invernizzi and Abouzeiad (1995) argued that there

are qualitative differences in written story retelling among different cultures. People often share everyday life experiences in their own words, depending upon the purpose and the reteller's perceptions (Dudukovic, Marsh, & Tversky, 2004). Invernizzi and Abouzeiad stated that children map their oral and written story summaries through the use of story retells, based on their background knowledge. As students reconstruct the text, they obtain ownership of this construction as they make connections with prior knowledge. In their study, participants were expected to retell stories in writing.

Story retell can also be practiced at home during story reading time. De Temple and Tabors (1996) conducted a study with kindergarteners on a mother's style of book reading and retelling of a story. The purpose was to detect the effects of a child's story retelling and to identify if this effect, if positive, would predict literacy levels in the first grade. The 62 participants selected for this study came from low income families. Mothers were asked to read a story to their children, and children were asked to retell the story. All retellings were transcribed and coded for story sense, non-picture information, and length, divided by the amount of words. All story retelling measurements were associated with first grade reading and language skills. The tests used by De Temple and Tabors were the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), the Gray Oral Passage and the total number of number of words. For the first measurement, sense of structure, a holistic coding was used. For the non-picture information measurement, the information was divided by the total number of words, the length of the retelling, and the total number of number of words. The researchers found a strong correlation between the retelling and reading measurements. Story sense was statistically significant and correlated with WRAT, $r = .40$, $p < .01$, with reading Gray Oral Passage Scores, $r = .53$, $p < .0001$, and definitional skills, $r = .30$, $p < .05$. Non-significant results were obtained for a total number of words with WRAT, but a strong correlation was found with the Gray Oral and Definitional skills, $r = .41$, $p < .0001$. These measurements contributed greatly to predicting first grade reading performance. They found that the model combining preschool home literacy environments and kindergarten emergent literacy, as well as a sense of story, was a predictor for first grade literacy skills.

In another study, retell fluency was used to measure reading comprehension because of the wealth of comprehension behaviors demonstrated as students retell a story. Good oral reading fluency, which reflects good decoding, does not equate to comprehension of a text. This means that that the scores obtained from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Systems (DIBELS, 2004) on oral reading fluency do not necessarily correlate with good comprehension, although in some cases they do. Robert, Good, and Corcoran (2005) recognized the need for ongoing monitoring of students with reading problems, but showing good oral reading fluency scores. In their study, reading comprehension using story retelling was assessed in 86 first grade students from six schools with a population of 96% African American students. Robert et al. used the scores of a curriculum-based measurement called Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP), a section of the Voyager Universal Literacy Program, as an alternate for DIBELS. The VIP measure was developed by Good of the University of Oregon (as cited by Robert et al.). The individual retell fluency passages from VIP correlated to .47 and .43 with the Broad Reading Clusters (letter and word identification and passage comprehension) from the Woodcock Diagnostic Reading Battery, combined at the post test point. The average of the VIP retells fluency passages correlated to .51, a 26% variance explained by the Broad Reading Scores (BRS). The latter achieved a correlation of .61 with the oral reading fluency average. They found a modest gain when adding retelling to a battery of fluency tests, but still offered teachers a tool to identify and monitor students with reading problems whose oral reading fluency did not represent reading comprehension.

STELLA Description

Story Retelling with Higher Order Thinking for English Literacy and Language Acquisition (STELLA) (Irby, Lara-Alecio, Quirós, Mathes, & Rodriguez, 2004), is a structured story-reading and retelling component that has been used as part of a longitudinal randomized trial study intervention for ELLs whose first language is Spanish. STELLA was designed to develop oral language to increase vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking, all of which facilitate English language and literacy acquisition for ELLS (see Figure 1).

