

Increasing Academic Vocabulary Acquisition in ELLs

by

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Abstract

This thesis capstone project aims to assist teachers, school counselors, and administrators who all work with English Language Learners (ELLs). At Sayville Elementary School, ELLs are a population that keeps growing as the years progress. This group of learners are impacted by the teacher's language output, language practices across disciplines, and the views, interpretations, and motivations of teachers toward academic vocabulary. To increase ELLs academic vocabulary acquisition, Sayville Elementary School must be looked at through a multilayered lens to provide effective changes for Sayville Elementary School District. Solutions to the problem at Sayville Elementary School include implementations of staff lists including faculty that are bilingual or foreign language speakers, changes to school signage, lesson plan templates designed specifically for ELLs, monthly professional development meetings for faculty, and an annual Cultural Welcome night for ELL students and their families. Several culminations are applicable to reducing and eliminating the gap in academic vocabulary acquisition that exists between ELL and non-ELL students. Recommendations include embodying future programs for ELLs and allocated staff to help the school and the population of ELLs. Moreover, programs that were newly established, for instance, the comprehensive vocabulary plan, should be evaluated to aid with obligatory changes for sizable improvement.

Keywords: English Language Learners, academic vocabulary, professional development, self-efficacy

Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic language plays an important role in the educational journey of a child. Within the United States, academic language refers to the specific language, both oral and written, that occurs in an academic setting which fosters both communication and thinking about disciplinary content (Barnes, 2016). Academic language impacts English Language Learners (ELLs) reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, and ultimately, their overall English Language Proficiency; (ELP) (Heppt et al., 2015). Academic vocabulary is a common term, yet it is less understood in schools (Heineke & Neugebauer, 2020). Many students do not obtain academic vocabulary due to multiple challenges.

One of the challenges resides in teachers' differing knowledge of the linguistic characteristics of academic language, teacher's varying level of understanding of the term, and teachers' varying interpretations and motivations regarding this topic. (Heineke & Neugebauer, 2020). Moreover, students' socioeconomic status (SES) can prevent a barrier for obtaining academic vocabulary. Differences in language exposure in addition to the home literacy environment predict elementary students' vocabulary knowledge (Heppt et al., 2015). Not all teachers have the same level of understanding of the term, nor have they received the proper training in how to implement academic vocabulary into classroom discourse (Coxhead, 2017).

Even if teacher language output incorporates academic vocabulary, there needs to be explicit language instruction that children can engage in that allow them to hear and apply the concept of academic vocabulary (Kelly, 2016). The ELL population is influenced by academic vocabulary, or a lack of it. In several U.S. school districts, including Sayville Elementary School District this presents a current problem. Working in the district for 8 years, Deannie Nobeas states that academic vocabulary acquisition has been a challenge for English Language Learners

(ELLs) taught in Sayville Elementary School for the past 8 years (personal communication, June 18, 2024). Deannie Nobea teaches 400 students and of the 400, 170 are ELLs and the remaining 360 students are English speaking in the 2023-2024 school year (personal communication, May 20, 2024).

These numbers prove the notable difference in school population, which can impact the practices teachers employ in the classroom and teachers' lack in experience working with ELLs in general. Mrs. Corrigan, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, noted that "Teachers language use in the classroom is related to their own language and levels of vocabulary, therefore, continued teacher training and awareness in academic language and vocabulary will help build up teachers' own language knowledge and plays as an important factor in their teaching (Wanzek et al., 2023). Therefore, ELL students may not be exposed to meaningful academic vocabulary use if their teachers are not trained in specific practices or hold the knowledge of how to foster such learning in their classroom.

Aspects of the school day including the school environment also impact ELL students' vocabulary acquisition. According to Coxhead (2017) and Neugebauer & Heineke (2020), EL students are typically not provided with the proper school community to foster vocabulary learning. Academic vocabulary becomes secondary to school communities. In a study of ELLs, 322 teachers of ELL students as well as 22 principals discussed their lack in understanding the role academic language plays in ELL students' learning and the impact their teacher talk, motivation toward and knowledge regarding academic language has on these students and their interpretations of this skill (Coxhead, 2017; Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020).

When ELL students are at school, they should feel academic support all throughout the school community. This is important because most of their day takes place within the school

community, therefore, it is important that students feel supported and understood. When students do not feel this way, their learning is deeply impacted. “When students can sense their teacher does not have an understanding of the material, students feel withdrawn from learning and often mirror the motivation their teachers display” (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020, p. 175). Coxhead (2017) further stated, “teacher attitudes and a school community heavily impact ELLs learning” (p. 2).

If the lack of academic vocabulary acquisition in ELLs continues, there will be more of a significant gap between the language acquisition of mainstream students and ELLs. It is important that ELLs have equal opportunities to engage in learning just like their English-speaking peers. Thus, the main purpose of this project is to help ELLs successfully acquire academic vocabulary by addressing the barriers and obstacles. In Chapter 2, I will address forgoing theories and studies that have evaluated the problem at hand and the possible solutions. The literature I review will help me in evolving my product which is discussed in Chapter 3. The product I discuss in Chapter 3 will seek to expand knowledge regarding academic vocabulary acquisition for ELLs, increasing the motivation, knowledge, and self-efficacy of teachers to help promote the acquisition of this skill, and creating useful practices that will help increase vocabulary development. Chapter 4 concludes with some implications to learning and teaching.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This Chapter reviews the literature related to the academic vocabulary development of English language learners (ELLs). When assessing vocabulary acquisition, it is vital to appraise many dimensions of the teacher's language output, language practices across disciplines, and the views, interpretations, and motivations of teachers toward academic vocabulary (Wanzek et al., 2023). It is only by examining academic language through a multilayered lens, we can understand and apply this skill with greater intention and success. Literature discusses different factors that impact students' understanding of academic language and vocabulary and the strategies General Education, ESOL, ENL, and Bilingual teachers can take to help improve their use of this term and their students' understanding.

These factors include teacher interpretations of academic language (Coxhead, 2017; Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020; Wanzek et al., 2023), knowledge among teachers regarding academic vocabulary (Goldstein et al., 2018; Meier et al., 2019), motivational differences among teachers (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020; Yeo et al., 2021), and the financial and social hardships families face (Barnes et al., 2016; Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler; Ryan, 2021). Research has further established strategies to help students acquire academic vocabulary such as explicit, active vocabulary instruction, sophisticated teacher talk, cross-disciplinary learning, and teachers gaining increased knowledge in language learning and proficiency (Ardell, 2021; Heppt et al., 2015; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Ryan, 2021; Meier et al., 2019). These strategies work coherently in the integration of academic vocabulary in the elementary classroom. As I explore these factors and strategies further, it is salient to frame the discussion within established theoretical constructs.

This chapter draws on Cummins' (1980) academic language and social language theories, specifically, the distinction between basic and interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These theoretical perspectives can help researchers understand academic vocabulary and explain the teacher talk in diverse educational settings.

Understanding ELLs' Academic and Social Development

Cummins' (1980) theories on academic and social language were developed to help draw attention to the many reasons behind the lower academic performance of ENL and bilingual students compared to their monolingual English-speaking peers. He introduced the concept of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) to describe the fluency students have with conversational language, and the concept of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which refers to students' skills and abilities to express ideas orally and in writing, particularly in academic contexts. In other words, BICS refers to informal, conversational language, while CALP pertains to formal, academic language, and understanding the distinction between formal and informal language is imperative to an ELL student's education (Khatib & Taie, 2016). Grasping the importance of both social and academic language helps teachers better prepare their students for future learning. Cummins (1980) furthermore vindicated that failure to acknowledge the differences between BICS and CALP has led to inequitable psychological assessment of bilingual, ESOL, and ELL students, and has led to untimely exit from language programs.

The distinction between informal and formal language is important to a student's learning, research has revealed that acquiring academic language proficiency helps improve ELL students' academic achievement^[MA1], specifically their reading development, oral language skills, and vocabulary (Heppt et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023). Other research supports the

concept that academic language vocabulary aids in students' acquisition of a second language; L2 while strengthening their first language; L1. Using the native language of a student yields hopeful effects on students' language skills. Research supports utilizing the students' home language to help develop their everyday speaking skills; BICS, and then using it to help support more complex, academic vocabulary development; CALP. Similarly, Khatib and Taie (2016) support Cummins' findings, favoring the idea that the more developed L1 is of a student, the easier it will be to support the L2; specifically, BICS. Furthermore, extensive exposure in the L2 helps students develop those complex L2 skills, including students' CALP (Khatib & Taie, 2016).

Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a central concept of Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which has a notable impact on the language acquisition process, specifically with ELL, ESOL, and Bilingual students. ZPD emphasizes the idea that a student will carry out tasks better when they are provided with the help of a skilled peer or adult. This concept emphasizes the role of teacher-student relationships, suggesting that students will perform at better rates provided with assistance rather than working alone. Having a novice and a skilled individual work together helps pass expertise to the novice. This is why teacher talk is important to ELL language development. The more academic and complex language a student hears, the more likely they will advance from their own developmental level and advance to their prospective developmental level (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). Hearing advanced vocabulary improves students' speaking (Zucker et al., 2021).

During the language learning process, specifically while acquiring academic vocabulary, mediated support is vital to students. Typically, school texts are above ENL and ELLs

developmental levels due to the unknown vocabulary they encompass (Barnes et al., 2016). Mediated support is imperative to help students understand the discipline-specific words. Vygotsky developed ZPD with the eventual goal of the student becoming independent. Each academic task entails a problem, a task, and a person who can provide support within the student's ZPD (Sarmiento-Campos, 2022). ELL students face this when presented with academic texts. The problem students face is with the unfamiliarity of the academic vocabulary, the task is to identify the unknown word within the context and the person to help the student with this task is the ELL, ENL, or Bilingual teacher. Mediation is a vital concept within language acquisition, as teachers learn to use tools and different practices to help their students' learning. In essence, ELLs can use academic language learning as a tool to help increase their reading comprehension skills and speaking skills (Coxhead, 2017; Wanzek et al, 2023; Zucker et al., 2021).

Thus, Cummins' (1980) BICS and CALP and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD can guide teachers to help ELLs, specifically in designing and implementing classroom activities that accommodate the needs of ELLs. Next, I will discuss factors that influence the limited acquisition of academic vocabulary in ELL students, as well as academic vocabulary programs.

Language Minority Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Families

Language minority students raised from low SES families are academically disadvantaged compared to their language majority peers coming from middle SES families. In Heppt's (2015) international large-scale assessment study of 19,108 fourth-grade Spanish and German-speaking students were compared to their monolingual English-speaking peers. The study found that minority Spanish and German students from low SES backgrounds had limited language acquisition of academic vocabulary. Similarly, Yeo et al., (2021) study of 322 Mexican-American mothers and their Spanish-speaking children from low SES backgrounds

reported more difficulty acquiring vocabulary than their English monolingual peers from higher SES backgrounds. Participants were selected from prenatal clinics that serviced low-income women and data were collected from mothers after 6, 12, 18, and 24 weeks postpartum, and their children from age 12, 24, 36, and 54 months. Both studies highlight the significant impact of socioeconomic status on vocabulary acquisition, with Yeo et al. emphasizing how financial and sociocultural hardships contribute to this disparity. The vocabulary assessments measured students' reading skills with both general and subject-specific vocabulary through 11 task units consisting of multiple expository texts and narrative texts in the subject of English Language Arts. Data were measured through "expected posteriori estimation based on plausible values; EAP/PV" (Heppt et al., 2015, p. 62).

From as early as infancy, home language environments impact variability in students' vocabulary acquisition. Yeo et al., (2021) found fewer financial stressors was associated with substantial greater receptive vocabulary in English at 4.5 years; $B = .14$, $SE = .05$, $p = .009$, and students from low SES backgrounds were associated with limited English vocabulary at 4.5 years, $B = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $p = .023$ (Yeo et al., 2021). Moreover, this longitudinal study signified the achievement gap between ELLs and English-speaking peers and how sociocultural hardship and financial hardship impact the vocabulary acquisition of ELLs from birth to 4.5 years. [MA3] The study also found that students who came from mostly Spanish-speaking parents and parents who did not complete high school or higher education, had more difficulty with their English language acquisition due to limited exposure and practice in the home environment. Furthermore, the study revealed that family stress impacts a students' receptive vocabulary, and it is present from as early on as 3 years (Yeo et al., 2021). Ryan (2021) conducted a study including 42 early elementary students consisting of equal parts male and female in the

Southwestern United States. Students were in transitional kindergarten and spoke Spanish. 65% of students' parents were not born in the United States and did not speak English (Ryan, 2021). Similar to Yeo et al. (2021), Ryan's (2021) study aimed to look at the Home Language Environment (HLE) and see which factors impact students' language development. Both Ryan (2021) and Yeo et al., (2021), found that family hardship and financial stressors impact a student's language significantly. Data found by Ryan (2021) were measured at five points in the study through in-person observations with data collection. During the longitudinal study, children were measured on their receptive vocabulary skills and reading comprehension skills during the year-long study. Results of the study proved financial stressors and family hardship impact students' reading and language the most, however, it was also noted that an emphasis on home literacy activities in English will help the student develop vocabulary skills in English (Ryan, 2021).

These findings reveal a correlation between academic language features and difficulties in reading comprehension for students classified as an EL from low SES families. Having less familiarity with the L1 being spoken in school, less exposure to language and sophisticated vocabulary, and little literacy activities at home negatively impact ELLs language learning (Yeo et al., 2021). The home language environment influences the literacy and language development of children (Ryan, 2021). Specifically, students who acquire a second language and grow up in a low SES household face challenges identifying long, complex words that are typically specialized academic vocabulary (Heppt et al., 2015).

Aspects outside of school impact ELLs academic performance. These financial hardships, particularly among low SES families and language minority students specifically affect ELLs acquisition of deeper, more complex, academic vocabulary. Yeo et al. (2021) asserts that

financial hardship and sociocultural hardship do not have a strong impact on the students' L1. Vocabulary appeared to suggest sociocultural hardship was less of an impact on students' Spanish; L1 language development as compared to financial stressors (Yeo et al., 2021). When examining the indirect and direct results of the two hardships, data supported the above claim. Students L1; Spanish, were less impacted by their financial and sociocultural hardships. Moreover, the two stressors did not impact the students' development in their native language.

Financial and Sociocultural hardships present difficulties in ELLs reading comprehension. Heppt et al. (2015) found in fourth-grade, language minority students from low SES backgrounds had a harder time with their English reading comprehension; specifically, texts containing a large number of lexical features of academic language (Heppt et al., 2015). Likewise, Yeo et al. (2021) noted the difficulty language minority students have with reading comprehension, mostly due to difficulties understanding receptive vocabulary. Yeo et al. (2021) note that at three years old, children display higher receptive vocabulary in Spanish than English. Furthermore, both Heppt et al. (2015) and Yeo et al. (2021) observed that school settings call for the use of an academic register that varies in both lexical and grammatical features and that is used across different content areas. The consequences of sociocultural and financial hardships for ELL's receptive vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension present difficulties in ELLs by age 4 (Yeo et al., 2021). Education demands the understanding of the academic register early on, making it imperative for ELLs to comprehend to gain greater skills in reading comprehension.

When sociocultural and financial stressors produce vocabulary acquisition difficulties for ELL, teachers need to implement practices to help alleviate these developmental competencies. ELLs struggle most with lexical; specifically general and specialized academic vocabulary,

words with 3 or more syllables, and grammatical features (Heppt et al., 2015; Yeo et al., 2021). Heppt et al. (2014) assert teachers' use of expository texts in the classroom exposes children to the academic language features they struggle with to reach mastery of the linguistic features that pose a barrier to comprehension.

Varying Teachers' Motivations and Knowledge of Academic Language

Varying teachers' motivations and lack of knowledge regarding academic language hinders ELLs acquisition of this skill. School teachers do not always foster academic language learning with ELLs. Neugebauer and Heineke (2020) affirm that despite its common use, academic language is less understood by teachers. Although academic vocabulary pervades the standards set in education as well as teacher evaluation systems for teachers' getting their licenses (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020; Wanzek et al., 2020; Weinburgh et al., 2014), it is a skill not all teachers across disciplines have acquired. Meanwhile, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation State Standards (NGSS) raise expectations for teachers and students in vocabulary learning. Not only are students expected to develop academic vocabulary, but they are also required to use academic language vocabulary, which places emphasis on using academic vocabulary in discussions that foster inquiry (Barnes, 2016; Kelly, 2016).

