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# The Effects of Content-Based Academic Paired Conversations on the Speaking Skills of Fifth-Grade English Learners

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THE EFFECTS OF INSTRUCTION ON CONTENT-BASED ACADEMIC PAIRED
CONVERSATIONS OF FIFTH-GRADE ENGLISH LEARNERS


by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Growing up, it was routine for me to watch the national evening news while eating dinner.  Based on the news video clips, my parents, sister, and I had conversations where we shared our opinions on events happening in the world.  As a child, I did not necessarily enjoy watching and discussing the news, but it did two things for me: increased my academic vocabulary and taught me how to hold an academic conversation.

Many English learners (ELs) do not have these sorts of language-enriching, academic experiences in their homes.  ELs have valuable experiences such as seeing the world through two or more languages, but being able to speak and write academically in English are the pathways to success in school and in life in the United States today.  Job applications at the professional level may require essays where applicants are assessed on word choice, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and style.  During a job interview, if a candidate cannot give thoughtful, clear answers with adequate explanation, chances are that candidate will not be hired.

WIDA English Language Development Standards

In 2010, my state joined the WIDA consortium.  According to its website, "WIDA advances academic language development and academic achievement for

linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators" (WIDA, n.d.). School year 2011-2012 saw implementation of WIDA's English Language Development (ELD) standards and a yearly proficiency test for all ELs. WIDA has five English Language Development Standards— Social and Instructional Language, the Language of Language Arts, the Language of Mathematics, the Language of Science, and the Language of Social Studies. The standards in and of themselves cannot be used on their own, since there is no content or skills specified in them. Rather one must take each academic standard (language arts, math, science, and social studies) and use corresponding WIDA standards to support the development of academic language (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2012). States whose educational departments have joined WIDA are known as member states. Member states must test their ELs yearly in the domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking using a WIDA-produced proficiency test called ACCESS for ELLs (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners). Students score a one to a six in each of the domains, with a student scoring one being a beginning student and a student scoring six being comparable to proficient English peers. After receiving their scores on this test for the past three years (2012, 2013, and 2014), I noticed that my students needed the most work in the productive language area, the areas of speaking and writing.

<div align="center">Receptive Versus Productive Language Skills</div>

In language learning, receptive skills include listening and reading, and productive skills include speaking and writing. Although I have taught English learners

for over eleven years, in that time I have only had one student, a recent immigrant of high-school age from Vietnam, who has had better productive than receptive skills. Knowing this, in the 2013-2014 school year the elementary English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in my district met to analyze the previous year's ACCESS for ELLs test results. The vast majority of our students scored lowest in the domains of speaking and listening. Using ACCESS for ELLs data from 2014, of the students selected to participate in this study who were enrolled at my school as of June 2014, five were lowest in speaking and three were lowest in writing, out of eight total students.

That many students' lowest domain was speaking was surprising. ESL teachers have traditionally observed that writing is the last domain in which learners gain proficiency (Staehr Fenner, 2013). If that is the case, I wondered why my students were not doing very well on the ACCESS speaking test (of academic oral language). I thought that perhaps they had developed social oral language, but still needed to further develop academic oral language.

The ACCESS speaking test is in the form of a table-tent flipchart, with a student and teacher view, a format unfamiliar to students. Students see illustrations, charts, and graphs while teachers read content information and question the student. The student must put together visual and aural information to answer the questions. He or she has to use the illustrations, charts, graphs, and the information the teacher provides to answer the teacher's questions (see Appendix A). Students' speaking is assessed on linguistic complexity ("quantity and variety of oral text"), vocabulary usage ("types, array, and use of language structures"), and language control ("specificity of word or phrase choice")

(WIDA, 2012).  To achieve a level five, students need to produce, among other things, extended discourse, technical language, and comprehensible and fluent language.

Upon reflection, I realized that the ACCESS speaking test asked my students to do something that was not being asked of them in their lessons— mainly to speak academically, especially on content topics.  In my pull-out English language classes, I was focusing more on reading and writing, thinking these were the areas of weakness for my students.

I observed mainstream classes in which my students spend the majority of their day and spoke with their mainstream teachers about what activities were used to teach the content.  What I learned was that, overwhelmingly, the focus was on listening, reading, and, to a much lesser extent, writing.  Speaking was an afterthought and was not seen as a skill that needed to be taught.  Mainstream teachers were primarily doing quick "turn and talks" as their speaking activity, without students having any chance for extended oral discourse, let alone academic conversations.

I could not blame the mainstream teachers, though, as they were being directed by the school district to focus primarily on reading and secondly on writing.  In my own training supplied by the district, "turn and talks" were promoted as a great way to keep students engaged.  While short bursts of student talk most likely would help with student engagement, they probably would not promote academic speaking and help students do well on the ACCESS speaking test.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards

In 2011, my state adopted the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards; schools needed to implement the standards in the 2012-2013 school year. When I started to work with the standards, I noticed that there was a section for "Speaking and Listening." More specifically, there was a standard that addressed academic speaking. An example for fifth grade is:

5.8.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, English Language Arts, Speaking and Listening section, grade 5). Speaking was recognized as an important skill, in which students needed to have instruction.

Teaching Speaking Skills

Deciding that I, as the ESL teacher, needed to implement more speaking practice in my English language classes, I began to reflect on what I had done in the past to teach speaking. I found that I had not really taught speaking very much. Instead, what I had worked on seemed to be more pronunciation with my high school students and news-centered discussions with my adult students. Although these learning activities had some merit, neither was going to help my current upper-elementary students succeed in the mainstream or on the ACCESS speaking test. I used some discussion cards (with, for example, language to share an idea and ask a question) and posters with functional language and graphic organizers (like for the language of compare and contrast) that we

received from E.L. Achieve (E.L. Achieve, 2015).  Students were able to use these tools

for support, but I still felt that they were not having genuine conversations; they were

reading off of the cards and looking at the posters for frames with which to start

speaking.  Something more was needed.

In January 2014, at a district ESL elementary teacher meeting, our director used

some materials for professional development that she took from the *Understanding*

*Language* website from Stanford University (Understanding Language, n.d.).  She also

told us about a massive open online course (MOOC) called "Constructive

Conversations," which taught teachers of ELs how to build more academic talk into their

lessons and to specifically teach students how to have paired academic conversations.

Thinking that this sounded interesting, I read through the website and I saw that Jeff

Zwiers was one of the instructors.  I remembered that I had recently bought a book by

Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford called *Academic Conversations* (2011), but had not read

it yet.  I signed up for and took the course.  I learned a lot about teaching conversation in

this course, with one of the most important aspects being that it takes preparation and

carefully structured lessons with support in order for the students to have successful

paired academic conversations.  Another emphasis in the course was on the teacher

writing good prompts that push students forward in their thinking and academic language

acquisition.  Zwiers and Crawford (2011) discuss four aspects that can form a base for a

teacher's academic conversation prompt: basing a prompt on a deep question, thinking

skill, a product or task, or life experiences (pp. 64-72).  After participating in the course

and reading the book later, I felt that implementing paired academic conversations could be very beneficial to my students' speaking development.

Role of the Researcher

My school is an arts magnet elementary school in a second-ring ethnically diverse suburb of a large mid-western city. I implemented content-based paired academic conversations with my fifth-grade pull-out English language class in the 2014-2015 school year. My fifth-grade ELs were of several different language backgrounds and were all at the advanced levels of English as measured by the 2014 and 2015 ACCESS for ELLs test, composite levels four to six. I taught academic vocabulary and appropriate academic communication strategies. Also, I taught the academic conversation skills of clarifying one's own points and asking for clarification of a partner's points and fortifying one's own points and partner's points. Students additionally used teacher-provided prompts and frames to enhance their conversations. Content for units came from the *Avenues* English Language Development (ELD) core curriculum (Schifini, Short, Villamil Tinajero, Garcia, E. E., Garcia, E., Hamayan, & Kratky, 2004) and from the mainstream curriculum *Houghton Mifflin Social Studies: United States History, Early Years* (Viola, Witham Bednarz, Cortes, Jennings, Schug, & White, 2008). Content vocabulary also came from this curriculum, with academic vocabulary coming from the supplemental curriculum *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit, Grade 5* (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015). Students were pre-assessed and post-assessed on their success in paired academic conversations. An accompanying rubric was used to assess these conversations.

Background of the Researcher

I substitute taught for three years and then went on to teach my own classes for eleven years, with students ranging from Kindergarten to adults. I conducted this research study in the hope that it would enhance my teaching of speaking, an area of particular interest to me. In order to complete this study well, as the researcher, I planned and put much thought into the design of this project. I plan on sharing my results with other elementary ESL teachers in my district. Since content-based paired academic conversations help students meet Common Core English Language Arts standards, the results of my study are also relevant to mainstream teachers (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). From my previous informal research and the aspects of academic vocabulary and conversation I had tried with my students already, I felt that the results of implementing these paired academic conversations would positively affect students' academic speaking.

Guiding Question

The question that provided the basis for this research was: How does instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with academic vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade English learners?