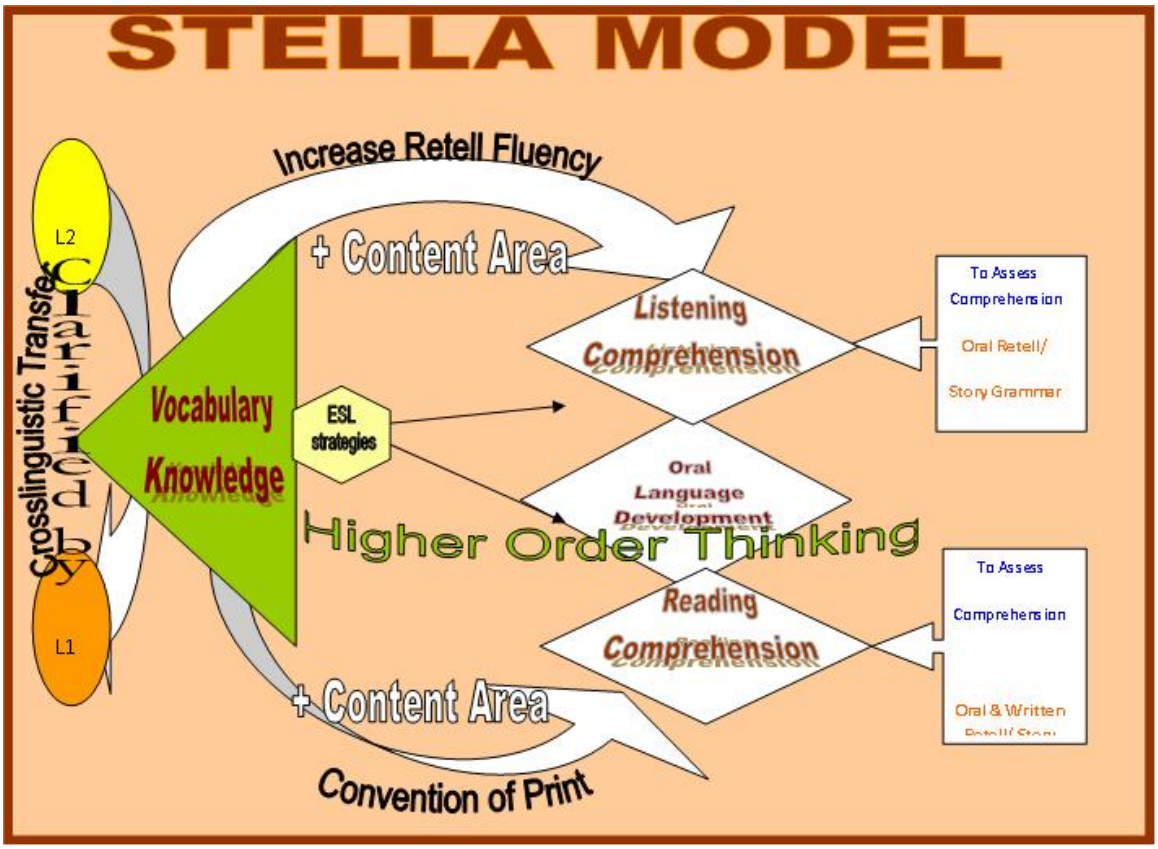

Figure 1. STELLA model.

STELLA is comprised of scripted lessons with controlled higher order thinking questions, L2 clarified by L1 concepts, and ESL strategies. Through STELLA, we are able to not only integrate skills but also introduce them in a sequence, providing scaffolding for the ELL. This structured story-reading component uses interactive read-aloud strategies in kindergarten and first grade. By second grade, students participate in choral reading, with the assistance of a teacher whenever necessary. An example of the second grade schedule for the story reading five day lesson is as follows:

Day 1.

- Introduce vocabulary – 3 words at a time.
- Introduce book – Author with a short biography when available, illustrator, art media, information provided by the illustrator. Story book introduced but not read.
- Make connections to previous lessons and activate prior knowledge.
- Topic Web – Organize knowledge or schema and add new information learned during the lessons.
- Review vocabulary introduced.

Day 2.

- Review vocabulary.
- Introduce new words and main characters – 3 words.
- Read story a page at a time – Stop at every page to ask accompanying leveled questions, breaking down the text into bits of information to make connections between the text and illustrations.

Day 3.

- Review vocabulary.

- Introduce new words – 3 words.
- Story review – Review what was learned on the previous day.

- Story mapping – Story grammar.
- Closure – Review vocabulary from the words according to the wall cards the teacher placed on the STELLA Word Wall to assist students during writing activity time.
- Writing activity.

Day 4.

- Review vocabulary.
- Introduce new words – 3 words.
- Interactive group retelling – Words, phrases, paragraphs and whole pages.
- Story Circle – Using higher level questions, story events, sequence of the story and science integration when appropriate.
- Vocabulary mapping chart – Review vocabulary, synonyms, antonyms, and write sentences using the word.
- Closure – Review words on the STELLA Word Wall.

