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**Developing Oral Literacy Skills in English Language Learners**

Developing Oral Literacy Skills in  
English Language Learners to Improve  
Oral Communication Skills

by

Yvette Turner

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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### Abstract

As the number of English learners enrolled in US schools continues to rise and the gap in achievement between Native English speakers and English Language Learners continues to grow, educators seek to find successful ways to meet the diverse language needs of our EL's to close this gap and provide more opportunities of academic success. This study seeks to answer the question: to what extent are English learners able to demonstrate the use of classroom norms for listening and speaking in structured conversations to help improve their English language development? The observational data were collected from the twenty, fourth grade, English language learners, ranging in language proficiency levels of level one to level three, supports prior research done by Wilson et al., (2016) that supports providing EL's with opportunities to practice using oral language skills as a means to increase their use of academic language and deepen their understanding of content across all disciplines. Observational data for this study were collected over a course of six weeks. A three-week intervention period, where student took part in creating, practicing, and applying the listening and speaking norms that would be used in the data collection phase of the study. Observational data were collected by the researcher over the course of three visits to the science lab. The researcher tallied the number of times students demonstrated use of the norms as they were engaged in academic conversations around science. An analysis of the data showed that students across all language levels demonstrated an increase in their ability to use of the norms over the course of the three observation sessions. The findings of this study support the need for further research in developing oral literacy skills for our EL learners as a means of supporting their English language development and creating improved academic outcomes across all content areas.

Keywords: Academic Language, English Language Learner, Listening and Speaking Norms, Literacy, Oral Language.

## Chapter One: Defining the Problem

### Statement of the Problem

The number of English language learners enrolled in US schools continues to increase with approximately 1.196 million English learners enrolled in California schools in the 2018-19 school year which accounts for about 70% of the enrollment in elementary grades of kindergarten through sixth grade (CalEdFacts, 2019). With such a large number of English learners concentrated at the elementary level there has been growing concern focused on closing the achievement gap that exists between English learners and native English speakers. Although English learners typically do well in acquiring the word-level skills of decoding, sight words, and spelling, they rarely approach the same skill level as native English speakers in text-level skills needed for reading comprehension and writing (August, 2006). As part of their literacy instruction, English learners need extensive practice in oral communication in English.

### Purpose of Research/Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study is to gather insight into how providing structured opportunities for English language learners to engage in academic discourse can support the overall development of language skills necessary for students to be successful in the more difficult skills related to reading comprehension and written application of language. This study will help build upon research done by Wilson et al., (2016) who explored how often and when English learners were engaged in academic speaking in grades K-8 and determined “the more opportunities students have to engage in group talk that involves academic language, the deeper their learning will be” (p. 54). The goal of this research is to collect data to determine the extent to which English learners are able to demonstrate the use of classroom norms in structured conversations to help improve their English language development. With this in mind, this study hopes to answer the following research question:

To what extent do EL students, when given opportunities to practice, implement the use of conversational norms of listening and speaking aligned to a unit of study in science?

## **Preview Literature**

To keep up with the rapid changes in ethnic diversity that exists in California schools today, we need to take a closer look at the programs and supports we have in place for our English language learners. The need to offer the right kinds of programs that will allow English learners to develop skills in the areas of both reading and oral communication are equally important as we work to close the gap in achievement that exists between our English language learners and their English-speaking peers. Adding to the problem is the growing number of English learners who are classified as Long-term English language learners (LTEL's). This term refers to those English learners who have been enrolled in US schools for 7 or more years but continue to struggle academically and have been unable to meet the necessary qualifications for reclassification (Kim, & Garcia, 2014). This review looks at research to develop a deeper understanding of some of the unique educational issues that exist for our English learner population.

Theme one explains some of the difficulties our long-term English learners face in developing English language proficiency. This group of learners share a unique characteristic of lacking proficiency in both English and their native language (Kim & Garcia, 2014). Although LTEL's tend to be fluent in social settings, they lack the deeper understanding of English necessary to be fluent in academic context of reading comprehension and writing. The research will discuss some of the reasons many LTEL students struggle despite their desire to do well.

Theme two discusses the importance of strong oral language development for our English language learners. Research done by Wilson et al., (2016) suggests that developing students oral language skills should be viewed as equally important to the development of literacy skills in our English learners. The research discusses how having strong oral language plays an important role in the development of skills in reading comprehension. It also states it is necessary for teachers to provide students with the ability to practice communication with peers in order to develop an understanding for the conventions of the English language necessary to become proficient English speakers.

Theme three discusses the critical role a students' home language plays in their development of skills in English. Developing strong language skills in their native language before students enter school can support them as they acquire skills in English, however many language minority students lack language development in their native language, which makes the development of English even more difficult. Research goes on to discuss how English learners can benefit from instruction in both their native language and English, as knowledge in one helping to support learning in the other (August & Shanahan, 2006).

The fourth theme discusses the importance of developing strong reading comprehension skills for our English learners. The research looks at how using strategies to improve students' ability to analyze text by asking and answering questions helps to improve their overall understanding of the content and improve comprehension. Studies focused on teaching the use reciprocal teaching strategies when students discuss text show that by offering multiple opportunities to practice academic discourse using these questioning strategies it can lead to deeper understanding of the content and better academic outcomes for our English learner population (Alfassi, 1998).

### **Preview of Methodology**

This research study will be conducted using quantitative research methods. Data will be collected through the use of a quantitative observation tool that will be used to tally the number of occurrences of student's independent application of listening and speaking norms in group discussions. The study will begin by first teaching and modeling a list of seven norms to students and offering language supports in the form of sentence frames for students to use as they build confidence in their oral abilities. The list of norms taught to the students was modeled after sample norms and expectations for science talks from The Inquiry Project, supported by the National Science Foundation (2012). Behavioral identifiers were added as indicators of performance and will be used during the observation process to determine if the students are able to independently incorporate these norms into group discussions.

The results of the study will provide educators with data that supports current research on the need to provide students with structured opportunities to engage in academic talk teachers can increase

English language learners oral use of academic language and help deepen learning (Wilson et al., 2016).

This research will help further refine our teaching practices for English language learners and provide more supports to strengthen their growth in oral language development.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study hopes to shed light on the important role oracy plays in oral language development in our English language learners. Through this research I will examine how focused instruction that builds students oral capabilities through the teaching and practicing of norms for speaking and listening can positively impact language development in our English learners. Although there is an abundance of research that identifies the language disparity that exists between our English learners and their English-speaking peers, currently there is little research that addresses how best to resolve this issue. With the findings of this study educators will have a better understanding of how teaching procedures for oral discourse and providing opportunities for student to talk in the classroom and gain practice in using those skills can positively affect academic outcomes for our English language learners.

## **Conclusion**

This study will explore the extent to which EL students are able to implement the use of conversational norms of listening and speaking as part of their normal academic classroom conversations. The research looks at the importance of developing oral language skills in student and the important connections that can be made between home and school in language acquisition. The research also examines the difficulties long term English language learners face in developing proficiency in English and how focusing on oral communication can help to improve reading comprehension skills in our English language learners. Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the important role these areas play in developing oracy skills in our language minority students and the impact they have in the language proficiency of our EL learners.

## **Definitions**

Achievement Gap: For the purposes of this study the achievement gap refers to the significant

and persistent disparity in academic performance that exists between Spanish speaking Hispanic/Latino students and English-speaking Caucasian American students.

**Behavioral indicators:** For the purposes of this study, refer to the specific verbal and non-verbal student behaviors that demonstrate application of communication norms the researcher is looking for students to demonstrate during the observation portion of the research.

**English Language Proficiency Assessment of California, (ELPAC):** Is an annual assessment required by the state of California to assess English language proficiency for students in grades K-12. The assessment is given to students whose primary language is a language other than English.

**English Language Learner:** Students who are unable to communicate fluently in English, who often times come from non-English speaking homes and backgrounds, and require specialized instruction in the English language.

**English Language proficiency:** Refers to a student's ability to use the English language to communicate meaning both verbally and in writing within the academic context of the classroom.

**Home language:** The language that is most commonly spoken by the members of the family in everyday interaction at home

**Long term English learners (LTEL's):** A classification given to students who have been enrolled in US schools for more than six years and are not progressing toward English proficiency and struggling academically due to limited English skills.

**Newcomers:** A classification given to students who have just arrived in US schools or have been enrolled for two years or less.

**Oracy:** For the purpose of this study oracy refers to a student's ability to utilize the skills of oral speaking and listening on par skills in reading and writing.

**Oral language development:** The system of using spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings as well as developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening and speaking that tie into the ability to transfer that knowledge into comprehension and

written language.