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed my interest in content-based paired academic conversations and provided reasons for my use of them in this project. The WIDA and

Common Core ELA standards were detailed, along with a brief overview of receptive and productive language skills. I discussed my role and background as the researcher.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter One, I established the need for increasing student talk in my ESL classroom. The context for the study was introduced along with the role and background of the researcher. At the end of the chapter, the research question was detailed. In Chapter Two, I will provide a review of the literature relevant to the research question. Areas to be reviewed are content-based instruction, academic language, oral language as a means of developing academic language, what types of oral language contribute to developing academic language and which do not, as well as what should be included in teaching academic conversation. Chapter Three will describe this study's research design and methodology. The results of this study will be presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, I will reflect on the data collected and the study's limitations. Also included will be implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research was to study the effects of implementation of content-based paired academic conversations (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011) with fifth grade English learners at the advanced levels (levels four to six on the WIDA ACCESS scale). The question that guided this research was: How does instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with academic vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade English learners?  In this study, students were provided with specific instruction and practice in conversation skills and academic language with the ultimate goal of increased academic success in English speaking skills as measured by academic conversations.

This chapter presents a review of research related to academic discussion and conversation.  For the purpose of this research study, I use "discussion" to refer to whole-class or small-group discussion on instructional or academic topics in the classroom.  I use Zwiers and Crawford's specific definition of "academic conversation," "Conversations are exchanges between people who are trying to learn from one another and build meanings they didn't have before….Academic conversations are sustained and purposeful conversations about school topics" (2011, p. 1).  First, an overview of the research on the importance of content-based instruction and academic language in student success is given.  Second, I review the research on language and interaction in the

classroom and why academic talk is important to advanced language acquisition. Third, studies looking at how to develop discussion and conversation in the classroom are discussed, along with research that looks at several major discussion and conversation formats widely used by teachers.

## Communicative Competence

ESL programs in my district primarily use a content-based communicative competence model for teaching and assessing student language acquisition. Hymes coined the term communicative competence to describe how language is used in authentic communication. The goal of communicative language teaching is to promote communicative competence. This has been the dominant form of ESL teaching for many years (Flowerdew, 2013). Communicative competence requires mastery of discourse competence. Discourse is defined "broadly as language in its contexts of use" (Flowerdew, 2013, p.1). It focuses on language above the sentence level, with fluency in discourse norms promoting communicative competence (Flowerdew, 2013). Teaching discourse, how to have conversations and discussions, is a primary goal of communicative language teaching (Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1994).

## Content-Based Instruction

Content-based instruction (CBI), in the context of ESL, involves teaching language through the medium of English. It integrates language learning with content learning (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). CBI originated in the 1960s in Canada with French immersion schools for native English speakers (Lo, 2014; Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). It can refer to a wide range of instructional models, drawing content from subject

matter such as social studies and science, themes, and workplace knowledge (Valeo, 2013). The belief around content-based instruction is that, in order for language learning to be meaningful, language learning must be in conjunction with content (Valeo, 2013).

Researchers, however, have shown that it is not sufficient to merely teach content through a second language; additionally, there must be a component that focuses on the structures of the target language (Kong, 2009). This means that teachers need to teach the language forms needed to access and produce the language of the content area. In other words, reciprocally, while the learning of content is necessary to learn language, the learning of content will be impeded if the language needed for comprehension is not present (Kong, 2009). Kong identified this reciprocal relationship after examining the instruction of two content-trained teachers and two language-trained teachers. The results suggest that although complex content provides rich opportunities for language learning, teachers need to support students in their use of this language, necessitating teachers' awareness of relationships between form and function. Teachers' support of their students should take the form of teaching and practicing academic language, such as the language needed to make hypotheses and the language of cause and effect (Kong, 2009).

Many content-based instruction courses use social studies and science as the content through which to teach language, although mathematics can also be taught in CBI (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010). Although discourse differences have been noted in these subjects by second language acquisition and systemic functional grammar analyses, schools frequently focus instruction in only one or two content areas. When only some

subjects are taught in the second language, humanities and social studies are favored, as they are thought to be more verbal, enhancing language learning (Lo, 2014). In a study involving nine teachers and two English-medium schools in Hong Kong, the language used in two subjects— humanities and science and mathematics was investigated. The researchers found that "conventional wisdom" regarding using humanities as a subject for CBI is correct. Humanities lessons are more learner-centered. In these lessons, there are more verbal exchanges between teachers and students, with lengthier student responses (Lo, 2014). Zwiers (2008) notes that in science, the language tends to be more technical; with math, the thinking tends to be quite abstract with vocabulary terms that are only used in math.

One model of CBI, known as sheltered instruction, seeks to provide access to the mainstream curriculum for English learners. This occurs by sheltering the content and supporting the language used in the instruction and materials, for example, keeping the same content, but using visuals or alternative reading materials to aid comprehension. A currently popular form of content-based instruction is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, which is widely used by both mainstream and ESL teachers. The model promotes teachers' writing content and language objectives, building background of concepts for students, and providing comprehensible input. It also stresses the use of teaching strategies that promote scaffolding, interaction with the teacher and other classmates, and higher-order thinking (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010).

The Need for Academic Language

Developing academic language, and not just social conversational language, is essential to student success in school.  This distinction is described by Cummins (1980), who distinguishes basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) from cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP).  BICS involve language that is common, interpersonal, and cognitively undemanding.  Thus, a first grader having a chat with a friend on the playground about what he did over the weekend would be an example of BICS.  CALP is language that is academic and cognitively demanding, the language that is needed for students to be successful in school.  Cummins states that it takes immigrant students who arrive in Canada after the age of six five to seven years to achieve a level of CALP similar to their peers.  To achieve proficient BICS takes significantly less time.  A series of studies by Collier and Thomas found that, for students with no education in their native language, it takes seven to ten years to achieve proficiency in academic English (Collier, 1995).

Scarcella (2003) extends this work and describes academic English as the language associated with academic disciplines.  Utilizing Kern's three dimensions of academic literacy, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural/psychological, Scarcella describes a framework for teaching academic English in the K-12 setting (Scarcella, p.10, 2003).  It consists of phonological, lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse components (p, 12, 2003).

Scarcella (2003) discusses the critical need for students to learn academic English, saying that learning academic English is the key to socioeconomic success (p. 3).  She

asserts that the unfortunate reality is that many English learners are often not exposed to academic English in their homes or in their schools.  Because of this, these students never learn the academic English needed for success in school and the workplace.  She points out that many teachers do not engage their students in activities to develop academic English and that numerous teachers also do not use academic English themselves in the classroom (Scarcella, 2003).

Awareness and use of academic language has also become a large component of the Common Core English Language Arts standards, which state: "Academic understandings and skills are permeated by language, both in terms of understanding concepts and accepted subject-specific procedures, and in terms of processes of learning to understand, to share, to consolidate, and to present" (van Lier & Walqui, 2011, p. 1, quoting the standards).  Kinsella (2012) recommends that teachers start an academic language campaign.  She suggests that teachers model academic English, that the school makes students aware of the academic language registers, and that students respond in an academic manner.

Based on their research, Freeman and Freeman (2009) assert that teachers must help their students learn the academic language appropriate for success in their classes. They suggest that teachers ask open-ended questions and respond to students in a way that helps them extend their thinking.  Asking students to tell the teacher or class more assists in this extension of language and thinking, as does asking how the student came up with a response.  Teachers can scaffold student talk to help them participate in associated reading and writing tasks (Freeman & Freeman, 2009).  Schleppegrell (2004)

maintains that for many native speaking students, learning academic language is itself like learning a second language. For these students, there needs to be a focus on form, correct input, and time to practice the academic language.

<div align="center">Language and Interaction in the Classroom</div>

Cook's (2008) discussion of Long's version of the Interaction Hypothesis involves communication. Long states that conversation in second language learning benefits learners though interaction and negotiation of meaning. He proposes that pushing learners to be appropriate and precise facilitates language learning. He also discusses the interactional approach. In brief, it involves negotiating meaning and continuing the conversation by checking for comprehension, with supports such as repetitions and reformulations, which create scaffolding with two or more speakers.

As Freeman and Freeman (2009) point out above, the form of questioning and verbal interaction impact academic language development. Much has been written about the role and form of teacher questioning in the classroom (Cazden, 2001; Heritage & Heritage, 2013). One predominant type of teacher questioning found in numerous classrooms is closed, known answer questions. These questions are referred to as initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) questions. In this format, the teacher asks a question to a student or the class which is a known answer or test question, in order to gauge what students know (Heritage & Heritage, 2013). These questions are typical in what were traditional recitation-type lessons and answering them requires little reasoning.

An effective academic language development curriculum must utilize language that involves using language to think and which moves student learning forward. For

example, Heritage and Heritage (2013) analyzed videotaped teacher-student conferences during writing time in a fifth-grade class with more than fifty-percent of students classified as English learners. They analyzed interactions where teacher questioning was utilized as a formative assessment. In examining the teacher's questioning, the researchers found that she used open-ended questions to guide her students' writing. The teacher took a collaborative approach in the writing conferences, which helped move the students' writing forward.

