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Pamela Magistad  
*Hamline University*

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ENGLISH LEARNERS AND ACADEMIC SPEAKING

by

Pamela Magistad

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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Primary Advisor: Julia Reimer  
Content Reviewer: Pam Rausch  
Peer Reviewer: Maddie Hillier  
Peer Reviewer: Ciera Nelson-Cheeseman

To Eric, whose love, encouragement, and support make everything seem possible.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

I stood at the back of the classroom observing the fifth grade mainstream teacher introducing the language arts vocabulary for the week. She was energetic and upbeat as she called out each word and had the students repeat it. Afterwards, she read the definition and examples displayed on the Smartboard. Later, I was observing in a first grade classroom and students were listening quietly to the teacher read a story to the whole group. At the end of the day, I went in to help second grade students with their writing. Students were working quietly on their own. After a couple weeks of “pushing in” to mainstream classes to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) services, I began to think about the low academic speaking scores that I had seen from the last year’s language proficiency assessment. Originally, I had attributed these low scores to the number of English Learners (ELs) whom I had been told were shy, and I had thought about how awkward students must feel sitting together in a room each speaking into their own microphone and being recorded. I knew that students were expected to give extended, academic verbal responses (described in Chapter Two) for the speaking portion of the language assessment, but I wondered how was I helping prepare them for this. The answer was easy, I wasn’t. I felt, in fact, that I was not developing their ability to speak academically at all, and my general sense of their mainstream classes was that the

classroom teachers were not cultivating this either. I began to consider ways that I could foster speaking skills in my classroom, and this led me to the guiding question for this capstone: *What educational strategies develop elementary EL students' academic English speaking skills?*

In this chapter, I will give context and rationale to my project by describing my journey to becoming an ESL teacher and the evolution of my teaching practice from push-in ESL to pull-out ESL, the context of my school, and the impact these had on my vision of concentrating on academic speaking skills. I will also describe how my initial teaching strategies for speaking were shaped and refined as I began working with students and identify some of the successes and known flaws of my early endeavors. Additionally, I will provide the interests of the stakeholders as developing student academic speaking skills applies.

### **My Background**

I began my teaching career in urban Las Vegas, Nevada, in January of 2006. I was hired mid-year to teach sixth grade English language arts. Walking in my first day, the special education co-teacher for the first period said, "Don't bother using the books. They can't read them." My confidence deflated and the poetry lesson that I had planned fell flat. I went home and cried and then started over with lesson plans for the rest of the week. My license was in secondary English language arts; I had been taught to discuss literature, teach writing, and refine grammar, not to teach students to read. Over the next few years, I began to figure out ways that I could support students in their reading, and in their writing. I picked up tips from other teachers and went to professional

developments. I created structure to the classroom while also allowing students to try new things and explore. I used images to provide background knowledge. I discussed vocabulary before students encountered it in their reading. I held high expectations. I used graphic organizers and we completed whole group essays. Students gave presentations on classrooms of the future, featuring iPad type desks and foretelling apps to come, and created and played challenging punctuation board games. I felt pretty successful, but what I didn't know was that I was already teaching ESL.

My classes in Las Vegas contained a high number of EL students, but I mistook their ability to carry on a casual conversation and answer class questions with just a couple words as having the language that they also needed, academic language, to be successful in their mainstream classes. I was confused as to why so many of my students struggled with reading and even more with writing. I secretly blamed this on what I assumed were ineffective teachers in the elementary, and I thought the students just needed more motivation to try harder.

In my second and third year, the school hired an ESL specialist to do staff development and work with teachers. I found that the staff developments were interesting and I did glean a great deal of ideas from them for things such as flip books and organizers and filling in background knowledge, but I was still missing the big picture. I was only half listening to these presentations because I did not think that my students were real ELs. My students were born in the US and had been in US schools since kindergarten. Sure, they might have been classified as ELs in kindergarten, but they weren't still language learners—they didn't even have accents. I used some of the



techniques the ESL specialist presented, but I just did not believe that my students' reading and writing concerns were due to English being their second language. The ESL specialist had provided ideas for supporting students but she had not given me a full understanding of EL students.

After five and a half years of teaching, I left Las Vegas for an adventure in France. With a partner, I opened a small restaurant in Avignon, France. I knew very little French, having only listened to language learning CDs in my car. I relied heavily on translators to write the menu and teach me what to say to customers, but by the time we opened, I had a pretty good level of expertise in discussing the menu, options, prices and amounts, and pleasantries. However, if customers veered off these topics, even just a little, I was stymied and they received only a blank stare as my brain tried desperately to figure out what they had said and how to respond before a reasonable amount of time had gone by. Going out of the restaurant was always difficult, and I planned not only where I was going, but what I was going to say when I got there. I considered possible responses and looked up various verb tenses depending on how the French speaker might phrase the question or answer. I refused to answer the phone; I couldn't understand what speakers were saying, and they couldn't understand me. I was always relieved to encounter sympathetic service people and felt angered and shamed by those who treated me as though I were stupid. After a year and a half, just as I was starting to be able to truly talk to friends, I decided to come home.

Both my experience teaching in Las Vegas and working in France set the stage for my desire to become an ESL teacher. I wanted to go back into teaching and I had a new

level of understanding of what it is like be a language learner. Sitting in ESL licensure classes I got one aha moment after another like electric shocks. Over and over I thought, *I wish I had known that when I was teaching in Vegas! I could have... I should have...* I could bring up in my mind specific lessons during which I missed the mark because I did not understand the true needs of my EL students, and I wondered just how many times I had said something really uniformed and insensitive to students or their families.

### **Context**

I am currently in my second year teaching ESL at a rural K-12 school in the upper Midwest. The elementary and high school are located in one building which constitutes the whole district, and I am the entire ESL department. At this site, EL students comprise approximately 10% of the total population of the district (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019b). When I began teaching at the school (2017/2018), all of the students spoke Spanish as their home language. At the end of last year, a family of five siblings ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade, whose home language is Hmong, moved into the district. At the beginning of the current school year, two elementary students whose home language is Russian enrolled. The majority of EL students of all home languages at my site, both elementary and high school, began preschool or kindergarten in schools in the U.S. and have functional conversational speaking skills by the time that they complete first grade and have little or no accent.

When I started at the school, I *pushed-in* to the mainstream classrooms. This meant that I would go into the mainstream classroom, usually during language arts classes, and give support to the EL students in the classroom. As discussed in the next

section, a couple months into the first school year, I switched to *pull-out ESL*, which is taking the EL students from their mainstream classes and teaching them in a separate room. All elementary students have 26 minutes of music each day, and I pull small groups of two to five students from their music class twice per week. This is functional, but not ideal.

### **Rationale**

When I began working at my current site, I followed the push-in program from previous years and the previous teacher. Though I have always been skeptical of the efficacy and efficiency of push-in programs, I was new to the district and to the profession and wanted to keep an open mind. I was hopeful that this could transition into a co-teaching situation, but I was simultaneously doubtful that co-teaching could be accomplished effectively when working with all the teachers grades kindergarten through twelfth. Indeed, I could not make it effective. I found myself standing on the sidelines as the mainstream teacher presented the lesson and then working with EL students on their given assignments. I found this problematic for several reasons, the most important of which being the fact that I wasn't really doing anything to further my students' language development.

Being the entire ESL department and having flexible administrators, I was in the position to change the program, but I felt that I needed to present to them a reasonable rationale for pulling students out of classes before I made any major changes. The first thing, in my mind, that I had to justify was what I was going to be teaching students that was worthy enough to have them miss something in their mainstream classes. I have

seen, through substitute teaching, practicums, and student teaching, ESL teachers pulling students out of the mainstream classroom to do the exact same kind of literacy activities that the students would have done in their mainstream classroom. This has never seemed to me to be a logical use of students' time, as much time is wasted gathering students and walking to and from classrooms.

One day, standing at the back of the room while the teacher presented the lesson, I began to think about how EL students get the same classroom instruction as students whose first language is English, but how different it could be when EL students go home. I thought about how my own childhood language experiences set me up to be successful in school and how EL students may not have access to the same kinds of language experiences.

For example, I might have learned about photosynthesis and then gone home to tell my parents about it. They would have listened, smiled and nodded like it was the first time they had ever heard about it. Then they would have asked me questions to lead me to clarity or an even deeper understanding of the concept. But how would this play out if the parent spoke little or no English? The student might be excited to tell his or her parent about the new concept learned in science that day, but when he or she starts to discuss it, the parent does not know the word *photosynthesis* in English and the child does not know it in the home language. I thought of numerous scenarios from there, often ending in frustration on the part of the student and the parent. This is not to say that all EL parents are unfamiliar with academic terms in English or that the parents and students do not whip out their phones and translator apps to work out the discussion, it was just

my musings on the advantages of native English speakers. The keyword here being *speaker*. I was thinking about how very much my parents and I talked about concepts that I had learned in school. We talked, and talked, and talked. I became comfortable speaking with and to adults, and I was adept at changing my register from casual discussions with peers to academic language with adults. I excelled at school with little effort. Standing at the back of the class that day, I wondered how this role was, if at all, being filled for my EL students.

At this time, I felt very strongly that I needed to pull the students out of the classroom and work on more focused language skills, and I felt my students' academic speaking skills had to become a priority. By this, however, I never intended to only teach speaking skills. Speaking is not the end game; I am not hoping to create professional orators, nor am I just looking to boost their speaking scores on the WIDA test. Speaking skills are communication tools, and am hoping to help students use speaking to communicate their ideas more effectively and learn through discussion. I think back to times in my academic career when I would read information required for a class. I would think throughout the reading, *Yes, I get this*. But, if I had to present what I had learned to the class or discuss it with a partner, I had to read and reread. I had to find keywords that were necessary to talk about the topic. I had to think about the reading much more and focus on the structure and details. I had to know enough about the reading to formulate coherent sentences. I had to understand the vocabulary and be able to pronounce the words. In short, I had to truly understand what I had read, not just follow along. I want my students to be able to do this, among many other uses of academic speaking. When I

refer to *focus* on these skills, I mean within a program that also supports vocabulary development, listening, reading, and writing.

The first question that I needed answered by research, however, was whether or not focusing on speaking was a good idea. In my experience, all of the other ESL teachers that I have worked with focused more on literacy skills—reading and writing. Speaking is one of the four language domains and students are tested for progress in academic speaking yearly, so it definitely has importance. My gut also told me, for all the reasons that I just discussed, that it is important to focus on speaking, but since it is a little different than what others seem to be doing, I really wanted confirmation from the experts.

