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# How Explicit Vocabulary Instruction Leads English Language Learners In Early Elementary Ages To Become Proficient Readers

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HOW EXPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION LEADS ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS IN EARLY ELEMENTARY AGES TO BECOME PROFICIENT  
READERS

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters  
of Arts in Education

Hamline University  
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To my amazing husband, thank you for your constant support as I navigated through this capstone. It quickly took up much of my time and I would not have finished without your encouragement and all the help with the girls. I love you! To my girls, Kallen and Kollins, thank you for understanding when mommy had to work on “homework” so much. I love you both to the moon and back!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Overview

“Nearly 3 in 4 American classrooms now includes at least one English-language learner, and these students make up roughly 1 in 10 public school students” (Sparks, 2016). With a growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in our classrooms each year, it is relevant to discuss teaching strategies that will not only benefit our English speaking students, but also bridge the gap with our non-English speaking students. I want to create Professional Development (PD) for teachers regarding the importance of vocabulary instruction with their English Language Learners in their classroom. The research question I have decided to focus on is *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?*

#### My Experience

I had the opportunity to work as a reading academic specialist my first year teaching. I worked with all different students, in different grades, with different backgrounds. I had students for about 20-30 minutes a day, in groups that averaged 6 students. The goal of those groups was to adequately fit students with peers based on their reading level, although it did not always work out like that. The groups were fluid, so changes were made frequently to meet the needs of our students. Depending on the academic level of the students, some things we worked on were letters, sounds, blends,

sight words, vocabulary instruction, fluency and comprehension practice. Looking back, that is where my passion began for reading instruction and ELLs. Working in a low income school district, our students were diverse and predominantly low academically and behind their grade level peers. The small groups were intense and overwhelming in thinking of how far the students needed to go. We charted sight words, oral reading goals as a starting point and referred to them often. When that became too much for me to maintain and explain (think 6-8 students a group, multi grade level, all day long!), I realized how overwhelming that would be for a student with minimal English. I had a colleague who I respected greatly and she helped me plan for one of my groups. She changed my thinking by asking one question, “What do you want the end result of your time with these students to be?” I didn't hesitate with my reply that I want them to understand the books I was trying to have them read. She reminded me that many ELLs struggle with vocabulary because of their lack of learning word meanings that English speaking students begin hearing and learning quite young. So I tossed the sheets and I took a step back and focused on one thing, and that was vocabulary instruction. This is where my beginning of vocabulary instruction within my guided reading groups really took off.

One of my most memorable teaching moments was when I had a non-English speaking student, Sarah (not her real name), three years ago in class. She came to the Midwest to live with her aunt and uncle and her parents were back in Mexico. Thankfully, I had a few other Spanish speaking students who helped us translate what was necessary throughout our day. She was welcomed by them and the familiarity of her

language was present in our classroom. Sarah came half way through the year, and it was evident that she had not been a part of a school system prior to this. Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) is a term that describes the subset of ELLs who share common characteristics such as limited background in reading and writing, and who are predominately below grade level (WIDA, 2015). According to Wrigley, Chen, White and Soroui (2009), ELLs who encounter SLIFE have difficulty “acquiring literacy skills in their native or second language” (Madrigal-Hopes, Villavicencio, Foote, & Green, 2014, p. 48). Sarah was eager to learn, and though I was overwhelmed to add her to my already low academic group, I am always up for a challenge. I was able to work with her in a small group during our guided reading block with other ELLs. Their backgrounds varied, but all came in at an emerging level of English. Sarah was a bright young girl, and took in as much as she could all day long. What I found she struggled with throughout our day was that she did not understand simple tasks and their meanings. “Come to the carpet” and “line up” were unknown tasks to her, making her day very long and exhausting, and that didn't even grasp the learning we attempted each day. With my guided reading group, I was working on a level C book, which is a kindergarten level text. A lot of pre-teaching was done, which was mainly introducing the book, concepts and vocabulary words. ELLs frequently speak in their home language at home, therefore what they hear and learn at school needs to be vast and important. Watching Sarah grasp new things and words was so interesting to observe. Using a word correctly in context was so exciting, for her and me. You can see the light



go off in their brains when they truly understand a word, story, or concept. It is one of my favorite things!

“Schools and teachers are under enormous pressure to help ELLs meet national and state accountability demands” (Rodriguez, Abrego, & Rubin, 2014, p. 65). As teachers who are held accountable in guiding our students’ growth throughout the school year, students who come in your classroom facing many challenges in regards to learning can easily become overwhelming and difficult in adding to the stress we already feel with students who speak English. ELLs are prevalent in our classrooms more and more, and we need to equip our teachers with any teaching strategies that will accelerate that growth to bridge that gap from their English speaking peers. Each student comes into our classroom with a different background and challenges, which we yearn to learn as we are a crucial part in their educational journey. When it comes to ELLs, they add a whole other complexity to our day.

### **EL Cluster**

For the past 4 years I taught in second grade and had the English Language Learner Cluster (EL cluster). I would have anywhere from 6-10 students that came from different backgrounds and English speaking ability. I happened upon that because I decided to go back into the classroom after the previous second grade teacher did not renew her contract. She had the ELLs for many years and a lot of training and prior experience. I was nervous and felt under qualified; however, I knew I would receive training throughout the year. If the ELLs were at our school the previous year, I received their World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) scores which gave me

background knowledge on their current level of English language proficiency. I would have students who spoke very little English, and students who were close to exiting English language support. Many times throughout that first year with this cluster I was overwhelmed in trying to reach all of my students. I often would spend my evenings reading article after article to try and learn new teaching strategies for ELLs. I am grateful that I began as an academic specialist prior to having a classroom, as I developed many teaching strategies for struggling learners. I was able to apply these strategies while learning the ins and outs of having my own classroom which was very instrumental in my teaching career. Towards the end of that school year, I had grown to appreciate the vast differences in my classroom compared to others, and found I had to look at instruction with my ELLs a little differently.