Academic Conversation and Common Core Standards

Fisher, Rothenberg, and Frey (2008) discuss the importance of talk in the classroom. One important aspect of talk is that it represents thinking. Since teachers want their classrooms to be abundant in thinking, it stands to reason that classrooms should be abundant in talk. However, researchers have found that teachers dominate talk in classrooms. Lingard, Hayes, and Mills assert that in classrooms with many economically disadvantaged students, teachers talk more than the students (Fisher et al., 2008). According to Mercer, student talk in the classroom allows students to work with information and promotes learning (Zwiers, 2008). Class discussion is most beneficial to average and below-average level students for learning about topics in the content areas (Johnson, 2009). In short, if students are not using the language they are learning, the language does not become their own. Student talk needs to be substantive and academic (Fisher et al., 2008).

The Common Core has also recognized the importance of oral skills. The mandated Common Core English Language Arts standards have a specific section for

speaking and listening skills.  These standards are a change from my state's previous

English Language Arts standards in that there is a focus on disciplinary literacy.  Students

need to demonstrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in the content areas of

history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2011).

Table 1

*Common Core English Language Arts Grade Five Speaking and Listening Standards:
Comprehension and Collaboration*

| | |
|---|---|
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1 | Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.A | Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.B | Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.C | Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.D | Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2 | Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. |
| CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.3 | Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence. |

Additional speaking and listening standards ask students to report on a topic, sequence ideas and provide details, speak clearly, and use academic English when necessary (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).  Bunch et al. (2011) point out that the standards ask students to participate in activities such as arguing and critiquing, skills that may not align with cultural values of ELs and may need to be taught to them.  The speaking and listening standards require students to collaborate and listen critically to each other. Students are asked to share opinions and build off others' ideas (Bunch et al., 2011).  In the fifth-grade writing standards, among other areas, students are asked to write opinion pieces with reasons and support, and informative/explanatory texts with facts, definitions, and details (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).   In writing, students are required to present logical arguments and back them up with evidence (Bunch et al., 2011).

Teacher support overall for substantive student talk can take on a variety of forms from deliberate planning for interaction in groups, explicit instruction, and modeling. Student talk can be used in all phases of instruction.  One instructional task in which talk can be beneficial is during collaborative tasks, when students are able to work together with support from the teacher, using supports such as linguistic frames or differentiated texts.  Small groups or pairs discuss ideas, question each other, negotiate meaning, and clarify their thinking in order to communicate with each other (Fisher et al., 2008).  This promotes academic language learning and deeper thinking.

There are a number of other types of talk activities, and while they promote engagement, they do not have evidence of promoting deep thinking or of pushing academic language forward. "Turn and talk" is a brief activity where a teacher poses a question, students physically turn towards a partner, and both partners share their answers verbally, one after the other, with little to no building. Many teachers rely on "turn and talk" for a student to quickly share any piece of verbal information with a partner, but more substantive discussion is called for in the Common Core ELA standards (Kamm, 2013). Examples include building on others' ideas, elaborating on the remarks of others, and drawing conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Other common classroom activities that limit thinking and discussion include think-pair-shares, small groups, and the use of sentence frames and starters (as the core instructional method) (Zwiers, 2011). These four instructional activities are often promoted as tools for student engagement, but they really do not promote deep thinking.

The oral language activities that develop academic language and conversational skills are also the skills that employers are looking for. Zwiers (2011) discusses skills that employers are looking for in their workers. He notes that the number one skill cited on most lists was for employees to communicate effectively. Employers look for employees to ask insightful questions, be able to collaborate with others, and to evaluate evidence (Zwiers, 2011). All of these skills can be practiced with classroom discussions and conversations based on students' work with content materials.

Developing ELs' academic language skills may best be done in a pull-out setting. Two studies found that having a separate time for explicit instruction in the English language is beneficial for ELs (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). One of the studies looked at Spanish-speaking kindergarteners who received this type of instruction. These students showed positive effects on their oral language proficiency. Other studies looked at where and how to develop academic language and conclude that programs for English learners need to include many areas of instruction. These studies demonstrate the necessity for developing ELs' academic oral language skills. The researchers assert that during explicit English language instruction time, speaking and listening should be emphasized because this time is probably the only time in the day when speaking and listening are the most important activities.

<div align="center">Models for Teaching Discussion Skills</div>

In a 1998 study examining effective instruction for English learners, Truscott and Watts-Taffe found that even though collaborative learning occurred in 75% of the lessons, there were few tasks where students were asked to meaningfully work with language, and only some of the students were actively participating (Williams, 2001). Many suggestions and models for how to teach discussion and conversation skills that actively promote student engagement and language learning are provided by researchers. While each of the following studies investigates an aspect of this study's research question, none fully address the question.

A number of models include focused small-group and whole-group discussion on a reading, guided by the teacher and assessed with a rubric. Research suggests that using

a well-written prompt and explicitly teaching conversation skills, supported by sentence starters, encourages academic conversations. Additionally, the content area of social studies is noted for producing rich opportunities for academic discussions and conversations.

Several authors discuss the positive academic impacts of instructional conversations on English learners (Goldenberg, 1992; Perez, 1996). Instructional conversations are "discussion-based lessons geared toward creating richly textured opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development" (Goldenberg, 1992). Before instruction, the teacher reads a selected text several times, looking for a theme in which to guide students in meaningful small-group or whole-group discussion. Relevant academic vocabulary and language structures are pre-taught and a discussion ensues, guided by the teacher but with much student-led participation (Goldenberg, 1992; Perez, 1996). In a study by Perez (1996), instructional conversations were held in a combined second and third grade ESL class with students at the late-beginning to intermediate levels of English. It was found that these discussions positively affected the students in the development of their academic English. Through the instructional conversations, the teacher provides needed academic vocabulary and gives the students practice during the discussions. Social interaction, scaffolding and turn-taking, and making connections and meaning amongst the students during the instructional conversations also contributes to positive growth in academic English (Perez, 1996).

Some authors have studied discussion and conversations in the science classroom. Michaels and O'Connor (2012) describe productive talk as focused discussion, including

every student, with the teacher guiding students as they try out new reasoning and

collaborate with one another.  These authors detail what components need to be in place

for productive talk to occur.  Among the items on the list appear setting clear purposes

for the talk, having a question to structure the talk with further questions to follow up,

and using a set of talk moves.  A primer on productive classroom conversations (2010, no

author) discusses several ideas for making talk in the science classroom more productive.

One is that the classroom must have an environment in which students feel safe to talk;

students need to feel that their contributions are valued and that they will not be made fun

of by other students.  Another is using wait time- students need time to think about what

they would like to say.  A third is scaffolding academic language.  The article suggests

providing students with sentence starters, having the teacher model thinking out loud, and

creating rubrics with students with clear explanations of good arguments.

Looking specifically at academic discussions in the content area of social studies,

Pontecorvo and Giradet (1993) worked with fourth grade teachers who were teaching

about the end of the Roman Empire.  Students were presented with an account by a

Roman writer from the fourth century claiming that the Huns were "beasts."  In groups,

students were given the accompanying discussion question:

> Ammiano Marcellino is a Roman writer of the 4th century.  In his description he
>
> says that the Huns had habits similar to beasts.  What do you think he meant?
>
> Was he right or wrong?  Discuss it with your classmates, and write down the
>
> reasons that could cause him to think in this way and whether you agree with him
>
> or not" (p. 369).

The goal was to get the students thinking and justifying claims as historians do. The study shows that, with the support of each other to work out their reasoning, fourth grade students are very capable of using argumentation and historical reasoning.

Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994) note that research demonstrates that conversations have rules and that conversation classes appear to improve the conversation skills of students. The authors point out that there are two methods in teaching conversation skills- the indirect method, where students learn by simply engaging in communicative tasks, and the direct method, where students are taught the language and routines to hold a conversation. They advocate the second method because teaching conversation skills can lead to learners having more effective conversations. They suggest teaching skills such as opening, turn-taking, interrupting, topic-shifting, adjacency pairs, and closing. Additionally, they promote teaching conversation strategies including paraphrasing, appealing for help, asking for repetition, and asking for clarification.

In a study by Lam and Wong (2000), 24 teachers were surveyed on strategies they felt students most needed to be successful in a group discussion. Recordings and transcripts were made of pre-treatment discussions. From these, key discussion strategies were identified and taught to sixth-form students (about 17 years of age), in order to prepare them for an examination where groups of four students would be evaluated on their conversation abilities. The discussion strategies selected were "clarifying oneself, seeking clarification, and checking one's understanding of other people's messages" (Lam & Wong, 2000, p. 247). The study shows mixed results. The students did exhibit a greater use of discussion strategies and the interaction was more authentic, but there were

more ineffective strategies used in the post-discussion than effective strategies (Lam &
Wong, 2000).

A subsequent study by Lam (2010) involved two classes of secondary two
students (ages 13 and 14 years old), for a total of eight lessons over five months. One
group received specific instruction in eight communication strategies: resourcing,
paraphrasing, using fillers, using self-repetition, asking for repetition, asking for
clarification, and asking for confirmation. The other group did not receive this special
instruction. The results show that low-proficiency students in the treatment group made
increases in target strategy use, indicating that low-proficiency students might benefit
more than high-proficiency students from communication strategy training.

