



Teachers' Perceptions of the Literacy Strategies Instruction Model

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Introduction & Background

Almasi and Fullerton's (2012) Critical Elements of Strategies Instruction (CESI) Model is a strategic approach to literacy instruction, which is outlined in the text *Teaching Strategic Processes of Reading*, the foundation of this research project. I was interested in exploring the execution of this model using research-based approaches in a school-based summer literacy practicum for literacy specialist candidates. I observed the implementation of the CESI Model with students ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 4.

As the summer 2019 literacy specialist graduate assistant in my first semester of this graduate program, I had the opportunity to observe four literacy specialist candidates, who were completing the culminating practicum. Each of the candidates entered the practicum with a Bachelor's Degree in Education and three years or less of teaching experience. I was provided access to their daily lesson plans and materials prior to observing. I began with a general focus on the various parts of the CESI model before narrowing the scope once I began to find patterns.

This research project responds to the following questions: What are the literacy specialist candidates' perceptions about their ability to use the Strategies Instruction Model to teach reading and writing strategies in a school-based summer practicum? What are the literacy specialist candidates' perceptions of how this method of instruction impacts students' reading and writing? How will the literacy specialist candidates determine if their strategy instruction is effective?

Components of CESI

Once a safe and risk-free learning environment for motivated strategy use has been established, there are three main components to the CESI model:

- Reduce Processing Demands
- Provide Explicit Instruction
- Create Opportunities for Student Verbalization

Method

In order to answer my research questions, I used these data sources:

- Pre-survey questionnaire
- Observations of literacy specialist candidates implementing the CESI Model during their culminating practicum
- Copies of lesson plans
- Post-survey questionnaire

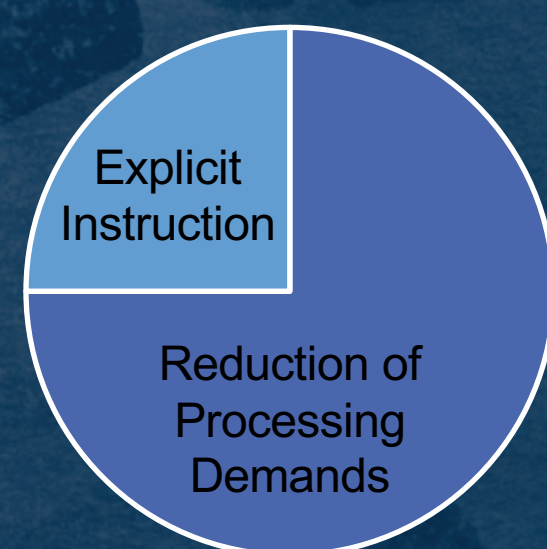
Using qualitative coding, I analyzed these data sources. Three major themes emerged:

- Explicit Instruction Using Think-Alouds, Visuals, and Analogies
- Opportunities for Student Verbalization
- CESI Implementation Challenges

Pre-Survey Results

The participating literacy specialist (LS) candidates completed an electronic pre-survey, which asked for some background on their teaching experience, level of confidence in implementing the CESI model with their small groups of students, any apprehensions in using the model, plans for assessment and progress monitoring, and goals for the course.

All LS candidates identified themselves as "confident" in utilizing the CESI model outlined in the Almasi and Fullerton text during their final practicum. They each believed the model would have an important place in classroom reading and writing instruction. As shown on the chart to the right, three of four participants identified the reduction of processing demands in students as what they anticipated to be most challenging during the practicum. The fourth predicted explicit instruction to be the most challenging. Goals included an increased confidence in efficiently using the model and become "more mindful of students' understanding and growth."



Explicit Instruction Using Think-Alouds, Visuals, and Analogies

Several instances of explicit, thorough instruction were observed throughout the literacy practicum. Such instruction begins with a brief explanation of the declarative ("what"), procedural ("how"), and conditional ("when") knowledge associated with the given strategy. After doing so, while practicing proper reading pace and phrasing with third graders using *There's a Wocket in My Pocket!* by Dr. Seuss, one LS candidate modeled both correct and incorrect examples of "scooping" (grouping words together). She utilized a think-aloud to reflect on the way her "good" and "bad" reading paces sounded. Guided practice with visuals on cards was used to reinforce the strategy and enhance student engagement and motivation.