Oral literacy norms: For the purpose of this study oral literacy norms refers to a set of commonly agreed upon expectations for verbal and non-verbal communication.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

As we continue to see our community and school ethnic makeup to change to include larger numbers of students and families who are non-native English speakers, our school districts are faced with the responsibility to provide more programs that support the needs of this ever-growing group of learners. It is estimated that there are 1,196 million English learners in California public school with over 40% of the total enrollment in US schools represent students who speak a language other than English in their homes (CalEdFacts, 2019). California schools are faced with meeting two major goals for our English learner population:

- Ensure that English learners acquire full proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible to attain parity with native speakers of English.
  - Ensure that English learners, within a reasonable period of time, achieve the same rigorous grade level academic standards that are expected of all students.
- (CalEdFacts, 2019, para. 1).

In order to meet these goals school districts have implemented many programs designed to provide designated and integrated English language development to our EL students, but an analysis of the assessment data shows that our EL population continues to perform below grade level in the area of English Language Arts. Adding to the complexity of this issue is the fact that many of these EL students have been enrolled in California schools since kindergarten and have joined a growing group of long-term English learners (LTEL's). These students have been unsuccessful in reaching advanced levels in English language proficiency and are unable to qualify for reclassification (Kim, & Garcia, 2014). They have fallen behind academically, compared to their English-speaking peers, which has led to a large and persistent gap in achievement between these two groups of learners (Carlo et al., 2004).

Closing the achievement gap has become a major area of focus for many districts and it calls for researchers to look for innovative solutions to this problem. Oral language development is a critical component for our English language learners based on its importance in facilitating communication and

providing better understanding of classroom content. In order for English learners to become proficient in basic English skills it is important that they be given opportunities to participate in academic conversations throughout the school day (Soto-Hinman, 2011). Language support that students receives between home and school play a crucial role in the development of their language skills (Palacios & Kibler, 2016), however, since many of our EL students lack strong language development at home, it makes acquiring language at school more difficult. It has become increasingly important for educators to explicitly teach conversational norms and protocols for listening and speaking to English learners to help support their oral language development. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the importance of developing oracy among English learners. Most identify a variety of strategies that can be employed by educators to promote proficiency levels among EL and LTEL students.

To aid in the collection of data in determining the effectiveness of providing EL students structured opportunities to practice skills in oral communication as a means to enhance their English language development, I pose the following research question: To what extent do EL students, when given opportunities to practice, implement the use of conversational norms of listening and speaking aligned to a unit of study in science? This study will utilize quantitative data collection methods to determine how the explicit teaching of conversational norms for listening and speaking effects students' ability to integrate them into structured academic conversations. Quantitative data will be collected through observing students as they engage in structured academic conversations in science during their visits to the Innovation lab on campus over a 6-week time period.

This literature review will provide information that can help in conceptualizing relevant themes that can be applied in the classroom situation that promote oracy and language development for the purpose of improving EL students' skills in oral communication. The main themes reflect the research that is currently available to educators on the important role oral language plays in English language development in our English learner population. This study will add to the already existing body of research on this topic.

### **Theme 1: Difficulties for Long Term English Language Learners**

Long-term English learners are an emergent group of EL students who demonstrate a unique set of characteristics of having limited language proficiency in both their native language and English.

Research conducted by Kim and Garcia (2014) in developing profiles of adolescent long-term EL's, define a long-term English learner as an "English learner who although they have attended public schools in the United States for at least 7 years, having received support in language development, have not reached adequate levels of language proficiency in English on state assessments"( p.300).

A distinctive characteristic of LTEL students is that they are orally bilingual in social contexts, but in the academic setting, their skills in English oral and written communication are limited (Menken et al., 2012). It is estimated that 50% to 70% of EL learners in secondary education were born in the United States and have been in public education since kindergarten (Batalova et al., 2007). Researchers are in agreement that there is a lack of research and minimal resources available to address the specific needs of this population (Kim & Garcia, 2014; Menkin et al, 2012).

Researchers have identified two main groups of LTEL students. One group is students who have had inconsistent schooling in the U.S. either due to changing from mainstream classrooms to Bilingual programs, or being in classrooms with no language supports (Kim & Garcia, 2014). The second group of LTEL students is considered transitional because they move back and forth between their country of origin and the U.S and many have not received adequate English language development (Kim & Garcia, 2014). Regardless, LTEL students are more likely to perform below other academic subgroups, are often blamed for their lack of achievement, and thought to be unmotivated and disengaged with school in general (Kim & Garcia, 2014). This has led to a gap in academic progress between LTEL students and their academic peers as well as an increase in misidentification and placement of EL students in special education programs (Kim & Garcia, 2014).

In a study conducted at the high school level by Kim and Garcia (2014) on LTEL students and their perceptions of their academic language experience, they found most students saw themselves as proficient English Learners who felt they were successful despite learning difficulties they may have had. The researchers went on to note that students in their study were grateful for the language support they

had received and were aware of their areas of weakness. Students went so far as to offer solutions in areas for continued academic improvement with the majority of students having a desire to continue on to college after graduation.

This work goes against the theory that LTEL students underperform because of their lack of motivation and/or the failure of their families to value education (Jacob, 2008). According to Menken et al., (2012) schools need to find a way to “address the unique obstacles LTEL students face in their language development by adapting and modifying curriculum as well as provide additional support to give these students the assistance they need to succeed” (p.135).

## **Theme 2: Oral Language Development**

Strong skills in oral language are the cornerstone for the success of beginning readers to apply their knowledge of the mechanics of spoken language as a bridge to literacy.

Spoken language skills are developed based school practices that foster oracy among students. The research seeks to explore the connections between oral language vocabulary of young learners and the ability to read written language (Hill, 2009). The school context naturally allows for the opportunity of social interactions by allowing students time to practice the use of oral skills as they interact and share experiences. According to Hill (2009), “young children need to have control over several aspects of oral language prior to beginning to read” (p.1).

When students are provided the opportunity to practice positive peer to peer communication, learners are more likely to develop a robust understanding of the conventions involved in spoken language. Researchers are in agreement that in the school context, teachers should be actively involved in teaching strategies that promote communication skills among learners. According to Mercer et al., (2017) a teachers’ ability to provide a variety of opportunities for students to practice classroom discourse offers an opportunity for learners to more fully develop spoken language skills. Minero (2016) found that through the use of various “talk tasks” (p.6), teachers could create opportunities for students to discuss their learning within the lesson, which improved their oral communication and deepened their understanding of the content.

A student's ability to read, write, listen and speak in English is critical to their success in school. According to Hill (2009) the connection between reading and phonology is predictive of their success in reading achievement but cautions that since one can influence the other, they are equally valuable in a child's reading development. Research by Wilson et al., (2016) state that a three-tiered approach to vocabulary development is essential for providing students with the content specific vocabulary they will need to deepen their understanding. In their research they identify four central practices teachers can use to increase the use of oral language of their English Learners. The first is to hold English learners to the same content standards and learning expectations we have for all learners. Along with explicitly teach academic and content specific vocabulary to EL students while providing language supports and scaffolds. Providing increased opportunities for students to talk helps to lower anxiety levels and enables students to access content and engage in successful academic conversations (Wilson et al., 2016).

A growing body of research points to the necessity for oral engagement in classrooms to help enhance learning (Wilson et al., 2016). According to research done by Mercer et al., teaching skills in oracy need to be given the same kind of attention that we give to teaching literacy skills (2015). The context of learning a language is a critical component that should be explicitly observed to help students in developing communication skills. It involves a variety of settings whereby language is practiced through listening and speaking in a variety of different ways. For example, there are certain words that can be used only in informal settings. Thus, by teachers ensuring that students are familiar with language contexts, they develop the acquisition of communication skills (Wilson et al., 2016). Alexander (2010) states that it is critical for an educator to make a connection between the differences in classroom talk among peers and in public settings for the purpose of enhancing language literacy among students. He assumes that by expanding the classroom learning, students are provided with the opportunity to learn how people in society communicate. As such, they are able to acquire the relevant communication skills based on context.

To fully develop oral language skills, a number of strategies have to be observed. A study done on enhancing academic speaking opportunities for English Learners by Wilson et al. conclude, "By

providing structured opportunities for students to practice skills in oral communication both with academic and content vocabulary, one on one and in the group setting, teachers increase English learners' use of academic language which leads to deeper learning outcomes" (2016, p.52). This is in agreement with Minero who adds, that teachers should help students learn how to reach a shared agreement and develop conversational leanings by embedding opportunities for oracy into the classroom (2016).