In a study by Reese and Wells (2007), the format used to teach academic
discussion skills was a game. Students in an intensive English program were provided
with summaries of controversial topics and each student was given two decks of cards, a
participant deck and a leader deck. Each card had a different expression to use in
conversation; cards were in groups of different conversation strategies, represented by
colors. Leaders started and ended the conversations. Students received points for each
card correctly used and pronounced. They were encouraged to make more difficult
conversation moves such as disagreeing or interrupting, as the cards for these moves
received more points. At the end of the course, students wrote responses to questions
asking their feelings on playing the game. Students wrote that they enjoyed the game and
that it helped them with speaking outside of the class. Due to the nature of the game,
many conversations produced short utterances and students who produced longer speech

were frequently interrupted by others with an "interruption card." The study suggests that students become skilled with the conversational moves and learn the expressions on the cards.

## The Gap

The research I have reviewed has indicated that student talk is an important aspect in teaching and learning, but that not all talk is equal in developing academic language skills. In most classrooms, ELs at all age levels are not getting enough instruction in discussion and academic conversation skills, nor do they have many opportunities to practice using academic language orally. Many of the relevant studies were, however, done with secondary school students or adults. In addition, numerous research projects focused on whole-class discussions. Research additionally indicates that pull-out ESL classes may provide a better setting than mainstream classes to build academic language and conversation skills. Although more studies have appeared in the last few years with elementary-aged students in paired conversations, there are few studies specifically looking at English learners in a pull-out model.

## Research Question

I taught conversation skills and academic language, along with social studies content to my fifth-grade ESL class. The aim of this study was to answer the research question: How does instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with academic vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade English learners?

Summary

This chapter provided the purpose of this study.  It discussed the relevant research in content-based instruction, academic language, oral language as a means of developing academic language, what types of oral language contribute to developing academic language and which do not, as well as what should be included in teaching academic conversation.  In Chapter Three, the methodology of the study will be discussed, along with the format of lessons and curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to address the research question: How does instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with academic vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade English learners?  This chapter details the methods used in the research study.

For the general academic vocabulary section of the study, students self-rated their knowledge of the vocabulary to be taught.  After the end of the general academic vocabulary treatment, students were assessed using a written test.  A recorded paired academic conversation of participants, scored with a rubric, served as a pre-assessment. Two mid-treatment recordings of paired academic conversations were also recorded and scored with the same rubric.  A final paired academic conversation was recorded and scored with the rubric, which served as a post-assessment.  The teacher researcher twice made observational notes of paired conversations during the treatment, using a form based on the rubric.

## Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study.  First, a description of the mixed methods research paradigm is presented along with the rationale and description of the research design.  Next, the specific method to the study is detailed. Last, data collection protocols are presented.

Basic Mixed Methods Research Paradigm

This study used basic research design.  It was undertaken to learn more about teaching academic vocabulary and academic conversation skills to ELs, with the goal of increasing knowledge of instruction in those areas.  This research study used a mixed methods approach, combining aspects of quantitative and qualitative research, with this study relying more heavily on qualitative methods.  Quantitative elements included a specific research question, aspects of academic conversations were broken down and analyzed, and data was presented to illustrate findings (McKay, 2006).  Qualitative research has as its goal to learn more about a phenomenon.  Qualitative research is defined by Van Maanen as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of a certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p.13).  Qualitative research was appropriate for my study because I utilized description for much of the analysis.  I was the teacher researcher and the number of participants was small.  Although there was a treatment to the study, I was not able to control for all variables.  Due in part to the fluid nature of an elementary ESL classroom, the research design was flexible (McKay, 2006).

Method

This research study specifically used the case study method.  Merriam (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40).  The bounded system in this study was a fifth-grade ESL classroom.  Rich description and analysis of the participants, using multiple sources of information such as

observation and paper documentation, make up the majority of this study (Merriam, 2009).

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

<u>Participants</u>

This research was conducted with fifth-grade English learners. There were twelve students in this class. They were all born in the United States or immigrated as very young children. They had several different home languages. Their families were from lower or middle socio-economic backgrounds. All students were at an advanced level of English (composite levels four to six on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment scale). All had been in either my school, my school district, or our state's schools for all or most of their schooling.

Table 2

*Study Participants*

| Participant Pseudonym | Country of Origin | Home Language |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Bee | United States | Hmong |
| Chue | United States | Hmong |
| Edward | United States | Ewe |
| Fabiana | United States | Spanish |
| Gabriella | United States | Spanish |
| Hunter | United States | Cambodian |
| Isabella | Mexico | Spanish |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jennifer | United States | Cambodian |
| Mai | United States | Hmong |
| Moua | United States | Hmong |
| Sua | Thailand | Hmong |
| Xia | Thailand | Hmong |

Below are the participants' results from the 2014 and 2015 ACCESS for ELLs test. As stated earlier, the domain with the lowest scores for many students was in the area of speaking. These scores added to the evidence demonstrating the need for an increased focus on the area of academic speaking.

Table 3

*2014 and 2015 ACCESS Scores for Study Participants*

| Participant Pseudonym | Listening 2014/2015 | Speaking 2014/2015 | Reading 2014/2015 | Writing 2014/2015 | Composite 2014/2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bee | 6/6 | 4.5/5.1 | 5.8/5.8 | 4.8/4.3 | 5.3/5.4 |
| Chue | 4.3/6 | 2.9/5.1 | 5/5.8 | 4.2/4.5 | 4.1/5.2 |
| Edward | 6/6 | 5.3/5.1 | 6/6 | 4.8/3.9 | 6/5.4 |
| Fabiana | 5.8/5.3 | 4.5/6 | 6/4 | 3.9/4 | 4.7/4.7 |
| Gabriella | 5/6 | 4.5/6 | 5/6 | 4.1/4.1 | 4.4/5.6 |
| Hunter | 5.8/5.3 | 3.3/5.1 | 6/5.8 | 4.6/4.4 | 4.9/4.9 |
| Isabella | 6/6 | 5.3/6 | 6/6 | 4.5/4.2 | 5.4/5.7 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jennifer | 6/6 | 4.5/6 | 6/6 | 5.3/5 | 6/6 |
| Mai | 6/6 | 4.5/5.1 | 5.2/6 | 5.2/4.4 | 5.5/5.4 |
| Moua | 5/5 | 5/6 | 2/5 | 3/4.4 | NA/4.9 |
| Sua | 5/6 | 6/6 | 5/6 | 4/4.4 | NA/5.6 |
| Xia | 4/6 | 6/5.1 | 5/3.6 | 4/4.2 | NA/4.6 |

Location and Setting

My study took place in an ethnically-diverse elementary arts magnet school in a second-ring suburb of a large Midwestern city. The school was an inter-district magnet school— a school designed to mix students of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, with several districts sending students to it. Sixty-one percent of the total student body qualified for free or reduced price lunches. Out of a total population of about 550 students, approximately seventy-five were ELs. The research was conducted in a pull-out ESL class, located in half of a full-size classroom. There were rolling cabinets and a rolling whiteboard which served as a divider to the room, but there was significant noise at times from another class on the other side of the room.

Data Collection Technique One: Written Test for General Academic Vocabulary

The first data collection technique was utilized during the general academic vocabulary treatment section of the study. The test consisted of selected-response and short-answer methods designed to assess students' comprehension and use of the general academic vocabulary taught in the unit. It was taken directly from unit eight: "Argument" from the supplemental academic vocabulary curriculum *Academic*

*Vocabulary Toolkit, Grade* 5 (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015). This type of assessment can be used to "efficiently assess students' knowledge of factual items, basic concepts, and simple skills" (Arter & McTighe, p. 8, 2001). The results from this test gave me clear information on which of the vocabulary words the students understood and could utilize.

Data Collection Technique Two: Recordings of Academic Conversations

Data collection technique two was implemented during the conversation treatment. It involved recording paired academic conversations and using a rubric to score them (see Appendix B). For a pre-test, I gave a prompt based on the content students had already studied. Students were paired up and asked to hold an academic conversation on the prompt. Each pair was recorded using the iPad app *Notability* (version 5.7.0; Ginger Labs, 2015). According to McKay (2006), recording the paired academic conversation preserves the conversation for later analysis. Pre-test conversations were scored using a rubric which looked at several aspects of academic conversation skills (Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). "A rubric is a particular format for criteria—it is a written-down version of the criteria, with all score points described and defined" (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p. 8). The main benefits of using a rubric are consistency in scoring and the knowledge gained can improve one's teaching (Arter & McTighe, 2001). The rubric included the academic conversation skills of maintaining coherence of topic, supporting ideas with explanations and examples, thinking and talking like experts in the discipline, and using appropriate communication behaviors. During the treatment, three additional prompts were given, and for two of these, the accompanying paired academic conversations were recorded, AirDropped, and scored

with the same rubric.  At the end of the treatment, a prompt was given that served as a

post-test.  Pairs then had a final academic conversation on this prompt, recorded it in

*Notability*, AirDropped it to me, and I assessed them using the rubric.  Also, for each of

the four recorded prompts, selected conversations were transcribed and I provided a brief

narrative to serve as a baseline for treatment and to show more clearly the post-test

results.