My husband was presented with a job opportunity, which resulted in an out of state move to Florida. I am currently at home with our two daughters with this transition and getting to know our new area. With this move and opportunity to start fresh at a new school, I have been thinking about where I would like to be when I go back in the classroom. Second grade has always had my heart, and through my past 4 years I have developed a passion with ELLs. I do not know what my opportunities will be, but I do want that work to include ELLs. I want to work with teachers of all levels in helping them acquire new teaching strategies specific to ELLs, however knowing they also benefit all learners. Since I was a young teacher with not much experience with ELLs when I had my first class, I do want this to be something helpful and worthwhile for those teachers in a similar situation, while benefiting all teachers and students as a whole.

## **Purpose**

The research question I decided to focus on is *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers*. The purpose of my research is to prepare teachers for ELLs they will encounter in their classroom each day (at one point or another in their teaching career) and how explicit vocabulary instruction will benefit them in reading. I know firsthand how exhausting it can be teaching strategy after strategy to my ELLs only to discover that they are not absorbing any of it or applying it incorrectly. I generally noticed it was due to lack of understanding, and I wanted to dive in deeper to be able to successfully teach my ELLs quality reading instruction.

**Why vocabulary instruction is important.** Vocabulary is one of five core components of reading instruction that are essential to successfully teach children how to read. These core components include phonemic awareness, phonics and word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). These five components are necessary for all students, and especially for ELLs when learning to read. I am striving to emphasize the importance of vocabulary instruction to improve the proficiency of readers with ELLs. Brassell (2009) states that vocabulary development ultimately leads to comprehension progress. It serves as a stepping stone in their reading progress (Brassell, 2009). Not only do we want our students to know how to read, we want them to understand their readings so their thinking can continue throughout and past the story. “Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas and content together... making

comprehension accessible for children” (Rupley, Logan & Nichols, 1998/99). The more ELLs can comprehend what they are reading, the deeper the meaning goes.

### **Proficient Readers**

Being a good reader is a skill that will carry you through your entire life. Your future is mainly dependent on your success in school and ties in to knowing how to read (Honig, 2001). Reading starts out with word recognition, and begins a stepping stone process to becoming a proficient reader. “Proficient readers recognize individual words and retrieve their meaning rapidly, effortlessly, and unconsciously” (Honig, 2001, p.19). Another characteristic of a proficient reader is being able to comprehend what you are reading, whether that is a short passage or a chapter book. Proficient readers are able to think about what they are reading, while they are reading it, and continue those thoughts and ideas past the end of their reading as well. If a student is comprehending the story, that student can reiterate back to the teacher what he/she just read through pictures, summaries in their own words, and being able to answer extension questions. In relation to ELLs who may be focused on word meaning/vocabulary in the text, that puts their ability to comprehend what they are reading to the back burner. This also relates to fluency in reading. If you are struggling to pronounce and understand a word, your energy is put into that and therefore your comprehension of a story will suffer.

### **Summary**

I believe ELLs bring a vast diversity to the classroom. As teachers, we want to reach all of our students and see growth throughout the year. I am hopeful that within my research and capstone project, I will be able to learn more about vocabulary instruction

and ELLs. My research question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?*, will lead me to literature that will help me create meaningful PD for our ELLs and their teachers who have them.

In chapter two, I discuss the literature pertaining to vocabulary instruction with ELLs. I will present a review of research regarding direct vocabulary instruction and indirect vocabulary instruction. Both strategies are imperative in teaching ELLs to become proficient readers. I will also present the importance and research for professional development.

Chapter three will be a description of my capstone project, professional development (PD). I discuss my intended audience, as well as my setting and reasoning for creating PD. Chapter 4 will be a reflection of this capstone project as an entirety. I will explain the limitations I had in creating the project, and will share my next steps as well.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

English Language Learners are prevalent in today's classroom. With the regard for schools and teachers being held accountable for inclusion of all students, Reeves (2006) states that “ELLs might receive ESL courses, but the students are mainstreamed for most, if not all, of the school day” (p. 132). With inclusion of all students in our classrooms, teachers need to have a variety of powerful teaching strategies to reach each student effectively. ELLs need understanding of what they are reading to be able to make connections and deepen their meanings throughout texts. The purpose of this literature review is to answer the research question: *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?* This section reviews effective instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs) in the classroom and specifically related to vocabulary within reading instruction.