Andrew Wilkinson introduced the term "Oracy" to mean "the ability to use the oral skills of speaking and listening" (Wilkinson, 1965, p.13). Developing skills in oracy requires intentionally planning how you "guide and organize opportunities for students to talk in the classrooms" (Minero, 2016, p. 2). Meaningful classroom discourse involves the participation of multiple students simultaneously. This can be challenging for teachers to organize and assess due to the lack of research and teacher resources in this area. Research done by Mercer et al. (2015) centered around the development of a set of "specific situational tasks to provide a profile of a child's oracy skills across a range of situations" (p.53). They successfully developed a framework of oracy skills with assessment tasks and rating rubrics that could be applied across a wide range of situations to give feedback on a student's oracy skills (Mercer et al., 2015).

### **Theme 3: The Connection Between Home and School Language**

Research has shown that students gain a better understanding of the world around when they interact with others through speech and language (Palacios & Kibler, 2016). According to Mercer et al., language development is affected by the quality of the experiences we have (2015). Oracy and language development are influenced by a number of factors. Home language and school support systems play a critical role in influencing the acquisition of communication skills among children. Studies comparing bilingual instruction to English only instruction show that when language minority students are instructed in their home language as well as English, they are more successful than when they are instructed in English alone (August & Shanahan, 2006). These two structures provide the building blocks that support English language acquisition. According to a study by Palacios and Kibler, most students acquire language skills prior to entering school (2016). Therefore, home language plays a major role in language

development. In most instances, children with bilingual status have an added advantage in their abilities to reproduce different languages concurrently (Palacios & Kibler, 2016). Studies indicate that students are able to use cognate relationships in their first language to help them understand words in English, which helps to improve comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2006). However, children who lack the supports in the development of their native language can have more difficulty developing the necessary skills for English language proficiency.

Parental input during the early years of child development is a factor that determines their proficiency in oracy when entering school. Palacios & Kibler state that an emphasis on language acquisition at home improves children's vocabulary development outcomes (2016). The more quality opportunities a child has to have meaningful interactions with language in the home setting, the more successful they will be in acquiring language skills at school (Palacios & Kibler, 2006). School supports provide the motivation for oracy and language development among students. According to August & Shanahan (2006), literacy programs that "provide instructional support of oral language development in English, aligned with high-quality literacy instruction are the most successful" (p,4). Students who have access to these high-quality programs are more likely to develop competencies in communication which promotes higher proficiency levels.

#### **Theme 4: Improving Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is an area of extreme interest among researchers. It continues to be an area where students struggle, especially our English learners and those who have been classified as Long Time English Learners, LTEL students. Findings from August and Shanahan identify comprehension as an area where language- minority students fall behind due to inadequate development oral proficiency (2006). Research by Alfassi examined the effectiveness of teaching self-monitoring skills to improve reading comprehension (1998). In his study, students who were exposed to reciprocal teaching (RT) strategies were better able to monitor their reading and showed improvement in reading comprehension compared to students taught with traditional methods (Alfassi, 1998).

Reciprocal Teaching (RT) is an instructional technique that incorporates listening and comprehension strategies into a problem-solving activity. During reading students practice four key comprehension strategies: generating questions, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting. As students engage in structured discourse in these areas, they improve understanding and self-monitor comprehension (Alfassi, 1998). In Hacker and Tenent's three-year qualitative study on the implementation of RT strategies at the elementary level, they note three essential elements of RT that contributed to the success: intentional teaching and implementing the four self-monitoring strategies to improve comprehension, focusing on the student's use of rich dialogue in applying RT strategies, and incorporating and maintaining appropriate scaffolds matched to the abilities of the students (2002). One of the problems they faced in the study was the quality of the dialogue between some groups of students, possibly due to the group dynamic and poor cooperative learning skills, was not successful in producing the type of high-quality dialogue they anticipated, which is a common occurrence within using any type of cooperative learning technique (Hacker & Tenent, 2002).

Other researchers echo positive benefits to overall comprehension with the use of reciprocal strategies making the task of teaching comprehension more manageable, while still holding students to a high level of accountability. This is evident in research done by Johnson-Glenberg on the effects of teaching poor comprehenders where they examined the effects of teaching students in a small group setting, utilizing the strategies of reciprocal teaching (2000). They noted an overall improvement in the students' abilities to generate questions, in their listening and recall skills, and a significant improvement in the ability to answer open-ended, text-dependent questions (2000).

## Conclusion

As we strive to prepare students to become successful members of the workforce, the need to have strong communication skills are characteristics of their future employability. This can be done by supporting our English Language Learners and LTEL's with the programs and supports they need to improve their levels of proficiency and achieve academic success. Improving student's oral language skills specific to the area of oracy is a critical area of focus for educators. Strengthening students' skills in oral language and their ability to communicate with their peers and adults is important to creating successful readers and thinkers. Teaching our EL students about the different language contexts in a social and formal setting can promote their understanding of general conversational norms of communication that they will encounter on a daily basis as a member of society. Validating student's ability to use their home language as a tool to transfer knowledge and build their conceptual understanding as they acquire English will help to motivate and encourage success.

It is also important to provide consistency in the implementation of programs geared to improve comprehension skills. This improves a student's ability to formulate questions and answer text-based questions that deepen student knowledge and create a better connection to the content they are learning. Based on this literature review, there is a growing need for teachers to employ strategies to develop communication skills in speaking, listening and writing. These are key indicators for academic success. By also providing opportunities for our language learners to participate in structured oral discourse, they will gain the language experience they need, which will, in turn, help them to more successful as they progress through collage and career.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

As the ethnic makeup of our communities become more diverse, and we continue to see an increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELL's) in our classrooms. It has become evident that we need to do more to address the specific language needs of this diverse group of learners. While many of our EL learners are able to decode and read at grade level, they are unable to be successful in tasks that involve comprehension and the application of written language. This speaks to the need for schools to design and implement programs that support oral language development in our EL learners and provide structured opportunities for students to engage in meaningful academic conversations. The research question that will be the focus of this study is: To what extent do EL students implement the use of communication norms in listening and speaking during structured conversations aligned to a unit of study in a co-teaching science lab environment?

For this study the researcher selected an elementary school located in a rural Southern California school district that services a large English learner population. Quantitative methodology was utilized to gather data from English language learners through observational methods. The researcher tallied the number of occurrences where students demonstrated visual and/or verbal behavioral indicators associated with previously taught norms for listening and speaking. Data was collected from a group of 21, fourth grade, students classified as English language learners during regularly scheduled visits to the science lab in the 2019-2020 school year. The results of the observations were analyzed to determine how successful students were at incorporating the use of listening and speaking norms during independent conversations.

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate how providing strong language supports for English learners through teaching and practicing communication norms in listening and speaking helps to strengthens their English language development.

#### Design

This study was conducted by collecting quantitative data from a representative group of English language (EL) learners in an elementary school setting. Data were collected through hand tallying observations that recorded the number of times students demonstrated the application of previously taught

classroom norms of communication. For calibration purposes, and to ensure the reliability of data throughout the study, the researcher was responsible for the collection of data, with the classroom teacher assisting in monitoring student behavior during the data collection period. Tallies were recorded each time the researcher observed identified EL students demonstrating the behavioral indicators that were representative of the communication norms being assessed in the current unit of science. Data was collected over the course of six weeks where students visited the lab on three separate occasions for 60 minutes each. The data collection tool was created in conjunction with the researcher and cooperating classroom teacher by identifying behavioral indicators that corresponded to conversational norms being assessed in the current science unit. The study focused on identified EL and LTEL fourth-grade students in a Southern California rural elementary school district during the first half of the school year.

This methodology is a good match for this research in that it allowed for the gathering of data that supported research on enhancing academic speaking opportunities for English learners conducted by Wilson et al. (2016), where they concluded that by “providing English learners with structured opportunities to practice oral language skills with partners and in small groups, teachers help increase English learner’s oral use of academic language, which in turn deepens learning”(p.54). By structuring this study in an Intervention Research format, the researcher hopes to establish a causal relationship between the intervention sessions the students received before the study and the ability of the students to demonstrate the use of conversational norms during the observation sessions (DeLucia & Pitts, 2019).

## **Participants**

The participants of this study were 20 fourth-grade English language learners, ages 9-10 from a Title One elementary school in San Diego County. The participants were classified as English learners who had been enrolled in US schools for more than two years, many of which have attended this school since kindergarten. Of the 21 students, 6 were female and 14 were male. All of the students who participated in the study were classified as Long-Term English Language Learners, having been enrolled in US schools since Kindergarten. Students were identified as English learners based on language status information retrieved from Infinite Campus, the school’s online student data base. Table 3.1 identifies the

Language proficiency levels of students in the participating class based on results of the most recent LPAC data for the 2018-2019 school year.