### **Initial Efforts**

The next challenge became structuring a program in which elementary students were each acquiring academic speaking and discussion skills. But at the same time, it was still necessary to provide reading support on the grade level texts that I was providing for the basis of our discussions, so that students had the comprehension of the material they needed in order to speak confidently about the text. I began by identifying vocabulary words that students would need in order to comprehend the text and by creating a slideshow. I used images that would illustrate visual words, lowering the cognitive load of the new vocabulary set.

Initially, I was unsure how I was going to motivate students and provide the language supports to speak confidently and on topic, but eventually I realized that the slides would work well for this too. I created the first slide for each vocabulary word

with a kid-friendly definition at the top and an image to support the concept and then created the following slides to provide opportunities for the students to practice. Prior to reading a text, we would go through the slides. For each vocabulary word, I would show the first slide, explain what it meant, and give several examples. On the second slide, I provided images for students to discuss using the vocabulary word. I labeled some of the images and also included some sentence frames for more difficult vocabulary. As this activity developed, I started adding more slides and more images.

I had a chart on which I would give students a check mark for each time they successfully (or approached successfully) used the vocabulary word. This quickly evolved into a competition as students not only attempted to use the current word for check marks but also past vocabulary or other “quality words” (a term I created on the fly which means concise words or perfectly descriptive words) within their sentences. I would also clarify the meaning and add phrases and collocations to the documents as we engaged in the activity. The students beg to do the Vocabulary Challenge, as I eventually named it, and I feel the students produce good quality oral sentences. As an example from last year, mid-year second grade students were going to be reading an article about flying cars. Included in the article and therefore also in my slideshow were the words *design*, *maneuver*, *prototype*, and *engineer*. Near the end of the slideshow I had placed an image of a small remote control airplane next to a car. One student raised her hand and stated, “The engineers designed the prototype to maneuver through the air.” Granted, this is my best example, but this reassured me that I was on the right track.

### **Room for Improvement**

The slides took a good deal of educational time, so I realized how important it was to choose the most effective words to not only increase students' understanding of the text, but also provide them with words that they could effectively incorporate into authentic speaking practice in multiple contexts. A good percentage of the words that I had chosen, such as *prototype*, were appropriate for comprehending the text we were utilizing but were not high frequency cross-content words, words that students were likely to use in their mainstream classes. The valuable educational time investment made it imperative to choose vocabulary words that will serve the students most effectively. Additionally, most of the discussions and speaking were focused on the slides which were related to the text only through the vocabulary. Although there was a great deal of speaking while we were working on the slides, this did not transfer to extended speaking regarding the text. Students could use the vocabulary, but I had given them no opportunity to do so regarding the text itself.

### **Stakeholders**

Students, their families, and the school are all stakeholders. Students in ESL have a wide variety of both skills and needs. Some students can communicate well socially but struggle with reading and writing. Some have academic skills in another language but not in English. Some can read and write in English but cannot speak or comprehend what is said to them. Students' language skills in all areas need to be developed in order to learn and achieve in school, no matter their individual starting point. Specific to this



topic, students must acquire the academic language necessary to orally discuss academic topics and collaborate with their peers in meaningful ways.

Parents and families are also stakeholders. Students are placed in ESL when the family indicates, on a family language questionnaire, that one or more languages other than English are spoken at home and/or the student has significant contact with a speaker of another language, such as a non-English speaking grandparent who watches the child for several hours each day after school until the parent returns home from work. Parents' and families' language skills vary significantly and they may or may not comprehend English orally or in writing, and/or they may not speak or write in English. Parents and other family members may or may not be able to read or write in their home languages. Parents and families rely on the ESL department, as well as the mainstream classes, to develop their children's language sufficiently for their children to be able to fully participate in school and beyond.

The school is also a stakeholder in that the school is held accountable for EL proficiency scores. EL students are assessed in the annual WIDA ACCESS test for English language learners, discussed in Chapter Two, as well as the standardized yearly assessment that all students take. Data for EL students on the mandatory yearly content assessment is analyzed together with the mainstream students but also separately. Schools are held accountable for the EL students making language acquisition progress and academic content progress as measured and reported by these assessments.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have given context for my topic and project by providing teaching and language background information on myself and by providing information about the school and the small district in which I work. I have also discussed my observational rationale for pursuing information on academic speaking for EL students. Additionally, I explained the type of academic speaking work that I have already begun with my students and some of the areas that I know need improvement. Finally, I identified the students, their parents and families, and the school as stakeholders.

Chapter Two reviews the literature regarding academic speaking and EL learners. The first section details WIDA and how EL student language acquisition, specifically speaking, is assessed. This is followed by a section that describes social language and academic language and discusses their differences. The next section describes the importance of teaching academic speaking including the link between speaking and literacy, the current state of academic speaking within classrooms, and the emphasis on speaking in the Common Core Standards. The final section describes researched general best practices and specific techniques used for developing academic speaking.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In the first chapter I described how my previous English language arts teaching experience and living in a foreign country drove my journey to becoming an *English as a second language* (ESL) teacher and how my observation of the silence of my *English learners* (ELs) within their mainstream classrooms at my current site led me to my guiding question: *What educational strategies develop elementary EL students' academic English speaking skills?*

As one of the four domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, writing), speaking is critical to student success in mainstream classrooms (Passe, 2013). However, speaking skills are often ignored in favor of literacy skills (Spies & Xu, 2018). In this chapter I will describe the role and importance of WIDA and WIDA's ACCESS assessment to show how EL speaking is assessed and scored, and the indications of the scores. Then I will define social and academic language and their relationships to each other as a base for discussion regarding academic speaking specifically. This is followed by a section on the importance of academic speaking skills and their vital relationship to literacy; the silence of EL students; and academic speaking in the Common Core State Standards. In the final section, I present best practices for academic speaking in theory

and practice, enrichment programming, and specific techniques for fostering academic speaking.

### **WIDA**

WIDA, originally created on the University of Wisconsin campus, is a consortium of thirty-nine states in the USA and over 400 international schools around the world (WIDA, 2018d). WIDA created the annual ESL assessment called ACCESS 2.0 and ESL standards used by states within the consortium. WIDA also provides researched support for teachers, families, and students (WIDA, 2018d).

Assessment and standardized testing are facts of life in education in the US. EL students are assessed on their yearly academic progress along with their peers, but they are also assessed separately on language acquisition as first designated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Public Law 107-1). According to WIDA (2018a), scores from this assessment can be used by teachers and administrators to monitor students' language skills and growth, inform teaching, make decisions on entering and exiting ESL programs, and make staffing decisions. Teachers may use these scores to group students, recognize strengths, focus on domains that indicate a need, and make decisions for scaffolding in order to reach the next level (WIDA, 2018a). Thus, it is important to understand how these scores are formulated, how language acquisition and proficiency is reported, and why each domain is important.

### **ACCESS 2.0 Scoring**

As described by WIDA (2019) there are four different sections to the ACCESS 2.0 assessment that measure and score students' language acquisition in each of four

language domains—listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Language acquisition is reported in scores ranging from one to six in each domain. One indicates beginning levels of acquisition and six indicates almost indiscernible from a native speaker. Scores are reported to the tenths, such as 2.8 and 6.0. Students receive scores in each of the four domains, and combinations of these scores are also calculated to give a literacy score, an oral language score, a comprehension score, and an overall composite score. The reading and writing domains are combined to give the literacy score, the listening and speaking are combined to give the oral language score, and the listening and reading are combined to give the comprehension score. The overall composite score is a score combining the four domains, with reading and writing weighted more heavily than listening and speaking (WIDA, 2019). A sample WIDA Individual Student Report can be found in Appendix A.

### **State Specific Entrance and Exiting ESL Services Example**

Each state decides the exact entrance and exit criteria for EL students (National Research Council, 2011). The guidelines for Minnesota, as one of the states in the WIDA consortium, are given here as an example.

**Entrance to ESL Services.** According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2017), families enrolling students in a school for the first time are required to complete a language survey for each of the students they enroll. If the family indicates on the survey that a language other than English is spoken at home, the student is tested for ESL services. If identified as EL, students are provided ESL services and are assessed yearly for language acquisition progress by the WIDA ACCESS assessment.

Students receive ESL services until they are exited from the program with qualifying ACCESS scores, described below (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

**Exiting from ESL services.** Students are not expected to reach 6.0 in any of the domains in order to be exited from ESL programs, rather, students who achieve a composite score of at least 4.5 and a score of 3.5 or more in all four domains are considered proficient and are automatically exited from ESL services (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). Students who achieve a 4.5 composite score but who have one domain under 3.5 are considered proficient but other criteria must be applied to decide if they should be exited from ESL services or retained for services (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). This is a gray area where districts may decide their own policy. Districts may elect to exit the student despite the one domain under 3.5 or other criteria may be applied such as teacher recommendations, another assessment, or success in the content classroom (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018).

Thus, each of the domains, including speaking, is important in assessing the overall language proficiency of each student. Each domain is also important as an indicator of an area in which an otherwise proficient student might benefit from focused attention. Additionally, each domain could potentially be the deciding factor in whether or not to exit a student from ESL services.

### **Online Speaking Domain Testing**

EL students are tested in each of the domains in separate testing sessions (WIDA, 2019). The reading, writing, and listening domains are fairly similar to other forms of traditional testing and classroom activities in which students respond to prompts in

writing or select the correct answer from four choices. However, for the speaking section of the ACCESS assessment, students respond to a prompt by speaking into a microphone and their responses are recorded. Student responses are then scored by an outside company (WIDA, 2018b).

As students take the online test, a virtual guide directs them through the test questions and a virtual student provides model responses to serve as examples for student responses. Student responses are scored on fluency, vocabulary, and discourse (WIDA, 2018b). *Discourse* can be defined as “any piece of extended language, written or spoken, that has unity and meaning and purpose” (Teaching English, 2007) *Extended language* can be further understood as a piece of language that is more than one sentence (Teaching English, 2007). Therefore, to be considered proficient, students are expected to produce language above single word answers or individual sentences. However, short, strong responses that are clear and contain concise vocabulary may also score well (WIDA, 2019).