#### English Language Learners

English language learners come to our classrooms today in the process of learning English. ELLs range in variety of levels and backgrounds, which is where it can be difficult as a teacher to reach all of their needs and help them attain the English language proficiently. ELLs needs are vast; however, they still are awarded quality education (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2006). Quality instruction needs to be specific when

teaching ELLs, not just best practice across the board. According to Gregory and Burkman (2012):

Providing high-quality instruction using research-based strategies is not enough when working with students who are learning English, in large part because the strategies are being applied across the board with little differentiation between student populations. Students who learn English after they start school have a special barrier that cannot be broken down by applying mass instructional strategies. (p. 2)

Burkman and Gregory bring up the point of differing levels and backgrounds of ELLs. They could be able to hold a conversation in English, but when it comes to academic work, they begin to fall behind because they do not have the tools and strategies to understand what they are being taught. “Some ELLs have developed reading and writing skills in English while others have only developed oral proficiency in their second language. Some ELLs started to learn English in their countries of origin while others arrive in the United States not speaking any English” (Rodriguez et al., 2014 p. 64). Wallace also refers to this predicament of ELLs coming with a wide variety of backgrounds, and states that students must attain appropriate vocabulary to become a proficient reader. “Students learning to read in their first language grasp 5,000-7,000 words before formal reading in school begins, while ELLs don’t come close to their peers” (Wallace, 2007, p. 37). Thus brings the importance of finding out what each ELL knows beforehand and where they fall on their English language proficiency. Vaughn and Linan-Thompson mention a common mistake with teachers delaying instruction with

ELLs being behind in their language proficiency, which does not mean ELLs are not capable. “Students benefit from literacy instruction even when their proficiency in English is below age-level expectations” (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2007, p. 148).

There are five levels of English language proficiency (ELP), 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. There are four language domains that consist of “listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as developed by Margo Gottlieb, expert on assessment of language proficiency” (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2006, p. 10). ELLs at level one require visual support in their learning, and can then understand single step directions or statements. ELLs who are considered at level two proficiency still require visuals to make meaning of stories. They will benefit with short phrases and tasks. Level three ELLs are able to grasp more language and produce questions and comprehension skills from stories and conversations. Level four and five ELLs begin understanding grade level academic language, and find a close track with their native English speaking classmates. Through the suggestions of instructional strategies listed, regardless of the level the student is, vocabulary instruction is indicated as a purposeful teaching strategy with different variation in helping ELLs achieve level five (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2006). Therefore, teachers of ELLs need to be taught and provided specific teaching strategies based off the known research to attain English proficiency.

**English Language Learners in the classroom.** When teaching early elementary students, many strategies are taught to reach the goal of students mastering their grade level targets. When ELLs are a part of a classroom, they require purposeful, planned instruction throughout their day to make sure their learning expands to meaningful



connections and understanding. Learning how to read is a foundation that is necessary for each student. While ELLs come in with a disadvantage compared to their English speaking peers who have an English background, with quality instruction ELLs will succeed in the classroom.

Effective second language instruction provides a combination of a) explicit teaching that helps students directly and efficiently learn features of the second language such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage and b) ample opportunities to use the second language in meaningful and motivating situations. We do not know whether there is an “optimal” balance, much less what it might be. But there is every reason to believe that successful second language instruction comprises elements of both. What we need is a new generation of second language research that examines the nature of this balance and addresses whether, and what kind of, instruction can shorten the time required for ELLs to gain native or near-native English proficiency. (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 13)

Our overall goal is to have ELLs reach their grade level reading proficiency. In working to answer my research question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers*, I knew I had to find specific information in how ELLs fit into the mainstream classroom and best practice instruction for them. “The National Literacy Panel (NLP) found that ELLs learning to read in English, just like English speakers learning to read in English, benefit from explicit teaching of the components of literacy, such as phonemic

awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 17). Therefore, ELLs need similar instruction as non-ELLs, combined with explicit literacy strategies in reading. Explicit instruction should be implemented cross content as well for ELLs. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) state four reasons why below:

1. Language forms and vocabulary will develop as students study areas of interest.
2. Motivation plays a role in learning complex language
3. Teachers can activate and build on students’ prior knowledge in the content area
4. Language structure and form should be learned in authentic contexts rather than through contrived drills in language workbooks (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 23)

Authentic and purposeful learning can activate prior insight ELLs (and all students) may have. Any positive and motivational encouragement will strengthen all students’ desire to learn and put forth effort, instead of shutting down and becoming overwhelmed. (Hill & Flynn, 2006).

**English Language Learners’ reading instruction.** There are differing opinions when it comes to teaching ELLs. A study suggested that teaching English Language development (ELd) can be benefitted by a separate pull-out period.

“Researchers found that when a separate ELd block was used, students scored higher on a standardized measure of English oral language. Teachers spent more time on oral English and were more efficient and focused in their use of time” (Goldenberg, 2008,

p. 13). On the other side when no ELd block was utilized, oral English was not taught nearly as much, and although this was one study, having a separate block of ELd could have significant outcomes (Goldenberg, 2008).

However, other research argues oral language development and pulling students out of their mainstream classroom is a common misconception. Calderón and Minaya-Rowe (2006) stated this regarding vocabulary development “mainstream students and English Language Learners has shown promising practices for accelerating the learning of vocabulary as a precursor of reading and writing in both English as a second language and mainstream content area classroom” (p. 172). According to Barr, Eslami and Joshi (2012), effective literacy strategies are at the forefront of teaching ELLs, regardless if they are in a pull out program, dual language program, or the mainstream classroom. “With skilled, explicit instruction, many children who start school speaking little or no English can gain word reading and spelling skills equal to those of native speakers in two to three years” (Barr, Eslami & Joshi, 2012, p. 107). After ELLs achieve word reading and spelling skills, vocabulary and reading comprehension follow suit, and takes more time. Therefore purposeful and explicit vocabulary instruction will enhance their learning and have a positive outcome in becoming a skilled reader.

### **Proficient Reader**

What is a proficient reader? Becoming a proficient reader is a necessary building block for success throughout one's education and beyond. There are many aspects of reading instruction that contribute to being a successful reader. Elementary teachers are expected to teach, support, and guide each student on their reading journey, teaching

them strategies and comprehension skills to understand a text. When an ELL student comes into a classroom with minimal English, a teacher needs to have quality instruction and the ability to help that student become a proficient reader.