Language Proficiency Levels	
Level 1 (Beginning)	5
Level 2 (Emerging)	11
Level 3 (Expanding)	4
Level 4 (Bridging)	0
Total Number of English Learners	20

**Table 3.1:** Student Language proficiency Levels from 2018-2019 LPAC testing data.

This data will be used to create triads, or talk teams, for data collection purposes. Talk teams were composed of three students of similar language level. The talk team groupings were consistently maintained throughout the study. Students who were classified as Newcomers or English Speakers participated in discussions but were not part of the data collected in this study. This sampling of students was chosen to determine to what extent focused instruction in oral communication would affect the academic performance of

English language learners.

The classroom teacher, who participated in the study along with the researcher, was a highly qualified, tenured teacher with strong classroom class room management practices. She has been a teacher in the district for over 15 years and has taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade for the last 5 years. She is a teacher that is well respected by her students and has created a positive, supportive classroom climate that encourages students to work hard and take risks. Together both the teacher and researcher collaborated on student grouping and discussion topics that would be used during the study.

### Setting

This research study was conducted in an elementary school in a rural southern California school district. The district has 9 schools consisting of 8, kindergarten thru 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools and one 7<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school. Of the eight elementary schools, one is classified as a dual emersion school, one is a STEM Magnet school, and two are located on a military base serving predominantly military families. The six elementary sites and middle school located in town serve a diverse community made up of 47% Hispanic, 47% Caucasian, and 6% American Indian and Asian families. In this liberal

English Language Proficiency Levels	
Proficiency Level	Percentage
Level 4	14.6%
Level 3	37.3%
Level 2	27.6%
Level 1	20.5%

Table 3.2 This table shows the proficiency levels of English language learners for the 2018-2019 school year. (California Score Board Data source.)

community of approximately 48,000 people, the major sources of employment come from the service and agricultural industry with an average median household income of \$56,000. The school district serves a large population of English language learners and students from families of low socio-economic status, with 25% of the children under 18 living below the poverty line and 12% of families qualifying for Migrant services. The high school

graduation rate in the community is 79%, with about 23% going on to earning a Bachelor's Degree or beyond.

Oak Vail Ranch Elementary was identified as a STEM magnet school in 2016. It was originally built in 1949 and is one of the oldest schools in the district. It has a population of 555 students with 92% percent of students coming from low socioeconomic households. The student body is made up of 81% Hispanic or Latino students, 14% Caucasian, and 2.5% of the students being of African American, Asian, and Pacific Islanders ethnicity. There are 308 students classified as English learner and as the chart below describes, the majority of those students have language proficiency levels of 2 and 3. Many of these students have been in US schools since kindergarten and are considered Long Term English language learners.

This study focused on fourth grade students who were identified as English language learners and attended Oak Vail Ranch Elementary during the 2019-2020 school year. The study was conducted during the first year that norms for listening and speaking were address school wide through a collaboration with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and the English Learner Improvement Project (ELIP) in Grand Oaks School District

This study began with a pre-study intervention period of three weeks. During this time the researcher and participating classroom teachers worked with students to develop a set of listening and speaking norms that would be used in the study. The list included behavior indicators that would be used

to gather data on how well students were able to demonstrate the use of these norms during academic discussions. Because the study took place at the beginning of the year and students were still in the process of learning all six norms, the researcher and classroom teacher decided that the main focus for this study would be how well students were able to demonstrate the norms for listening, speaking and how to build on a conversation. Table 3.3 is an example of a placemat that was created for students to use during their discussions. It highlighted the norms for listening and speaking as well as provided appropriate sentence frames for students to use to extend the conversation. The boxes for *listening carefully* and *speaking loudly* are highlighted because students are expected to practice these two norms at all times. The other norms will be introduced throughout the first half of the year, starting with *building on each other's ideas*, which was part of the data collected during this study.

<b>Listen carefully to each other</b>	<b>Speak loudly enough so everyone can hear</b>	<b>Build on each other's ideas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look the speaker in the eye</li> <li>• Face the speaker</li> <li>• Keep your body still</li> <li>• Lean into the conversation</li> <li>• Nod in agreement</li> <li>• Use facial expressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project your voice when it's your turn</li> <li>• Speak clearly, don't mumble or cover your mouth</li> <li>• The level of your voice should match the number of people you are talking to (partner, table, big group, whole class)</li> <li>• Face the people you are talking to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the speaker's name</li> <li>• "I agree, and I also think..."</li> <li>• "That was a great idea, and I also think..."</li> <li>• "That was a great idea, have you considered..."</li> <li>• "I had not thought of it that way, have you considered..."</li> <li>• "I would like to add..."</li> <li>• "I (agree/disagree) because..."</li> <li>• "In other words, you're saying..."</li> </ul>
<b>Invite others into the conversation</b>	<b>Ask questions when you are confused or cannot hear</b>	<b>Explain your ideas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize what has been said for new people to the conversation</li> <li>• Use people's names when speaking to them</li> <li>• "Do you want to share your idea?"</li> <li>• "What do you think?"</li> <li>• "What's your idea?"</li> <li>• "(name) how do you feel about that?"</li> <li>• "(name) what is your opinion?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I didn't hear what you said, can you please repeat that?"</li> <li>• "Can you explain it in a different way?"</li> <li>• "Can you help me understand?"</li> <li>• "Can you tell me more about it...?"</li> <li>• "What makes you think that?"</li> <li>• "What evidence do you see for that idea?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I think..."</li> <li>• "My idea is..."</li> <li>• "It said in the text..."</li> <li>• "I learned..."</li> <li>• "I read..."</li> <li>• "I understand it like this..."</li> <li>• "What I'm trying to say is..."</li> <li>• "For example..."</li> </ul>

Table 3.3: A Norms Placemat Used for Student Reference during data collection.

In preparation for the study the researcher and cooperating teachers grouped students in talk teams according to the most recent language proficiency data retrieved from the 2019 LPAC data. It was decided to group students in the following manner: Language proficiency levels 1's and 2's would be grouped together and Language proficiency 3's and 4's would be grouped together. This was done to allow for more equitable access for all students to participate in the discussion.

During the pre-study intervention period students were taught how to engage in academic conversations using strategies that were modeled using a fishbowl method of demonstration. The classroom teacher and volunteer students modeled how the listening and speaking norms would be used during academic discussions. The students also watched a video that modeled strategies on how to be an active listener. Students were then given several opportunities to practice applying these skills in academic discussions using topics they have been investigating as part of their science curriculum. As the students practice using the norms, the teachers monitored students and provided feedback to the group on the positive interactions they saw occurring. The researcher and teacher also used this opportunity to answer questions students had as to the process of engaging in academic discussions. The feedback provided by the students lead the researcher to determine students needed a fair amount of guidance and practice in how to engage in academic discussions before it could be assumed that they could participate independently. For this reason, the researcher extended the number of pre-research interventions to three sessions before starting to collect data from students.

## **Instruments**

The two data collection tools used in this study were a self-created discussion tally sheet and a list of listening and speaking norms with behavior indicators. Both were created using input collected from the participating classroom teacher and the students involved in the study. The tally sheet identified student talk team triads and was used much like a seating chart during the data collection phase of the study. Students were paired by language proficiency level as follows: level one's were paired with mid to low level two's, mid two's were paired with high level two or low level three students, and level three proficiency students were paired with high level two or other level three students. The list of Listening

and Speaking Norms was created with student input during the intervention phase of the study. The norms for listening and speaking were agreed upon and behavioral indicators were identified that demonstrate their use to the researcher. Out of the 6 norms that were created, the data collected in this study focused on the student's use of the following 3 norms: Listening carefully to each other, Speak loudly enough so everyone can hear, and Build on each other's ideas. These norms were introduced and specifically taught to the students as an integrated part of their daily instruction before the research began. The observation tool created by the researcher can be found in the appendix of this study. The classroom norms and behavior indicators were a good match for this study because they match with the specific behaviors the researcher was looking for as demonstration that students were applying the norms for listening and speaking to independent in-class discussions.

Quantitative data was collected based on whether or not the students were able to demonstrate use of the three focus norms as described by the behavior indicators during each observation session. Students were observed during 5-minute, structured conversations in the science lab during 3 regularly scheduled visits, over the course of 6 weeks. The observation tool was created to allow the researcher to document characteristics students demonstrate as they took part in science conversations. Students were assigned to talk teams based on their most recent language proficiency score with students with proficiency levels of 3 and 4 being grouped together. The observation tool organized responses in the following manner: A= level 1 language proficiency, B =level 2 language proficiency, and C= Level 3-4 language proficiency. Collecting data in this way added to flexibility in which that data could be analyzed. This data collection process supports earlier research that states, "when students have a clear set of guidelines that have been taught and practiced, their discussions are more focused, learning outcomes are improved, and students are better able to transfer information into other academic areas. (Minero, 2016, p.2).