Data Collection Technique Three: Focused Observation

The third data collection technique was used during the conversation treatment

and was focused observation using an observation form (see Appendix C).  The form was

based on the rubric used to assess the paired academic conversations; it included all the

same academic conversation skills.  Focused observation took place while students were

engaged in the paired academic conversations during the conversation treatment.

Merriam (2009) maintains that "observation is a research tool when it is systematic, when

it addresses a specific research question, and when it is subject to the checks and balances

in producing trustworthy results" (2009, p. 118).  Because the data was summarized in

the form of notes, I could highlight the important parts of the conversation that helped me

answer my research question (McKay, p. 56).

Procedure

The entire treatment consisted of deliberate instruction in content, academic

vocabulary, and conversation skills, with academic vocabulary and conversation skills

being the primary areas of emphasis.  The research question that was answered was: How

does instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with

academic vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade

English learners?  What follows was a brief description of procedures.  (For detailed

procedures, please see Appendix D for lesson plans.)

Pilot Study

A pilot study for the academic conversation piece was conducted with my sixth-

grade ESL class from April 23-May 1, 2015.  The students and teacher together read an

article from the magazine *Storyworks,* "Is Cursive Writing Still Important?" (2014).

After that, students got into pairs and picked out and wrote out *yes* and *no* arguments

detailed in the article.  The teacher and students came back as a whole-class and went

over student answers.  Students then got back into the same pairs and were then

instructed to have an academic conversation with the prompt "Should Cursive Writing

Still Be Taught in School?"  Pairs were instructed to record using the iPad app *Audio*

*memos free* (version 4.4.0; Imesart, 2015).  I subsequently discovered that there was no

way to get the recordings off of the individual iPads with this particular app.  So, after

exploring the available apps already on the district-owned iPads, I decided to use the app

*Notability* (version 5.7.0; Ginger Labs, 2015) to do the recordings.  The same procedure

was followed using the *Storyworks* article "Extreme Sports: Too Dangerous for Kids?"

(2014).  Pairs were able to AirDrop the recordings to me, meaning that they were able to

wirelessly send me their recordings.  *Notability* (version 5.7.0; Ginger Labs, 2015) turned

out to be a better app as the students were able to type their names and the prompt,

record, and then AirDrop the labeled recordings to me for archiving.  From this pilot

study, I decided that this would be the format and app that I would adopt for the study with my fifth-graders.

General Academic Vocabulary

To begin instruction, general academic vocabulary was pre-taught from the supplemental ESL curriculum *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit, grade 5* by Kinsella and Hancock (2015).  From this curriculum, the unit 8 "Argument" general academic vocabulary was pre-taught.  Examples of this vocabulary included: persuade, reasonable, and support.  At the end of the general academic vocabulary treatment, students took a written post-test taken from this curriculum.

Academic Conversation Pre-test

After the general academic vocabulary instruction, the conversation pre-test occurred.  The pre-test consisted of a pre-treatment content-based paired academic conversation that occurred for each pair of students.  Students were given a prompt that required both partners to talk, produce academic language, and that fostered critical thinking appropriate to the social studies discipline.  The prompt for the pre-test was: "Was the Columbian Exchange helpful or harmful to the world?"  The background content for the pre-treatment prompt was based on a previously-taught lesson from their mainstream social studies textbook.  The paired academic conversations were recorded, transcribed, and assessed using a rubric.

Academic Conversation Materials

The academic conversation instruction was integrated into the district-adopted ESL curriculum, Hampton Brown *Avenues* (Schifini et al., 2004).  The content readings

came from *Avenues* and the district-adopted mainstream social studies curriculum,

*Houghton Mifflin Social Studies: United States History, Early Years* (Viola et al., 2008).

I chose social studies as the content area because Lo (2014) suggests that this content

area produces more verbal exchanges between teachers and students with lengthier

student responses.

<u>Academic Conversation Treatment</u>

During the treatment, students were explicitly taught two conversation skills,

based on Zwiers and Crawford's book *Academic Conversations* (2011): "clarify" and

"fortify."  Instruction was based on activities detailed by Zwiers and Crawford, including

activities such as: using sentence starters, modeling paired conversations with the teacher

and a strong student volunteer, using graphic organizers for talking, teaching how to

provide examples, analogies, and clarification, and providing multiple opportunities to

make their paired academic conversations better.  Also, students were taught how to use

and practiced using academic vocabulary (from the sources above) in their conversations.

Example language included: "What do you mean by…?" and "In the text it said that…."

During the conversation treatment, students were put into pairs on three occasions and

asked to hold an academic conversation on prompts directly related to the content being

studied.  Two of these paired academic conversations were recorded (for all students)

using the iPad app *Notability* (version 5.7.0; Ginger Labs, 2015).  All conversations

recorded during the treatment were assessed using the same rubric used for the pre-test,

with selected samples of these conversations also being transcribed with short narratives

to explain the rationale for the scores given.  During one of the mid-treatment prompts, I

took focused observational notes using a form focusing on academic conversation skills.
I did the same for an additional unrecorded mid-treatment prompt.

Academic Conversation Post-test

At the end of the treatment, pairs had content-based academic conversations once
more to serve as a post-test. All pairs had their conversations recorded and all were
scored with the rubric. I then transcribed and gave a short rationale for scores for three
representative conversations.

Data Analysis

Data was collected in three different forms and analyzed in three different ways.
The written test for the general academic vocabulary treatment was simply scored. Each
question had a point value ranging from five to fifteen points, with 100 being the total
points on the test. Some of the answers were the general academic vocabulary words
themselves, and were either correct or incorrect. Other answers were more subjective as
students needed to write in their own ideas. I judged those answers by reading them, and
if they made sense in meaning and structure, they received the full points. If they were
related to the topic under discussion, but the meaning was not quite right, they received a
lower amount of points. If they did not make sense at all, they received no points.
During the conversation treatment, all conversations were recorded and I selected
representative samples of paired academic conversations to transcribe. All of the original
recordings were replayed multiple times for further analysis with the rubric. Each pair
was assessed and given points on the "Rubric for Academic Conversation Skills." Also,
as the teacher researcher, I examined the filled-out rubrics for trends in strengths and

deficiencies in conversation skills and reported on them in written format, both in tables and in narrative form.  With regard to the filled-out "Observation Forms for Academic Conversation Skills," I analyzed these for trends in strengths and deficiencies in conversation skills and reported on them in writing.

Verification of Data

This study maintained internal validity by triangulation.  "Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods and/or multiple data sources in order to verify the researchers' interpretations…" (McKay, 2006, p.79).  Three data collection methods were used: a written test, a rubric used to assess the paired academic conversations, and a form to record focused observations.

Ethics

This study employed the following safeguards to protect participants' rights:

1. Research objectives were shared with the participants and their parents/guardians.

2. Written permission was obtained from participants' parents/guardians, with translations provided in native languages if needed.

3. Human subjects review permission was obtained from Hamline University, and the school district and school in which the research was carried out.

4. Pseudonyms were used for participants.

5. Paper data was kept in a locked desk drawer; recorded data was only kept for the time needed and was not available for student access.  Data on the computer was protected with passwords.  All data will be destroyed after a maximum of seven years.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methods I used to carry out this research. I conducted a general academic vocabulary written post-test. A pre-test also occurred consisting of content-based paired academic conversations. During treatment, students engaged in paired academic conversations which were recorded and assessed using a rubric, with some selected conversations transcribed. Additionally, focused observational notes were taken for some of the paired academic conversations. At the end of the treatment, student pairs conducted a post-treatment conversation, which were scored with the rubric, with some selected conversations also being transcribed. The next chapter presents the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place in a pull-out ESL class in spring 2015. This study was

conducted to examine the effects of content-based paired academic conversations on

fifth-grade English learners' speaking skills. The research question was: How does

instruction on content-based paired academic conversations in conjunction with academic

vocabulary affect the academic conversations of advanced level fifth-grade English

learners? Data was collected primarily through the recordings of paired academic

conversations. A written test of general academic vocabulary and focused observational

notes were also used to collect data. Findings will be presented for the general academic

vocabulary portion of the study, followed by the academic conversation portion of the

study.

## Academic Vocabulary

General academic vocabulary useful for the content area of social studies,

specifically the American Revolution era, was taught before the content and conversation

instruction. This vocabulary was taken from the supplemental ESL curriculum *Academic

Vocabulary Toolkit, grade 5* (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015). From this curriculum, the Unit

8: "Argument" general academic vocabulary was pre-taught. The words were:

perspective, persuade, position, reasonable, support, and opposing. Students were

introduced to the academic concept of making an argument. For the unit, we used the

text's definition, "To make an *argument* means to explain why you believe something is true by supporting it with convincing reasons, relevant examples, and personal experiences" (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015, p.142). Students were asked individually to rate their knowledge of each word, before instruction occurred. Overall, students self-reported that they were not very familiar with the words. Some of the words they had reported seeing before, but they did not feel confident that they could use them in an academic manner.