**Definition.** The National Reading Panel completed an analysis to determine the best approach to reading instruction. It was recommended that instruction included explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency, and comprehension skills and strategies (NICHD, 2000). Conventional reading and writing skills that are developed in the years from birth to age 5 have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008). That being said, ELLs who have limited English background are put at a disadvantage before they enter school and the gap widens from their English speaking peers. “Over the years, the focus of reading instruction has varied, shifting from decoding, to fluency, and, recently, to comprehension and word meaning” (Calderón, Sanchez, & Slavin, 2011, pp. 110-111). Since reading instruction and expectations have changed and become more rigorous, ELLs need to be equipped with the fundamentals of reading (Calderón et al., 2011).

**Florida state standards.** The state of Florida has specific standards for each of their students to master by the end of second grade as seen below. These state standards have many sub letters that make up each target for student mastery. Educators need to have full understanding of what is required of them in teaching these standards so they can provide quality and specific instruction to all of their students, and especially ELLs that they have in their classroom.

Cluster 3: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use	
STANDARD CODE	STANDARD
LAFS.2.L.3.4	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</li> <li>Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known prefix is added to a known word (e.g., happy/unhappy, tell/retell).</li> <li>Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., addition, additional).</li> <li>Use knowledge of the meaning of individual words to predict the meaning of compound words (e.g., birdhouse, lighthouse, housefly; bookshelf, notebook, bookmark).</li> <li>Use glossaries and beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases.</li> </ol> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 2: Basic Application of Skills &amp; Concepts</p>

LAFS.2.L.3.5	<p>Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., <i>describe foods that are spicy or juicy</i>).</li> <li>Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., <i>toss, throw, hurl</i>) and closely related adjectives (e.g., <i>thin, slender, skinny, scrawny</i>).</li> </ol> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 3: Strategic Thinking &amp; Complex Reasoning</p>
LAFS.2.L.3.6	<p>Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using adjectives and adverbs to describe (e.g., <i>When other kids are happy that makes me happy</i>).</p> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 1: Recall</p>

Strand: READING STANDARDS FOR LITERATURE	
Cluster 1: Key Ideas and Details	
STANDARD CODE	STANDARD
LAFS.2.RL.1.1	<p>Ask and answer such questions as <i>who, what, where, when, why, and how</i> to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.</p> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 2: Basic Application of Skills &amp; Concepts</p>
LAFS.2.RL.1.2	<p>Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.</p> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 3: Strategic Thinking &amp; Complex Reasoning</p>
LAFS.2.RL.1.3	<p>Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.</p> <p><i>Cognitive Complexity:</i> Level 2: Basic Application of Skills &amp; Concepts</p>

Figure #1. Second grade Florida reading standards for literature.

(<http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7539/urlt/lafs.pdf>)

## **Vocabulary Instruction**

The importance of vocabulary knowledge has long been recognized in the development of reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). Vocabulary instruction is imperative for all students, and can be taught throughout all content areas. Beck suggests 3 tiers for determining vocabulary. Tier one is defined as common everyday terms. Terms like open, see, give, help, play, ask are used in conversation everyday and most students come in knowing the meaning of tier one words. Tier two words are considered academic vocabulary and are important for students to grasp and fully understand. Words like analyze, compare, contrast, emphasize, and similar are found in a multitude of texts, hence their importance. Tier three words are contextual. They are specific to content reading and often pulled out or highlighted in text. Examples would be nocturnal and hibernation (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). These tier words extend cross content and through all part of their school day including Phy Ed, Music, and Art.

There are many teaching strategies that teachers use every day to help their students develop the skills and techniques to become proficient readers. Pictures and visuals that accompany simple tasks and for academic work is very important, especially if the ELL falls into level one or two of their English Language Proficiency. This section reviews vocabulary instruction and how it applies with ELLs.

“Students’ word knowledge is linked strongly to academic success because students who have large vocabularies can understand new ideas and concepts more quickly than students with limited vocabularies” (Sedita, 2005, p. 33). Furthermore, without vocabulary knowledge, comprehension of a text will be unattainable.

**Specific vocabulary instruction.** Teaching vocabulary words in a stand alone instance will not create meaningful connections with English Language Learners (ELLs). Academic vocabulary development is critical to success of all learners-particularly ELLs. Research findings indicate that vocabulary instruction for ELLs must be intentional (Sedita, 2005). Therefore, explicit vocabulary instruction is necessary in developing ELLs reading proficiency. In a small group setting, a direct instruction example would be before reading the story, the teacher would state the vocabulary word, share the definition, use the word multiple ways/opportunities and then having the students be able to give their own example to show they grasped the term and understanding. ELLs need to develop word meanings and strategies for reading comprehension, to ensure independent thinking will come thereafter. We have all come to know that we learn differently. Our students bring a variety of learning preferences into our classrooms each day. When ELLs bring limited English on top of that, teachers need to be intentional about their vocabulary instruction to their students. The National Reading Panel (2000) suggested there is not one tried and true method in vocabulary instruction. It must come from direct and indirect instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000).

**Indirect instruction.** How do you become exposed to new words if you cannot read? Especially if your family speaks another language other than English at home? At an elementary level, in the case of ELLs, indirect instruction is vital to learning new words. "Vocabulary instruction must also include indirect instruction methods, such as exposing students to lots of new words and having them read a lot" (Sedita, 2005, p. 2). Read alouds are a perfect example of indirect instruction that ELLs would benefit from in

vocabulary instruction. Butler et al. (2010) suggested repeated reading and frequent exposure to vocabulary words would result in increased word knowledge. According to Baumann, Kame'enui & Ash, "Indirect instruction also includes helping students develop an appreciation for words and experience enjoyment and satisfaction in their use" (Sedita, 2005, p. 3). In doing so, ELLs will hopefully expose themselves to more vocabulary on top of direct instruction that is coming from their teachers.