According to WIDA’s *Online Speaking Guidance Grades 1-3* (2018b), the assessment is designed to elicit progressively higher levels of language proficiency as the student progresses through the test. The assessment begins with tasks designed to elicit responses at level one, which is well below the exit proficiency level minimum of 3.5. At this level, students may respond with language below the discourse level, such as single words or chunks of language (WIDA, 2018b). The assessment then progresses to level three responses which require comprehensible sentences that “incorporate general and some specific language” (WIDA, 2018b, p. 1). The third set of tasks is at a proficiency

level five. To score well at level five, students must “produce task-specific vocabulary in cohesive extended discourse” (WIDA, 2018b, p. 1). The assessment, therefore, begins at a level of merely producing language, but moves to producing more complex and specific language by level three, and complex, specific, and cohesive language must be produced to score well at level five. Since automatic exiting criteria is set for each domain at 3.5, students must produce language above the level three in order to be exited.

This section described the WIDA consortium and its role in testing and reporting EL students’ language acquisition. It then used the Minnesota entrance and exiting policies to show how each of the separate domain tests play a role in students being retained or exited from ESL services. It also described the increasingly higher levels of language proficiency that are required as students progress through the assessment. Academic language and social language are defined in the following section.

### **Social and Academic Language Defined**

Several terms are used by educators, researchers, and experts to define roughly the same concepts of social language and academic language. Cummins (1999) coined the terms *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS) and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP) to identify the conceptual differences between social and academic language, respectively, and the terms BICS and CALP are sometimes used interchangeably with *social language* and *academic language*.

*Social language* is the language of everyday life in the home and community, such as texting a friend and discussing dinner plans at home (Passe, 2013). Social language, also sometimes called conversational language or BICS, includes phonological



skills (being able to make the sounds of the language, such as the /*th*/ sound in English) and fluency (Cummins, 1999; Passe, 2013). Most learners acquire social language quickly, but the development of it usually levels off after a couple of years (Colorin Colorado, 2019; Cummins, 1999; Passe, 2013). Cummins (1999) illustrates this as the fact that though there is a great difference in what a six-year-old (with English as a first language) and a twelve-year-old (with English as a first language) can read and write, each can understand most things in his or her social interactions and can communicate effectively socially.

Social language, or BICS, is often face to face communication which is high in context and receives immediate feedback (Colorin Colorado, 2019; Martínez, Harris, & McClain, 2014; Mohr & Mohr, 2007). For example, third grade students are eating lunch together (face to face) and talking about the foods they do and do not like (high context). One student asks another if he would like to trade his carrots for her sandwich, and he nods as he hands her his carrots (immediate feedback).

In comparison, academic language, also referred to as CALP, is the language of schools, textbooks, and educational discussions (Colorin Colorado, 2019; Passe, 2013). Academic language involves literacy and vocabulary development that continue through all levels of education and throughout people's lives (Cummins, 1999; Colorin Colorado, 2019; Passe, 2013). Academic language is decontextualized and is the vocabulary and language structures that allow deeper comprehension of content and that which we use to communicate higher-order thinking, such as comparing, synthesizing, and inferring (Colorin Colorado, 2019; Cummins, 1999; Martínez et al., 2014; Passe, 2013). An

example of CALP would be this paper. It is written about speaking, though no one is talking (decontextualized). It also contains words such as *differentiate*, *decontextualized*, and *proficiency* (vocabulary that allows deeper comprehension).

Academic language includes vocabulary that one would not hear in everyday conversations, such as the examples given above: *differentiate*, *decontextualized*, and *proficiency* (Passe, 2013). For young students, academic vocabulary would be the words found in stories but that are not used in regular social interactions (Passe, 2013). This is well illustrated by Passe (2013) using a sentence from Jan Brett's children's book *Annie and the Wild Animals*. The sentence reads, "At dawn Annie heard the snarls and growls of the wild animals" (Brett, 1985 as cited in Passe, 2013 p. 16). According to Passe (2013), this sentence contains at least five words, *dawn*, *heard*, *snarls*, *growls*, and *wild*, that would not typically be used in children's social language and would render the sentence incomprehensible to children with only social language.

Van Kleeck (2014) refers to casual talk (CT) and academic talk (AT). Conceptually, CT is similar to BICS and AT is similar to CALP, but CT and AT refer specifically to productive oral language (speaking). CT is the spoken language of everyday life, the language people use to accomplish everyday tasks and maintain relationships. AT is the spoken language used for teaching, and learning and supports the communication of ideas and knowledge (Van Kleeck, 2014). Van Kleeck (2014) describes CT and AT as being co-occurring but serving different purposes. Conceptually, the terms *CT* (casual talk) and *social speaking* are similar and *AT* (academic talk) and

*academic speaking* and are similar. The term *academic speaking* is the term used throughout this paper.

This section showed that, while terms may vary, the concepts of social language and academic language are consistent. Social language is used for everyday transactions and academic language is the language of education. Academic language requires the use of complex language and vocabulary that can communicate higher order thinking. This is true of both literacy, reading and writing, and oral language, listening and speaking. However, the importance comes from not just the definitions, but, as shown in the next section, the fundamental differences, student acquisition rates, and usages of the social and academic language.

### **Social Language vs. Academic Language**

Problems arise when there is a lack of understanding of the differences between social language and academic language (Cummins, 1999; Martínez et al., 2014). An EL learner's native sounding social speaking ability may be mistaken for an equally high level of academic language ability, and students may be exited too early from ESL programs, incorrectly identified as learning disabled, or not given adequate instructional language support within the mainstream classroom (Cummins, 1999; Martínez et al., 2014). Cummins (1999) states that the reason he created the definitions and distinctions of BICS and CALP was to illuminate the differences, not to imply that they are completely different processes.

EL students often learn social speaking skills in two years or less (Cummins, 1999; Martinez et al., 2014; Thomas & Collier, 2002). In comparison, according to

researchers and experts, the minimal time it takes for EL students to catch up to their English speaking peers in academic language is four years, though EL learners may take five to ten years (Cummins, 1999; Martinez et al., 2014; Thomas & Collier, 2002). EL learners may make great strides in their academic language acquisition, but their peers are continuing to acquire new language structures and vocabulary also. EL learners must learn at a greater rate than their peers in order to attain grade level proficiency.

Teachers and staff may mistakenly view EL students' language abilities to be more proficient than they are, due to their ability to communicate in social language, convey simple ideas, and ask simple questions (Martinez et al., 2014). However, a much deeper level of language acquisition is necessary to be successful academically (Cummins, 1999; Martinez et al., 2014; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

### **Importance of Academic Speaking**

Oral language is not weighted as heavily as literacy on the WIDA assessment (WIDA, 2019). Once students have acquired enough language to communicate socially, this might make one might wonder why focus on speaking at all. The answer lies in the interconnection of oral language and literacy, the lack of speaking opportunities EL students often have or take advantage of in mainstream classrooms, and the emphasis on speaking and collaboration in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

### **Oral Language and Literacy**

There is a large body of work that supports the idea that improving EL's oral academic language proficiency (listening and academic speaking) also improves their literacy proficiency (Martinez et al, 2014). Three important reports published regarding

best practices in EL reading were reviewed by Martinez et al (2014). The documents *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide* (Gersten et al., 2007 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014) and *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* (August & Shanahan, 2006 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014) were produced by experts in order to synthesize best practices in teaching EL students literacy. Working with the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE), the third document, *Educating English Language Learners: A Synthesis of Research Evidence* (Genesee et al., 2006 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014) summarized over 200 sources. In turn, these three documents were synthesized by Martinez et al. (2014) in *Practices That Promote English Reading for English Learners (ELs)*. Three key ideas for effective educational practices that support English reading achievement for EL students emerged. Of the three ideas, the first one relates directly to the teaching of oral language skills. According to the analysis by Martinez et al. (2014), the first “Big Idea” is that English reading proficiency can be improved by explicitly teaching vocabulary, teaching students to transfer what they know from their first language to their second language, and giving students opportunities to develop their oral language. The authors emphasize that these practices for teaching academic English should be fostered at all stages of second language acquisition. Citing the work of Bialystok, Luk, and Kwan (2005) and Coleman and Goldenberg (2009), Martinez et al. (2014, p. 137) state that “ongoing literacy acquisition has as its foundation strong oral language proficiency.”

Zwiers, O'Hara, and Pritchard (2014) describe three of the reasons in which academic speaking skills are important and how they relate to literacy. First, when students talk about what they have read, it supports reading by building understanding. During discussion, students practice important skills such as paraphrasing, questioning, comparing, and clarifying. This is especially important for students who are struggling readers. Second, academic discussions support writing. As students discuss texts and academic topics they must produce language to clarify and support their ideas. Students receive immediate feedback from their partner or group as to how well they communicated their ideas. Third, students develop their language skills through authentic speaking and by creating unique sentences that convey their ideas. Therefore, academic speaking supports reading and writing, and also further develops language acquisition (Zwiers et al., 2014).

This section described the importance of developing oral language to support literacy, both reading and writing. However, as the next section shows, EL students are often not given or are not taking opportunities to develop their oral language.

### **Silent, Passive**

Researchers have found that in many classrooms, EL students have few opportunities to speak beyond a one- or two-word answer, and when they are given the opportunity to speak, such as in small groups, they often do not take the opportunity, allowing more proficient students to do most of the speaking (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Zwiers and Crawford, 2009). In an action research project in fourth grade classrooms in a

northern California school district with a 73% EL population, Zwiers and Crawford (2009) found that even in paired student discussions, the duration of the speaking by EL students was short and lacked depth. Similarly, Fisher and Frey (2018) found, throughout a formative experiment in a California middle school, that students working together tended to use “low-accountability exchanges” which did not provide opportunities to use academic language (p. 42).

Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) completed a study in an urban Midwestern school of twenty-four at risk EL students whose first language was Spanish. They studied students in third grade through fifth, in both their mainstream classrooms and ESL classrooms. Using a data collection tool called ESCRIBE, researchers observed students for six school days and assigned codes to the setting, teacher, and student language behaviors. This included how the teacher delivered the lesson, whether oral or written language was used, and students’ verbal activity. They found that students spent less than 5% of their mainstream classroom time speaking and only 2% was academic speaking; the rest of the speaking being social or involved in management. Management was not defined, but presumably this would be how or where to hand in papers, where the teacher wanted the students’ names on the papers, or similar discussions (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996).

Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) also found that on average within the mainstream classroom, student language behavior per day was as follows: 96% no talking; 82% no use of language, oral or written; 18% use of the English language, oral or written; 4% speaking (academic, social, and management combined); and 2% academic

talk. Language use within the ESL classroom was only marginally better and was as follows: 92% no talking; 79% no use of language, oral or written; 20% use of the English language, oral or written; 9% speaking (academic, social, and management combined); and 6% academic talk (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996).

Mohr and Mohr (2007) had similar results. First citing multiple past studies finding that teachers allow students EL learners to participate less than more English proficient speaking peers (Laosa, 1977; Penfield, 1987; Schinke-Llano, 1983; Wilhelm, Contreras, & Mohr, 2004 as cited by Mohr and Mohr, 2007), Mohr (2007) referenced a study in which she had recently participated and had found that teachers missed opportunities to assist ELs in classroom communication, and instead allowed them to have less interaction in the classroom discussion. Despite one of the goals of the participating school that stated the school was targeting English language proficiency for EL students, observations revealed students remaining silent for hours of classroom instruction (Mohr & Mohr, 2007).

A later study by Brooks (2011) attempting to discover which instructional groupings best fostered language production by middle school EL students, found slightly better percentages of EL student speaking times than Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996). Using the same ESCRIBE data collection tool, Brooks found that across all types of instruction groupings, EL students spent slightly less than 9% of their time on academic speaking.

In an effort to create awareness of academic speaking, the lack of opportunities EL students often have to develop their oral language, and the subsequent silence and



invisibility of the EL students, Soto-Hinman (2011) worked with teachers who shadowed EL students. Following training in academic speaking and types of listening, the teachers monitored the oral academic language (speaking and listening) of one student at five minute intervals for at least two hours. Soto-Hinman (2011) noted that teacher observers were often “astonished” to find that the teacher was usually the primary speaker in the classroom (p. 22). Soto-Hinman (2011) suggested that this awareness will help educators to see the need for and make changes to instructional practices in order to provide more academic speaking opportunities for EL students.

For EL students this silence is problematic for several reasons. First, due to differences in language and culture, EL learners can disconnect both academically and emotionally from their classes and become even more passive within the classroom (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Passe, 2013; Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2013). These disconnected students may pass their classes and do okay on tests, but they may not be truly learning much (Zwiers et al., 2013). Second, the lack of speaking opportunity has been identified as a contributing factor to the literacy development gap between ELs and their peers (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011). Third, as shown in the previous subsection, speaking promotes literacy and further increases language acquisition (Martinez et al., 2014; Zwiers et al. 2014). Students may be able to comprehend oral academic language (listening) but still may not be able to produce it (speaking), and it is important for EL students to be able to produce academic language orally before they are required to produce academic writing (Mohr & Mohr, 2007). Fourth, as described in a previous section, students are required to respond to prompts in

the WIDA ACCESS assessment that require the student to speak on a topic and support the response. Students who spend most of their time in silence in their classes may feel ill prepared to complete this task. Finally, as discussed in the next section, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) suggest that all students, mainstream and EL learners, further develop speaking skills to improve the workforce skills of communication and collaboration (Spies & Xu, 2018; Zwiers et al., 2013).

### **Speaking and Collaboration in the Common Core State Standards**

Learning to speak academically is not only an ESL concern. In 2010, Minnesota adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019a). The CCSS specify developing oral communication and collaboration skills for all students (Spies & Xu, 2018; Zwiers et al, 2013; Zwiers et al., 2014). If mainstream students are further increasing their academic speaking skills while EL learners are remaining silent, the gap between EL students' and mainstream students' speaking skills could widen.

In order to meet some of the CCSS standards, students are required to give longer and more complete, more complex answers (Zwiers et al. 2014). The standards were created to prepare students better for a workforce and/or higher education future of cooperation and collaboration (Spies & Xu, 2018; Zwiers et al, 2013; Zwiers et al., 2014). Staying silent may then not only compromise a student's basic education but also their future abilities to enter college and competitiveness in the job market.

This section described the importance of developing oral language as a foundation for and a promotion of literacy, but then provided multiple studies indicating that EL

students spend little of their time within their classes speaking, and even less time in academic speaking. It then described some of the problems that may occur or be exacerbated by the lack of speaking practice. Along with the fact that CCSS require all students, EL and mainstream, to develop their academic speaking skills to prepare them for a future of workplace cooperation and collaboration, the necessity of providing opportunities for students to develop their academic speaking skills has been shown to be vital for school and future success. The next section provides best practices in the forms of conceptual frameworks and specific strategies for providing opportunities for students to develop their academic speaking.

## **Best Practices**

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

If students are to be speaking academically, they must be speaking on an academic topic. Thematic units and activities based on a text are both recommended ways for EL students to learn, interact with, and use language (Zweirs et al., 2013). Therefore, some discussion here must be devoted to more general best practices for EL students. EL programs should be cognitively challenging and enriching, not remedial, and teachers should maintain high expectations for EL students in classroom discussions (Cummins, 1999; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Zweirs et al., 2013). Additionally, grade level, language rich texts should be provided to EL students with support (Zweirs et al., 2013, 2014).

**Enrichment programs.** A key point in EL education is that programs and lessons are for enrichment, not remediation (Cummins, 1999; Thomas & Collier, 2002;

Zwiers et al., 2013) Thomas and Collier (2002) clearly indicated that *enrichment* means a bilingual, additive program. In this type of program, students are taught in both their home language and the second language that they are acquiring. They have content classes in both languages and progress in all four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in both languages. A second language is added and nothing is lost from their first language. However, not all experts make this distinction in the term *enrichment*. While these others agree that EL programs should not be remedial, they seem to use the term and the concept of enrichment more broadly.

In the broader sense, enrichment models offer cognitively challenging learning opportunities that require higher-order thinking skills (Cummins, 1999). Challenging activities and engaging discussion should not wait until students have acquired a high level of academic language, rather, they are necessary to help students to acquire that language (Cummins, 1999; Mohr & Mohr, 2007). In order for EL students to comprehend and participate, teachers should scaffold the lessons to support grade level reading and speaking, not provide simplified texts (Zwiers et al., 2014). EL students need to read and hear rich language, complex sentence styles, and vibrant vocabulary in order to be able to acquire rich, complex, and vibrant language (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Zwiers et al., 2013). EL students need to be asked to complete cognitively challenging activities and be expected to participate in discussions. These quality language opportunities that show and produce rich language expand language use for EL students (Mohr & Mohr, 2007). Additionally, the focus of speaking assignments should not be talking, but rather conversing. Talking is presenting one's ideas or information, like a

teacher does. Conversing is a building on each other's ideas, co-constructing knowledge, and negotiating for understanding (Zwiers et al., 2014). In cooperation and collaboration, one is not talking, one is conversing; these are the real world, workforce skills that need to be fostered, modeled, and taught.

The opposite of enrichment programs are the *deficit* ESL programs. In these programs, EL students are considered to be lacking and in need of fixing. Students are provided with simplified texts, and they complete worksheets and drill-and-practice activities that are low-level thinking activities (Cummins, 1999). Students are thought of as having bad English or broken English and as needing help. This can be socially injurious and contribute to the achievement gap for EL students (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 1998).

**Vocabulary.** Learning new vocabulary is undeniably important for both language comprehension and language production (Schmitt, 2008). However, understanding words encountered in a text and being able to use words require different levels of knowledge. When listening or reading, learners may only require a basic concept of a word in order to comprehend the meaning of the text, but further, in-depth knowledge of a word is necessary for productive usage (Proctor, Carlos, August, & Snow, 2005; Schmitt, 2008). However, many teachers and students feel that knowing how a vocabulary word, also called a *lexical item*, sounds and looks and knowing the definition of the lexical item means that the word has been learned. Further, if the goal is productive usage, students need to develop their understanding of the words in productive

tasks; receptive understanding of the words does not necessarily lead to productive usage (Schmitt, 2008).

Individual words are not the only lexical items. *Phrasal vocabulary* refers to phrases that convey meaning, have widespread usage, are used for multiple purposes, and allow for more speaking fluency, and these should also be explicitly taught to EL learners (Schmitt, 2008). Examples of phrasal vocabulary include figurative language such as idioms and other phrases such as *in the wild*. Research suggests that teaching phrasal vocabulary not only increases students' understanding of phrasal vocabulary, but also may help learners appear to have more proficient speaking skills (Schmitt, 2008).

In order to use a lexical item a student must know more about the item, such as what concepts are included in it and what other words frequently occur with it (Schmitt, 2008). For example, the word *disguise* is similar to the words *costume* and *camouflage*, but the concept of *disguise* is more of an attempt to hide one's identity, whereas the concept of *costume* is more playful, and the concept of *camouflage* is more like disappearing into the surroundings. Some words frequently occurring with the lexical item *disguise* would be *in disguise*, *good disguise*, *bad disguise*, *put on a disguise*, *wears a disguise*, and *made an attempt to disguise*.

Learning lexical items in enough depth to use them requires explicit teaching, repeated exposures to the items in multiple contexts, and student engagement. Although students can benefit from exposure to new vocabulary while reading and listening, explicitly teaching vocabulary is more efficient and increases students' abilities to remember and be able to use the lexical items (Schmitt, 2008; Teng, 2014). One of the

reasons for this is that a lexical item must be encountered multiple times, and soon after the initial exposure, in order for it to be remembered. A new lexical item should be encountered ten or more times, and these encounters from reading alone would mean language learner reading would have to occur at an intensive rate much too high to be feasible (Laufer, 2006; Schmitt, 2008; Teng, 2014).

Word families should also be explicitly taught to EL students (Schmitt, 2008).

*Word families* are groups of words that have a common base word to which affixes are attached (Nordquist, 2018). An example of a word family would be *respond*, *responsive*, and *unresponsive*, and would include the inflectional endings for tense—*responds*, *responded*, and *responding*. It should not be assumed that students will be able to recognize or use a form of a word other than the one that they were taught, including inflectional endings (Gardner & Davies, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). For example, the noun *response* and the verb *respond* carry the same basic concept of answering, but they look and sound slightly different and would be used differently in a sentence. Teaching the word *respond* does not mean the student will be able to recognize or use the word *response*. Also, while it might be clear to native speakers that the words *respond*, *responds*, *responded*, and *responding* are just the different tenses of the same verb and therefore carry the same meaning, this may not be obvious to EL learners and these inflectional endings should be taught explicitly (Nordquist, 2018; Schmitt, 2008). The amount of time and effort that a student puts into learning lexical items directly affects how well the student remembers the new word (Proctor et al., 2005; Schmitt, 2008; Teng, 2014). Students will learn the lexical item more effectively if they notice

and focus on the item, are required to know the item, have a use for the item (task), manipulate the item, and spend time engaging with the item. Some of the more effective tasks for learning lexical items include negotiating the input of the item and using the item in an original sentence (Schmitt, 2008).