As pointed out in Scarcella (2003), teachers must engage ELs in activities to develop academic English. Knowing this, we spent several weeks learning the academic vocabulary from Unit 8: "Argument." Each word was taught over two lessons for a total of approximately sixty minutes devoted to each word. Lessons occurred over three weeks. On some days, there were no lessons, and on some days, there were two lessons-one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Instruction consisted of a familiar set of routines for each word. Each word's instruction began with an introduction to the word using a definition, visual, synonyms and antonyms, sentence examples, word forms, and word partners. Subsequently there were multiple activities to practice using the word verbally and in writing. These activities included whole-class, partner, and individual work. Being an arts magnet school, there were numerous absences due to orchestra and troupe pull-out lessons. Also, one student, Fabiana, did not participate in the afternoon lessons due to a math intervention. On Monday, May 11 we spent thirty-five minutes in the morning reviewing the first three words with the "Smart Starts" exercises and spent

thirty-five minutes in the afternoon reviewing the last three words with the "Smart Starts" exercises.

On Tuesday, May 12, students took the post-test in the afternoon. The post-test was taken individually. It was written, with students needing to supply the correct academic vocabulary word and a word or phrase of their choosing that would make sense. As noted previously, Fabiana missed a large amount of the academic vocabulary instruction due to a math intervention, but she still took the post-test. Students absent for the post-test were: Mai, Jennifer, Edward, and Moua. On the whole, the students did quite well. The results are below.

Table 4

*Percentage Correct on Academic Vocabulary Test*

| | |
|---|---|
| Bee | 85% |
| Chue | 85% |
| Fabiana | 77% |
| Gabriella | 100% |
| Hunter | 95% |
| Isabella | 95% |
| Sua | 84% |
| Xia | 99% |

Although I often used these general academic vocabulary words in my lessons and in the paired academic conversation prompts, students rarely used them in their

paired academic conversations.  From my observations, their daily work, and their post-tests students did truly know these words and could use them in common contexts. They did not do well in incorporating these general academic vocabulary words into their paired academic conversations, which required conversation on content topics which were new to the students.  Students seemed to concentrate their energy on getting the content correct in their paired academic conversations.  As discussed in Freeman and Freeman (2009), teachers must teach needed academic language and scaffold it as necessary.  In this study, some students would try to incorporate the sentence frames, prompt starters, and prompt responses into their speaking as well, when I reminded them.

Lo (2014) asserts that content-based language teaching often focuses on humanities and social studies, as these subjects are considered to provide more opportunities for verbal interaction.  This study's content came from the area of social studies.  Subject-specific vocabulary words that were directly taught or reinforced were: king, army, soldiers, colony, colonist, taxes, protest, riot, boycott, repeal, Patriot, Loyalist, Neutral, treaty, government, politics, harbor, representative, traitor, document, tea, Sons of Liberty, and Parliament (Schifini et al., 2004; Viola et al., 2008).  This subject-specific vocabulary was used with a large frequency in class activities and, to a lesser extent, in the content-based paired academic conversations.  Although students understood all of the vocabulary, it was obvious in my observations and in the selected conversation samples (which appear later in this chapter) that certain words were easier for the students to use in their academic paired conversations. Examining the selected conversation samples, the words king, colonist, taxes, and tea were the most frequently

used in the paired academic conversations, with six, three, seven, five, and six uses respectively.

## Academic Conversations

Students participated in five total paired academic conversations, with four of these conversations being recorded. After each conversation, we reflected on and discussed the conversations. Over the five week period, academic paired conversations were recorded and scored using an accompanying rubric. The students' ability to maintain coherence of topic, support ideas with explanations and examples, think and talk like experts in the discipline, and use communication behaviors can be seen in the table below. (Specific daily lesson plans can be found in Appendix D.) These activities supported research discussed in Zwiers and Crawford (2011) and Fisher, Rothenberg, and Frey (2008).

Table 5

*Summary of Results of Academic Conversation Treatment*

| | Bee | Chue | Edward | Fabiana | Gabriella | Hunter | Isabella | Jennifer | Mai | Moua | Sua | Xia | Class average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre-test** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coherence of topic | 2 | 2 | 2 | * | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | **2** |
| Support ideas | 1 | 1 | 1 | * | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | **1.37** |
| Think & talk discipline | 1 | 1 | 1 | * | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | **1** |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | 2 | 2 | * | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | **2** |
| Total score | 6 | 6 | 6 | * | 7 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 | **6.37** |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Post-test** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coherence of topic | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | **2.17** |
| Support ideas | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | **2.33** |
| Think & talk discipline | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | **2.17** |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | **2.17** |
| Total score | 9 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 11 | 11 | 8 | **8.83** |

**Change pre to post-test on class average**

| Coherence of topic | 0.17 | Support ideas | 0.96 | Think & talk discipline | 1.17 | Comm. behaviors | 0.17 | **Total score** | **2.49** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Mid-treatment prompt 1**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | * | 2 | 2 | **2** |
| Support ideas | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | * | 1 | 2 | **1.54** |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | * | 2 | 2 | **1.72** |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | * | 2 | 3 | **2.19** |
| Total score | 8 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 8 | * | 7 | 9 | **7.45** |

**Mid-treatment prompt 2**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | **1.8** |
| Support ideas | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | **2.33** |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | **1.83** |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | **2.17** |
| Total score | 9 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 10 | **8.17** |

* Student not present for conversation.

Learning to Use the iPad Recorder

On the first day of the academic conversation treatment, we learned how to create and correctly format a note in the iPad app *Notability* (version 5.7.0; Ginger Labs, 2015). This assured that all pairs were successful in making their recordings, which formed the backbone of the conversation piece of this study.

Paired Academic Conversation Treatment

After each recording of the academic paired conversations, I evaluated each conversation using a rubric. The rubric was taken from Zwiers and Crawford (2009). (See Appendix B for a copy.) Pairs were evaluated on four skills and assigned a level from one to three, with one being below the standard, two approaching the standard, and three meeting or exceeding the standard. The skills evaluated were: maintaining coherence of the topic, supporting ideas with explanations and examples, thinking and talking like experts in the discipline, and using appropriate communication behaviors. These four skills also are promoted in research (2008) by Fisher, Rothenberg, and Frey.

Pre-test. On the second day of the academic conversation treatment, a pre-test was given. Prior to the pre-test, we reviewed a section on the Columbian Exchange from their mainstream social studies text (Viola, et al. 2008). The content of this section was already quite familiar to students, but they had not been asked to think critically or give their opinions on the topic before. The pre-test consisted of a prompt which was written on the board and read to the students. Then I put students into pairs and instructed them

to have an academic conversation about the prompt and record it.  The prompt was "Was the Columbian Exchange helpful or harmful to the world?"  The results below represent a good cross-section of the recordings.

"Was the Columbian Exchange helpful or harmful to the world?"

Selected Pre-test Sample One

Students: Edward and Bee

Bee: *I say yes that The Columbian Exchange is helpful because it helped the it helped Columbus and um get other stuff from Native Americans.*

Edward: *I say yes for the Columbus Columbus exchange because um Eurapearans Eurapearans* [Europeans] *don't have food like corn they don't have corn and the Native Americans don't have what what they have like um Eurapearans have corn, tomato, potatoes, squash, peanuts, cocoa and the Native Americans have cattle, I mean, sorry.*

(Some undistinguishable whispering between the conversants occurs.)

Table 6

*Summary of Results Pre-test Edward and Bee*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | They stayed on topic with no tangents. There was a very small amount of building of an idea. |
| Support ideas | 1 | Some support of ideas was presented, like specific foods, but no prompts were verbalized to encourage support. |
| Think & talk discipline | 1 | They gave few interpretations and mostly used social language. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | Although the students took turns talking, there was no paraphrasing of partner comments. |
| **Total** | **6 / 12** | |

Selected Pre-test Sample Two

Students: Mai and Jennifer

Mai: *Was the Columbians Exchange helpful or harmful to the world?  I say yes.  I mean, I say helpful because um it's healthier and also he exchanged for good and he exchange of to what they have and to what the others have to each other and um they um switch because Columbi um made a Columbius* [Columbus] *made a good deal with them and I think that it's good because um it's very helpful to their land so that helps the world because whatever Columbius bought and exchanged was what the world mostly planted.*

Jennifer: *Um and that he changed the world world, and okay, and helps a lot people from the different from the different countries um um from other parts of the world. And it was very helpful.*

Table 7

*Summary of Results Pre-test Mai and Jennifer*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | They stayed on topic quite well. |
| Support ideas | 2 | This was on the lower end. No prompts were given to encourage support, but some examples were provided of how the Columbian Exchange was helpful. |
| Think & talk discipline | 1 | They remained at a basic retell level and did not extend the conversation. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | The pair actively listened and took turns, but no paraphrasing of partner comments occurred. |
| **Total** | **7 / 12** | |

Selected Pre-test Sample Three

---

Students: Gabriella and Sua

Gabriella: (Reading from book…) *"*This movement of plants, animals, and people who tamed the eastern and western hemispheres is known as the Columbian Exchange.  The Columbian Exchange benefitted people all over the world.  Potatoes from the Americas became an important food for most Europeans."