**Direct instruction.** Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) explained direct vocabulary instruction as "teaching specific words, such as pre-teaching vocabulary prior to reading a selection" (Sedita, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, since we are unable to teach all of the words, we need to be particular and intentional about the words we directly teach to our ELLs. Providing multiple exposures to each word is necessary for ELLs to fully understand word meaning and being able to showcase in the correct context (Nisbet & Tindall, 2015).

Nisbet and Tindall (2015) laid out a step by step process in introducing a new vocabulary words with the see/hear/say/write method, explained below:

1. Present the word in written form for all students to see
2. Point to the word and say "this word is circumference"
3. Invite students to read the word with you. "Say it with me."
4. Have students read the word chorally. "Now say it together."
5. Have students say the word to a partner. "Turn to your partner and take turns saying the word."



6. Have students write the word on the front of a reference card, saying the word quietly as they write it. “Now, write the word here (teacher points to her card) on the front of your reference card.” (p. 77)

This strategy would benefit a small group or whole class activity, and could also add onto this process with additional methods for further instruction if necessary.

Another method of direct instruction is The STAR MODEL, which stands for: Select, Teach, Activate/Analyze/Apply and Revisit. S stands for Select, and in selecting a word something to remember is making sure it is essential to the understanding of the text. T is for Teach, representing teaching the word(s) before, during and after the reading. A stands for Activate, Analyze, and Apply, where you turn over responsibility to the students. Students can find the word, explain definition, and use the word in sentence or appropriate context. The last letter, R, is for Revisit. The selected words should arise again. Throughout the story, discussion questions, writing prompts, and other writing tasks such as graphic organizers. You want these terms to be connected and used thoroughly (Blachowicz, Fisher, & Watts-Taffe, 2005).

Direct vocabulary instruction is bringing attention to words. “Direct instruction of specific words can include teaching the multiple meanings of some words, different word associations (such as antonyms and synonyms), and word concepts (such as related concept words and categories of words)” (Sedita, 2005, p. 2). All students need to have their word meanings clear and in student friendly language, and this is especially important for ELLs. By having students understand the word meaning in the correct context, students will be able to gradually add to their vocabulary bank and build up their

word consciousness. In doing so, that adheres to their reading skills in becoming proficient readers. (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Instructing teachers on how to effectively teach vocabulary instruction will not only benefit ELLs but also will help solidify all student's vocabulary foundation.

### **Professional development.**

Staff inservice days, workshops, seminars, and conferences are a part of being a teacher and growing with the ever changing world of education. Thomas Guskey is widely known for his work in professional learning and educational change. He stresses the importance of any professional learning opportunity, is dependent on how well it is planned from the beginning. Guskey (2014) states, when it comes to planning professional development, student learning outcomes needs to be the first step. Which means we are planning backwards to break down what we want to accomplish and taking it step by step (Guskey, 2014). Guskey lays out steps to plan effective PD as (1) discuss and decide on end results/goals for student learning. (2) Finding new practices to be implemented - ones that are research based and verified quality. (3) Organizational support - making sure everyone is on board and giving teachers time, materials, and support to plan and prepare. Planning to give feedback is also critical, so teachers know the new practices are working. (4) Education knowledge - making sure teachers are aware of what they are required to know, and how to implement in their classroom efficiently. (5) Ideal learning opportunities - after following the steps shared above, plan and find the most ideal opportunities to get the desired information across (Guskey, 2014, p. 15-16).

Cooper (2004) stated there are four critical components to help teachers learn new strategies and skills as stated in the table below:

1. Presentation of theory
2. Demonstration of the strategy or skill
3. Initial practice in the workshop
4. Prompt feedback about their teaching.

In compiling teaching strategies for explicit vocabulary instruction, teachers will be presented with the theory and research, be shown a demonstration of how to teach to ELLs and all students. Then I will have a few practices and throughout observations following the PD, I will observe and provide feedback to create quality PD (Cooper, 2004).

## Figure

**Figure 2**

**A Summary of the Steps in the Model for Effective Professional Development**

STEP	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
<b>1. Theory</b>	Present underlying definitions, research, and rationale.	The assessment technique of using a decoding screening test is presented. The definitions and research related to the procedure are presented.
<b>2. Demonstration</b>	Show the teachers how "it" is done.	Techniques for teaching phonemic awareness are learned. The trainer models each technique by using the teachers as students.
<b>3. Practice and Feedback</b>	Give teachers time to try the procedure and provide a critique of their efforts.	The technique of semantic mapping has been taught as a way to expand meaning vocabulary. Teachers practice the technique with their colleagues by constructing several semantic maps for words that are included in a particular selection. Under the direction of the trainer, they discuss how they did and receive input from their colleagues and the trainer.
<b>4. Coaching and Follow-up</b>	Provide observation, feedback, and additional support.	After attending a workshop on comprehension strategies, teachers return to their schools. Each teacher selects one strategy to model for his/her class. A mentor colleague observes the lesson and makes suggestions for improvements. At the monthly staff meeting, teachers share the results of their lessons and discuss the feedback.

