Abstract

This study investigated the observed behaviors and reported experiences of third grade English language learners when pre-reading activities intended to build schema and vocabulary were implemented. A preliminary student survey was taken to assess students’ reading attitudes and use of strategies. Then a variety of pre-reading strategies such as hand-on experiences and games, visual aids, scaffolded texts, and direct vocabulary instruction were employed with the goal of increasing comprehension of non-fiction texts. Through tests, quizzes, reading assessments, observations and a post-study survey, several themes emerged. Research showed that hands-on activities and games increased student engagement and provided opportunities for students to use new words authentically. Learning new words through meaningful experiences helped students retain vocabulary. Visual aids helped build and activate student schema, which made the text more accessible. Using texts that gradually increased in complexity and that revisited key concepts, provided students with effective scaffolding. By reading nonfiction books, English language learners acquired English and science and social studies content simultaneously. Although interventions did not result in increased reading levels for all students, students successfully acquired new vocabulary and demonstrated strong comprehension of specific texts within the fall unit. For the greatest success, teachers need to combine strategies that meet the needs of their individual students.