Day 5.

- Reread story – No interruption.
- Science activity – Practice concepts learned.
- Writing activity.

An example of Day 1 script is presented in Figure 2. Notice the blue color is teacher talk and the red color represents clarifications offered by the bilingual aide.

Project ELLA
STELLA
Story–retell Time for English Literacy and Language Acquisition

Little Rabbit's Journey

By: Beverly J.Irby/ Rafael Lara Alecio

Illustrated by Eva Vagretti Cockrille

Materials:

- Little Rabbit's Journey
- Picture Word Cards
- Chart Paper for Rabbit Topic Web
- Story Mapping Chart
- Story Map/Dry Erase Marker
- Vocabulary graphic organizer
- Picture of a rabbit or a stuffed rabbit

ESL Strategy: Interactive Read Aloud, Visual Scaffolding, Preview/ Review, Advance Organizer

Science: Chemistry – Earth Science/Landform

Language Arts:

- **Objective 1:** Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms
- **Objective 2**: To develop student's comprehension through the use of higher order questioning and thinking strategies.
- **Objective 3:** To expand student's vocabulary, listening and speaking skills.

Vocabulary:

boulder	**sigh**	**stream**
wisest	**steep**	**journey**

Day 1

Introduce Vocabulary

(Point to the title.)
Say This book was read to you while you were in Kindergarten last year.
Say Who remembers the title of the book?

- Say Yes the title of our story is **Little Rabbit's Journey.**

(Point to the author's name.)

Figure 2. Example of part of day 1 of a STELLA lesson.

Vocabulary

As indicated by the previously noted daily schedule, vocabulary instruction is a key element of STELLA lessons, using systematic direct and indirect vocabulary instruction with critical thinking to increase comprehension. Comprehension of the vocabulary is targeted by providing the definition of a selected word, by the teacher modeling the word's usage, and by students practicing the new vocabulary using the word both in and out of context. STELLA introduces three new words every week, per story, in kindergarten. This increases to nine words in the first grade and 12 words in the second grade (The sample of the daily lessons indicates 12 words are presented throughout the week.). STELLA follows Beck and McKeown (2002) three Tiers vocabulary instruction criteria with some modifications. The three tier words are as follows: (a) Tier 1 consist of basic word such as house, door, pet, and mother, (b) Tier II words are high frequency words such as predicted, immersion, and obstinate and are considered as the most productive of the three tiers, and (c) Tier III words are encountered less frequently and are mostly content related. For second language learners, Tier I words might not be part of their lexicon; therefore, they should be part of the instruction. This explained why Calderon, August, Slavin, Duran, Madden and Cheung (2005) developed a set of word selection criteria modifying Beck and McKeown (2002) guide. Therefore, modifications such as use of cognates, depth of meaning, high utility, and nature of the word as described by Calderón et al. (2005) are implemented by STELLA.

For the reasons aforementioned, it is necessary to introduce Tier I words rather than Tier II words in kindergarten students at the beginning of the school year because the students lack English vocabulary in the target language. The new vocabulary is introduced on day one and revisited every day for the reminder of the week, allowing students to become comfortable with using the new words. These words are introduced

using direct instruction, by introducing the word represented by a picture (for example, the word boulder with a picture of a boulder), and a friendly definition on the back of the card (such as "a boulder is a large rock"). Immediately after the introduction of the word, students are asked "Have you ever seen a boulder? What is it like?" Then students are expected to use the new word to complete their ideas. For example, "A boulder is like...." This provides students an opportunity to practice the new word and to integrate the word in and out of context. Some words are encountered in other stories and revisited for reinforcement. In first and second grade, Tier II words and cognates are selected, as well as antonyms and synonyms, by using a vocabulary mapping organizer. In STELLA, Tier III words are introduced since science is the content area selected on which to center the story selections. Vocabulary cards, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, are made for the new vocabulary, and a word-wall card is made for each word with the same picture and word on the vocabulary card. These word-wall cards are used to close the lesson by reviewing the definition of the words and either, by the teacher providing a sentence using the new word, or the teacher asking students to provide a sentence using the word. In addition, these word-wall cards serve as scaffolding for spelling the words once students began to write in the second language.