Since a great deal of educational time is shown to be necessary to learn academic vocabulary well enough for students to use it in their speaking, the words and other lexical items taught should be chosen with attention to their usefulness (Teng, 2014). Gardner and Davies (2014) compiled a list of academic vocabulary based on frequency within 120 million words in 13,000 academic texts that occur more frequently in academic texts than in the 425 million word Corpus of Contemporary American English. This list is helpful for teachers who choose which words on which to focus their students' time and energy. The developers of this list, Gardner and Davies (2014), request that the list not be printed but rather the link shared so that others can download the list. Therefore, the link is shared in the bibliography rather than the list in an appendix.

The term *lexical item* was used in this section as a specific term to refer to individual words, phrasal vocabulary, and word families. However, throughout the curricular unit and slides, *vocabulary* will be used to refer to lexical items.

**Grouping for speaking.** Brooks (2011), a researcher studying EL student speaking in academic middle school classes found that students produce the most academic oral language in collaborative groups. This refutes findings by earlier researchers who found that EL students did not participate much in collaborative groups (Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, & Wheeler, 1996 as cited by Brooks, 2011), but it supports



findings by Foster (1993) who found that EL students were more likely to participate if the group task required an exchange of information. Brooks (2011) suggests that these studies are not broad enough to draw conclusions regarding EL participation in discussions and suggests that more research needs to be done in this area to determine how other factors such as age and language proficiency affect the willingness of EL students to interact in various kinds of content area classroom groupings. However, Brooks (2011) states that EL students would be likely to increase their speaking if they spent more of their time in collaborative groups and less of their time in whole groups listening to the teacher.

**Immediate feedback.** One of the reasons that social language is learned quickly is that social interactions tend to have immediate feedback (Cummins, 1999; Zwiers et al., 2013). If a child says the word *apple* and someone gives him an apple, the child knows that he has chosen the correct word. Additionally, the intentional use of immediate feedback can be used effectively in oral discussions to reinforce student use of academic language (Mohr & Mohr, 2007). For example, in Chapter One of this paper an example was given in which a student responded to an image prompt by using the vocabulary word *maneuver* and said, *The engineers designed the prototype to maneuver through the air*. If the teacher were to have responded to the student with *Fantastic!* the student would have had the immediate feedback that she had used the words correctly. Conversely, if a student were to have said, *The maneuver airplane is sitting on the ground*, the teacher would immediately realize that the student did not understand how to

use the word and/or did not understand the meaning of the word. The teacher could then provide immediate clarification and offer more modeling of the usage of the word.

### **Strategies**

**Response Protocol.** First citing multiple studies finding that teachers allow students with lower language proficiency to participate less (Laosa, 1977; Penfield, 1987; Schinke-Llano, 1983; Wilhelm, Contreras, & Mohr, 2004 as cited by Mohr & Mohr, 2007), Mohr referenced a study that she had recently participated in and had found that teachers missed opportunities to assist ELs in classroom communication and instead allowed them to have less interaction the classroom discussion. *Extending English-language learners' classroom interactions using the Response Protocol* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007) was a result of the analysis of that study. The Response Protocol, described by Mohr and Mohr (2007) is a technique of teacher scaffolding in which a teacher can elicit more elaborate responses and increase language development in EL students. There are two key elements: valuing the students' efforts and teacher response scaffolding to elicit more elaboration. There are six categories of responses that students may give to a classroom discussion prompt and are as follows: a correct response, a partially correct response, an incorrect or inappropriate response, a response in their home language, a question, or no response.

For each of the six responses, Mohr and Mohr (2007) give suggestions for how to have the student elaborate on his or her original answer. For correct responses, students should be encouraged to elaborate on than their original response due to the fact that the student likely knows more than stated in their original answer. Some of the teacher

prompts suggested were *You're right! Can you tell me more?* and *Yes, that's a very good answer. Can you also tell me why this (concept, information) is important?* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 444). Similarly, students responding with partially correct answers may be prompted with *You're telling me some good things, especially the part about \_\_\_\_\_.* *What else?* or *Yes, I agree that \_\_\_\_.* *Now, let's think more about \_\_\_\_\_.* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 444). If a student gives an answer that is not in English, the teacher could respond *Do you know any words in English to say that?* or *Call on someone (one of your friends) to help tell us what you said in English* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 445). Examples of teacher responses to student question responses could be *Thank you for asking.* *Understanding is important. Good learners ask lots of questions* or *Let me first answer your question, and then I will ask my question again* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 446). In response to answers that are inappropriate or wrong may be *Help me understand what you mean. Tell me again* or *Do you think \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?* (with a correct answer as one of the options) (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 446). For students who do not answer or *say I don't know* Mohr and Mohr (2007) give additional suggestions in the way of body language such as smiling and moving closer to the student. Teachers are also encouraged to give more wait time or rephrase the question. In response to non-answers, some examples of teacher elaboration are *I'm going to come back to you and ask you again. Please get ready to talk with us* or *I think you know something about this, and I would like to hear what you have to say* (Mohr & Mohr, 2007, p. 447).

**Scaffolding for extended student discussions.** In their action research, Zwiers and Crawford (2009) set out to equip fourth grade students with better educational

discussion skills. They began by analyzing both ineffective and effective conversations from a variety of sources and formulated a list of six features of effective, extended, in-depth discussions on which they wanted to focus. The list is as follows: “initiating a worthwhile topic, elaborating and clarifying, supporting one's ideas, building on or challenging another's ideas, applying ideas to life, and paraphrasing/summarizing” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2009, p. 71). For these features, the researchers used both sentence stems and sentence frames to scaffold the discussion. Students were provided with prompts for using each feature and prompts for responding. The specific features and prompts used by Zwiers and Crawford (2009) can be found in Appendix A.

Teachers in the study explicitly taught and modeled the features. Students were then paired for conversations using the features, and afterwards, students would synthesize the discussion for the class, and complete an exit ticket and a checklist. Through analysis of transcripts, researchers discovered students were discussing more worthwhile topics, using more academic vocabulary, showing more independent thinking, and the improvements were also showing in class discussions and other classes (Zwiers & Crawford, 2009).

Similarly, Spies and Xu (2018) developed a sequence of steps to scaffold academic conversations in order to increase student levels of academic language. The sequence begins with discussing and using the academic vocabulary, then talking about the content that they learned, and culminating with the student orally presenting the content. Throughout the process, the teacher uses scaffolding questions and graphic organizers to guide and prompt the student.

**Sentence stems and frames.** Sentence stems and sentence frames are both useful techniques for scaffolding academic speaking (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Soto-Hinman, 2011). Both are effective ways to scaffold discussions, use of academic vocabulary, and understanding of the word order in English (Fisher & Frey, 2018). Sentence stems are the beginnings of sentences provided to students in order for students to successfully formulate their response to a prompt (Soto-Hinman, 2011). Examples of sentence stems are *In my opinion, it should/should not be legal to...* and *When Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer are sneaking out of the house they...*

Sentence frames are similar to sentence stems, but support more of the sentence (Fisher & Frey, 2018). For example, students who are asked to contrast two ideas could be given the sentence frame \_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_ *are different because* \_\_\_\_\_. Fisher and Frey (2018) used sentence frames as part of a formative experiment consisting of several intervention techniques, and teachers involved in the intervention reported success using the sentence frames.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with an overview of WIDA and the WIDA ACCESS assessment and the role the assessment plays in the exiting or retaining of students in ESL services. Then the terms *social language*, *academic language*, and *academic speaking* were defined and examples were given. It was then shown that problems may arise when the distinctions between social and academic language are not properly understood or recognized. This was followed by a discussion of the importance of academic speaking in the role it plays in literacy. It was then shown that EL students

were not often engaged in speaking in their mainstream or ESL classrooms, yet there is increased emphasis on speaking in the Common Core Standards.

The chapter then focused on best practices for academic speaking starting with enrichment programs over deficit programs. It then discussed the value of explicitly teaching vocabulary and the importance of understanding words in multiple ways in order to use them productively. Grouping students in collaborative groups to increase the time they have for speaking and purposely using immediate feedback were also discussed. It then outlined specific strategies to expand students' language use in speaking and discussions. This was followed by the strategy of providing sentence stems and sentence frames to scaffold students' vocabulary acquisition, sentence structure, and discussions.

The next chapter provides the details for the academic speaking curriculum that is presented as the project for this capstone. It includes the rationale for the curriculum, the framework used to create it, and descriptions of the audience and setting, followed by the project description, assessment details, and the timeline for implementation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature regarding the necessity of developing academic speaking skills for EL (English learner) students and strategies for developing these skills. EL students are assessed yearly on their academic speaking, yet studies show that EL students spend the majority of the time in their classrooms in silence (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). Further, research suggests that there is a strong link between oral language proficiency and literacy (Martinez et al., 2014; Zwiers et al., 2014). This research has led me to creating this curriculum in response to the question: *What educational strategies develop elementary EL students' academic English speaking skills?*

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter I provide the details for my academic speaking curriculum. I begin with the rationale that shows the necessity of providing EL students with academic speaking opportunities and show how my project uses ESL best practices. Following, I show how the unit was created using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). This is followed by a description of the audience for whom the project is designed and then the setting of the school in which the curriculum will be

implemented and the participants. I then provide the project description, assessment details, and the timeline for implementation.

### **Rationale**

This curriculum is needed to address EL students' academic speaking needs. As discussed in the literature review, EL students are often left sitting in silence in both their mainstream and EL classrooms (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Passe, 2013; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). Additionally, due to students' fluent sounding social speaking skills, academic speaking skills are frequently ignored in favor of literacy skills (Spies & Xu, 2018). This is harmful to students as they may become passive in the classroom (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Passe, 2013). It also contributes to the literacy gap (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011). Further, EL students have little practice for the speaking test they take annually, and Common Core standards include increased speaking skills for all students (Spies & Xu, 2018). Additionally, multiple experts, researchers, and consortiums agree that explicitly teaching vocabulary and developing oral language improves English reading skills (August & Shanahan, 2006 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014; Bialystok et al., 2005 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014; Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014; Genesee et al., 2006 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014; Gersten et al., 2007 as cited by Martinez et al. 2014; Martinez et al., 2014).