## **Procedures**

The research began with a desire to improve language development of English learners. Through the explicit teaching and practicing of conversational norms for listening and speaking the researcher

sought to provide increased opportunities for students to engage in academic discourse in the content area of science. To do this permission was requested from the principal of Oak Vail Ranch Elementary School to conduct the study focusing on improving oral language development in English learners. The researcher chose the fourth graders in attendance at the school as a representative sampling of targeted English learners. The researcher then began working in collaboration with the fourth-grade teachers to create a plan for the study.

It was determined that the study timeline would run through the first three months of the school year from August 12<sup>th</sup> through October 31<sup>st</sup>. It was also determined that the specific dates of the observations would be determined as the project progressed.

The participant group of 20 students were then identified as English learners by looking at the fourth-grade data from the school's online data base, Infinite Campus. Students were grouped in talk teams based on their English language proficiency level determined by the most recent LPAC data. Students who were classified as newcomer or English speaking, were not included in the data collection, although they did participate with the group in the discussions.

The researcher then worked in collaboration with the classroom teachers to identify six norms for both listening and speaking along with behavior indicators for each that would be used as key identifiers during the observations. An observation tool that would be used to collect the data was then created that reflected the norms and behavior indicators the team agreed on. The team then chose three norms that would be used for the focus of the observation.

This study includes two weeks intervention period, where the researcher (who is also the classroom teacher) explicitly taught and modeled the classroom norms for listening and speaking that would be used for the focus of the study. The students were taught how to use sentence stems and visual clues that were acceptable verbal and non-verbal behavioral indicators of participation in group conversations. During practice discussions students had access to visual clues, a norms placemat and sentence frame cards as well as having posters of the norms located around the room to refer to.

The observations took place within the context of the normal school day, during regularly scheduled 60-minute visits to the science lab for integrated science lessons taught in a co-teaching format by the researcher and the regular classroom teacher. The class visited the lab 3 times for one hour during the 2019-2020 academic school year. Data were collected by the researcher with the classroom teacher providing support by monitoring student performance during the data collection period. During the observation period the researcher was not responsible for classroom instruction, and was seated at a table where she could observe the group conversation, but not interact in the discussion.

Data were collected during one planned 5-minute group discussion per visit to the science lab. Students were grouped in triads by a prearranged coding system that identified group members by English language proficiency level: (A) level 1 language proficiency, (B) level 2 language proficiency, and (C) level 3 and 4 language proficiency, as noted on the observation tool. Students utilized the carpet or were seated at lab tables to engage in their discussions. The researcher began by introducing the discussion topic to the students and clarified questions. The researcher then signaled the groups to begin their discussion. The researcher then set the timer for 10 minutes. Once the timer was set, the researcher removed herself from the discussion and sat at a table that was in proximity to where the students were seated and began tallying behavior indicators she observed. The classroom teacher was responsible for monitoring students as they participated with their groups. The researcher recorded a tally marks each time she observed a student demonstrating one of the behavior indicators associated with the targeted classroom norm on the recoding sheet. Tally marks were recorded using the prearranged grouping codes to note which member(s) of the group was exhibiting the behaviors. When the timer went off the researcher stopped recoding data and the class would continue with the normal flow of the lesson. This would be the repetitive process followed for each visit throughout the duration of the study. This process was chosen as the best way to demonstrate who and how often students were able to apply the learned listening and speaking norms on their own during group discussions. It allowed the researcher to gather data to support the ease in which students were able to incorporate previously taught norms into regular

lab discussions. The researcher was considered an insider because she was the science lab teacher who regularly taught science content to the students during their lab visits.

At the end of the discussion the observation sheets were kept in a file until the data was analyzed. The data was then transferred to a password protected laptop computer that only the researcher had access to. No identifiable student information was recorded by the researcher and the observation forms were kept in her possession for the duration of the study and shredded when the study was completed.

## **Analysis**

The data was analyzed using comparative data analysis to find the frequency distribution of nominal data collected during student observations to determine how often students were demonstrating the use of norms and protocols independently during classroom conversation. Data was collected and sorted according to the students' English language proficiency level. Graphs were created to compare students' ability to independently implement classroom norms at the three different proficiency levels. This analysis was a good match for the research because it seeks to determine if and to what degree students are able to independently implement norms as a part of academic conversations once they have been taught. The findings are validated by research that says "by providing structured opportunities to practice oral language skills with partners and in small groups, teachers help increase English learners oral use of academic language, which in turn deepens learning" (Wilson et al., 2016).

## **Conclusion**

With the continued change in ethnic diversity of our schools' educators are continually look for way to support the language development of our English learners and stimulate their progress in reaching grade level proficiency standards. The need to provide our English language learners with opportunities to engage in oral discourse to improve their use of academic language is an important part of language development. This study was conducted to determine the effect of how establishing norms and protocols for active speaking and listening effects the academic performance of our English language learners. The students chosen for this study represent a comparative sampling of the school population and are part of this same demographic. Many are low achieving, at-risk students who have been in US schools since

kindergarten, but are not made adequate growth towards academic standards or language proficiency. A self-made data collection tool was used to record observational data on student's ability to independently incorporate listening and speaking norms in academic conversations. Chapter 4 will examine the results of the data collected by the researcher during those observations.

## Chapter Four: Data Analysis

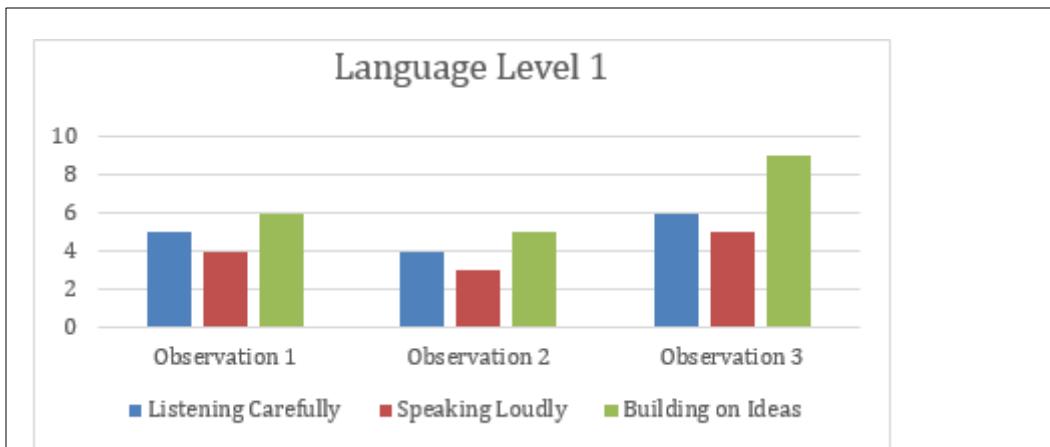
As the population of Hispanic and Latino students has increased in California schools over the past decade, we have seen a continued growth in the academic achievement gap that exist for this student population. It has become increasingly important for districts to find new and innovative ways to bridge this gap by providing programs that support literacy and language development that will meet the needs of our underserved population and provide them with the tools necessary to successfully meet the rigorous requires of the common core state standards. This all begins with giving students more opportunities to engage in academic conversations in the classroom in order to practice and apply the literacy skills they are being taught in the classroom. This study attempts to answer the question: To what extent do EL students, when given opportunities to practice, implement the use of conversational norms of listening and speaking aligned to a unit of study in science?

This chapter will present data collected through observational research that looked at how often students were able to incorporate the use norms for listening and speaking in academic classroom conversations in science as the first step in strengthening skills in literacy. In this chapter I will present data related to the findings in my observations and describe their meaning within the context of my research. In the Data Analysis section will provide an explanation of the data and how it relates to the topic being studied. The Data Interpretation section will provide connections between the data collected in the study, the research question, and best practices in education. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of the data collected in my research.