A problem arises when students are required to learn a skill and teachers are not fluent in teaching the skill. In Neugebauer and Heineke's (2020) survey of 322 elementary school teachers; 83% female and 17% male across 22 schools located in the United States reported that differences in ESL and Bilingual teachers' experience and expertise with academic vocabulary can be because teacher preparatory trainings focus solely on ELs rather than ELs, ELLs and Bilingual students. This can cause ELL and Bilingual teachers to have varying understandings of how to implement this within their classrooms due to a lack of information. Teachers from

Neugebauer and Heineke's (2020) study reported on average teaching for at least 13 years, others for at least 5. Similarly, Meier et al. (2019) grapple that teacher education programs are geared more toward teachers of ELs and lack coursework and hands-on experiences for ELL and Bilingual teachers in the practices and strategies, such inquiry-based learning in science, that have proved effective in supporting ELL vocabulary learning.

ELL students require support from teachers across all disciplines . By providing all teachers with such training and experiences to help build their knowledge and motivation to use academic language, they will become better equipped to implement academic vocabulary learning for all students. In their 13-month mixed-methods study involving individual and focus group interviews to assess the understanding of academic language among 12 preservice science teachers in a teacher education program, Meier et al. (2019) found teachers' biggest challenge was with implementing academic language support within the classroom to better foster academic language development for ELLs. Despite demonstrating an advanced understanding of academic language and envisioning it as a skill encompassing lexical or vocabulary, syntactic, and message levels by the end of their program, teachers struggled with practical application. Similarly, Neugebauer and Heineke (2020) suggested that while teachers developed a sophisticated view on academic vocabulary and understood the term clearly, they faced challenges in carrying out classroom practices that support academic language use.

Another factor that impacts teachers' behaviors; specifically, their use of academic vocabulary in the classroom is inconsistent levels of teacher self-efficacy. Neugebauer and Heineke (2020) found that teacher self-efficacy influences teachers' classroom behaviors, specifically, their practices with academic language learning. Teacher self-efficacy is a motivational construct that emphasizes the belief that teachers can impart knowledge that will

influence student behavior (Shahid & Thompson, 2001). In the study conducted by Shahid & Thompson (2001), task-value research surfaced as another motivational factor for teachers implementing academic vocabulary in the classroom. Both teacher self-efficacy and task-value research are two crucial aspects to consider when studying varying motivations in teachers' use of academic vocabulary.

Shahid and Thompson (2001) concluded that task value research documents the level of engagement of a teacher in a function that exemplifies the perceptions of both value and importance of the task. Capturing the two motivational factors for targeted teaching practices and ameliorating initiatives has proven essential given the multilayer nature of vocabulary instruction and now has provided functions for teacher training (Neugebauer & Heineke; 2020; Weinburgh et al., 2014). In line with these findings, Tolbert and Salinas (2019) and Brown et al. (2019) concluded teacher behavior impacts student behavior. Moreover, they insist teachers engage in output-focused supports such as explicit clear modeling and examples of the target language through teacher-led discussions or reconstruction and metalinguistic discussions. By doing so, students gain academic language skills through exposure and meaningful practices.

Moreover, Meier et al. (2019) determined that teachers must understand the teaching of disciplinary language needs to coexist with teaching across all content areas. The study insisted teachers' understanding of academic language grew over time from a primary focus on just vocabulary, to embodying all three levels of language: syntax, lexical, and discourse. The growth of what teachers have learned was also noted in the study as teachers reflected on their own learning process. Interview responses recorded teachers having a vague understanding of academic language. As the study progressed, teacher participants engaged in instructional support that provided students with hands-on learning before introducing academic vocabulary

terms, and practices that ensured comprehensible input, and facilitation of language production (Meier et al. 2019). These were practices that surfaced as the most useful to use with ELLs to yield academic language acquisition .

Instructional Methods and Practices Hindering ELLs' Academic Language Acquisition

Poorly planned classroom instruction impedes ELLs vocabulary acquisition. According to Wanzek et al. (2023), teacher talk highly impacts students' vocabulary outcomes, therefore, if teachers are not exposing students to sophisticated targeted words during classroom practices, they are limiting students' ability of gaining academic vocabulary. Teachers face challenges incorporating instruction that promotes engagement in academic vocabulary and academic teacher talk into their pedagogy (Coxhead, 2017; Keisler & Bowers, 2014; Weinburgh et al., 2014). The quantity and quality of teacher talk varied in the study conducted by Wanzek et al. (2023), common words, less common words, academic words, and curriculum vocabulary were all considered. 1% of words used in the classroom were classified as academic words, 15% were less common words, curriculum vocabulary was used during 1% of classroom instruction, and 83% of the words used were common words (Wanzek et al., 2023).

The study reviewed the use of 64 second grade teachers' vocabulary in the United States throughout the school day across different content areas. The study aimed to look at the relationship between teacher talk and the language achievement of both general education and ELL students. 28 schools across 4 districts in the Southeast United States were reviewed. All teacher vocabulary was collected through 2 full day recordings of teacher instruction twice a month using both a language environment analysis; LENA, and a digital language processor (Wanzek et al., 2023). Teachers knew that students' grammar, reading achievement and vocabulary were being measured in the Fall and Spring of that one year. Students' achievement

in these three areas were measured using specific tests such as the Expressive Vocabulary Test for vocabulary measurement, the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals for measurement of grammar, and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test for measurement of reading (Wanzek et al., 2023).

Similarly, Uccelli et al. (2015) conclude that elementary teachers do not meet the rigor and scaffolding necessary for lessons across content areas that are deemed necessary for ELLs vocabulary development. While efforts at adaptations are made, not all were triumphant in the classroom and in their implementation. Strategies that were used in the elementary classrooms were deemed surface level, did not engage students, and were not context-dependent nor usage-based (Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2020; Uccelli et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023). In Uccelli et al.'s (2015) study, a cross-sectional sample was collected at the end of the school year during regular school activities involving 218 students from the United States ranging from grades 4 to 6 that were considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). The participants were equal parts male and female and the majority were Spanish speaking with a smaller portion Arabic. Data was retrieved through 4 assessments, each lasting 45 minutes. The assessments consisted of Core Academic-Language skills (CALS, the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT), the Vocabulary Association Test (VAT) and the Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF).

In these comparable studies (Uccelli et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023), researchers suggest that teachers do not engage in academic teacher talk frequently enough to promote the acquisition of academic vocabulary in their students, nor are they prepared to effectively carry out practices that elicit this type of language use. Both studies indicate that elementary teachers are not equipped, nor aware of the impact their academic language output has on their students' academic language acquisition, even if they have formerly received training or instruction on

how to do so. If students are not exposed to high-quality teacher talk nor provided opportunities to use academic language, the skill will not be acquired. Furthermore, there will be challenges in ELL's literacy skills such as reading comprehension as school texts utilize academic vocabulary. Uccelli et al. (2015) noted that academic vocabulary exposure through teacher talk accounted for a considerable portion of the variance in ELL students' reading comprehension, indicating that the more academic teacher talk a student is exposed to, the higher reading comprehension skills they have. Similar findings from Perfetti & Stafura (2014) note that academic vocabulary knowledge is a critical donor to reading comprehension. Teacher talk which utilizes academic vocabulary will increase the language achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students, promoting further segregation between these two groups of students within the school community.

To rectify teacher practices, teachers can reconfigure their lesson plans and classroom practices to foster cross-disciplinary academic language. Teachers can do this through a comprehensive vocabulary program utilizing direct instruction for specific words, wide reading, word learning strategies, and word consciousness (Uccelli et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023; Zucker et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers can work on building their academic teacher talk through shared book reading while promoting student academic language by modeling turn and talk conversations, allowing students to then engage in them with peers, and utilizing other content areas in learning such as science and social studies (Coxhead, 2017; Uccelli et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023; Zucker et al., 2021). These approaches to learning will ensure that ELLs vocabulary is a top priority and secure their proper opportunity to learn in the classroom.

