**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 research-based instructional model which is supported 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 was given 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?

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**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

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**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

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**Pre-Survey Results**

The participating literacy specialist (LS) candidates completed an electronic pre-survey, which asked for some background information, which is supported in the text. The LS candidates identified as most challenging the acquiring of procedural (“how”), and conditional (“when”) knowledge associated with the given strategy. After giving successful strategies 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 “scoping” (grouping words together). She utilized think-alouds in this way that 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.

Another challenge indicated by a LS candidate was teaching strategizing in writing. In this lesson, the candidates used visuals to reduce processing demands, explicit instruction, and opportunities for student verbalization. One candidate discussed the importance of including an adequate number of details and examples when teaching the main idea of a passage. Similarly, in a lesson on how to think aloud while navigating a passage about dolphins, the students observed this strategy. Guided practice involved an interactive read-aloud of The Great Jam Sandwich by Janet Runnegar with questions embedded in the lesson to test students’ thinking. The first LS candidate’s method of teaching both correct and incorrect examples of “scoping” involved pointing out both important and less significant details to the story’s overall message.

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**Opportunities for Student Verbalization**

The LS specialist candidate who modeled correct and incorrect examples using There’s a Wocket in My Pocket! included in the students the text to discuss these “good” and “bad” examples, which also incorporated several opportunities for student verbalization. Check-ins with 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 plan, the students’ interaction was more limited. After the LS candidates discussed the text, the students appeared unfocused and uninterested in the lesson.

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**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 engagement from the students. The candidate discussing the lesson’s challenges gave a variety of examples, this candidate pointed out both important and less significant details to the story’s overall message.

Another challenge indicated by a LS candidate was the reduction of processing demands, explicit instruction, and opportunities for student verbalization. The candidate discussed the importance of including an adequate number of details and examples when teaching the main idea of a passage. Similarly, in a lesson on how to think aloud while navigating a passage about dolphins, the students observed this strategy. Guided practice involved an interactive read-aloud of The Great Jam Sandwich by Janet Runnegar with questions embedded in the lesson to test students’ thinking. The first LS candidate’s method of teaching both correct and incorrect examples of “scoping” involved pointing out both important and less significant details to the story’s overall message.

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**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 giving successful strategies 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 “scoping” (grouping words together). She utilized think-alouds in this way that 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 Runnegar with questions embedded in the lesson to test 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.

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**Post-Survey Results**

Three of the four LS candidates participated in the post-survey questionnaire. Two of the four LS candidates indicated it was effective from day to day and throughout the practicum, while another indicated it was helpful. One candidate indicated she utilized the rubrics as well as a conversation with the student at the end of the lesson regarding the strategy’s declarative knowledge “how,” (procedural knowledge) “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 candidates chose a different component, providing explicit instruction, reducing processing demands, and motivating students. Zero candidates chose student verbalization as a challenge. Once completing the practicum, two candidates felt “confident” in their ability to utilize the strategy instruction model, while one felt “very confident.”

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**Implications**

The LS candidates’ ability to effectively utilize the CESI model outlined in the Almasi and Fullerton (2012) text helps demonstrate that this strategy instruction model can be 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. There has been 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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**References**