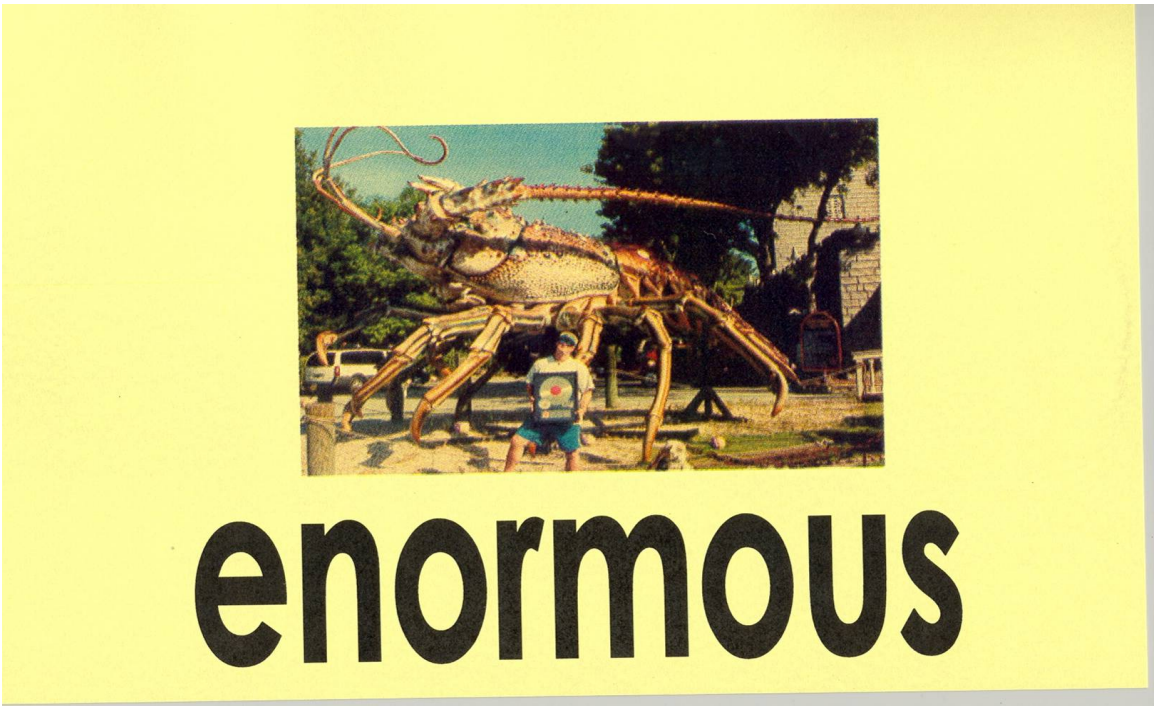

Figure 1

Figure 3. Front side of a STELLA vocabulary card.