Sua: (Continues reading from book…) "Corn became an important crop in Africa.  Sweet potato up important crop in Africa.  Sweet potato was grown as far away as China.  Today tomato, peanuts, and America beans and [undistinguishable] are grown in many land." *So, we think that*

Gabriella: *it was helpful*

Sua: *It was helpful because*

Gabriella: *It helped people.  It helped people grow new plants in different land.*

*Sua: And it helped* [whispering]*...  It help getting more animal and more plants in different land, different state.  Yeah.*

Table 8

*Summary of Results Pre-test Gabriella and Sua*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | There was some building on one another's comments through finishing each other's sentences and continuing the same idea. |
| Support ideas | 2 | This was on the lower end, as there were no prompts to encourage support. |
| Think & talk discipline | 1 | The entire beginning of the conversation was simply read from the mainstream textbook. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | No paraphrasing of partner comments occurred. |
| **Total** | **7 / 12** | |

Preparing for mid-treatment prompt one. Between the pre-test and the recording of mid-treatment prompt one, a number of lessons occurred. The overarching goal was to build students' background, provide them with an overview of events surrounding the early days leading up to the American Revolution, and build their academic conversation skills. The hope was to give students the skills to have the paired academic conversations along with some knowledge of an academic topic in which to hold a conversation.

Following activities detailed in Zwiers and Crawford (2011), students were taught how to have an academic conversation. This was done through modeling videos, students modeling with me, and students modeling with other students. An anchor chart of paired academic conversation skills was created with student input. Using contexts

familiar to fifth-graders, we practiced these academic conversation skills whole-class and in pairs. (See Appendix D for specifics.)

I built students' background via content vocabulary work and discussions about visuals. We read a number of texts from the mainstream text and our ESL text. With these texts, we focused on language skills such as sequencing words and phrases. Also, we focused on reading skills, for example, finding details to support an argument. Academic conversations, argumentation, and providing evidence are key parts of the Common Core English Language Arts Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and fit well with the topic of the American Revolution.

"Clarify" was the conversation skill that we focused on in the lessons from the pre-test to the first mid-treatment recording. As discussed in a study by Lam and Wong (2000), this skill is critical for academic conversations. I used prompt starters and response starters from Jeff Zwiers's website *Academic Language and Literacy* (2014). I selected the prompt starters and response starters that I felt were most applicable and easily utilized by my students and created note cards with this language on it for my students to reference and use during their academic paired conversations. These note cards were similar to the cards used in a study by Reese and Wells (2007), but contained more prompt and response starters. After teaching this language to the students and having them practice, I realized that it was a bit overwhelming for them and had them highlight and only focus on some of the language. Some examples of highlighted prompts to ask for clarification included: "Can you elaborate on…, What do you mean

by…, and Is what I just said clear?" Some examples of highlighted prompts to clarify one's own or partner's points included: "I think it means…, In other words…, and It sounds like you think that…."

   Observational notes from non-recorded prompt. The prompt for practicing "clarify" was, "What were some problems the colonists faced? How did they solve their problems? Were their solutions reasonable?

Students: Jennifer and Moua

Maintain coherence of topic: They stayed on topic, but just asked each other questions and individually answered them. There was no building up of a partner's comments.

Support ideas with explanations and examples: These students gave good examples of the problems and how colonists solved them. They did not discuss if they were reasonable or not.

Think and talk like experts in the discipline: There was no evidence of using their "clarify" card for prompt starters and/or response starters.

Use appropriate communication behaviors: Jennifer seemed nervous and had some hesitations and false starts.

I used this non-recorded prompt as an informal assessment. This led me to further refine my lesson plans.

  Mid-treatment prompt one. On day seventeen of the academic conversation treatment, I assigned the prompt, "What were some arguments for each side of the tea tax issue? What is your personal position? Support it with examples." During the academic paired

conversations, individual students were allowed to use their "clarify" cards and, between the two students, their cards with arguments for each side printed on them.

"What were some arguments for each side of the tea tax issue?  What is your personal position?  Support it with examples."

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt One Sample One

---

Students: Fabiana and Xia

Xia: *I think it's unfair because King George the Third is having like too much tax like he done the money and the people doesn't have like a lot and the tax so they could, you know, pay for their tea.*

Fabiana: *I think, um, people shouldn't pay for tea 'cause I think it's just like weird to, um weird to pay taxes for tea and um…like it's just…just weird how they have to like pay and…*

Xia: *Um, my personal position is that it is very unfair because King George is just using the tax, but then the people doesn't get to pay a tax for their tea.  And like for example, um, some other example is that we should have the right to vote for our own taxes and our* [undistinguishable]*.  It was in the um book.  So, it was some example.*

Fabiana: *I think it's unfair because, because um…wait for example, there is we can't we can't vote for the* [undistinguishable] *colonial representative.  If we don't like how how our representatives spend our money, we have to vote for something else.*

Xia: *So, we both think that it's unfair because what we just uh read in the book.  What it is.  So, that's all.*

Table 9

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt One Fabiana and Xia*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of Topic | 2 | The students mostly stayed on topic, but went on a few small tangents. Some of the ideas had some building. |
| Support ideas | 2 | No prompts were used to encourage support. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | This was on the lower end. Xia did refer to what she had learned in the text for support of her ideas. |
| Comm. behaviors | 3 | This was on the lower end. At the end, Xia did a paraphrase of the conversation overall, to serve as closure. |
| **Total** | **9 / 12** | |

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt One Sample Two

Students: Hunter and Isabella

Isabella: *I think it's unfair because like colonists cannot vote for their representatives in the Parliament of England because it's 'cause they I think it's unfair because like they can't vote for the other side and they should have like the privilege to vote for the other side.*

Hunter: *I think it's unfair because King George says that is using* [undistinguishable] *It's unfair that colonists can't vote for representatives from* [undistinguishable] *in the Parliament of England that they can't vote because King King King George the Third is unfair. And, yeah. He's unfair. He's a bad guy. The end.*

Isabella: *Okay.*

Table 10

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt One Hunter and Isabella*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|----------|-------|-----------|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | This was on the lower end. There was not much building of their idea. |
| Support ideas | 1 | There was some support for their idea, but it was not in-depth at all. |
| Think & talk discipline | 1 | They give few interpretations and there was no extension of the conversation. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | There was turn-taking, but no active listening. |
| **Total** | **6 / 12** | |

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt One Sample Three

---

Students: Mai and Jennifer

Mai: *We should be happy with the only the one tax on tea. Parliament has repealed with another tax except this one. Well, as I say that we should be happy. It's fair because, um, that the um, like they don't put a lot of tax on tea.*

Jennifer: *Um. Um, we can vote for whomever we want for colonial representatives. If we don't like how our representatives spend our money, we can vote for someone else.*

Mai: *I think it's unfair because, um, like they can't vote for someone else. I think that people should have the right to vote for themselves. Colonists cannot vote for their representatives in the Parliament of England; therefore, we have no representatives in Parliament. Well, I think that's unfair because the colonists cannot vote for representatives in the Parliament of England. So, um representative, like they have no representatives in Parliament. So, yeah.*

Jennifer: *We should have the right to vote for our own taxes in our own colony because like, um he was just like spend the money on the on tea when it cost really expensive and like some people enjoy it.*

Table 11

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt One Mai and Jennifer*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | This was on the higher end. |
| Support ideas | 2 | The students chose different sides to argue, but did well supporting their arguments with examples and clarification.  There were no prompts to encourage partner support, though. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | This was on the higher end.  Neither uses academic expressions or vocabulary. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | This was on the higher end, but no paraphrasing happened. |
| **Total** | **8 / 12** | |

  Observational notes from mid-treatment prompt one.  In addition to students recording

their conversations, I also observed one student pair live so that I could view their non-

verbal interactions and so that I could get immediate feedback on the success of the

conversations.

Students: Mai and Bee

Support ideas with explanations and examples:  This pair did not get to conversing about

their personal positions.

Think and talk like experts in the discipline:  They were reading off of the arguments

cards…all of the cards.  We modeled how not to do this and they were still doing it.

Use appropriate communication behaviors: They were trying to decide who would argue for the "fair" side and who would argue for the "unfair" side. This was not a debate, so I was confused as to why they were doing this.

  Preparing for mid-treatment prompt two. In the interim between mid-treatment prompt one and mid-treatment prompt two, three lessons occurred. We reviewed what we had learned so far using our texts and a large timeline that we created together. As a class, we decided on the top-five most impactful events that contributed to the American Revolution. Pairs then looked for cause and effect relationships and recorded the information on a graphic organizer.

We also did the "Pro-Con" activity from Zwiers's and Crawford's *Academic Conversations* (2011, pp. 96-97). Transitions were the language focus and pairs were challenged to think and speak about both sides of an issue of relevance to fifth-graders.

  Mid-treatment prompt two. Content-based paired academic conversations were held and recorded on day twenty of the conversation treatment. The prompt was, "What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution? Why?" I challenged students to see if they could have their paired academic conversation last at least three minutes. Pairs had the conversations two times with the same partners, in hopes that their second conversation would be improved. Students AirDropped their recordings to me. What follows are a selection of the academic paired conversations.

"What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution?  Why?"

