

Fieldwork Project Report

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Introduction

The purpose of this fieldwork project is to complete an investigation of an unfamiliar culture. While the population of ELLs where I teach is relatively small compared to some, I have noticed in my school that we have an increasing number of Polish families moving in, and therefore students enrolling each year. Personally, being unfamiliar with Polish culture and language, I chose to complete this investigation to learn more about the population, including culture and language, but also traditions, customs, and holidays. My goal is to educate myself to then in turn be able to meet the needs of the changing student population as an educator. This information will help me to bring students' culture into my classroom and hopefully build relationships with families. "If families are to trust teachers and other school staff members, in other words, they must believe that school personnel are qualified, fair, and dependable, and have their child's best interests at heart" (Brewster & Railsback, 2010). By researching the Polish language, I can determine similarities and differences between Polish and English, and the different areas that students may succeed or struggle with English. My research will consist of collecting books and articles to investigate Polish culture and language, as well as seeking out community resources that may be helpful for families. I will examine how I can use this information to help improve my teaching practices.

Methodology

This study was carried out by first examining the school community and determining what needs are present that would be worthwhile to investigate to improve my teaching practices. Shortly after beginning brainstorming, I remembered that we have been seeing an increasing number of Polish families and students moving into the community. There have been Polish Multilingual Learners (MLs) in the Pre-K program for the past two school years as I have

been substituting and teaching in it. I knew that this was a culture and language that I wanted to learn more about, with the goal of improving my teaching practices and helping students and families. This is especially important in early childhood education. “Children benefit from a positive, supportive learning environment where their contributions are valued...The experiences that children have in their first classrooms are foundational to how they think about themselves as learners, students, and members of the larger communities around them” (Adair, 2015). An investigation such as this one is designed to benefit the early childhood experiences of students in the classroom by including and valuing their culture to support them in their learning. I approached this as a two-part project. First, to learn about Polish culture, language, holidays, and traditions, and then to investigate potential community resources.

My investigation began by searching the Internet to collect articles and books on Polish culture in order to educate myself on the holidays, food, customs, traditions, and other useful information that I could find. Culture is an important aspect of gaining knowledge on a particular population, and can be defined as “a way of life, especially as it relates to the socially transmitted habits, customs, traditions, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people at a particular time. It includes the behaviors, actions, practices, attitudes, norms and values, communications (language), patterns, traits, etiquette, spirituality, concepts of health and healing, superstitions, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. It is the lens through which we look at the world” (Brewster & Railsback, 2010). This can help me to gain insight into students’ and families’ values and priorities, as well as their expectations and approaches for their childrens’ education. With this, the goal is to work with families as a team to best meet the needs of their child. In addition, I began searching online at my local library for books about Poland, to see what might be useful for myself to learn about the culture, and also potential

children's books to bring into my classroom to include books about Polish culture into my classroom, and potentially to educate students to learn about the culture. Doing this research also led me into beginning to find potential resources for families, as I discovered Polish/English children's books available through the public library system.

After researching articles and books about the culture and learning about Polish/English children's books available through the library, the next step I decided to take was to search for other books and literacy resources that may be helpful for Polish families whose children are learning English. Especially at the young age of students that I teach, it is so important for families to have ways to be involved in their child's education and literacy development. I also examined web resources for tip sheets, facts sheets, etc. related to literacy and other educational topics that are available in multiple languages. In addition, I familiarized myself more with the Google Translate app, as well as how to translate documents in Google Docs, to see how useful these could be in helping families to translate documents, or to translate documents for them.

Next, in order to find out more about the Polish language itself, with which I am very unfamiliar, I searched for research articles related to English second language acquisition with Polish as a first language. I did this in order to determine where similarities and differences may exist between the two languages, and where students who have Polish as a home language, and are learning English, may succeed or struggle. I also looked for resources that would be useful to help my students acquire English based upon their needs with regard to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Finally, through searching online and going out in the community, I looked to find resources available to families that may be available in the local town or surrounding areas with information for basic needs, as well as programs available for both adult and child English Language Learners (ELLs).

Findings & Discussion

In conducting research about Poland and Polish culture, I found quite a bit of information. Similarly, to families in the United States, according to AFS-USA (n.d), Polish families tend to be close and tight-knit, enjoying outings and family gatherings together. Poland is a country that is home to rich history and traditions. Families vary in socioeconomic status, vary in the busyness of their lives, and are a generally well-educated population. Religion plays a large role in Polish culture, with the majority of the population being Roman Catholic. Christmas and Easter are known to be two major holidays in Poland. This is useful information for the population and school district, which this investigation is being conducted for. The town is predominantly Catholic, so having these holidays in common is helpful for bridging the two cultures together and connecting students. Food is an important part of the culture with some of the favorite dishes being pierogi (a meat stuffed dumpling), bread and baked goods, as well as “Rosół, which is chicken soup with noodles, usually eaten on Sundays, Barszcz, a clear beetroot soup whose ingredients are garlic, onions, carrots, and celery, and Bigos, cabbage stew with meat and sausage” (AFS-USA, n.d.). Another popular meal that some may enjoy is called “drugie śniadanie”, or “second breakfast”. Polish families often try to eat meals together.

While navigating through and exploring the public library system, I found resources for both the classroom and families. Through the Suffolk County Public library system, there is the ability to check out books and materials from other libraries in the county, as well as your own home library. Patrons may also request books and materials from other libraries, and the librarians are able to help with this. In the Suffolk County Library System, there are a couple of children’s books, entitled *Friends* and *Love*, published in 2018 by the Milet Publishing Company, containing Polish and English vocabulary with simple text and pictures that would be

appropriate for toddlers through the early childhood age group. These could be used in the classroom to bring in students' language and culture, as well as recommended to families to work on vocabulary and early literacy skills with their young children.