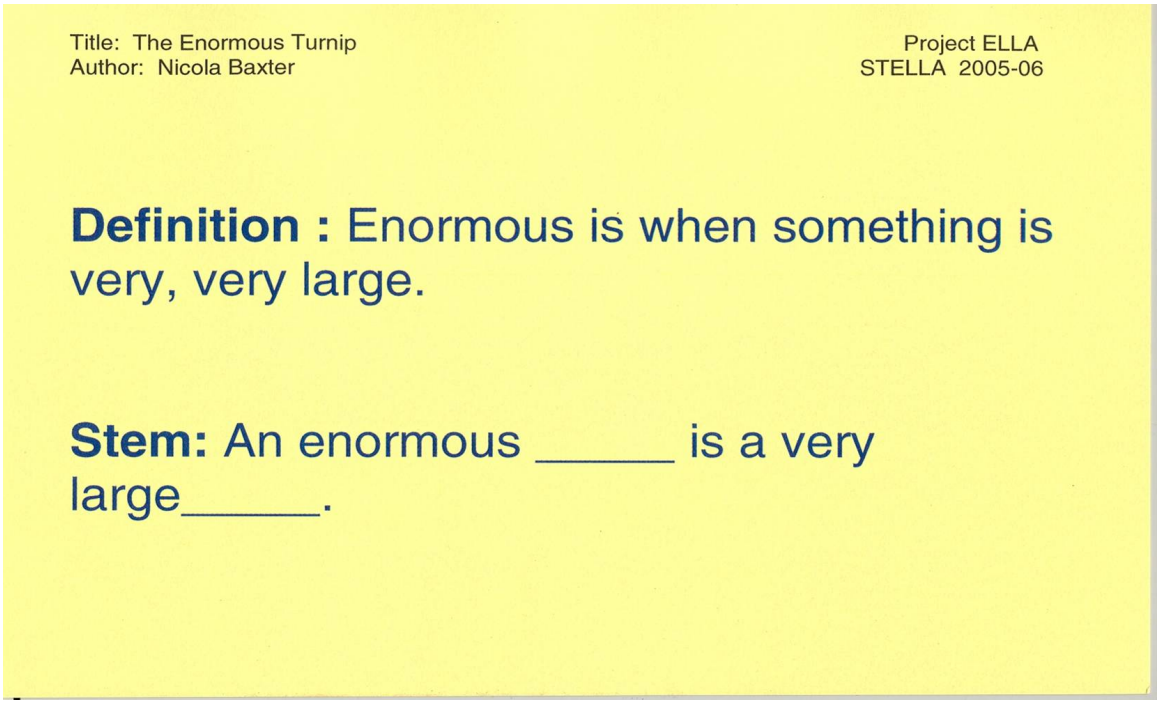

Figure 2

Figure 4. Back of a STELLA vocabulary card.

Additionally, an example of a list of STELLA vocabulary introduced in kindergarten (Figure 5) is provided.

WK	K						
1	chew	tardy	recess	12	munch	boulder	swoop
2	face	bus	wave	13	spring	winter	fall
3	clap	hop	stomp	14	emu	zookeeper	crowd
4	wake up	get ready	climb	15	cookie jar	squirm	trail
5	snow	mittens	boots	16	house	shelter	puddle
6	caterpillar	cocoon	butterfly	17	rake	dig	spray
7	born	sister	brother	18	iguana	jungle	perch
8	feathers	fur	llama	19	fancy	trousers	bespectacled
9	bear	woods	porridge	20	buds	blossom	branch(es)
10	night	morning	track	21	Duck	Hill	far
11	frog	scarf	long john				

Table 3

Figure 5. Sample list of vocabulary from STELLA books used in kindergarten.

Higher Order Thinking Questions

As new vocabulary is learned, students are provided with a strategies to answer higher level questions based on the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking (Bloom, 1956), and to increase comprehension. Each level of question is calibrated in STELLA. For example, STELLA is written with 25% of the questions at the Evaluation Level, 25% at the Synthesis Level, 20% at the Analysis Level, 15% at the Application Level; only 15% of the questions are written at the lower levels of Knowledge and Comprehension.[1] The leveled questions are asked as the story is read for the first time on Day 2. Every page of the story ends with a series of scripted questions. The information or prior knowledge activated on Day 1 facilitates students' understanding of the story and second language use, and increases their comprehension in the target language, English. Questions, for example, for the story, Little Rabbit's Journey (Irby & Lara-Alecio, 2004), are: "Who do you think will help the little rabbit and how? (Analysis; Evaluation), Why do you think the little rabbit believes that the other side is the right place for him? (Evaluation), What surprised you the most about the story? (Evaluation), and What would you do if you were the little rabbit? (Evaluation)." Such questions are samples from Day 2 interactive dialog after each page is read.

ESL Strategies

ESL strategies are instructional strategies that support and accommodate ELLs' needs allowing these students to better understand the English language by reducing the level of anxiety and increasing knowledge of the target language. STELLA systematically organizes and introduces ESL strategies to facilitate vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension (see Table 3 for STELLA ESL strategies). One of the instructional ESL strategies we employ is a variety of graphic organizers. These organizers are tools that allow students to construct meaning, to make connections with prior knowledge (Herrell & Jordan, 2008). They are also used to guide students in the thinking process. An example of a graphic organizer for the story, Catching Sunlight (Blackaby, 2003) is: "This is what I know about leaves." After the organizer is introduced, the students provide information such as how leaves look, how leaves smell, how leaves feel, and how some leaves taste. Also, because our focus is in the content area of science, we provide a variety of types of leaves for comparison and consideration for the graphic organizer. For the story, The Cowboy Mouse (Lara-Alecio & Irby, 2003), the organizer includes words describing the main character of the story, the Cowboy Mouse, along with story grammar practice. A sample of a vocabulary mapping chart used as a graphic organizer of the story grammar is depicted in Figure 6. The organizers are selected dependent upon the story and the objectives for the lesson, with the objective being that students could organize their knowledge and increase their comprehension.