Think-alouds were a recurring instructional tool in modeling the proper use of strategies. One teacher modeled how to find the main idea of a passage and locate key details. She used a think-aloud to navigate a passage about dolphins, while the students observed her strategies. Guided practice involved an interactive read-aloud of *The Great Jam Sandwich* by Janet Burroway with questions embedded in the lesson to probe students' thinking. Similar to the first LS candidate's method of teaching both correct and incorrect examples, this candidate pointed out both important and less significant details to the story's overall message.

In another lesson, a "wiggly chair" analogy was used as a visual to display the importance of including an adequate number of details and examples when finding the main idea of a passage. Similar to the way in which a stool needs four legs to stand stable and secure, a review of a passage's main idea needs four details to be strong and complete. Visuals help to reduce processing demands in students as well as assist in the transfer of learning the strategy to applying the strategy.

Opportunities for Student Verbalization

The LS specialist candidate who modeled correct and incorrect examples using *There's a Wocket in My Pocket!* checked in with the students throughout the text to discuss these "good" and "bad" examples, which also incorporated several opportunities for student verbalization. Another participant had multiple conversations with her students regarding the difference between plot and theme throughout the lesson, inviting students to practice and verbalize what they were learning.

Conversely, I observed one LS candidate teaching phonemic awareness in which students had opportunities to manipulate sounds and break apart words. It became increasingly evident that opportunities for student verbalization also increase engagement, which increases motivation to learn. Though the candidate had a constructive lesson planned, because she ended up spending more time than the students talking during this lesson, the students appeared unfocused and uninterested in the lesson.

CESI Implementation Challenges

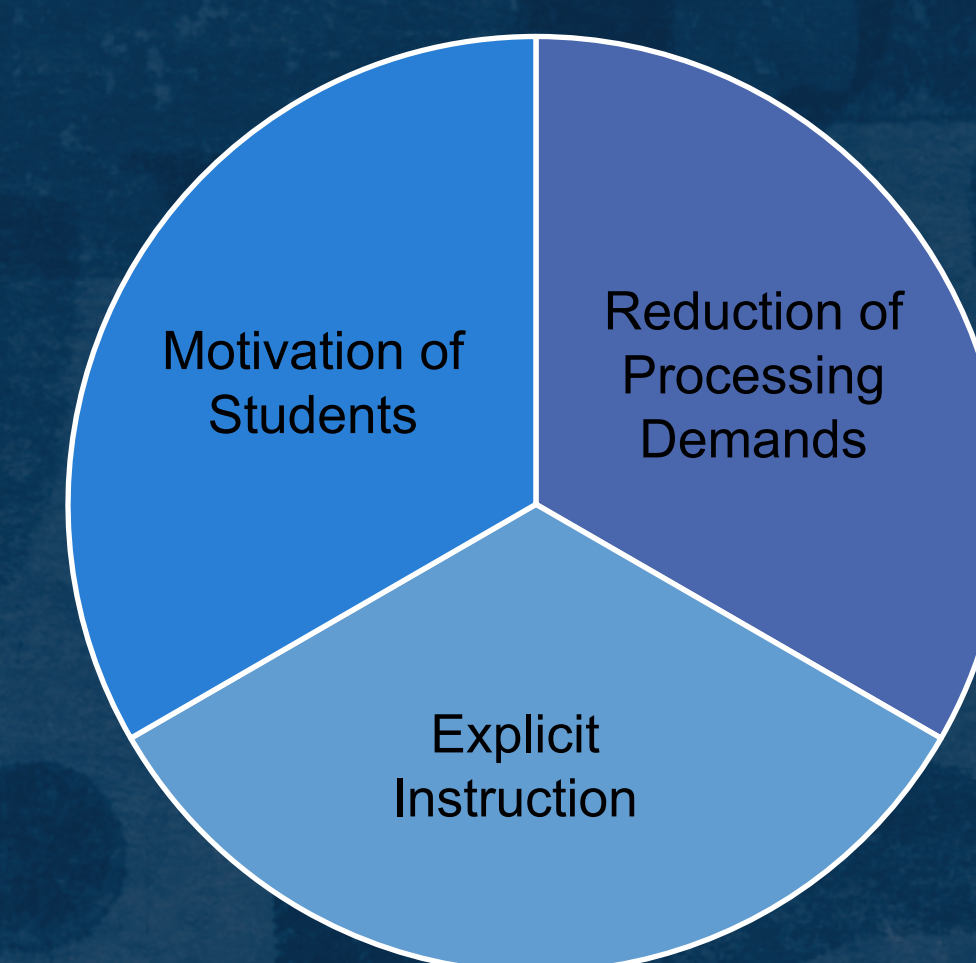
The LS candidates discussed some challenges they faced while implementing the CESI model during their practicum. One candidate expressed difficulty with appropriately and effectively reducing processing demands, one component of the model. Student motivation was another factor with which the candidates experienced difficulty. It should be reiterated that this practicum took place during the students' summer vacation, likely leading to less cooperation than normal from the students receiving the instruction.