This curriculum unit has been carefully structured and scaffolded to provide students with opportunities to use a variety of speaking skills that are focused on academic tasks, and it is enriching, not remedial (Cummins, 1999; Mohr & Mohr, 2007;



Thomas & Collier, 2002). It includes activities to support oral participation and encourages students to speak on topic (Schmitt, 2008). It also extensively utilizes, sentence stems and sentence frames, which have been shown to help students learn new language and language structures (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). As students progress through the lessons, they will build on the ideas and language usage of other students within the group and benefit from immediate feedback from the teacher (Mohr & Mohr, 2007).

### **Framework**

Understanding by Design (UbD) by Wiggins and McTighe (2011) was used to create the framework of this curriculum unit. Some of the basic principles of UbD include deep understanding of what has been taught, active meaning making, and transfer of skills to new contexts. Units and lessons are designed backwards starting from desired long-term understandings and skills, moving to how the students will be assessed, and then finally to the lesson activities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

In the first stage of UbD, the unit designer must identify the desired understanding and skills that students should have as a result of the unit (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Using the Minnesota academic standards for language arts to identify grade level skills and expectations and WIDA's proficiency level descriptors as guides, I identified that I wanted students to use well constructed sentences and academic vocabulary associated with a topic to speak for an extended time and convey multiple related ideas on the topic (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010; WIDA, 2019).

The next stage of the UbD framework is to design an assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). I needed to create an assessment in which students use vocabulary orally and have the opportunity to speak for an extended period, thus I decided to have students video record a compare and contrast structured short presentation in pairs or groups of three. Since the assessment is to assess their academic speaking, students will be given a chance to organize and practice their thoughts, but they will not be allowed to write their thoughts down and read from their prepared script. Student presentations would then be assessed by both the teacher and the students based on rubrics. The teacher's rubric is modified from WIDA's (2019) scoring scales, and the students' self assessment rubric is further modified from the teacher's rubric. The teacher rubric and the student self assessment rubric can be found in Appendices D and E, respectively.

The third stage of the UbD framework is to design activities that lead to the desired results (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). As stated in my first chapter, this curriculum utilizes an activity (Vocabulary Challenge) that I had already conceived of. Although this seems counter to the UbD framework, the activity was originally created from backward design. I had not, however, originally created an assessment, as one is to do with UbD (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Upon following the guidelines and considering important components of UbD, especially the long term understandings and transfer of skills to a new context, I altered and added to the Vocabulary Challenge activity and new activities also emerged that were vital to build the desired skills I was assessing (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

### **Audience**

This curriculum unit is intended for ESL teachers who have small, pull-out classes. Though the timeline is written for 20 minutes of instructional time twice weekly, it would be preferable to complete the unit more quickly by seeing students more frequently each week.

The students for whom this curriculum is intended are third grade EL students who have an overall composite WIDA level of 3.0 and above, have reading and listening scores above 2.5, and speaking scores above 2.0. Ideally, the class would have mixed levels of students so that more proficient students will serve as language models for less proficient students. The unit was designed for a group of students whose home language is Spanish, but there is nothing in the unit that is specific to the Spanish language or Hispanic culture.

### **Setting**

The school in which this curriculum will be implemented is a K-12 rural school, which is also the entire district. The EL population of the school is approximately 16%. The community has had a stable population of Spanish speakers, and most of the EL students are second or third generation residents of the area. At the end of last year, a Hmong speaking family moved into the district, and at the beginning of this year, a Russian speaking family moved into the district. The majority of the EL students in the school have been in US schools since preschool or kindergarten and few have discernable accents. Several students in each grade level leave for a month or more starting in December and return in January or February. With a little over fifty total EL students in

the school, I see students from the full range of kindergarten through twelfth grade, the majority of whom are in the elementary school.

The school is well equipped, with Smartboards in every classroom and access to computer labs and Chromebooks. The elementary school uses the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill *Treasures* literacy curriculum. The EL materials that came with the curriculum are simplified versions of the mainstream curriculum, and I do not use them because this is a deficit approach to ESL rather than the enrichment approach, as discussed in Chapter Two. I frequently use articles from Newsela.com, which are available in multiple grade levels and contain richer language.

I have scheduled to see third graders for twenty-six minutes twice a week for a total of fifty-two minutes a week. However, realistically, I only have about twenty minutes per session, due to transit time from their classroom on the opposite side of the building, for a total of approximately forty minutes of educational time per week.

### **Participants**

I have nine third grade EL students split into two sections, with both sections having a variety of language acquisition levels, rather than a higher level class and a lower level class. All of these students have attended this school since kindergarten and all speak Spanish as their home language. Two of the students frequently return to Mexico during the school year to visit family and have levels of language acquisition slightly lower than their EL peers. Most of the students also receive or have received Title I reading support.

## Project Description

This third grade curricular unit is focused on academic speaking, but it is also based on two texts on a similar topic. Students will learn vocabulary and sentence structures that support speaking on topic, and they are also provided scaffolds that will enable them to verbally summarize and compare and contrast the ideas from the articles. Students will also view a video on the same topic and compare and contrast the articles and the video in an oral, video format.

The unit is based on two articles and a video on the same topic—cameras disguised as creatures that can observe like creatures without frightening them. The first article is about cameras used to study penguins and the second is about cameras used to study marine life. Students will compare the ideas presented in these two articles to a video about a camera used to study monkeys.

The first unit begins with a slideshow of what I call *Visual Vocabulary*. These are words or phrases from the text that students might not already know but are easily shown and set the stage for learning. As an example, the word *continent* is used in the first article and two images of continents are shown in the slides. Students have a chart on which they write the word and draw a picture. Afterwards, the article is read aloud to students as they follow along. Each student will be given two cards, one reading *question* and one reading *connection* to use to orally ask a question or make a connection to the text.

Students will then view a slideshow of target vocabulary of words either taken from the text or needed to discuss the text. Each vocabulary slide contains a brief,

student friendly definition, at least one image, and sentence frames and/or sentence stems to scaffold vocabulary use. As students view each slide, they will create original, oral sentences about images on the slides. The slideshows also contain videos to give students further visualization and background knowledge to comprehend the articles and/or to give opportunities to use the vocabulary. Students will then reread the text and complete a summary graphic organizer as a group. This process is then repeated for the second article.

Following completion of the slideshows and summary organizers for both articles, as a group, students will complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the ideas in the two articles. Using the information from the Venn diagram and a scaffolded compare and contrast format, students will work in pairs to create an oral compare and contrast presentation.

Students will then watch a video about a camera disguised as a baby monkey that has an interesting twist. As their assessment, in pairs or groups of three, students will complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two articles to the video. Using their Venn diagrams and the same scaffolding for the compare and contrast presentation, students will practice their oral compare and contrast of the two articles to the video. Finally, students will record their presentations and self assess their videos based on a student friendly speaking rubric.

The unit applicable Minnesota State Standards for Language Arts and the WIDA English Language Development Standards can be found in Appendix B (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010; WIDA, 2007).

### **Assessments**

Because this is a small group setting and predominantly oral activities, formative assessment can occur at most points during the unit. During the vocabulary portion of the unit, students will be given check marks for using the target vocabulary word. Students who are not participating or understanding how to use the vocabulary are easily identified and can be given more scaffolding and encouragement.

For the summative assessment, students will video record compare and contrast structured oral presentations. The teacher will assess the student videos using a modified WIDA speaking rubric, and students will self assess their own videos using a rubric further modified from the teacher rubric (WIDA, 2019).

### **Timeline**

This unit requires thirty class meetings at approximately twenty minutes per meeting. Lessons are divided into three parts and shown below. The summative assessment is within the third section.

#### **Part One: Penguin Robots**

Lessons for Penguin Robots are as follows: lesson 1, introduction, build background, and Visual Vocabulary; lesson 2, first read of the text and the question/connection discussion; lesson 3, introduction to vocabulary slides (Vocabulary Challenge); lessons 4-8, Vocabulary Challenge; lessons 9-10, on topic Vocabulary Challenge; lessons 11-12, reread, on topic Vocabulary Challenge, and summarizing organizer.

**Part Two: SoFi**

Lessons for SoFi are as follows: lesson 13, build background; lesson 14, first read and question/connection discussion; lessons 15-16, Vocabulary Challenge 1 (a shorter version of Vocabulary Challenge); lessons 17-21, Vocabulary Challenge; lessons 22-23, on topic Vocabulary Challenge; lesson 24/25, reread, on topic Vocabulary Challenge, and summarizing organizer.

**Part Three: Compare and Contrast**

Students will compare and contrast the two articles and a video, and the lessons go as follows: lesson 26, reread Penguin Robots, compare and contrast with SoFi using a Venn diagram; lesson 27, compare and contrast sentences and presentation structure; lessons 28-29 view monkey video, group/pair completion of graphic organizers, record video; lesson 30, view student videos, student self-assessment.

**My Site**

As I meet with my students twice weekly, this unit will take approximately fifteen weeks. We will begin at the beginning of the school year and finish just before Winter Break.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I first provided my rationale for the curriculum based on the research in Chapter Two. I then discussed how I used the UbD framework to create the unit. Next, I detailed the audience for whom the curriculum unit is intended, the rural setting in which I will be implementing the curriculum, and the third grade participants.



Finally, I gave a detailed description of the project and assessment, and a timeline for implementation.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on some of the major learnings during the capstone project process and some of the challenges.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection

I began thinking about this research and project when I first started teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at my current school. I noticed that students, both English learners (ELs) and mainstream students, spent most of their time silent, listening to the teacher or working on individual assignments. Since my students likely go home and speak their home language to the adults around them, I began to wonder exactly when these students were going to get an opportunity to speak to anyone but their peers. When would these students become practiced in speaking academic English?

I answered my initial question myself. My students were going to practice academic speaking in my classroom. However, how I was going to do this remained a question. This led me to my guiding question: *What educational strategies develop elementary EL students' academic English speaking skills?*

I also wondered if this silence were as prevalent as it appeared to me in my first couple months teaching ESL; my working theory was based on extremely limited information. Additionally, I wondered just how important the speaking component of academic language was. I knew that EL students were tested yearly on academic language acquisition and one of the four tests was a speaking test. However, I also knew

that the oral components, listening and speaking, were not weighted as heavily as the literacy components, reading and writing.

