Title of Project: The Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts Applied in a Kindergarten Class with English Language Learners

Project Abstract (< 100 words): The implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is placing high demands on teachers. Teachers of ELLs face even greater challenges in supporting their students to reach the expectations of the CCSS. However, the CCSS provide little guidance for addressing ELLs. This project focused on how a kindergarten teacher integrated the different text types (narrative, informative/explanatory, argument) of the CCSS in a classroom with a high number of ELLs, as well as how the teacher scaffolds learning of these text types in the classroom.

Project Personnel:
Dr. Luciana de Oliveira: Principal Investigator, Associate Professor at Purdue University
Amber J. Ma: Kindergarten Teacher at Edgelea Elementary School
Marshall Klassen: Graduate Student at Purdue University

1. Describe the partnership created and the methods you used to sustain the partnerships.

The partnership between the primary investigator and the participating teacher has strengthened as a result of this project, as well as created new working relationships between in-service teachers and future teacher educators. Furthermore, this project involved a number of participants that established working relationships between the primary investigator and participating teacher that are being maintained even after the completion of this research.

Future projects are anticipated with this participating teacher as she continues to work with ELLs every year and has been recognized as an excellent teacher by the community. This coming year she is transitioning into a new position at a new school, but she will continue to work with ELLs alongside mainstream students in the elementary classroom. Future research projects are anticipated between Purdue University and the participating teacher.

2. Describe the activities you completed this year for your Synergy Grant in relationship to the partners’ strategic plans.

Activities completed over the school year included reading stories aloud and encouraging students to explore their understanding through written and/or drawn responses to the stories, as well as responding to writing prompts using their own thoughts and ideas. These stories, song and nursery rhymes included a number of different themes, many of which were included to introduce students to other cultures outside of the American tradition including holiday traditions, different family structures and schooling environments around the world. ELLs received appropriate support through their home languages through discussion and occasional translation, as well as focus on written forms of literacy in journals and transcriptions of the students’
thoughts from spoken to written in English and their home language as necessary. Students were also encouraged to read in small groups, explore level appropriate texts, songs and nursery rhymes during time set aside specifically for exploration and cooperation.

These activities were designed to help struggling learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, ELLs, and students in need of additional learning resources and opportunities. These activities were conducted in first half of the semester to provide a rich literacy background for students to address the text types of the CCSS. ELLs were able to relate more easily to these stories and more comfortable with writing in a cultural context that includes their own cultures.

3. Describe your plans, if any, for continuation, scaling up, and/or institutionalization of the project next year.

Due to the participating teacher continuing her career at a different school and the PI leaving Purdue in August, further research concerning this project will be discontinued at this point. However, collaboration between the researchers and participating teacher will continue through production of additional journal articles and book chapters. The potential for future research in the classroom is also high.

4. Summarize any impact data you have collected on your project, especially impact on P-12 students, teachers, principals, etc.

Impact data concerning this project includes teacher and student evaluations, and the teacher was ranked as an effective teacher within the school district. In-class student evaluations showed that all students increased at least one level of writing over the year. The ELLs in the class showed particular improvement with an average growth of 3.5 writing levels from their scores in the fall to the spring. Many students in the class also improved reading by at least one level. In addition to receiving the Synergy Grant, the teacher also received another award from Purdue in recognition of her service to minority and immigrant students.

5. Summarize your plan for disseminating the results of your project to state and national audiences.

We are working on writing the results of this research for publications focusing on the following topics: how the participating teacher uses Spanish in the classroom as a native English speaker, the effects of the Common Core on instruction, and a practitioner article for Talking Points discussing practical applications concerning the CCSS text types based on this research.

6. What suggestions do you have for future Synergy Grant participants or for the project administrators?

Future participants should continue to focus on Purdue’s strategic plan, focusing on preparing teachers to address the needs of teachers of English Language Learners, fostering attitudes that are accepting of cultural and racial diversity, and disseminating effective teacher pedagogy to the community at large. One of the most important aspects of a successful partnership is collaborating with a teacher who is supportive of this kind of work.