*Figure #2 - Steps for Effective Professional Development*

### Summary

My research question is *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?* When I began researching ELLs and how to further them in becoming proficient readers, I kept finding vocabulary instruction as a connection. The research that I have discussed above shows ELLs and the variables they bring to our classrooms. As early elementary educators, one of our larger goals is to teach our students the fundamentals in reading. That entails learning how to read and comprehending what you have read overall. Vocabulary instruction, whether direct or indirectly taught, will enhance and benefit ELLs as they become proficient readers.

In chapter three, I explain the professional development (PD) literature and tools that I will create from my research. I explain the importance of the research and findings with ELLs and vocabulary instruction.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

#### Introduction

Our classrooms and education as a whole are constantly evolving. Because of this, as teachers we need to equip ourselves with continuous learning to reach all of our learners we have in our classrooms today. My research question is *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?* When we have ELLs come into our classrooms, we need to have adequate teaching skills to meet the needs of all of our early elementary students to become proficient readers. We are given multiple PD opportunities throughout the year; however, it is not always ELL focused, and teachers do not always have that background knowledge in adapting to best practices for ELLs. “Professional learning is the link between teachers’ individual skills and knowledge and the contribution they make to a school district and students” (Vracar, 2015, p. 1). By developing PD, I hope to bridge the gaps for ELLs in their reading and to make a difference in becoming proficient readers.

#### Project

For my project, I am focusing on PD. According to Sparks and Richardson, “Professional development focuses on knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of teachers, administrators, and other school employees that are directed toward all students learning at high levels of achievement” (Cooper, 2004, p. 1). I have noticed through my research of our community that there are increasing numbers of ELLs, but there was not a quality plan in place when it comes to teaching early elementary ELLs how to become

proficient readers. Teachers in my community are required to take ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses, however they do not complete with their team or school community, but independently. Therefore, it is difficult to know which teachers are implementing and using daily in their classrooms. I wanted to encourage and educate the teachers who are working with ELLs in their classrooms each day. Many of our strategies and skills we teach all learners are very important and essential in becoming a proficient reader. With ELLs, I believe vocabulary instruction needs to be held to a critical importance. I created a powerpoint, to be easily viewed by the staff during the PD and then can be sent to them afterward for future reference. The powerpoint will have research based information on ELLs and vocabulary instruction related to reading instruction. It will also showcase teaching strategies on how to effectively teach vocabulary instruction imbedded in a small group for reading instruction. Teachers will be shown examples of explicit vocabulary instruction during the PD, and then have an opportunity to practice. Then myself and instructional coaches will be giving feedback after observations following the PD in their classroom setting.

### **Research.**

The National Literacy Panel (NLP) found that ELLs learning to read in English, just like English speakers learning to read in English, benefit from explicit teaching of the components of literacy, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 17).

The NLP stated how important it is to explicitly teach the literacy components, and with that, explained ELLs will benefit by doing so. “When English Language

Learners struggle with reading comprehension, it can often be attributed to their difficulty with understanding the vocabulary” (Sibold, 2011, p. 24). With this information, we as teachers need to understand the importance and learn quality teaching strategies to help our ELLs succeed as English readers. As school communities, we need to expose the need for PD for our ELLs to support all of our students and their academic needs that us as teachers are not reaching. “School based professional learning promotes greater consistency in instruction, taps the expertise within schools, contributes to vertical alignment of a curriculum, and offers sustained support over time for continued refinement of instruction that leads to increased student achievement” (Killion, 2012, p. 18). This professional learning that is completed will ultimately increase student achievement, which is something our entire school community aspires to accomplish each day.

**Setting.** The setting of this project was completed in North Florida. I created PD for all teachers and staff. There are 52 employees on staff. The demographics for that school community are 89% white, 5.6% black, 5.1% Asian, and of that, 6.4% are Hispanic (St Johns County School District, 2016/2017). The above information was found on the St. Johns County district website, at <http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/about/>. As it is evident by the demographics, incoming ELLs in this district are very much a minority and needed to have effective and imperative instruction to help ELLs achieve reading proficiency. This school is well established, and has been similar for the past 10+ years in regards to their socio economic class, along with similar backgrounds in demographics based off the St. Johns County Census Population (article 1) . That has



now started to evolve, which is causing some shift in teaching strategies in order to reach all students effectively.

This PD will take place at the school, during a staff inservice day, where teachers can have work time after the session with their team/colleagues to develop appropriate lessons based on the PD for their students. It is most beneficial to hold this PD at the beginning of the year, where teachers can start right away adding vocabulary instruction to their lessons for their ELL students. However as teachers we are always accommodating with the ebb and flow of our classrooms, and any new learning in regards to ELLs can be applied when the information is presented. Also, ELLs are often move ins and may not start at the beginning of the year, which is why it is critical to educate all teachers, as most likely they will have an English language learner in their classroom one day.

**Participants.** The intended audience of my project was the staff at the Kindergarten-5th grade elementary school in my community. After discussing with a few teachers in the school community, they shared that they did not have much PD regarding ELLs, so this will be beneficial for all teaching staff, academic specialists, and teacher aides that will be working with ELLs day to day to help them become proficient readers.

**Timeline.** I completed a draft of chapters one through three in May 2017. Through the summer of 2017, I edited and added where necessary, discussing with my content reviewer as well. I took my capstone completion course in the fall of 2017 and continued developing, researching and editing my capstone paper and project. I

completed my capstone project in December of 2017. I would be able to present to staff in Spring of 2018, or Fall 2018 in the new school year.

### **Summary**

In chapter three, I described my audience, the setting, and the reasoning for my project I created. The professional development (PD) for teachers will effectively showcase the research and importance of vocabulary instruction, as well as how to teach vocabulary instruction to ELLs to become proficient readers.