In this chapter I will revisit some of the literature to answer my secondary questions regarding the silence of EL students in the classroom and the importance of teaching academic speaking, and, in response to my guiding question, best practices for developing academic speaking. I will also discuss some of the classroom uses for research that I did not use in the final project, and I will present the challenges and limitations of the final project. I will then discuss what will happen with the project after the capstone is completed and offer some final reflections on the masters and capstone process.

### **Return to the Literature Review**

#### **Answers to Secondary Questions**

**Silence.** I had my suspicions that the lack of speaking that I was seeing with my students was not unusual, but I needed to find out if this were accurate. The research does seem to support my observation that it is common for EL students to spend the majority of their classroom time in silence. Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) completed a study in an urban Midwestern school of twenty-four at risk EL students whose first language was Spanish. They found that students spent less than 5% of their mainstream classroom time speaking and only 2% was academic speaking. A later study by Brooks (2011) found that EL students spent slightly less than 9% of their time on academic speaking. Additionally, Soto-Hinman (2011) worked with teachers who shadowed EL students. Teachers within the study were often shocked to discover that the

teacher was usually the primary speaker in the classroom. According to this research, my school is not unusual in the lack of general and academic speaking done by EL students.

**Importance.** I also needed to know if focusing on speaking was really a good use of valuable educational time. I felt like it was important and it made sense to me, but I wanted to see if the research would support my intuition. The research indicates that focusing on academic speaking is a worthwhile endeavor. Experts suggested that the lack of speaking could make EL students more disconnected and passive within their classes (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Passe, 2013; Zwiers et al., 2013) and may contribute to the literacy development gap between ELs and their peers (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996; Brooks, 2011). Conversely, according to Martinez et al. (2014) and Zwiers et al. (2014), speaking promotes literacy and increases language acquisition. Additionally, Mohr and Mohr (2007) suggested that students should orally produce academic language before they are required to produce academic writing. Also, the Common Core State Standards require all students to develop speaking skills in preparation for careers that will require communication and cooperation (Spies & Xu, 2018; Zwiers et al, 2013; Zwiers et al., 2014). Therefore, academic speaking is an important skill for EL students to develop. Whatsmore, since, according to Spies and Xu (2018), speaking skills are often ignored in favor of literacy skills, targeting the development of speaking skills in the ESL classroom seems like a good fit.

### **Best Practices**

**Rich language.** Once that I was satisfied that spending time focusing on academic speaking was worthwhile, I wanted to know what best practices were for doing

so. The research discussing the use of enrichment rather than deficit models for ESL programs really struck me (Cummins, 1999; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Zwiers et al., 2013). The idea of enrichment rather than remedial for ELs was not new to me, but the ideas of rich language in an enrichment model rather than watered down language in the deficit model (Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Zwiers et al., 2013) reverberated in my mind. This was a more concrete way for me to look at the concepts.

I thought about the academic speaking activities that I had already begun with my students and became aware that rich language, in all the domains, was what I had been aiming at all along, but couldn't quite express. In the slide presentations, I was already providing support for grade-level, not simplified, reading, and was also providing opportunities for students to use rich language. After reviewing the literature, however, I understood my initial endeavors better and was able to expand upon the original ideas.

One of the ways that discovered I could improve upon the slide activity (which I call the Vocabulary Challenge) was to include much more support in the way of sentence stems and sentence frames. The use of these was not new to me, but an idea popped out during the research. According to Fisher and Frey (2018) both sentence stems and sentence frames are effective ways to scaffold discussions, use of academic vocabulary, and the understanding of word order in English. Though my students have good social speaking skills, I realized that I could use the sentence stems and frames to not only scaffold the learning of the new target vocabulary but also expand student language by providing more complexity to their sentences. For the Vocabulary Challenge slides, I

included options, when appropriate, that students could use to create sentences that had introductory phrases or clauses, or to create complex sentences.

Additionally, I included words that frequently occur with the target word. Schmitt (2008) suggests this is something that students need to have in order to productively use new vocabulary. However, I found that in doing this I could also sneak in a few extra words that might be considered enrichen student language, such as including *aquatic creature* for the target word *creature*.

**Immediate feedback.** Immediate feedback was discussed in the literature as one of the features of social language that aids in the speedy learning of social language (Cummins, 1999; Zwiers et al., 2013). However, Mohr & Mohr (2007) suggested that this could also be used in oral discussions to reinforce student use of academic language. I know that I was using immediate feedback as a way to guide students' language, but I became more and more aware of how I was using it. I now use immediate feedback more purposefully to try to let students know what was right in what they said, even if not all of their response was correct, and I try to give verbal confirmation to their successes, not just nodding or giving them points.

**Unused.** Some of the research in best practices did not make it through to the final project as intended. However, this is not to say that I did not find value in the information. Unfortunately, scaffolding for extended student discussions by Zwiers and Crawford (2009) did not make it into my curriculum unit even though I had originally planned to include it. When I envisioned this unit, I wanted to make the final assessment a recorded student discussion and have students be peer coaches to each other as they

record. I thought that this would be a good way to help each other add detail, description, and complexity to their responses. This idea was based on a statement from Zwiers et al. (2014) suggesting the focus on speaking assignments should not be talking but rather conversing. I wanted to teach students to ask for more information or clarity by modifying the scaffolding for academic conversation by Zwiers and Crawford (2009) and use this independently in their final assessment.

In the end, I decided against the idea of a discussion and peer coaches mainly because I was afraid that students would feel overwhelmed during the final project. They had a variety of materials that were given to support them during their recordings--word lists with sentence stems/frames, the articles, and Venn diagrams. They also had a couple things to accomplish during the recording--comparing and contrasting, and using the vocabulary. Adding the peer coaching task to this seemed overwhelming and a little unfocused. If it felt that way to me, surely it would to third grade students. I chose to keep the compare and contrast and make it more of an oral essay with a specific structure rather than a discussion.

In summary, my two secondary questions regarding teaching academic speaking were answered by the research. The research showed that ELs do spend the majority of their time in their classrooms in silence, and developing academic speaking is a worthwhile pursuit. The research on best practices answering my guiding question gave me the confidence that I was on the right track with the Vocabulary Challenge in terms of vibrant vocabulary, rich language, and expanding language use, and also gave me ways to fortify the activity. I infused the activity with more sentence stems, sentence frames, and

frequently occurring words for support and to expand language use, and made sure to give students immediate feedback. The research on discussion techniques did not make its way into the final project so as not to overwhelm the students.

In the next section I will discuss a couple of the challenges and limitations of the project including writing curriculum for a public audience and searching for images that fit my ideas.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

### **Writing Curriculum**

The process of writing this curriculum has shown me just how challenging it is to write for an audience that goes beyond my own students. ESL, by nature, serves students at multiple levels of language acquisition and from extremely varied backgrounds. There is no typical EL student. I went round and round with what-ifs in regards to levels and backgrounds and finally decided that, though my current students should not be called typical, they are also not atypical--there is nothing unusual about my group of students. I decided to write the curriculum somewhat like I would write a lesson plan for a substitute teacher. I wrote it for my specific students but gave more explicit direction than I would do if I were only writing plans for myself.

Also, I had to assume that students at the level for which the unit is intended (WIDA overall composite levels above 3.0) understood a great deal about the structure of English. One of the graduate students in my peer review group asked if I had pre-taught verbs to students. This was something that I already had concerns about in the way that verbs were presented in the slides and word lists. In a way I had pre-taught my students,



but I had not done so before I initially began the vocabulary word lists that I hand out to students. Like in the lesson plans, I handed the lists out to the students and told them that the slide would read, for example, *disturb*, but they could use any of the forms for *disturb* on the list. My students didn't question this at all and never had an issue using whichever form fit best in what they wanted to say. I felt like the list was more of a permission so that they did not need to ask if it were okay to say *disturbed* instead of *disturb* or avoid using *disturbed* because they thought it might be wrong. But this is not to say that every student will understand why the different forms are on the list and won't require more information on verbs. After consideration, though, I felt as though this could be explained quite easily during the vocabulary slide lessons and would not require any specific pre-teaching.

I also wondered how much to add into the curriculum that just seemed like my style. I, like every teacher, have my own way of supporting and encouraging students. For example, I write down sentences that I really like and post them on the classroom door. I have a couple students who work really hard to "make the door." My students love the Vocabulary Challenge, but I wonder how much of this lies with the things that I do that aren't included in a typical lesson plan. I did include some discussion regarding rewards for this reason.

### **Images**

The images used for the slides were also a challenge. Since I am not a big company with deep pockets, sometimes I had to settle for an image that was not exactly what I wanted. I often had something very specific in mind but could not find an image

no matter what search terms I typed in. For the term *disturb*, I was trying to find a picture of a younger brother or sister bothering an older sibling who is trying to play a video game. I felt this was something that many students could relate to and would give them plenty of things to talk about using the word *disturb*. However, no matter what I searched, I couldn't find a satisfactory image. I finally gave up and moved on to one of the ideas that made the final cut in the slides.

Also, in my initial slides for Penguin Robots, I included the word *disguise*. I think this is a good word for students to know and very useful to discuss the articles and video. However, images were an issue. A good disguise just looked like a normal person, and a bad disguise looked like a costume. Many of the images had a "stranger danger" feeling to them, and I just was not going to use these in class. I settled on an image of a chow-chow groomed to look like a lion and some silly disguises/costumes, but I did not get good results for word usage. I was afraid that I was giving students the idea that disguises were costumes, and students still said a couple of the images were "creepy." I tried to find workable images again while revising the slides for this project, but I had no better success. I ended up dropping the word for that reason alone.

Additionally, being sensitive to students' cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds was an important consideration. This, however, sometimes clashed with images that I thought would create student interest. For example, one of the slides for the phrase *first of its kind* in the SoFi presentation shows a variety of Apple products--a couple iPhones, an iPad, and a Magic Mouse. I wondered if this might be insensitive to students' socioeconomic situations, but I also know that most students probably want a

phone and this would be of interest to them. This image did make the cut, but I still wonder about it.

To summarize, two major challenges and limitations were writing curriculum for a public audience and appropriate images. I found it difficult to write lessons for generalized third grade EL students; I wasn't sure how much I should assume that students already knew or could do; and I had to consider what might be more of a teacher style than something that should be written into the curriculum. Additionally, images for the slides were problematic in finding exactly what I wanted and in justifying student interest against sensitivity to students' possible situations. I solved these challenges to the best of my ability and now am looking toward the future.