[1] Percentage levels may vary up to five percentage points in a category depending on the story.

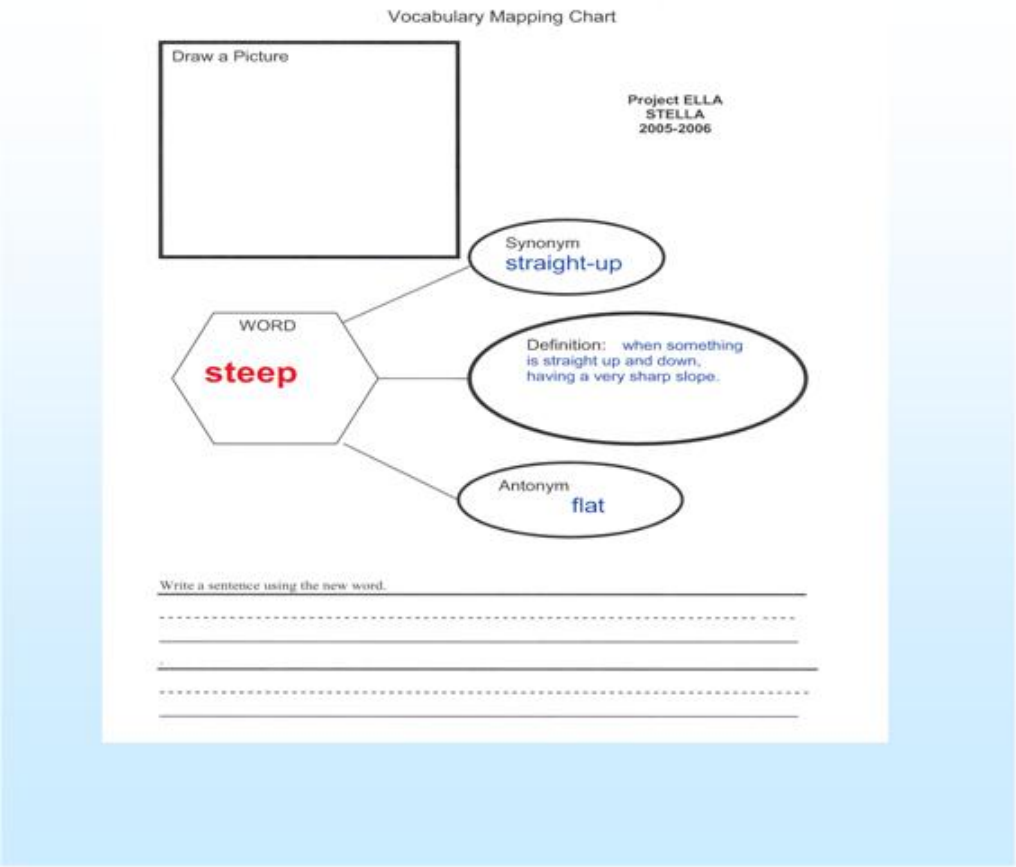

Figure 6. Vocabulary mapping chart.

Lastly, story mapping (Beck & McKeown, 1981) is used on Day 4 for every story that is read. The setting is identified as to when and where the story takes place; the characters are identified by name; the problems and their resolutions are identified, and finally, how the story was resolved also is discussed.

Other ESL strategies used in STELLA to increase comprehension are repetition of story reading and vocabulary, cloze sentences, and retelling. Rereading the same story for a week's period allows for the development of oral language skills and active engagement with activities in a risk-free environment. Students have multiple exposures to the information in the second language (English), and they have structured connections to their background knowledge. Beginning in kindergarten, students are expected to provide a missing word from the story on Days 4 and 5 of the lesson. In first grade, five cloze sentences related to the story are used, and students are asked to select the correct word and explain the reason for that selection. Rhyming words are selected at first as scaffolding, in order to allow students to acquire necessary skills. In second grade, a word or two per page are covered from the story, which is presented via an ELMO, a camera connected to a television set that magnifies the pictures and text in the story books. As students become successful at recalling the missing words, phrases are then covered instead of single words, moving eventually to whole paragraphs, and progressing into every other page and finally the entire story. Teachers act as facilitators scaffolding, when necessary, especially with the more challenging words.