Chapter four will recount my stand out learnings throughout this project, and any new learnings I have found through research and developing my project. I will discuss the most important literature I discovered, and how I find that valuable. I will also describe how I will utilize this project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

With the ever growing ELL population in our schools, I felt the need to prepare our teachers thoroughly in how to effectively teach ELLs. I know as teachers we want to reach all of our students that enter our room each day, regardless of where they come from and their past experiences. Being on target for reading proficiency is crucial for each student at the end of their academic year to continuously build onto their foundation of learning.

My research question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers*, has given me a broader understanding and appreciation of the foundations of reading in general. Since I was evaluating how explicit vocabulary instruction in the classroom will benefit ELLs greatly in their reading journey, I focused on analyzing reading strategies, techniques, and the foundations of literacy as a whole. There are many interventions that are available and put in place for struggling readers, however, I wanted to break down the fundamentals of vocabulary instruction to specifically reach and support ELLs in their reading journey.

#### Chapter Four Preview

In this chapter I will share how explicit vocabulary instruction ultimately benefits ELLs in becoming proficient readers. I will explain the research that supports those findings, and how to implement in the classroom each day. I will also discuss how

continuous and purposeful professional development for teachers is imperative in our ever changing world of education as we grow and learn more about the students we teach each day.

### **ELLs**

When I first had my classroom and the EL cluster, I was quite overwhelmed and ill prepared. I did not know much about teaching ELLs, only from what I had gathered as an academic specialist, however in that instance I only worked with my students for about 20 minutes a day. Having ELLs in your class all day was much more intensified when it came to their daily learning. With ELLs, not only do you need to know where they are academically, you need to address what they understand and know in English. Like I referenced earlier, ELLs can have a conversation in English, play well and communicate with their peers, but may not have academic language to understand and learn from subject to subject (Burkman & Gregory, 2012). It is imperative to learn where your ELLs are at academically, so you can meet the needs of their learning.

I do feel that it is important to note that every student wants (and needs) to succeed throughout their school day. When teaching ELLs, it is imperative to keep in mind that while they may be behind their English speaking peers, they need to feel successful. Motivation is a key factor in student moral and helps encourage student achievement, rather than students feeling defeated from their language deficiency (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

### **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction and ELLs**

Throughout this project I have learned the difference between explicit vocabulary instruction and implicit vocabulary instruction, along with strategies to support instruction. I had not realized how much I deferred to implicit (in the moment) vocabulary instruction at the beginning of my teaching career, and while that definitely has an importance, explicit instruction for ELLs builds sets a foundation in their literacy journey. Research has showed how critical explicit vocabulary instruction is for ELLs to become proficient readers. According to August et al. 2005, “ELLs know fewer words and are less likely to fully comprehend the meanings of words compared to their English-only learner peers” (Crevecoeur et al., 2015, p. 52). Since word recognition is the beginning point in the process of becoming a proficient reader, explicit vocabulary instruction will accelerate the growth ELLs depend on. (Honig, 2001). I know that explicit vocabulary instruction of tier two words will help ELLs grasp the literature they are reading, and build on their foundation of reading.

### **Professional Development**

I have gained a vast amount of knowledge from countless Professional Development opportunities in my teaching career. I knew I wanted to share my learnings about ELLs and realized early on that PD would be a wonderful opportunity. I took Guskey’s (2014) approach of developing the outcomes I want to accomplish in regards to ELLs and explicit vocabulary instruction and worked backwards through the PD. Cooper (2004) lays out a four step process for PD that I also referred to while creating my project. Cooper and Guskey have similar approaches, and I believe those foundations helped me create a meaningful and effective presentation. In Cooper’s (2004) process,

your first step is to state the theory by explaining what new learnings you are sharing and defining them. The next step is to demonstrate that theory by showing techniques, model examples. Once those two steps have been executed, give teachers an opportunity to practice and then provide feedback/critique where necessary. This allows teachers to practice and feel more comfortable with what you are asking them to do and transfer their learning into practice. Outside the PD, share that coaching and follow ups will be conducted formally and informally. I wanted to follow this approach when creating my PD, as I would personally have a better response to any learning through PD I was a part of when I was able to see the material presented and demonstrated. I also appreciated when I was given an opportunity to incorporate my new learnings into my students and classroom during the PD, rather than after when I would immediately be pulled in many other directions the moment the PD ended.

I created my project through Google slides, and will take about 40-45 minutes to present, including work time. I included background knowledge on ELLs, and vital information on the main points to address my research question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers*. With examples and demonstrations throughout the presentation, I am confident teachers will be able to incorporate explicit vocabulary instruction throughout their days following the PD. The presentation can be shared with teachers following the presentation, so they are able to refer back when planning if needed.

### **Limitations of Project**

I anticipated limitations in condensing material and sharing quality but matter of fact information for my professional development presentation. However as I was creating the project, and knowing I was also on a time limit for my presentation, I struggled with what research to include to best suit my goals. It forced me to reduce quite a bit of information and that was difficult to determine what was most necessary and beneficial for my research question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers?* As a teacher who has struggled with ELLs in the classroom, knowing I can use specific instruction that will benefit my students, I wanted to share all I had learned.

I know those challenges are minor, and also know they will continue to drive my research in regards to ELLs and best practice methods to share with my colleagues to better reach our students effectively.

### **Future Work**

I will be using this PD to educate teachers in how to teach vocabulary instruction explicitly in their day to day teaching. There are so many levels of progression in teaching any student how to read, let alone when discussing ELLs. I plan to continue researching best practice instruction for ELLs, and take that knowledge and information back to the classroom and to my colleagues. If the opportunity presents itself, I would enjoy presenting more information about ELLs and how to further their reading instruction in the future.