### **Where from Here?**

My third grade classes have already completed the Penguin Robot lessons, although in a slightly different, less elaborate form as appears in the project presented here. We worked on the unit just after winter break. We are currently in the process of working on the SoFi portion of the curriculum. Due to the time that has passed between the articles, we may not complete the compare and contrast between the two. However, we can still compare and contrast SoFi with the video.

I am excited to see how the additions and changes play out, but more importantly, I am anxious to see what kinds of things that I can tweak and improve. After just the first day, I changed the order of a couple slides.

I had planned to do this curriculum next year directly after Winter Break, but now I plan to start the year off with it. I feel as though this is a great starting point for

academic speaking, but I want to move students towards academic discussion throughout the year. I want to build an entire unit around Zwiars and Crawford's (2009) scaffolding for extended student discussions, although I do not have any specific ideas at this time.

As for the curriculum developed for this project, I will be moving all of the documents to my personal Google account when everything is complete, since my Hamline Google account will eventually be deactivated. The documents can then be made public. I have researched how to have users copy and alter the documents without changing the originals, as I would like teachers to have the option to change things in response to their own students' needs.

As I have been going through this capstone process and speaking to other ESL teachers about what I am doing, many have asked me for copies of the finished project. I will let these teachers know when copies are available. I also belong to a couple online groups of ESL teachers, and I intend to offer the lessons to them also.

I am currently working on similar plans for other articles and other grade levels that incorporate many of the same activities and concepts. If I get good feedback from the original lessons, I may make the new lessons available also.

As stated, I am on my way with using the curriculum that I created, though I will not be able to fully implement it until next year. I have plans to make copies available to teachers who have already asked and plans for making the lessons public, and I am currently working on similar plans for other grades.

I have a few final thoughts.

## Final Reflections

Though the capstone process has been stressful, exhausting, and frustrating, it has also taught me much about my teaching practice and about myself. Throughout this whole experience of researching and writing the paper and working on the project, I have been extremely aware of how much I talk and how much my students talk in class. I have made adjustments to my practices to lessen the time I speak and increase the time that students speak. For example, I was out for a couple days with the flu, and instead of writing out complete directions for activities and games (that students already knew), I gave a little direction and instructed the sub to ask the students and not to be satisfied until she understood. If a student is absent, I have the other students explain what the student missed or rules to a game. Before I start explaining almost anything, I first try to ask if someone already knows. This lets the students be the experts and I just fill in the gaps.

Finally, on a very personal note, for many years, I have dreamed of getting my masters degree but thought it was out of my reach. I thought that I would never be able to deal with the stress and certainly not while I was working full time. I thought that I would quit and feel forever defeated. Now, I sit typing this actually feeling that I am nearing completion of my capstone and masters degree. Beyond an academic accomplishment, this has been a life accomplishment in overcoming my personal insecurities and demons.

## Appendix A



### Sample Student

Birth Date: mm/dd/yyyy | Grade: sample grade  
 Tier: sample tier  
 District ID: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX | State ID: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
 School: sample school  
 District: sample district  
 State: sample state

### Individual Student Report 20XX

This report provides information about the student's scores on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 English language proficiency test. This test is based on the WIDA English Language Development Standards and is used to measure students' progress in learning English. Scores are reported as Language Proficiency Levels and as Scale Scores.

Language Domain	Proficiency Level (Possible 1.0-6.0)						Scale Score (Possible 100-600) and Confidence Band See Interpretive Guide for Score Reports for definitions					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	100	200	300	400	500	600
Listening	4.0						368					
Speaking	2.2						320					
Reading	3.4						356					
Writing	3.5						355					
Oral Language 50% Listening + 50% Speaking	3.2						344					
Literacy 50% Reading + 50% Writing	3.5						356					
Comprehension 70% Reading + 30% Listening	3.7						360					
Overall* 35% Reading + 35% Writing + 15% Listening + 15% Speaking	3.4						352					

\*Overall score is calculated only when all four domains have been assessed. NA: Not available

Domain	Proficiency Level	Students at this level generally can...
Listening	4	understand oral language in English related to specific topics in school and can participate in class discussions, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exchange information and ideas with others</li> <li>- Connect people and events based on oral information</li> <li>- Apply key information about processes or concepts presented orally</li> <li>- Identify positions or points of view on issues in oral discussions</li> </ul>
Speaking	2	communicate ideas and information orally in English using language that contains short sentences and everyday words and phrases, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share about what, when, or where something happened</li> <li>- Compare objects, people, pictures, events</li> <li>- Describe steps in cycles or processes</li> <li>- Express opinions</li> </ul>
Reading	3	understand written language related to common topics in school and can participate in class discussions, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Classify main ideas and examples in written information</li> <li>- Identify main information that tells who, what, when or where something happened</li> <li>- Identify steps in written processes and procedures</li> <li>- Recognize language related to claims and supporting evidence</li> </ul>
Writing	3	communicate in writing in English using language related to common topics in school, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describe familiar issues and events</li> <li>- Create stories or short narratives</li> <li>- Describe processes and procedures with some details</li> <li>- Give opinions with reasons in a few short sentences</li> </ul>

For details regarding the scores on this report, refer to the Interpretive Guide for Score Reports at [www.wida.us/scorereport](http://www.wida.us/scorereport)

## Appendix B

The following table shows the features and the prompts used by Zwiers and Crawford (2009, p.2):

Table 1		
<i>Academic Conversation Features</i>		
<u>Feature of Conversation</u>	<u>Prompts for Using the Feature</u>	<u>Prompts for Responding</u>
Come up with a worthwhile topic	Why do you think the author wrote this? What are some themes that emerged in..?	I think the author wrote it to teach us about...  One theme might be...
Elaborate and clarify	Can you elaborate? What do you mean by...? Can you tell me more about...? What makes you think that?	I think it means that...  In other words...
Support ideas with examples	Can you give an example?  Can you show me where it says that? Can you be more specific? Are there any cases of that?	For example, ...  In the text it said that...  One case showed that...

Build on or challenge another's idea	What do you think? Can you add to this idea? Do you agree? What might be other points of view?	I would add that... Then again, I think that... I want to expand on your point about...
Apply/Connect	So how can we apply this idea to our lives? What can we learn from this character/part/story? If you were...	In my life... I think it can teach us... If I were..., I would have...
Paraphrase and summarize	What have we discussed so far? How should we summarize what we talked about?	We can say that... The main theme/point of the text seems to be...



## Appendix C

### Standards

This unit addresses the following Minnesota Academic Standards for third grade language arts. Common Core Standards for ELA are shown in regular font and Minnesota's additions are shown in bold font (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010):

**3.2.1.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

**3.2.2.2** Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

**3.2.9.9** Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic.

**3.3.0.4** Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.

**3.8.1.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

b. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).

c. Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others.

d. Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

**e. Cooperate and compromise as appropriate for productive group discussion.**

**f. Follow multi-step oral directions.**

**3.8.2.2** Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**3.8.6.6** Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

**3.10.1.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

b. Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns.

c. Use abstract nouns (e.g., childhood).

d. Form and use regular and irregular verbs.

e. Form and use the simple (e.g., I walked; I walk; I will walk) verb tenses.

f. Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.

g. Form and use comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.

h. Use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

i. Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.

**3.10.6.6** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate conversational, general academic, and domains specific words and phrases, including those that signal spatial and temporal relationships (e.g., After dinner that night we went looking for them).

Additionally, this unit addresses the following WIDA standards (WIDA, 2018c):

**Standard 1 – Social and Instructional Language**

English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.

**Standard 2 – Language of Language Arts**

English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of language arts.

**Standard 4 – Language of Science**

English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Science.

## Appendix D

### Assessment Rubric

Score Point	Complexity	Delivery	Word choice
<b>Exemplary</b>  4	Student uses sentences that are expanded beyond the complexity of the stems/frames and/or original sentences exceed the complexity of the frames.	Clear, automatic, and fluent delivery	Precise and appropriate word choice; student uses 5 or more target vocabulary words appropriately
<b>Strong</b>  3	Student uses the sentence stems/frames to create complex and varied sentences and/or student creates original sentences that have the same level of complexity and variation as the sentence stems/frames	Clear delivery	Appropriate word choice; student uses 4 or more target vocabulary words in a way that indicates the student comprehends the words
<b>Adequate</b>  2	Student uses simpler sentences than the sentence stems/frames; sentences are not complex and/or varied.	Generally comprehensible use of oral language	Adequate word choice; student uses 3 target vocabulary words in a way that indicates the student generally comprehends the words
<b>Attempted</b>  1	Student uses sentences that do not compare or contrast; or student does not complete his or her part (fewer than 2-3 sentences)	Comprehensibility may be compromised	Word choice may not be fully adequate; student uses less than 3 target vocabulary words and/or in a way that indicates that the student does not comprehend the words
<b>No response</b>  0	Student gives no response or only reads the introduction and/or transition	Student gives no response or only reads the introduction and/or transition	Student gives no response or only reads the introduction and/or transition

Rubric modified from WIDA Screener Speaking Scoring Scale (WIDA, 2019)

## Appendix E

### Student Self-Assessment Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Exceeds 3</b>	<b>Meets 2</b>	<b>Doesn't Meet 1</b>	<b>No response 0</b>
<p><b>Complexity</b></p> <p>My score ____</p>	<p>I used sentences that compared/contrasted and used lots of details.</p>	<p>I used sentences that compared/contrasted and used a little detail.</p>	<p>My sentences didn't compare or contrast.</p>	<p>I didn't say anything;</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>or</b></p> <p>I only read the introduction and/or transition.</p>
<p><b>Delivery</b></p> <p>My score ____</p>	<p>It is easy to hear and understand everything that I said;</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>and</b></p> <p>It is clear that I am speaking, not reading aloud.</p>	<p>It is easy to hear and understand everything that I said.</p>	<p>Sometimes it is hard to understand what I said because I was speaking too quietly or I was speaking too fast.</p>	<p>I didn't say anything;</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>or</b></p> <p>I only read the introduction and/or transition.</p>
<p><b>Word choice</b></p> <p>My score ____</p>	<p>I used 5 or more target vocabulary words.</p>	<p>I used 4 target vocabulary words.</p>	<p>I used 3 or fewer vocabulary words.</p>	<p>I didn't say anything;</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>or</b></p> <p>I only read the introduction and/or transition.</p>

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