Another challenge indicated by a LS candidate regarded strategy instruction in writing. Though it seemed more difficult to this candidate to teach strategizing in writing than reading, she mentioned that Serravallo's (2017) text does offer more writing than reading strategies. Unlike writing, reading is limited to concepts, such as comprehension or fluency. Likewise, another candidate expressed that it felt more challenging to find effective strategies for younger students to teach the basics of literacy (sounds, word identification, etc.) than for older students who are learning fluency, comprehension, etc.). Overall, however, the successes of the candidates in their final literacy practicum far outweighed the challenges they faced, as expressed in their post-surveys.

Post-Survey Results

Three of the four LS candidates participated in the post-survey questionnaire. Two candidates discussed their plans to use the strategy instruction model in a future teaching position, however one indicated that it may be difficult to implement if she is "not working with students in such an intense way." Additionally, when asked how it was determined if strategy instruction was effective from day to day and throughout the practicum, one candidate indicated she utilized the rubrics as well as a conversation with the student at the end of the lesson regarding the "what," (declarative knowledge) "how," (procedural knowledge) and "when" (conditional knowledge) in using the strategy to determine lesson effectiveness and student understanding.

Interestingly, after the majority of candidates indicated in the pre-survey that they anticipated the reduction of processing demands to be the most challenging during the practicum, this was not the case in the post-survey. When asked which part(s) of the strategy instruction model were most challenging to implement, each of the three candidates chose a different component: providing explicit instruction, reducing processing demands, and motivating students. Zero candidates chose student verbalization as a challenge. Finally, after completing the practicum, two candidates felt "confident" in their ability to utilize the strategy instruction model, while one felt "very confident."



Components of CESI identified as most challenging to implement by LS candidates

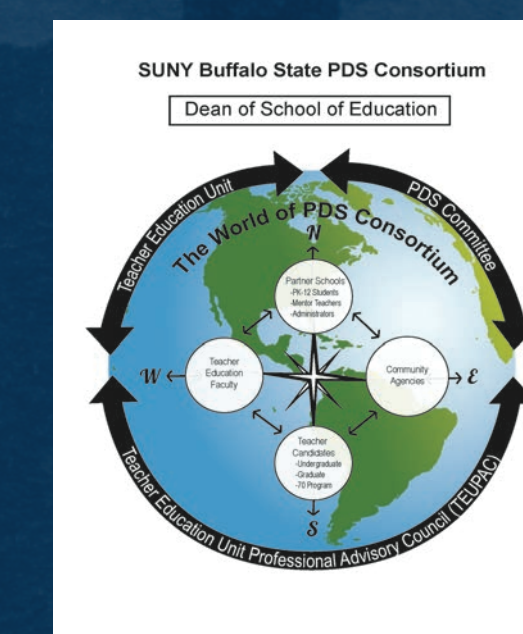
Implications

The LS candidates' ability to effectively utilize the CESI model outlined in the Almasi and Fullerton (2012) text hinges heavily on their familiarity with the content, which was practiced throughout their graduate program. The text serves as a continuous reference for the candidates throughout their program as well as their final practicum. On a scale ranging from "very unhelpful" to "extremely helpful," the text itself was identified at the culmination of the practicum by the participants to be either "neutral" or "unhelpful," signifying that once the candidates learned the model in prior courses, it was not common that participants refer back to the information in the practicum.

The most critical aspect of the model is the creation of a safe and risk-free learning environment for motivated strategy use. Without this first being implemented, strategy instruction simply cannot take place. It has a reciprocal relationship with the reduction of processing demands, explicit instruction, and opportunities for student verbalization. This safe and risk-free environment is a recursive one that creates, and is created by, these three components.

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