Opportunities for active engagement in vocabulary acquisition are challenging for ELL students during the school day. According to Somé-Guièbré (2015), engagement in vocabulary

learning is frequently interrupted for ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Additionally, Somé-Guiébré (2015) concluded that ELL students have less opportunity to engage in active vocabulary learning due to their limited exposure to content knowledge. In a year-long study of African immigrant students in a midwestern elementary school in the United States, data was retrieved through observation field-notes, interviews, and audio-tapes. ELL students in this study were taken away from the classroom environment twice a day for 40 minutes of instruction. Students left the classroom in the middle of a subject and then returned in the middle of another subject.

By the same token, Coxhead (2017) contends that teacher talk is much lower in the elementary grades and prevents students from active engagement in the vocabulary process. In fact, the study revealed a gap in the acquisition of everyday discourse and the academic register frequently used in school due to a lack of opportunities for engagement. Coxhead (2017) evaluated two different including Heatly and Range Programme and Nation's (2016) (Coxhead, 2017). These two lists are derived from the British National Corpus and the Corpus of American English (Coxhead, 2017). Both Coxhead (2017) and Somé-Guiébré (2015) concluded that a lack of exposure to teacher talk and passive vocabulary engagement resulted in increased challenges with students' vocabulary acquisition and literacy skills. Passive vocabulary engagement was experienced by ELL students who were taken from instructional time, causing them to further lack content knowledge (Somé-Guiébré, 2015). Also, she asserts that passive vocabulary leads to disengagement in the learning process and withdrawal from the language learning environment. Coxhead (2017) additionally claims that ELLs suffer from a lack of content knowledge which emphasizes their challenges with acquiring academic vocabulary.

Differing practices that emphasize active language learning can benefit ELLs academic vocabulary possession. Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) assert that using songs during vocabulary instruction for elementary English Learners (ELs) is beneficial. This practice generates opportunities for students to gain multitudes of words, have access to repetition, learn the sequence of words, maintain memory, reduce anxiety and promote acquisition (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Kelly, 2016; Uccelli et al., 2015). Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) revealed that songs are effective in instruction and teachers responded in favor of using songs during classroom activities. Nguyen and Nguyen (2020), conducted a descriptive study with 75 teachers and observed their instructional practice of using songs in their vocabulary learning. Data was collected through questionnaires and follow-up interviews over a 20-week period at an English language center. English learners at the center ranged from age 6 to 10. Likewise, Goldstein et al. (2017) uphold that participation in active language learning benefits ELLs vocabulary possessions.

Active language learning includes learning where students produce a product and play an active role in the learning process such as singing songs to learn vocabulary (Goldstein et al., 2017; Nguyen & Nguyen 2020). Active learning provides ELLs with a strong opportunity to overcome limited vocabularies. Participation in classroom practices that emphasize comprehensible learning through incidental vocabulary learning, direct vocabulary learning, and building students' word consciousness is beneficial. Furthermore, practices that also incorporate basic words, domain-general sophisticated words, and domain-specific technical words are useful (Coxhead, 2017; Goldstein et al., 2017; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Zucker et al., 2021).

These determinations were further made in Goldstein et al. (2017) study via curriculum-based assessments that measured targeted vocabulary words used by teachers and their

relationship with students' word knowledge. First graders in two different elementary schools located in the United States participated in the study and were randomly selected for vocabulary instruction groups or phonics groups. The students were participants in the study for a total of three years; their progress being tracked from grades one to three. The students were randomly assigned a group: vocabulary instruction or phonics, starting in first grade and then continued in this group for second and third grade.

Each group had their strengths, although enforced differently. Both groups were administered through learning centers carried out by researchers, having students listen to interactive activities for 20-minute sessions, repeated four times a week. The groups did differ greatly in their results, specifically on the vocabulary assessment. Students in the vocabulary instruction group had greater word recognition, specifically with tier 3 words consisting of discipline-specific vocabulary. Teachers can encourage practices and participation in active language learning with participation in songs, shared book reading, multiple-turn conversations, content area instruction, and direct vocabulary instruction emphasizing word consciousness (Goldstein et al., 2017). These specific practices were utilized during the vocabulary instruction group and helped ELLs acquire academic vocabulary through active participation.

Solutions and Academic Vocabulary Programs

There are potential research gaps that exist in the reviewed literature. When considering students' academic language acquisition, including parent questionnaires of their welfare and background, as well as the varying levels of professional development, teacher training, and teacher endorsements, should be noted. More research needs to be dedicated to assessing and aiding teachers, administrators, and practitioners in developing an understanding of academic language learning. Furthermore, providing teachers with opportunities to build up their

understanding of this skill and deconstruct any misconceptions they have of academic language through training and development would be beneficial. Training that fosters linguistic thinking in teachers and increases their awareness of the role financial and social hardships play in student learning will help the overall learning process for diverse learners.

Language minority students from low SES families can be conciliated through both teacher and school intervention practices. It is salient that teachers and other school staff members help students by getting to know them beyond the classroom and their backgrounds. Schools can employ practices to help address the linguistic features that are correlated with disparities ascribed to students' language backgrounds and features due to social disparities. Such practices include targeted vocabulary instruction, and early experience with academic texts (Heppert et al., 2015).

Some studies are smaller in sample-size (Goldstein et al., 2017; Meier et al., 2019; Somè-Guièbrè et al., 2015) Future larger samples of students and teachers from different racial and ethnic groups would help deliver a grander picture and more discernment. Furthermore, some studies only seize one portion of the whole population. For example, in Wanzek et al., (2023) study, only second grade teachers were enlisted for the research. Moreover, while some studies had two cooperating schools or districts talked through in their literature, additional research may be necessary to understand which practices would best work in each classroom program: English Immersion, Sheltered Immersion, or Dual Language. Lastly, it is critical to mull over the limitations of participants' responses because they may not fully represent their thoughts and beliefs.

Specific interventions need to be employed by preservice teachers to better scaffold the language demands. To bridge the gap between teachers' knowledge and motivation to use

academic language in the classroom, specific practices can be utilized. Meier et al. (2019) suggest, ELLs academic language acquisition should be broken up into 4 categories of instructional support: providing context for language being used in the classroom, managing language comprehension, addressing language production, and incorporating students' L1 and linguistic practices. Such practices can be consecrated to promote a positive, effective approach to ELLs acquisition of academic language and support for disciplinary language use.

A complete review of literature, research, studies, and knowledge of potential research gaps has illuminated my understanding of ELLs language acquisition, specifically their acquisition of academic vocabulary. The following reasoning for the professional development and teacher training that will be implemented to help decode and decipher these known problems will be useful in further exploring this topic. In chapter 3 I will discuss my professional development plan. This professional development plan is designed to emphasize the importance of teachers who are well-prepared to work with students of diverse backgrounds such as ELLs, and the importance of culturally responsive practices and materials in classrooms. ELL students will be given opportunities to engage in classroom practices and interactions that promote the acquisition of academic vocabulary, which is integral for their vocabulary acquisition (Wanzek et al., 2023).

Moreover, the professional development I design will help the school distinguish itself as a multilingual and culturally responsive learning community. Through planning and enforcing new ideas and practices, academic vocabulary acquisition will be much more attainable for students in the Sayville Elementary School District.

Chapter 3: Description of the Product and Tools

In this chapter, I will introduce a professional development plan and coinciding rationale that petitions to improve ELLs opportunities to engage in academic language practices at Sayville Elementary School. Working in the district for 8 years, as an English as a New Language (ENL) Elementary teacher, Deannie Nobeia asserts that academic language learning; specifically academic vocabulary, has been a challenge for English Language Learners (ELLs) taught in the Sayville Elementary School District for the past 8 years (personal communication, July 8, 2024). I have assessed this problem in agreement with literature. It became perceivable that there are many areas of deficiency within the school environment and teacher practices that work against the implementation and use of academic language for ELL students. The elements of the product were selected based on the areas that presented as high needs and measures that can be willingly achieved to institute the changes that are required.

In the following portions, solutions to the problem of academic language acquisition at Sayville Elementary School are presented. At the forefront, an outline of the professional development plan is provided. Thereafter, newly-developed tools for the teachers, and students are expressed. Implements include dynamically introducing academic vocabulary, changes to school signage, improved ELL lesson-plan templates, professional development for staff, and a Comprehensive Vocabulary Plan including wide reading, increased morphology, and direct instruction.