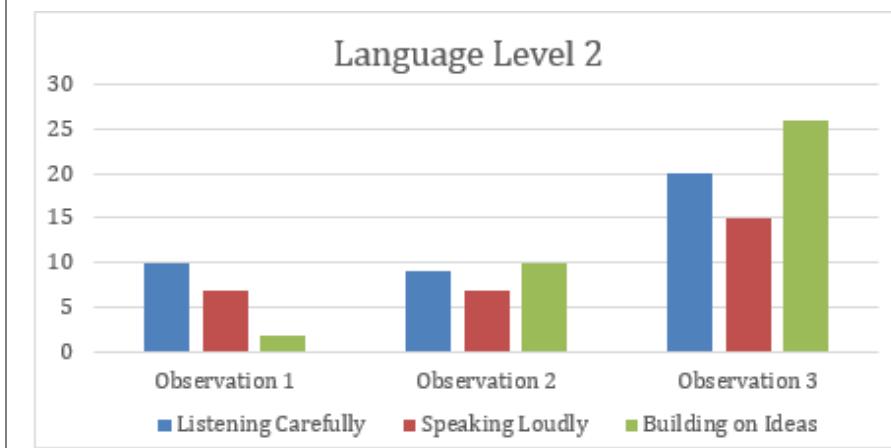
### Data Presentation

The data for this study was collected over the course of 5 weeks during the first trimester of the school year. The study began with a two-week intervention period where students were taught the communication norms and given an opportunity to practice science talk procedures in their talk teams. The quantitative data was collected through observing students during structured 5-minute science talks to determine whether or not they were able to demonstrate the

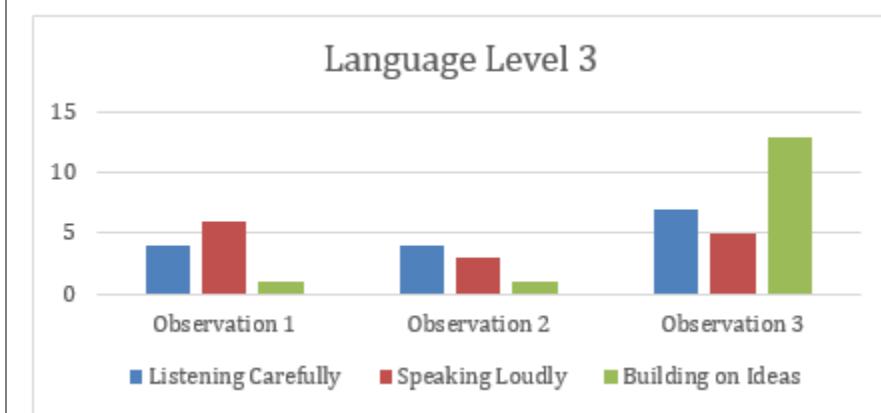
use of the three identified norms. The data for the 20 students was coded and entered on a spreadsheet which was used to compare the frequency at which students at each language level demonstrated use of each of the three norms over the course of the observation period. The data shows that students at all language levels were able to show an increase the frequency at which they independently used each of the three norms during academic conversations as they progressed through the three data collection sessions. Figures 4.1-4.3 break down student responses for each norm by language level and illustrates student growth over the course of the study. The findings in this study support research that states when students are given multiple opportunity to engage in structured academic discourse, they strengthen their skills in oracy and their oral language development improves.



*Figure 4.1: Number of occurrences for each norm for students at language level 1 for the three observation sessions.*



*Figure 4.2: Number of occurrences for each norm for students at language level 2 for the three observation sessions.*



*Figure 4.3: Number of occurrences for each norm for students at language level 3 for the three observation sessions.*

## Data Analysis

Data for this study was gathered using a self-made data collection tool where the researcher tallied the number of times students demonstrating use of three listening and speaking norms: *Listening Carefully, Speaking Loudly, and Building on the Ideas of Others*. Data was collected when students exhibiting one or more of the behavior indicators identified for each norm. The data was tallied according to frequency of occurrence, coded and entered into an excel spread sheet where graphs was created to display data collected for each language level noting the number of occurrences observed for each norm over the three observation periods as well as data that demonstrates student growth in the ability to Build on the Ideas of Others among the three language levels present in the group of student observed.

Of the 20 participants in the study, 5 of them were Level 1 Language Learners. Figure 4.1 illustrates data collected from the 5 Level 1 Language Learners indicates an increase in students independent use of all three norms between session one and session three even though the data indicates a slight drop in number of observances in session two. When looking at the observances of student behaviors from norm to norm by level 1 language learners you can see that among the 5 language learners at this level, they were fairly consistent with their ability to implement the norms of *Listening Carefully* and *Speaking Loudly* with the number of observances ranging from 4 to 6 throughout the three observation sessions. You can also see an increase in their ability demonstrate the norm of *Building on the Ideas of Others* from 6 observances in session one to 9 observances in session three, which is not what you might expect to see from English learners at this level.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the data collected from the 11 students who were classified at a level 2 language proficiency. This group represented the largest sampling in the study, with more than

double the number of participants in each of the other levels. This trend is representative of the EL student population at the school, where 65% of EL students have a language proficiency levels of 2 or 3. The data collected from the 11 students at this level shows drastic jump in students' abilities to independently use all three norms. When you compare the number of observances from session one to session three the data doubles or more than doubles for each of the three norms. When you compare the data from norm to norm with the Level 2 English Learners you can see that for sessions one and two the number of observances for the three norms observed were fairly similar, but you can see a significant increase in the data when you compare that to the session three data, where the number of observances more than double for all three norms. This could be due to the large number of students observed at this level as well as their level of comfort in speaking with their talk team members.

Figure 4.3 represents data taken from the 4 students classified as level 3 English learners. Students in this group showed consistent use of norms in session one and two with the number of observances being very similar between all three norms. In session three students demonstrated a significant increase in the number of observances jumping to 7 observances for norm one, *Listening Carefully*, and 13 observances for norm three, *Building on the Ideas of Others*. For norm two the data shows a slight inconsistency jumping from 6 observances in session one, to 3 observances in session two to 5 observances in session three. This could indicate more time needs to be spent on practicing the behavior indicators associated with Speaking *loudly* enough to be heard by others. When comparing the data norm to norm for level 3 students the data shows a positive upward trend in students ability to demonstrate independent use of all three norms with the most gains coming from the number of observances of students' independent use of norm three, *Building on the Ideas of Others* an overall increase from session one with the

number of observances of 1 to session three where the number of observances was 13. This large jump could be attributed to the students building confidence in their ability to engage in opportunities involving academic discourse.

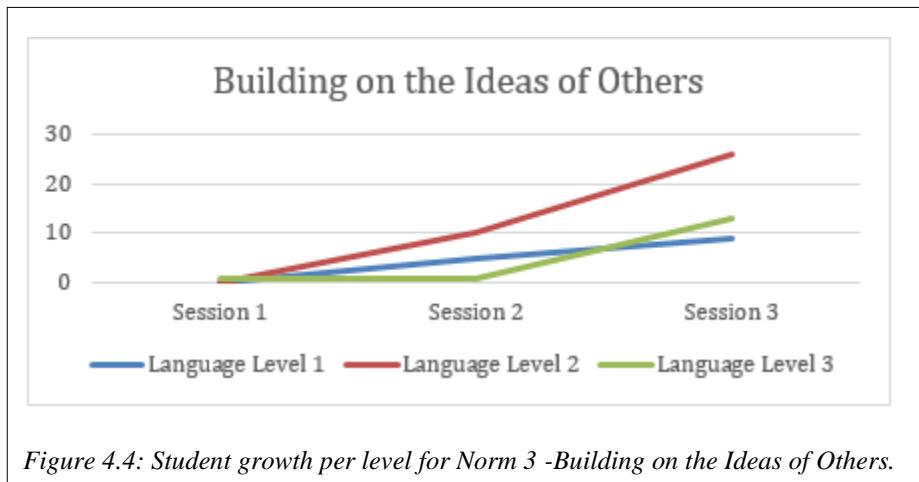


Figure 4.4: Student growth per level for Norm 3 -Building on the Ideas of Others.

Figure 4.4 focuses on data collected from observations of students demonstrating use of norm 3: *Building on the Ideas of Others*. It shows student growth in their ability to build on the ideas of others in an academic conversation across all three language levels. The data shows growth for each language level from session one to session three. This is significant because this was discussed as being the most difficult of the norms by the researcher and classroom teacher. As students progressed through the study, they became more comfortable in their abilities to engage in academic conversations. The group that made the most significant gains were students classified as Language level 2's. These students increased from 0 observances in session one to 26 occurrences in session three. Although this was the most significant increase within all three groups Level one students showed an increase from 6 observances in session one to 9 observances in session three. And language level 3 students increased from 1 observance in session one to 13 observances in session 3. This is consistent with data from Wilson et al (2016) that states “by providing structured opportunities to practice oral language skills with partners

and in small groups teachers help increase English learner's oral use of academic language with in turn deepens learning" (p. 54).