STELLA provides instruction and modeling of the various story structure elements (setting, characters, plot, problem, and solution). In kindergarten, for example, in the Story Critique Time, students vote regarding whether they like or dislike the story by feeding peanuts to an elephant named STELLA, depicted on a large poster. Soon students learn that stories can be subject to criticism. In kindergarten and first grade

students are provided with a prompt or sequence of event cards to guide them through the story retelling process. By mid-first grade picture event cards are removed, and students transition from visual scaffolding to recalling and retelling information heard or read in English. As students move to second grade, the same strategy is upgraded into oral and written story grammar where teachers use guided practice to identify the different elements of the story. Scaffolding and leveled questions are used by the teacher to stimulate critical thinking.

To assist further in comprehension, story grammar is practiced on the 3rd and 4th day of the lesson. In kindergarten, the author and illustrators of the books are introduced first, then the setting and the characters, and later the students progress into incorporating one or more elements of the story at a time. By the mid-first grade and throughout the second grade, students transition from oral responses to writing about the story grammar elements, including setting, characters, problem and solution. Each of these are introduced one at a time over time systematically. Because this instruction is in English, written story grammar is not introduced until second grade, with the purpose being by that time students have acquired enough writing skills and enough English vocabulary to express their thoughts and knowledge in the second language. Teachers provide kind and encouraging feedback to the students and scaffold for them as necessary as specified in the scripted lesson.

Because this story reading component creates the opportunity for development in the English language, ESL strategies are embedded throughout the five day lessons. Table 3 shows the STELLA ESL strategies used in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Some of the strategies remain in place for all three consecutive years such as interactive activities, preview/review, and academic scaffolding read aloud, but others are replaced according to the skill emphasized for that academic year.

As mentioned previously, ESL strategies are used to facilitate second language development and to lower the affective filter that is achieved with the use of predictable routine strategies, established and provided in the five-day STELLA lesson plan. The ESL strategies build upon what the students already know by activating prior knowledge, providing meaning in full context, developing oral communication skills and supporting culture. Other ESL strategies commonly used in STELLA are the word wall, which is used at the end of the lesson on Day 1, and twice thereafter to review and reinforce learned vocabulary, the visual scaffolding used to make language more understandable, advanced organizers, bridging through the use of L2 clarified by L1 provided by the paraprofessional, connections with content area, modeled talk, and interactive read-aloud.

Table 3

ESL Strategies for Kindergarten, First Grade, and Second Grade

Kindergarten	1st grade	2nd grade
Interactive Read Aloud	Interactive Read Aloud	Interactive Read Aloud
Preview/Review	Preview/Review	Preview/Review
Total Physical Response	Total Physical Response	
Academic Scaffolding	Academic Scaffolding	Academic Scaffolding
Think Aloud	Think Aloud	Think Aloud
Leveled Questioning	Leveled Questioning	Leveled Questioning
	Word Wall	Word Wall
	Graphic Organizers	Graphic Organizers
Cloze	Bridging	Bridging
L2 clarified by L1	L2 clarified by L1	L2 clarified by L1

Table 4

NOTE: Strategies used for the first three years (kindergarten, first, and second grade).

Conclusion

Campus administrators and teacher leaders can improve the oral language development of the ELLs they serve through the story reading intervention described in this paper, Story Retelling and Higher Order Thinking for English Language and Literacy Acquisition, STELLA (Irby, Lara-Alecio, Quiros, Mathes, & Rodriguez, 2004). As indicated it is a systematic structured story reading, an amalgam of different language and content literacy skills and strategies presented in a systematic way to increase the effect that each skill or strategy would produce if presented in isolation. STELLA (Irby et al.) is in no way a panacea to all oral language development, nor a plan to accelerate reading or comprehension by itself, but it can be a beneficial and useful supplement of language arts curriculum, integrating (a) vocabulary instruction, (b) research-based instructional strategies, (c) English as second language (ESL) strategies, (d) content area academic language as in science, and (e) ongoing professional development in the intervention. In STELLA, emphasis is given to cross-linguistic similarities between the English and Spanish languages. It is our hope that administrators who serve ELLs will consider such a strategy and other research-based strategies for use in their schools.

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