Description of the Professional Development

The professional development plan will be presented at the Sayville Elementary School annual Summer meeting held on August 31, 2024. The ELL professional development will be held in the Sayville Elementary School auditorium from 10AM to 1PM. The three hour meeting

will provide me with an opportunity to communicate with all of my staff members. Additionally, the elementary school teacher; Deannie Nobeia, will present at the session and will contribute to the discussion by including specific details about ELLs if needed.

The professional development will be set up in the form of a Google slideshow in addition to many different handouts (see appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H) to help guide the discussion. The name of the professional development I created is called Sayville Elementary School Take 2; as it is designed to establish a refined, upgraded, version of the school we all currently know and love. The professional development will be a multifaceted transfiguration to correct the shortcomings of the school environment and classroom practices and will encircle the following topics: dynamically introducing academic vocabulary, considering morphology in instruction, changes to school signage, improved ELL lesson-plan templates, professional development for staff, and focusing on systematic vocabulary learning in school.

Each constituent is discussed separately in the following section including the following: a description, rationale, how it resolves the lack of academic vocabulary acquisition in ELLs at Sayville Elementary School, and its respect to the literature reviewed.

Dynamically Introducing Academic Vocabulary

ELL students are inclined to face difficulty in reading comprehension due to the result of students' difficulty in understanding the academic vocabulary and language of school texts (Uccelli et al., 2015). Dynamically introducing academic vocabulary can help alleviate difficulty in reading comprehension. Giving students recurrent encounters with multiple contexts can help students personalize the definition. In a study by Wanzek et al. (2023), second-grade teachers felt that students had difficulty grasping the academic vocabulary in school texts because they did not have authentic encounters that could help these students internalize definitions of these

sophisticated vocabulary words. One second-grade teacher of the study on academic vocabulary and literacy achievement noted that ELL students were not able to partake in school-wide reading activities and library practices due to their lack of encounters with contexts to help internalize academic definitions. The participant stated:

I recognize that vocabulary is fundamental to recognizing and comprehending words in print. I noticed ELL students were not engaged and appeared to be very confused with the vocabulary and grammar being used. The students did not understand the vocabulary being used so they were not even engaged in the reading nor were they comprehending the reading. (Wanzek et al., 2023, p. 3574)

A reading comprehension study by Uccelli et al. (2015) shows that “students with higher academic vocabulary knowledge tend to score higher on reading comprehension assessments and a lack of academic vocabulary knowledge promotes regression in reading comprehension skills (p. 347). Thus, dynamically introducing academic vocabulary by giving students repeated encounters with vocabulary and context emphasizing the specific vocabulary is very beneficial to students’ academic vocabulary acquisition. Teachers can say the vocabulary words aloud and have students repeat the words. Furthermore, to provide students with repeated visual support, the teacher could display the vocabulary words along with their definitions for students to view on the classroom word wall, a flip chart, or a graphic organizer specific for vocabulary.

Exemplifying pictures that are related to the word is also a helpful technique to dynamically introduce academic vocabulary. Introducing vocabulary in these ways can help students overall academic achievement. Ferlazzo (2014) states “Academic vocabulary has been shown to be a critical element in reading comprehension and academic achievement. Vocabulary accounts for over half of the impact of all factors that influence reading comprehension” (p. 2).

Improving School Signage

Students of minority groups such as ELLs face difficulty in feeling valued and understood (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020). In a study conducted by Neugebauer and Heineke (2020), students all agreed on having teachers that “lacked in making them feel understood” (pg, 161) and “tended to focus on ELs” (p. 161). Students were feeling this way due to a lack of an inclusive learning community. An inclusive learning community is one that allows all students to feel a sense of acceptance, belongingness, and desire to be their true selves while participating fully in the educational journey (Kelly, 2016). The student body represents a group of students that have come together to be active participants in their education and take interest in their education. Regrettably, the student body does not represent ELL students and lacks cultural signage serving ELL students cultural backgrounds.

Being receptive to multicultural learning is vital to helping students feel a sense of belongingness in the classroom environment (Kelly, 2016). Although it is important for ELL students to feel welcomed and comfortable in the classroom environment, it is also important that they feel comfortable in the overall school community, outside of the formal learning setting (Somé-Guiébré, 2015). Somé-Guiébré (2015) noted a lack of teachers’ understanding of students and their cultures negatively impacts the students’ learning process. To help ELLs feel accepted in their school community and encourage these students to engage in the school environment, the school signage can be renovated to complement the community of ELL learners and help them feel included in learning.

Currently, not many areas of the school depict countries other than America. Therefore, increased energy needs to display increased appreciation for various cultures and countries. The school will total current signage with translated signage. Prior to the school year beginning, the

signs in the school will be taken down and changed in order to include the language(s) of students that make up the school community. The school will refer to the new roster to see how many languages will need to be included in the list of languages to add on signs. The custodial crew will make these changes prior to the first day of school; September 4th, 2024. Signage being changed will be in areas of the school such as the main office, the guidance office, the nurse, the cafeteria, the gym, the bathrooms, and the library. ELL students will feel better supported and accepted in the school community which can increase their motivation in the learning environment (Kelly, 2016).

Templates for ELL Lesson Plans

Research has demonstrated that pre-service teachers are not properly trained on how to teach academic vocabulary to ELL students (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020). At the moment, content teachers at Sayville Elementary School do not use a lesson plan template specifically geared toward ELLs nor do these lesson plan templates emphasize the sophisticated language known as academic vocabulary. This portion of the professional development incorporates faculty discussions regarding their knowledge of the lesson plan elements. I set in motion this segment by asking teacher personnel to tell me the segments that make up a lesson plan. On the SMARTBoard, I will list the answers I received. We will then take time to review the responses as a group for mainstream learning. The teachers will then answer the question of if these components listed on the SMARTBoard are geared toward the needs of ELLs. By asking this question, it will direct the conversation to introduce the next few elements in the section to ensure teachers know how to provide ELLs with an effective and efficient lesson plan.

Following the many different elements to drafting a lesson plan specific for ELLs, I will further supply a description of each section, focusing on the components that possibly are not

used by content teachers already. For example, I will discuss both content and language objectives, since they are both critical to instruction for a language learner. In addition, I will go over the accommodations and which accommodations are for all students, and which are specific to ELLs. For instance, extended time is a general accommodation whereas providing bilingual dictionaries is an accommodation geared toward ELLs (Coxhead, 2017). “Teacher talk, pre-teaching vocabulary, active language instruction, and scaffolded opportunities for learning are the most important aspects for ELL teachers” (Meier et al., 2020, p. 26).

Lesson plan templates that distinctly define ELL categories can aid teachers in differentiating for ELLs (Meier et al., 2020). By utilizing templates, the self-efficacy should increase in teachers. Self-efficacy “reflects perceived competence in imparting knowledge and influencing student behavior (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020). Professional personnel should hold more confidence in that they can accomplish the goals set forth in the ELL lesson plan. Lesson plans have the power to construct effective teachers of ELLs as the content objectives and knowledge, as well as the language pedagogy will be reckoned (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020). Templates for lesson planning need to incorporate spaces for students to exercise their understanding of academic vocabulary and their needs to be a space where teachers can self-check their own practices to make sure they are utilizing this type of vocabulary and providing time for students to as well.

The Aspen Institute states “The lack of frequent and systematic instruction of academic vocabulary as its focus is a primary cause of the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs (pg. 2). Lesson plan templates that emphasize academic vocabulary are better geared toward helping ELLs acquire better language acquisition overall. ELL-teacher created lesson templates

will be shared with the elementary school staff that can be utilized in all classrooms across the building and can also be accessed in the digital version on Google Drive.

Templates that emphasize vocabulary, specific academic vocabulary aid in students' overall knowledge. According to Sedita (2005), "Students' word knowledge is strongly linked to academic success because students who have large vocabularies can understand new ideas and concepts and build connections between ideas. Having this template with new emphasis on vocabulary helps teachers see what is expected of ELL learners and helps build their overall word knowledge as well as academic success. The template has areas for everyday words, cross-disciplinary content words, and content or technical words. The main components of the lesson plan are broken down into word/phrase level, sentence level, discourse level, and sociocultural context. Using this template helps provide appropriate and effective instruction for ELLs that promote differentiation and accommodations without decreasing the expectations for these students. More effective and efficient instruction should help yield more improvements in students' academic performance.