### **Interpretations**

The study began with the students, classroom teacher, and researcher creating a list of listening and speaking norms they would begin to implement in classroom discussions. The students then took part in a series of intervention sessions lead by the researcher to review and practice the roles of listeners and speakers in an academic discussion before data was collected to determine to what extent the students were able to demonstrate independent use of the three listening and speaking norms selected for the study. The evidence from the research showed the average rate of growth in observances of student's independent use of norm one, *Listening Carefully*, to be 65% overall for students across all three language levels from session one to session three. The average growth in observances in student use of norm two, *Speaking Loudly*, showed an increase of 51% overall, and data collected for norm three, *Building on the Ideas of Others*, showed an average increase of over 100% across all three language levels from session one to session three. This growth could be attributed to an increase in the confidence levels of students and their ability to participate in academic conversations. As the study progressed the researcher and classroom teacher noticed an increase in the amount of time students were talking during the session. This could be attribute to the fact that, over course of the study, students became more confident in their abilities to engage in group discussions and as the study progressed, they engaged in the discussion more frequently.

The students observed in this study were 4<sup>th</sup> grade English language learners ranging from level one, beginning language learner with very limited English language skills, to level 3 language learner who are more advanced in their skill development in English. The majority of

students in this study group were level 2 language learner and produced the most significant growth in all three norms observed. Students in this group showed growth in each of the three norms of over 100% from session one to session three. This could be due to the fact the number of participants in this group were more than double than those in the other two groups. It could also be possible that because most students in the level 2 group were for the most part, in groups with other level 2 learners, it made it easier for the group as a whole to engage in the discussion, creating a more confident team overall and therefore an increase in the total number of observances.

An interesting trend in the data can be seen when you look at the number observances of norm two, *Speaking loudly* collect for each group in session two. For each language group there was either a decrease, or no change recorded, for the number of times students demonstrated use of that norm. Level one students decreased from 4 observances to 3, level two students showed no recorded change, and level three students showed a decrease from 6 to 3 observances which is a drop of 50%. While these were not significant changes, it is consistent with the overall performance of the group. There was no significant change noted by the researcher or the classroom teacher in the procedures followed for session two or student performance that could have impacted the data. This dip in the data could be interpreted as a part of the normal fluctuation in student understanding that occurs within the context of the classroom during the course of normal instruction. Educators can benefit from the research provided in this study because it supports research in how providing practice and support to our English learners in developing oral language skills can lead to improved academic performance.

Although the data collected from the research showed that students did improve in their abilities to engage in academic discussions, there were several factors that proved to limit the

findings. The length of the study took place over the course of 5 weeks with the student observations occurring in the last two weeks of the study. The ability to extend the length of time of the study and number of observation sessions could provide a more in-depth connection to student growth in language proficiency levels and academic improvement across content areas. Although the researcher was considered to be an insider due to the fact that she teaches science content to the class and has normal interaction with the students her limited exposure to the students did not allow her to develop the same relationship as the classroom teacher and could have an impact on the outcome of the study. Due to the large number of students in the group it was somewhat difficult to collect data. It may be more beneficial in the future to choose a smaller group of learners to focused data collection on and track their academic progress over time to get a more accurate picture of their abilities to implement the use of norms in a variety of context. This may provide a more accurate picture of their growth instead of just focusing on their performance in the lab.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented data to support my research in determining to what extent EL students independently implement classroom norms of listening and speaking as a part of structured classroom conversations in science as means of strengthening literacy skills and improved academic performance. The data showed that overall, across all three language levels, students were able to demonstrate independent use of classroom norms for listening and speaking. Although the number of observances of students' ability to independently use norms for listening and speaking varied depending on language level and the norm being observed, all groups were able to show growth in their oral literacy skills from session one to session three. This indicates that when we provide students with the necessary structures to support their oral language development and provide them time to practice speaking in academic context,

their oral language skills will improve. In chapter 5 I will discuss the lessons learned from my research and make recommendations for future research in this area of study.

## **Chapter Five: Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent students were able to implement conversational norms for listening and speaking as part of academic conversations focused on science. As the ethnic makeup of our schools continues to change and the number of non-native English-speaking students continues to grow, there is an increased urgency to implement programs and strategies that will help support the oral language development of our English language learners to support their academic success in school. This study supports research done in the area of oral language development which states, that by providing students with the opportunities to engage in academic discussions with partners and in small groups, using language supports and academic vocabulary, it will help develop their skills in oral communication and deepen their learning across all subject areas (Wilson et. al. 2016).

In this chapter I will provide a summary of my findings through the research I conducted on the use of classroom norms for listening and speaking with a group of English language learners in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class at Oak Vail Ranch Elementary School. I will offer a summary of my findings as they relate to the field of education and provide recommendations as well as insight into lesson learned during my research. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide you with a clear picture of the findings of my research and translate my analysis for practical application in the classroom, as well as offer suggestions for future research in this area.

### **Finding Summary/Interpretation**

The goal of this study was to determine to what extent EL students were able to independently implement previously learned norms for listening and speaking into academic conversations in science. The quantitative data collected suggest that although the frequency of response varied depending on the norm being observed and the language level of the students, overall students were able to show significant growth in the number of times they were observed demonstrating the behavioral characteristics associated with each of the three norms chosen for the study when you compare data collected from the first observation session to the third. This

trend is confirmed when you look at the percentage of growth for each language level for each of the three norms.

The quantitative data collected shows that student's ability to *Listening Carefully* increased by 20% for language level 1's, 100% for language level 2's, and 65% for language level 3 students comparing the number of observances from session one to session three. Some of the behavior indicators demonstrated by students included: looking at and facing the speaker, keeping your body still, lean into the conversation, nod in agreement and use facial expressions to indicate agreement. These behaviors were familiar to students and fairly easy for students to demonstrate and are part of the normal classroom routine, which could account high percentage of increase. Data collected for the norm *Speaking Loudly* increased by 25% for language level 1 students, and 51% for language level 3 students but then showed a decrease of 17% for language level 2 students. This drop in the data could be due to several factors. The 11 level 2 students accounted for over half of the students in the study. Generally, these students do well with communicating in social settings, but have difficulty when conversations involve academic content. Many of the students in this group are somewhat shy and unsure of their abilities in English and therefore do not speak in a voice that is easily heard by others. All of these factors can account for the decrease percentage growth for level 2 students. In contrast, the ability to *Build on the Ideas of Others* increased by 50% for level 1 learner and growth of more than 100% for students at level 2 and 3. Students showed the largest amount of growth in their ability to demonstrate use of this norm, which was an interesting occurrence since both the classroom teacher and research felt this norm would be the most difficult for students to demonstrate. During each observation session students were able to use sentence frames to support academic talk, which could have made building on the conversation easier.

## Findings in Context

Based on the data collected in this study, the findings are in agreement with previous research included in the literature review that suggests that oral language skills are developed based on school practices that foster oracy among students. When students are given the opportunity to practice peer to peer communication, students are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of the conventions of spoken language and more fully develop their spoken language skills (Minero, 2016). During the course of the study it was observed that students were more hesitant to participate in academic conversations when they were first introduced. As students were taught how to engage in discussions and were provided with supports such as sentence frames, they became more comfortable with the process and were more willing to participate in academic conversations with their partners. This is evident when looking at the data collected on student's ability to *Build on the Ideas of Others* across all three language groups. The quantitative data collected for this norm shows that all groups experience substantial increases in the number of observances from session one to session three with the most noticeable growth coming from language level 2 students who increased from 2 observances in session one to over 20 in session three. These findings are in support of research conducted by Wilson et al. on providing English learners with academic speaking opportunities. They concluded that by providing multiple opportunities for EL's to practice using academic and content vocabulary with peers in a variety of settings it can help increase their use of academic language and lead to a deeper understanding of content across all subject matter (2016).

Many of our EL students come from homes where a language other than English is spoken in the home and their parents speak little or no English. Since they do not have a strong language support system in place at home, the only opportunity they have to practice their English skills is at school. This makes it even more important for teachers to provide students with multiple opportunities to practice speaking in academic contexts. As the literature review suggests, providing students with literacy programs that provide students with the structures and

supports they need to access the language while still maintaining alignment with academic content standards provide students with the best opportunities for success (August & Shanahan 2006). The more opportunities English learners have to develop their English language skills the more comfortable they will be to engage in academic discussions and experience improved academic outcomes overall.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

This study adds to current research on improving academic outcomes for our English language learners. While there is a large body of research defining the specific language needs of our EL's and the difficulties they face meeting the rigorous proficiency expectations that exist today, there is limited research centered around the development of oracy skills and increasing the amount of time English learners are engaged in academic conversations as a means to increase their oral language development.

The implication from this study, is that when students were introduced to and made a part of creating listening and speaking norms as part of their regular classroom routine and then given explicit instruction on how to implement the norms in academic conversations, they demonstrated substantial growth in their ability to independently use the norms in academic conversations. By providing students with the supports in academic content and vocabulary they were able to improve their skills in oral communication by increasing their participation in academic conversations.

A recommendation would be to conduct further research in this area. Further research might include lengthening the duration of the study and include multiple classroom participants to increase the amount of data collected. Looking at the data over a longer period of time and increasing the number of participants may offer a more comprehensive data set and be more representative of the total school population rather than observations and data collected from one class.