### **Conclusion**

As a teacher who had multiple ELLs in my classroom each year, I knew my research was going to be geared in that direction. I was highly invested and wanted to learn how to use research based teaching with my ELLs. I was especially searching in regards to teaching them how to read. My question, *How does explicit vocabulary instruction lead English Language Learners in early elementary ages to become proficient readers*, came from trying my tried and true strategies I had used countless times through the years with my English speaking students. When my ELLs were consistently behind and lacking in their reading and comprehension skills, I decided to dig deep and search what was best for reading and ELLs. I was constantly brought back to vocabulary instruction. I have found that the research supports explicit vocabulary instruction, especially of tier two words, to benefit ELLs in efforts to becoming proficient readers. It is a necessary building block in their foundation of literacy skills and development.

I believe my project will benefit ELLs that arrive each day in our classrooms, and the teachers who are a part of the PD will hopefully become more aware of the critical impact vocabulary instruction has with ELLs. I have thoroughly enjoyed researching and although I am finished with this project, I will always be trying to bridge the gap between ELLs and their English speaking peers, while enjoying the rich culture and diversity they bring to our classrooms each day.



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## APPENDIX A:

## St. Johns County Economic and Demographic status

## St. Johns County

Florida's 24th most populous county

with 1.1% of Florida's population



## Population

	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Census Population</b>		
1980 Census	51,303	9,746,961
1990 Census	83,829	12,938,071
% change 1980-90	63.4%	32.7%
2000 Census	123,135	15,982,824
% change 1990-00	46.9%	23.5%
2010 Census	190,039	18,801,332
% change 2000-10	54.3%	17.6%
<b>Age</b>		
% Under 18 years of age	23.1%	21.3%
% 65 years of age and over	15.7%	17.3%
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>		
% White alone	89.3%	75.0%
% Black or African American alone	5.6%	16.0%
% Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	5.2%	22.5%
<b>Estimates and Projections</b>		
2016 Estimate	220,257	20,148,654
% change 2010-16	15.9%	7.2%
2020 Projection based on 2015 estimate	253,643	21,372,207
% change 2015-20	15.2%	6.1%
2025 Projection based on 2015 estimate	292,217	22,799,508
% change 2020-25	15.2%	6.7%
2015 Median Age	42.8	41.5
<b>Density</b>		
Persons per square mile		
2000	202.2	296.4
2010	316.4	350.6
2016	366.7	375.7

## Households and Family Households

	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Households</b>		
Total households, 2000 Census	49,614	6,338,075
Family households, 2000 Census	34,103	4,210,760
% with own children under 18	42.5%	42.3%
Total households, 2010 Census	75,338	7,420,802
Family households, 2010 Census	52,223	4,835,475
% with own children under 18	42.8%	40.0%
Average Household Size, 2010 Census	2.49	2.48
Average Family Size, 2010 Census	2.95	3.01

According to Census definitions, a household includes all of the people who occupy a housing unit. The occupants may be a single family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated people who share living quarters. A family includes a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. Census counts may be corrected for Census Count Question Resolution (CCR).

## Housing

	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Housing Counts</b>		
Housing units, 2000 Census	58,008	7,302,947
Occupied	49,614	6,337,929
Owner-occupied	37,886	4,441,799
Renter-occupied	11,728	1,896,130
Vacant	8,394	965,018
Housing units, 2010 Census	89,830	8,989,580
Occupied	75,338	7,420,802
Owner-occupied	57,862	4,998,979
Renter-occupied	17,476	2,421,823
Vacant	14,492	1,568,778
<b>Units Permitted</b>		
1990	1,168	126,384
2000	2,484	155,269
2010	1,268	38,679
2011	1,491	42,360
2012	2,190	64,810
2013	2,801	86,752
2014	2,786	84,075
2015	3,026	109,924

## Population Characteristics

	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Language spoken at home other than English</b>		
Persons aged 5 and over	8.4% +/- 0.7%	28.1% +/- 0.1%
<b>Place of birth</b>		
Foreign born	6.8% +/- 0.6%	19.7% +/- 0.1%
<b>Veteran status</b>		
Civilian population 18 and over	12.1% +/- 0.6%	9.7% +/- 0.1%

## Residence 1 Year Ago

	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Persons aged 1 and over</b>		
Same house	82.9% +/- 1.2%	83.8% +/- 0.1%
Different house in the U.S.	16.2% +/- 1.2%	15.2% +/- 0.1%
Same county in Florida	7.1% +/- 0.9%	9.4% +/- 0.1%
Different county in Florida	5.2% +/- 0.8%	3.1% +/- 0.1%
Different county in another state	3.9% +/- 0.7%	2.8% +/- 0.1%
Abroad	0.8% +/- 0.3%	0.9% +/- 0.1%

+/- = margin of error based on a 90% confidence level.

## Employment by Industry

	St. Johns County	Florida	Percent of All Establishments 2015	St. Johns County	Florida
<b>Number of Establishments 2015</b>					
All industries	6,495	642,518	All industries	6,495	642,518
Natural Resource & Mining	55	5,385	Natural Resource & Mining	0.8%	0.8%
Construction	661	61,674	Construction	10.2%	9.6%
Manufacturing	140	19,590	Manufacturing	2.2%	3.0%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	1,287	139,815	Trade, Transportation and Utilities	19.8%	21.8%
Information	98	10,369	Information	1.5%	1.6%