Professional Development Monthly Meetings

Consistent professional development improves teacher's self-efficacy, motivation, and knowledge (Neugebauer & Heineke; 2020). According to a participant in Neugebauer and Heineke (2020) study of K-12 teachers' understandings of teaching ELLs academic language and professional development provided to them in this area, an in-service teacher stated, "I feel less equipped and motivated to think and act linguistically based on my preparation" (p. 160).

To ameliorate the knowledge of teaching personnel, each monthly meeting with faculty will include a portion dedicated to just ELLs. This portion will be called "Effective, Engagement, ELLs" (EEE). This portion of the meeting will be dedicated to the commitment of

effectively and efficiently teaching language learners. Each department in the school will take turns presenting on ELLs and “taking the lead”. It is not beneficial for every professional development to have the same speaker, therefore, circulating the responsibilities throughout departments is a good way to ensure variability. Each department will present an activity they use within their class and content area that works particularly well with their ELLs.

During each professional development, the department in charge of presenting will present their information to the faculty through any platform they feel comfortable using. Many staff members pick Google Slideshow or PowerPoint and hand out paper copies of the presentation for staff to follow along with. There is a Google File where faculty can add any new, useful information after the meeting. Additional folders for different content areas will be added to the Google File, allowing for teachers to add additional information such as Google documents, worksheets, or other electronic files.

Throughout time, useful resources will begin to accumulate such as worksheets, information, and lesson plans for all of Sayville Elementary School teachers. It would be beneficial for other schools within the Sayville School District to follow this model partnership and collaborative monthly professional developments. Continuing professional development professional development by different faculty members, in addition to following current themes with ELLs, is important to help all professionals working with ELLs and build their recognition of what they can be doing to help all of their students (Kelly, 2016; Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020). By increasing teacher awareness, we can better meet the needs of ELLs and ensure academic growth (Coxhead, 2017; Meier et al., 2020; Wanzek et al., 2023). E.E.E. would reinforce ELLs social emotional needs, well-being, rapport with faculty, academic needs, vocabulary acquisition, and integration at all levels,

Professional development is important for teachers to attend, especially those teachers that have not received education, preparatory courses, or training in working with ELLs. Furthermore, it is important to keep the topics discussed relevant and keep the discussion engaging and active. Allowing the dialogue and discussion to be open to each different department monthly, it helps keep ELLs at the forefront of educators' minds. During the professional developments educators can ask questions to help clarify topics or concepts and gain support from their other colleagues. The elementary school ELL teacher will be present at faculty meetings so she can answer any questions colleagues may have. Moreover, other teaching personnel may also be able to answer questions faculty may have. Monthly professional developments permit faculty to gain and continue conversation that will continue to promote the well-being of the students they work with.

Comprehensive Vocabulary Development: Wide Reading, Morphology, & Direct

Instruction

In a study conducted by Somé-Guiébré (2015), Mrs. Banks, Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Li, and Mrs. Rita all claim that academic vocabulary rarely occurs in oral conversations but rather only in academic disciplines. As a consequence of this, students are not exposed to word origins, the multiple meanings of words, and the multiple references to concepts that connect to different content areas. This portion of the professional development aims to show teachers how they can provide ELL students with comprehensive vocabulary development. Wide reading is one approach teachers will be trained on. This instructional technique is an indirect instructional model that helps expose children to a large number of words through several opportunities to read many different texts. Extensive reading has been linked to improvement in general knowledge, vocabulary, spelling, verbal fluency, and reading comprehension (Cunningham &

Stanovich, 2001). This instructional technique shows teachers the importance of reading. Students cannot possibly learn all the vocabulary they need to learn, therefore, giving them the opportunity to read different texts allows them to be exposed to new words.

However, students sometimes still lack vocabulary because they do not grasp meaning from what they are reading, therefore more exposure to printed words helps give students an opportunity to gain background knowledge, grasp an understanding of the academic vocabulary, and acquire new word meanings for specific words. This technique to provide teachers with will help close the word gap and promote learning of academic language and vocabulary. Teachers express the challenges they have with incorporating academic vocabulary into the classroom due to a lack of knowledge of academic vocabulary and the types of practices that help the development of this skill (Coxhead, 2017). Coxhead (2017) showed that teachers are unfamiliar with academic vocabulary practices and teachers' teach-talk and vocabulary is lexically poor. Therefore, it is crucial teachers become educated on how they can gain a better understanding of academic vocabulary, how to use it in their classroom, and how to teach it.

Direct instruction of the academic vocabulary words is important; however, it is not the only effective vocabulary instruction technique. During the professional development, teachers will be introduced to another portion of comprehensive vocabulary instruction which is direct instruction of important academic words. According to Ryan (2021), students learn between 2,000 and 3,000 words each year. Although we cannot directly teach each word, we can provide direct instruction to some words by pre-teaching vocabulary prior to reading tasks which will also further alleviate challenges with reading comprehension. When teachers decide which words they will teach, they will be able to provide students with instruction that will help the words really stick. For example, providing students with clear explanations in addition to examples of

the word meanings. Additionally, giving students the means to talk with peers, analyze their thoughts, and use the words in sentences is a beneficial way for students to acquire academic vocabulary knowledge (Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2020). Providing professional development in helping teachers understand the need for academic vocabulary in the classroom is crucial in helping students build a greater overall understanding of words.

The last component of the comprehensive vocabulary development proposal is considering student' morphology. Morphology helps students understand individual parts of meanings within the words which can help students when they approach a word they do not know. Students come across multiple academic vocabulary words they do not know, however, when they use their knowledge of the words' units such as the root words, suffixes, as well as prefixes, they may be able to uncover the words meaning. Students face difficulty reading textbooks and other school texts because of the academic vocabulary embedded within the text (Uccelli et al., 2015), with this being said, increasing students' morphology awareness can help them break the word down into its known parts and potentially uncover the word's meaning.

A comprehensive vocabulary development plan eases the difficulties both teachers and students have with acquiring academic vocabulary. This plan was selected for Sayville Elementary School because there is no current vocabulary instruction that places emphasis on building students' vocabulary specifically. Having faculty be aware of the ways to provide instruction that is active, direct, and comprehensive helps prepare students for their future where they will engage with sophisticated vocabulary. Donna and Leah; two second grade teachers state "both the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) and the *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS) raise the stakes for us and our students in academic vocabulary (Kelly, 2016, p. 53). Academic vocabulary instruction works for the common good of ELLs.

Intended Outcomes of “Sayville Elementary School Take 2”

There are multiple anticipated outcomes to sharing this professional development designed for Sayville Elementary School. Paramount, it provides all staff and faculty with useful information to make further knowledgeable decisions that they currently do not have. Adjacent to this, attendees are now going to be cautious of the fresh changes and will understand the benefits of participating in a discussion with other colleagues about ELL students. Furthermore, the professional development provides an opportunity for faculty to engage in ongoing conversation about future monthly meetings and create practices that emphasize the well-being of ELL students. By having information that is pertinent and accessible, teachers will be able to provide inclusive learning environments that are tailored to the vocabulary development of ELLs which is another goal of professional development. The large goals of this professional development are to enable ELLs to feel valued, included, and respected in the classroom environment and in return, their willingness to participate in the classroom learning will increase and they will better face academic success.

Specific improvements in the classroom will help students’ academic language development specifically (Goldstein et al., 2018). The diversified changes will work concurrently in multiple areas, creating a triumphant environment of change. Changes in practices and school agreements can help students feel included in the learning community and can help them acquire better language acquisition. As time passes, approaches and viewpoints should be more considerate and extensive. Each year, we can move these implications and make necessary changes as we go. Plan of actions must be implemented in the classroom and the school to generate an environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and upholds respect and value of ELL students so that their language acquisition process can be better supported.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis capstone project has explored the deficiency in vocabulary acquisition in several U.S. school districts, including Sayville Elementary School. This shortage can result in reading comprehension difficulties, and overall difficulties in language proficiency (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020; Ryan, 2021). The project also appraised teacher interpretations of academic language, knowledge among teachers regarding academic vocabulary, motivational differences amongst teachers, and lastly, the financial and social hardships families face. Further discussion is placed on the strategies that help students acquire academic vocabulary such as providing vocabulary instruction that is explicit and active, sophisticated teacher talk, cross-disciplinary learning, and teachers gaining increased knowledge in language learning and proficiency (Ardell, 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Ryan, 2021).