### **Limitations of Research**

The data collected from the fourth grade EL students in this study showed that when you provide multiple opportunities for student to practice and engage in academic conversations, their ability to

demonstrate use of conversational norms for listening and speaking improve. The data also suggests that students benefit from these opportunities to develop their oral language skills, however due to the limited nature of the study there are several factors that could help improve further research in this area.

One limitation of the study was the time period in which the study took place. The study was conducted over a six-week period with a three-week intervention period followed by a three-week data collection period. This was a limitation because since this study was conducted outside of the regular classroom setting by someone other than the classroom teacher, it did not maintain the level of consistency that would have occurred if it was conducted in the regular classroom setting by the classroom teacher. It was noted by both the researcher and the classroom teacher that they would have liked to have more observation opportunities. While the study provided valuable data on student's ability to independent demonstrate the listening and speaking norms, future research that includes a longer time frame to allow for additional observation sessions could produce a richer data set.

A second limitation to the study is that the study did not have a control group. All of the students received the same instruction during the intervention period as opposed to collecting data on an intervention – outcome association (DeLucia & Pitts, 2019). Setting up this type of causal relationship could provide for a more informed set of data in terms of comparing the performance of the two groups.

A third limitation to the study was the size of the data collection group. The study was conducted with the cooperation of one fourth grade class with 20 English learners. The original plan for the study was to include two separate fourth grade classes, however, it was necessary to make a change to the plan for two reasons. One being the difficulty in scheduling time to meet with both classes through the intervention and data collection phase of the study. Juggling the demands of so many outside factors made meeting with both classes difficult. A second reason being the experience level of the classroom teacher and differences in behavior management styles different between the two classes. The fourth-grade class that participated in the study was taught by an experienced teacher with a well-established behavior management system in place. The second fourth grade class was taught by a teacher new to the grade level and in her second year in the teaching profession. She had an established behavior

management system in place, but lacked the consistency that experience brings. This had an effect on the ability to successfully conduct the intervention sessions with the class, and so it was determined, by both the researcher and the classroom teacher, to modify the study to include only one group of students.

### **Future Research Directions**

This study looked at how successful one fourth grade class of English learners was at implementing norms for listening and speaking independently during academic conversations in science. The quantitative data collected gave us useful data in the number of times students were able to successfully demonstrate the three norms being observed. Future research that also includes qualitative data focusing on the students' level of confidence in academic discussions, before and after the study would add an important dimension to the research that includes the perspective of the EL learner.

The results of this study focused around the students' ability to independently use norms for listening and speaking during academic conversations in science. In future research it would be important to expand the research to include a mixed methods approach to analyze how the use of strategies such as reciprocal practices or assigning roles in the discussion helps to facilitate academic discussions not just in science, but across other academic areas like reading comprehension and math. These results could help inform instructional practices for teachers moving forward.

### **Conclusion**

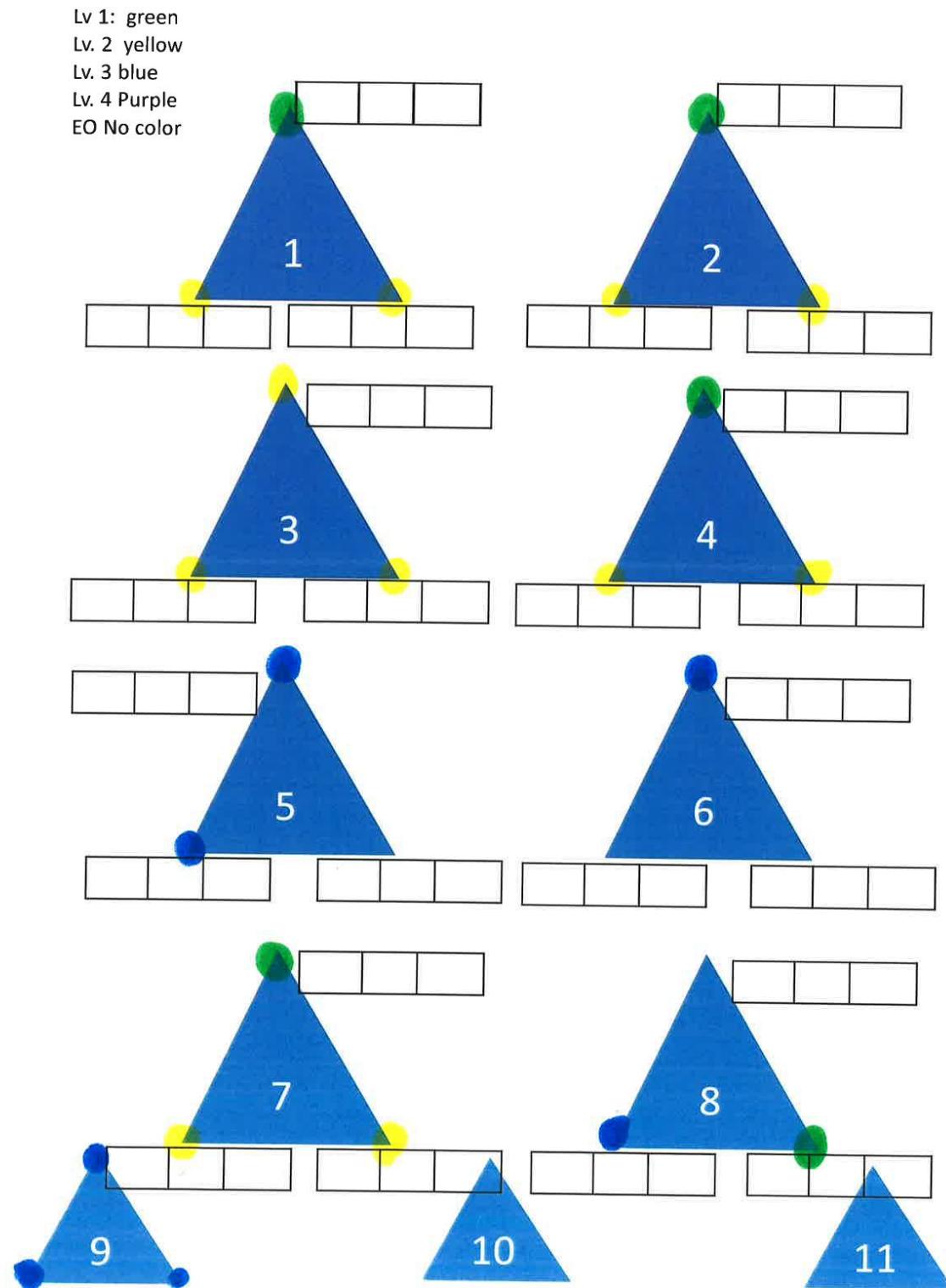
In this chapter I provide a summary of the results of my study as well as an interpretation of my findings. Through the results of this study I sought to answer the question: To what extent do EL students, when given opportunities to practice, implement the use of conversational norms of listening and speaking aligned to a unit of study in science? While there were slight differences between the language level groups, the results showed that overall students were successful at independently using the norms for listening and speaking during academic conversations in science. The chapter also makes connections to how the findings in the study add to current research on improving academic outcomes for our English language learners. The implications of the study were as follows:

When students were introduced to and made a part of creating listening and speaking norms and given explicit instruction on how to implement the norms in academic conversations, they were able to independently use the norms in academic conversations. There were several limitations outlined in this chapter: the condensed time frame of the study, the lack of having a control group to use as a means of comparison of data, and the small sampling group of 20 EL students. These were all taken into account in formulating the suggestions for future research which suggests the use of a mixed methods approach which would enhance the credibility of the study.

In preparing our EL students to meet the rigorous language standards necessary for reclassification as well as meeting grade level proficiency of Common Core State Standards, it is important to provide consistently implemented programs geared to offer language support in oral communication and improved comprehension skills in English. Providing students with continuous practice in applying these skills through structured academic discourse will help them make connections and deepen their understanding of the different language contexts they will encounter in daily life. By encouraging students to utilize the knowledge they have in their home language can help build their conceptual understanding as they strengthen their skills in English.

This study was conducted to determine the impact of the use of norms for listening and speaking had on students' ability to comprehend the difficult concepts they were learning in science. By incorporating listening and speaking norms as well as language supports as part of structured academic conversations students were able to produce more meaningful discussions and deepen their understanding of the more difficult concepts they were learning in science. Although more research needs to be done in this area, data collected in this study indicates that we provide students with the necessary structures and supports they need to access language as well as provide opportunities for them to participate in academic discussions across all content areas, they will be more successful in their ability to comprehend and apply the concepts they are learning.

## Appendix



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