In addition to my findings at the library regarding books, there are also several resources available through both the local public library and nearby libraries within the public library system. The local public library offers both no cost and low-cost program options for children, teenagers, and adults. These include book clubs, story time, games, arts & crafts, etc. Families in the community may get a library card to enroll in these programs and check out books and materials. Although the local community library does not have any information regarding this, in two neighboring libraries, there is information about local programs for both children and adult English Language Learners. Additionally, other resources available online, found on the [Illinois Early Learning Project website for Polish families include multilingual tip sheets](#), available in a variety of languages, including Polish, such as one attached to this paper about discovering letters and words. There are many different types of tip sheets regarding literacy and other skills that could be shared with families to enable them to help their children. Encouraging families to continue building their children's literacy skills at home is very important. According to Colorín Colorado (2022) several ways teachers can help families to help their children is encourage them to speak with their child in their home language, ensuring them that it will not confuse the child from learning English, talk with their children about the benefits of being bilingual, share stories, rhymes, games, and songs from their home culture, share special traditions and recipes from home, talk with your child about their day, encourage the child to write every day, listen to your child read out loud, and get free e-books from the library. Although Colorín Colorado has these tips available for families in several languages, unfortunately Polish is not one that is offered but

these tips could be translated by the teacher using the [Google Translate app](#) or typing them into Google Docs and translating them for families. There is a great deal of research supporting the use of the first language in helping to develop a second language. Students benefit from the use of the first language because it may help them to transfer concepts into the new language. "...the languages in a bilingual or multilingual person do not work independently; they work through the same processing system (Madriñan, 2014). There are also leveled readers available in Polish online through the website Reading A-Z, a resource the school district subscribes to, that could be made available for families to help their children practice reading at home.

Finally, there were several findings about the Polish language itself, and how Polish speakers develop English as part of this investigation. The Polish language is a Slavic language and has several dialects. Generally, the communication style in Poland is a direct one. Also, English education is known to be emphasized in Poland, now considered an essential part of a good education, and is widely taught (Śpiewak & Gołębiowska, 2001). With regards to Polish speakers learning English, the greater the difference between languages, the more difficulty and errors exist when transferring from one language to another. English and Polish differ in terms of pronunciation, spelling, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (Jaskulska & Łockiewicz, 2017). More specifically in these areas, Polish speakers learning English may tend to struggle with pronunciation of both vowels and consonants, as well as word stress and intonation (Rataj, 2009). Research recommends that second language instruction involve explicit instruction in areas and errors caused by linguistic transfer in order for it to be effective. The lack of consistency between spelling and pronunciation is a large area of struggle for Polish speakers who are new to learning English, often expecting each letter to be pronounced as in their native language, whereas English is highly irregular (Śpiewak & Gołębiowska, 2001). Syntax and

morphology are also very important areas for teachers to consider when teaching English to native Polish speakers. English has articles, unlike Polish, and English has a much stricter word order. In Polish, word order is optional as the morphological structure of a word indicates its syntactic function. Teachers should emphasize the importance of strict word order in English. Differences in Polish and English should be emphasized, and the frequent English structures in reading, writing, and oral communication should be repeatedly practiced. Teachers should also indicate that in English, pronunciation and spelling often do not correspond. Sight word practice could be helpful for students to work on this (Jaskulska & Łockiewicz, 2017).

Conclusion, Reflection, and Future Research

I learned quite a bit from this investigation of Polish culture, and I am glad that I chose this project to inform my knowledge and meet the changing needs of my school population. I will be able to use what I learned going forward to provide Polish families with resources and bring students' culture into the classroom with bilingual and multicultural books and materials. Additionally, I now know many of the differences between Polish and English, and the areas where these students may struggle with learning the language. I have a stronger understanding of how to help students develop appropriate pronunciation and spelling skills and emphasize the word order of English. Frequent practice with reading, speaking, and writing tasks while enforcing the rules of English is crucial. Additionally, I found this investigation to be interesting and encouraging to learn more about other different cultures and languages as needed. It is helpful that there are so many resources available to learn about a language and culture. Even if you are not familiar with it at all, there are still plenty of ways to learn how to support your students and meet their needs.

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Odkrywaj litery i wyrazy

Litery i wyrazy są wszędzie dookoła nas! Odkrywaj świat wyrazów ze swoim dzieckiem, gdy tylko jesteście na spacerze. Gdy rozmawiasz ze swoim dzieckiem o wyrazach, które widzicie dookoła siebie, pomagasz mu we wczesnym rozwijaniu umiejętności czytania.

Polowanie na litery

Wybierzcie jedną literę i znajdzie jak najwięcej jej wystąpień. Spróbujcie przepisywać znalezione litery na kartkę.



Rozmawiajcie o głoskach

Rozmawiajcie o literach jak o klockach, z których buduje się słowa. Zidentyfikujcie pierwsze, środkowe i ostatnie litery. Czytajcie razem proste słowa – pomagaj swojemu dziecku przeczytać każdą literę oddzielnie i po kolei.



Zagrajcie w imiona

Imiona to wyjątkowe słowa, ponieważ opisują osoby mające wyjątkowe znaczenie w życiu Twojego dziecka. Ćwiczcie pisanie imion osób, które są dla niego ważne.

Pokazuj słowo pisane

Rozmawiaj o spacjach, interpunkcji oraz małych i wielkich literach. Twoje dziecko nauczy się, w jaki sposób pisać wyrazy.



Szukaj liter dookoła siebie

Pokazuj znaki drogowe oraz logotypy sklepów i drużyn sportowych, które widzicie, gdy przemieszczacie się po mieście lub okolicy. Pomóż dziecku zrozumieć, że te znaki przekazują informacje.



English Title: Discover Letters and Words



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