In order to fully probe academic vocabulary in schools, the students' school community needs to consider the students' homelife, classroom instruction and practices, and teachers' motivations and knowledge regarding academic vocabulary. In this Chapter, I initially summarize the literature. Preceding this, I talk over the implications for teaching ELLs and lastly, I conclude with recommendations for moving ahead and conducting future research.

Overview of Previous Research

I have assessed various studies revolving around the academic vocabulary acquisition in ELLs. The studies include case studies based on financial and social hardships ELLs and their families face (Heppt et al., 2015; Ryan, 2021), the impact teachers' knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy have on academic vocabulary use (Ardell, 2021; Neugebauer & Heineke; 2020), instruction in ELL classrooms (Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2020; Meier et al., 2020), ELL challenges with reading comprehension due to lack of academic vocabulary acquisition

(Coxhead 2017; Uccelli et al., 2015), and teachers' vocabulary use and students' language and literacy development (Uccelli et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2023). Making use of this research, I was able to contrive the best approaches as we move forward at Sayville Elementary school in the Sayville District.

There are many approaches a school can take to provide students with the greater opportunity to engage in academic vocabulary learning. It is important to consider students' demographics, the different activities and programs offered to students, and the different approaches that would work best for the student and the population of parents that are involved in the school. There are multiple routes to help improve this topic for each district, however, the first stepping stone for any district is initiating the process and committing to change.

In correspondence with my research questions, there are multiple interpretations that are applicable to reducing and eliminating the challenge of ELLs acquiring academic vocabulary. First, ELLs typically face social and financial hardships when compared to their non-ELL peers (Heppt et al., 2015; Ryan, 2021), which can cause difficulties in their literacy and language achievements; specifically, their academic vocabulary. Lower levels of literacy and language achievement can lead to an increase in withdrawal from the learning environment, and decreased motivation in learning (Meier et al., 2020). Second, it was divulged that elementary pre-service teachers as well as Bilingual and ESOL teachers do not have a strong sense of knowledge when it comes to the application of academic vocabulary, resulting in decreased acquisition in their students, and increased difficulty deciphering school texts (Ardell, 2021; Meier et al., 2020; Uccelli et al., 2015). Thereafter, it is imperative school staff is educated in how to efficiently and effectively work with ELL students.

Furthermore, specific lesson plans carried out by pre-service teachers do not include the vocabulary components needed to support academic vocabulary acquisition and appropriate accommodations (Nguyen & Nguyen 2020; Wanzek et al., 2023). This includes teachers who have licenses to work with ELL students. Moreover, ELLs are frequently deprived of opportunities to be active participants in reading activities because of their challenges with school texts (Coxhead, 2017; Ryan, 2021). Also, it is noted that frequent and consistent communication needs to be established with all faculty and staff working with ELL students to ensure fluency in learning and prevent regression in student skills.

With regards to these findings, I have created a professional development plan and tools. The provided tools pursue to establish strong academic vocabulary acquisition among ELL students at Sayville Elementary School. In order to do so, a multilayered plan was considered to help support the ELL students and staff and faculty of Sayville Elementary School. The product that was produced has both implications as well as recommendations.

Enhancing ELL Integration: Strategies, Implications, and Professional Development

Many implications and recommendations for student learning and teaching based on the provided research findings have been developed. Strategies are currently in place to help ELL integration with language and vocabulary learning. Language learning students will be provided with opportunities that make them feel more valued and appreciated in the learning environment such as flags, signs, and use of their L1 (see Appendices A, B, C). There will be additional respect, and comfort achieved through ELL lesson plan templates that are better geared toward the needs of ELLs (see Appendices D, E). Additionally valuable changes made through “Effective, Engagement, ELLs” (E.E.E), will work to make necessary changes to help better the learning, language, and communication of ELLs.

Furthermore, the Sayville Elementary School comprehensive vocabulary plan will allow students to work on their vocabulary acquisition through direct instruction, exposure to a vast number of texts through wide reading, and increasing morphology knowledge through word studies and other activities. Active vocabulary engagement promotes greater acquisition (Nguyen & Nguyen 2020). New programs such as the comprehensive vocabulary plan can help provide instructional techniques that enforce greater opportunities to engage with academic vocabulary in a more meaningful way and provide experience and practice for ELLs to learn how to build their abilities and knowledge of this skill as a whole (see Appendix G).

Additionally, all teachers despite their licenses and certification backgrounds will reap benefits from both the concepts and the ideas that are shared within the professional development. Currently, there are two ENL teachers; Deannie Nobeia and Cindy Castiblanco that speak a second language and will benefit from the professional development presented. The lesson plan templates that are shared specifically for ELLs will help guide teachers to create effective lessons regardless of students' background and help provide lessons that will engage ELLs development of content specific, academic language (see Appendices D, E). The lesson plan templates provided help ELLs achieve both their lesson and content area objectives at the same time, which is extremely beneficial when acquiring academic language and vocabulary (Goldstein et al., 2017; Meier et al., 2020). The ELL lesson plan templates help provide teachers with guidance regarding what areas they should be focusing on to help build vocabulary in their classrooms.

Professional development is crucial to teaching, however, it is particularly important for faculty and staff, especially faculty that has very limited experience working with ELL students. This particular professional development will help decrease teachers' limited knowledge,

motivation, and understanding of academic language (Neugebauer & Heineke, 2020; Wanzek et al., 2023). Monthly professional developments hosted at the school can assist teachers in gaining relevant, useful information that they have the opportunity to share, or receive, and can help bestow the ongoing school learning and communication that helps put ELLs at the head of discussions (see Appendix F). The professional developments hosted monthly will also increase teachers' self-efficacy and will help these pre-service teachers better serve the ELL population.

Recommendation for Future Research

The professional development is a great stepping stone to help enforce change for Sayville Elementary School. In a time to come, more work regarding academic language acquisition can be attained. First, another comprehensive vocabulary plan can be established at the tail end of the year that provides the same type of learning but gives the students a way to monitor their understanding and growth. This plan can be called comprehensive vocabulary development part 2. This second plan will help assist peer-to-peer relationships aimed at ELLs success. The peer-to-peer relationships will consist of one ELL and one advanced non-ELL.

Moreover, the programs that have been recently created will help decrease the achievement gap between reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in ELLs and non-ELLs. Future research can help see what future programs can help Sayville Elementary School. These programs should be centered around the needs of ELLs. Some examples of additional ideas that can be carried out are AIS (Academic Intervention Services), which can be provided to ELLs after school, and tutoring. Additionally, it could be interesting to provide faculty with professional development that is hosted by a company, rather than their district. This company can inform faculty and staff of new ideas, concepts, and practices.

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Appendix A
"One Language is Never Enough"

12 POSTERS TO EMPOWER...

"I framed these posters in my classroom and they look great! I wanted to add more Spanish to my walls and this was the **perfect resource.**"



Pinterest



Teacher Pay Teacher

Appendix B
“Where is the ESL Teacher?”



Appendix C
Inspirational sign for classroom



Pinterest

**Appendix D
Lesson Plan Template #1**

Lesson Objectives:	
Text Type (e.g., biography, poem, lab report, word problem):	
Text Purpose (e.g., to inform, to persuade)	

Word/Phrase level

Awareness-Building Questions	Example(s)	Priority for Instruction
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Are there everyday words (e.g., desk) that you would like MLs to use?		<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there cross-disciplinary academic words (e.g., analyze, describe, summarize) that you would like MLs to use?		<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there content or technical words (e.g., biofuel, metamorphosis) specific to the topic that you would like MLs to use?		<input type="checkbox"/>

Sentence Level

Awareness Building Questions	Example(s)	Priority for Instruction
<p>Are there aspects of grammar (e.g., verb tense, pronouns, adjectives) that MLs will need to use that may be challenging for them?</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Are there any specific sentence structures (i.e., simple, compound, complex) or a variety of sentence structures that you would like MLs to use that they may need practice with?</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Are there any conventions that you are expecting MLs to use that may be new or challenging (e.g., transitional words, punctuation, spelling)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>

Appendix E
ELL Lesson Plan Template #2

Subject:

Key Academic Vocabulary of Lesson	What tools will you use to help ELLs with acquiring the academic vocabulary? (Sentence Stems, Sentence frames, dictionaries, etc.)
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How will background knowledge be activated?	Content Objective(s)	Language Objective(s) *Make sure it relates to the content objective and make sure it includes the language domains: reading, writing, speaking, listening)
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<p>Demonstration of the learning/skill/practices</p> <p><u>I do</u></p>	<p>Modeling together as a group</p> <p><u>We do</u></p>	<p>Check to see if students are grasping the concept</p> <p><u>You do</u></p>
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Closure:

Appendix F: Monthly Professional Development

<p>Sayville Elementary School E.E.E.</p>	
<p>Teaching Course of Action</p>	<p>Counselor Choice</p>
<p>1. Look at a challenge with ELL learning that has surfaced in your class and provide insight on how to best handle it</p>	<p>1. Look at challenge with ELL students that has surfaced</p>
<p>1. Give an example of a vocabulary building activity that has proven useful and successful in your classroom</p>	<p>2. How can you collaborate with ELLs or their families?</p>
<p>3. Share a new activity you would like to use</p>	<p>3. Share some concerns you have in this area and how you would try to fix this concern</p>

Department	Month	Title of Professional Development	Name of Staff Involved	Duration of professional development
<p>Science</p>	<p>October</p>	<p>Using academic vocabulary in teacher talk</p>	<p>Joan Scott Steven Hill Deannie Nobeia</p>	<p>30 minutes</p>

Appendix G

Comprehensive Vocabulary Development

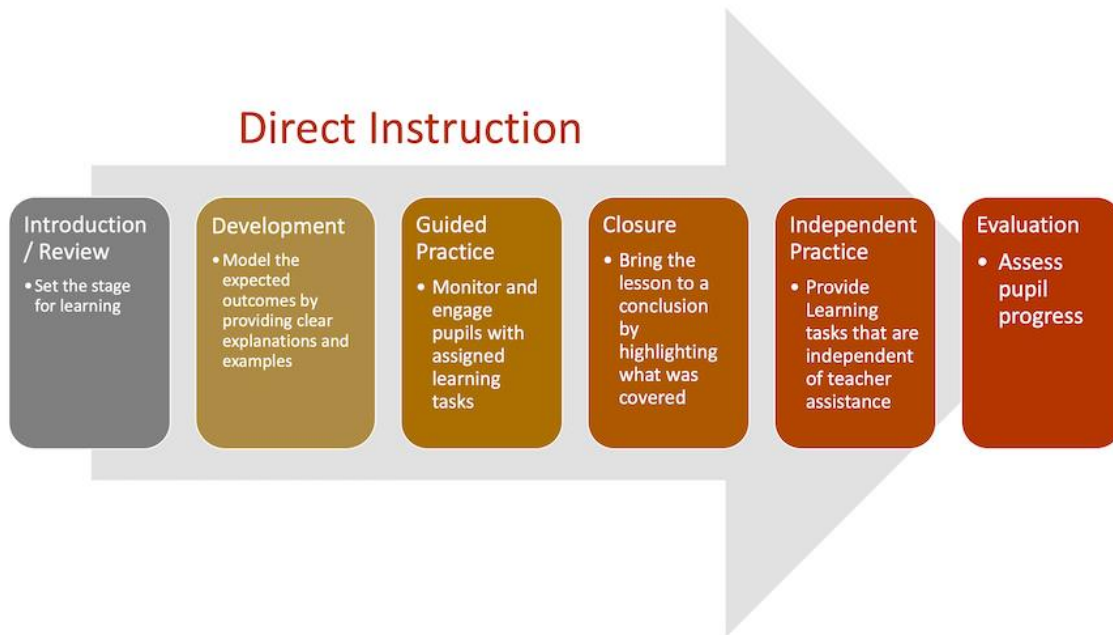
Wide Reading



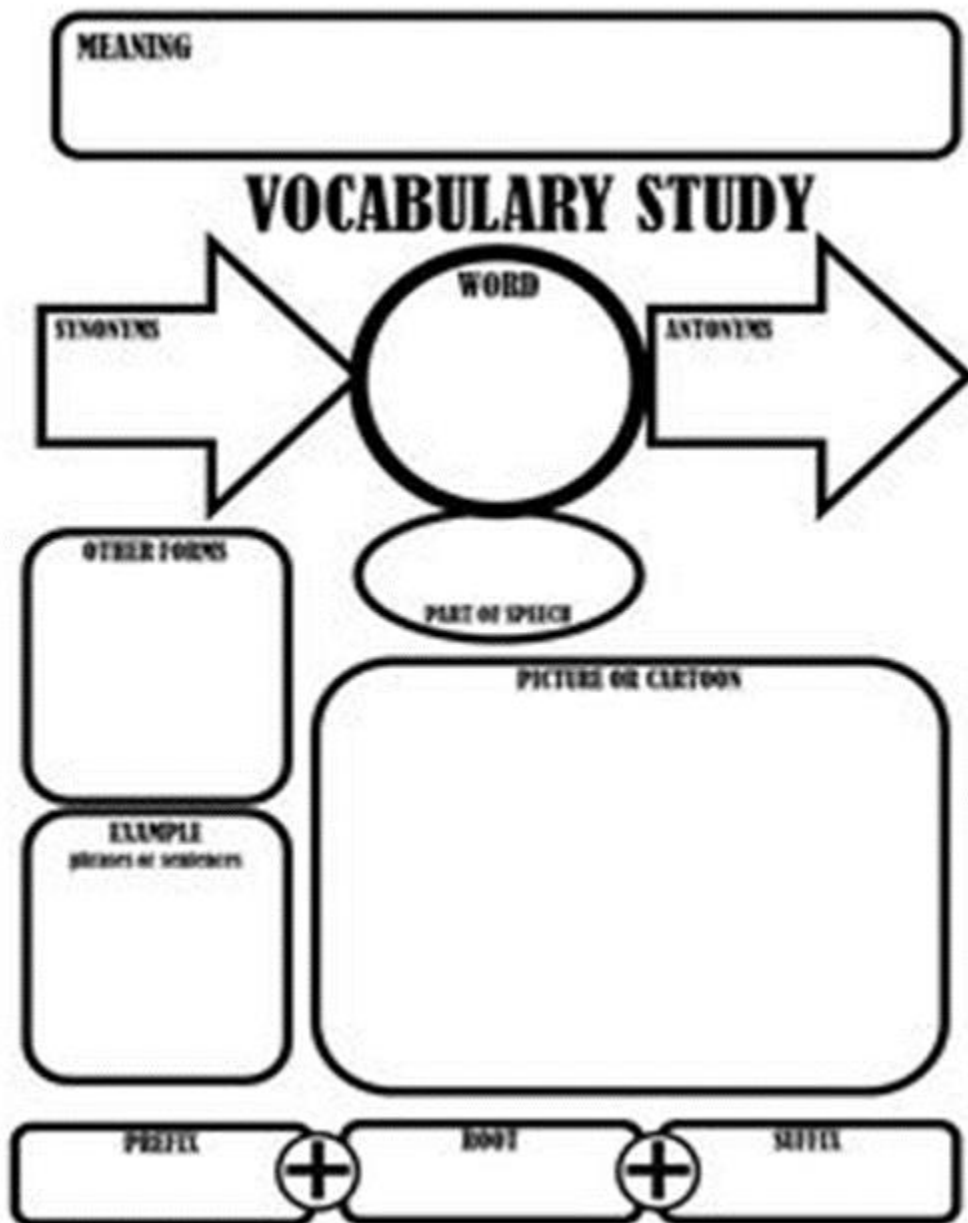
Give students the opportunity to read books! Wide reading promotes extensive exposure to several different books which gives students the opportunity to gain general knowledge, spelling, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

Direct Instruction

Resource: Structural Learning <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/direct-instruction-a-teachers-guide>



Morphology





Additional tool for building students' morphology

Appendix H

Professional Development Slides

[Capstone Presentation.pptx](#)