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt Two Sample One

---

Students: Bee and Chue

Bee: *A major cause of Britain, um French and Indian Wars.  Proclamation in 19-, I mean 1763 colonists were upset by, I mean with Britain.*

Chue: *Say more about that.*

Bee: *Um, as a result of French and Indian Wars is that the Indians didn't like the French taking over their land, so they went into a war.*

Chue: *What do you mean by that?*

Bee: *A consequence, what I mean by that is a consequence of the French is that they're taking over the Indians' land and the Indians didn't like it.*

Chue: *As a result, wait.  A major cause a major cause of the tea act is that they forced colonists to buy British tea to pay, uh the tax.*

Bee: *Is what I just heard clear?*

Chue: *Yes, they were forced to buy British tea.*

Bee: *What do you mean by by the tea act?*

Chue: *Because colonists didn't like them to be forced to buy the tea from the British.*

Bee: *Say more about that.*

Chue: *Um, they don't like to be force because they using money too much on them and George George the Third might be part of it and use it to pay soldiers for nothing.  And, I think colonists might not like it and be think that's unfair for the colonists.  So, they wouldn't really pay the taxes and buy the tea, unless they might get killed.  Major cause, a major cause of the Boston Massacre, wait, Townshend Act is the greatest cause because they put a tax on tea, glass, lead, paint, and paper to get a lot more money.*

Bee: *What do you mean by by putting taxes?*

Chue: *So they could get a lot more money and then they won't buy it and get a lot more money.  Yes, because they puted a lot taxes on their stuff.*

Bee: *Say more about…I mean, what do you mean by that?  Putting taxes on the British citizens…*

Chue: *That means to, um, put taxes and then give it to George the Third and then give it to the soldiers and then after that they can try to make money and that's* [undistinguishable].

Bee: *Why is it important?*

Chue: *So they can get a lot more money and be so happy to have a lot money.*

Table 12

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt Two Bee and Chue*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | There was a lot of building on ideas for each individual, but no real building on each other's ideas. |
| Support ideas | 3 | These students intentionally prompted to encourage each other. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | This was on the higher end. Students did use some academic expressions and vocabulary, such as "as a result" and "consequence." These expressions were not always used correctly, though, and some historical misinterpretations were present in the conversation. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | This was on the higher end, but they did not paraphrase each other's comments. |
| **Total** | **9 / 12** | |

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt Two Sample Two

Students: Edward and Jennifer

Jennifer: *What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution?  Why?*

Edward: *I say the Tea Act because many people, um many um people didn't like the tax on the tea.  So, they start the they uh they uh throw the tea into the water, they threw the tea in the water.  That started the Boston Tea Party.*

Jennifer: *Um, say more, say more about it.  What else?*

Edward: *Um…um…the forced the colonists to buy British tea to for and pay for the tax. What about you?*

Jennifer: *I think that it's the Townshend Act in 1767 because it's like where it all started with the taxes with most of the soldiers coming and they and they collect the taxes from the tea, from the tea, glass, and paper, which is that's how it started.*

Edward: *I think Townshend Acts is kind of related with tea tax, the Tea Act.*

Jennifer: *Because it's…I say that because a lot of people think they did tax the tea. They started to tax the tea. What else do you think is important?*

Edward: *I think the French and Indian War have might started it a little bit. King George the Third…I think he was the one who started everything.*

Table 13

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt Two Edward and Jennifer*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 3 | This was on the lower end.  This did have the tone of an academic conversation. Edward does build on Jennifer's point about the Townshend Acts by commenting that it's related to the Tea Act. |
| Support ideas | 3 | This is on the lower end.  Both did well with prompting each other for more explanation and examples. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | There was some application to life back then along with some of the discipline's language and thinking. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | Although the pair used appropriate listening and turn-taking behaviors, there were not any instances of paraphrasing each other's comments. |
| **Total** | **10 / 12** | |

Selected Mid-treatment Prompt Two Sample Three

Students: Mai and Isabella

Mai: *What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution and why?*

Isabella: *Um…I'm thinking the Tea Tea Act.*

Mai: *And why?*

Isabella: *Um because it's I think the I think the tea tax is important because like um people* [undistinguishable] *the tax was too high and people couldn't some people couldn't pay.*

Mai: *Okay.*

Isabella: *What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution and why?*

Mai: *I think it means, um Townshend Act in like 1767 it's because Parliament is Parliament created new tax taxes to pay for the service of British governors and the* [undistinguishable] *of colonists.  So, this is why I think that this is what I think of what do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution and why.*

Isabella: *Say more about what do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution.*

Mai: *Well, I also think that it could be French and um British government.  Boston soldier citizens didn't want them there, so this is also why.  What do you think?  What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution and could you explain more?*

Isabella: *Um, the tea tax the taxes are going higher and higher and people thought it wasn't fair and they didn't want to drink like coffee.*

Mai: *It sounds like you think that Boston Massacre of British soldiers and Boston citizens* [undistinguishable] *five people were killed.*

Isabella: *What I heard was what they were doing* [undistinguishable].

Table 14

*Summary of Results Mid-treatment Prompt Two Mai and Isabella*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 1 | This was on the higher end. Their comments were not totally random, nor did they go off on un-related tangents, but they struggled to keep to one or even just a couple of ideas. |
| Support ideas | 2 | There were some prompts, primarily asking what the partner thought. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | This was on the lower end. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | They used some appropriate listening and turn-taking behaviors. |
| **Total** | **7 / 12** | |

Preparing for the post-test prompt. From the afternoon of day twenty of the

conversation treatment to the end of the treatment, we focused on learning about Patriots,

Loyalists, and Neutrals and what arguments they made for their positions. We read texts

and completed a chart; we also read a Readers' Theater.

Post-test prompt. On the second to the last day of the treatment, I did a mini-lesson on

the conversation skill of "fortify" (support), again using the prompt starters and response

starters from Zwiers's website (2014). Some of the prompt starters included: "Can you

give an example from the text?, Where does it say that?, and Can you give an example

from your life?" Some of the response starters included: "For example…, In the text it

said that…, and An example from my life is…." Students were given a role-play card

and had to take on the role of a non-famous historical person for the post-test paired academic conversation. The prompt was, "Who is more right— the Patriots, Loyalists, or Neutrals? Why?" The paired academic conversations were recorded and AirDropped to me. Transcriptions of representative conversations are included below.

"Who is more right— the Patriots, Loyalists, or Neutrals? Why?"

Selected Post-test Sample One

---

Students: Edward and Bee

Edward: *Who is more right…the Patriots, Loyalists, or Neutrals? Why?*

Bee: *I say the Patriots because they didn't 'cause they didn't want to listen to King George's rule because King George always wanted them to pay taxes for them. And they didn't like it so the Patriots fought against the British.*

Edward: *Can you give an example from the text?*

Bee: *For example, King George was King George always wanted us to pay for his taxes and buy him clothing.*

Edward: *What does it say that?*

Bee: *In the text it said that it said that many many Neutrals and many Loyalists wanted to stop paying King King George.*

Edward: *What is the real-world example?*

Bee: *For, an example for for my life is that you shouldn't always paying be paying taxes a lot.*

Edward: *Can you give an example from your life?*

Bee: *I already did.*

Edward: *What is what is the strongest support for…*

Bee: *Strongest supporting evidence is that King George always wanted them to pay taxes on tea every single day they bought tea.*

Table 15

*Summary of Results Post-test Edward and Bee*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | The academic conversation was on-topic, but there was no building on each other's ideas. The conversation was one-sided with Bee doing the talking and Edward doing the prompting. |
| Support ideas | 2 | There were many prompts to encourage support. Much of the support via examples and clarifications was redundant. |
| Think & talk discipline | 3 | This was on the lower end. Academic expressions and vocabulary were used, but they were not always used correctly. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | No paraphrasing of a partner's answers occurred. |
| **Total** | **9 / 12** | |

Selected Post-test Sample Two

Students: Chue and Xia

Chue: *I think the Patriots because they have the freedom to fight for their country and some peoples being much mad at Loyalist.*

Xia: *My turn.  I think the Neutrals are are right because um the Patriots are not seeing a good like um and Loyalists um um like doesn't…I don't know what to say.  So, yeah. Why do you think that?*

Chue: *Because 'cause 'cause they wanted the country and like for freedom.*

Xia: *Where does it say that?*

Chue: *It said in the text, in the book.  For example, that the British um the British and the Loyalist and the Patriot fought for what they wanted.  How does that support it support your point of view?*

Xia: *Um, um um 'cause in the um in the um text it said um that uh the Britain may cause them to be target of the mob so they are scared that they might get killed or 'cause they are in their team, but they might get killed so yeah I think it's major.*

Chue: *Can you give an example from the text?*

Xia: *Okay, the example is is…I just said it…the example is that I just said it.*

Table 16

*Summary of Results Post-test Chue and Xia*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|----------|-------|-----------|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | This pair struggled a bit to assert their points. There was not a lot of building on one another's ideas. |
| Support ideas | 2 | Both students prompted each other nicely. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | They both made reference to how people felt during the time period. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | No paraphrasing of a partner's comments occurred. |
| **Total** | **8 / 12** | |

Selected Post-test Sample Three

Students: Isabella and Jennifer

Isabella: *Who has more right- Patriots, Loyalist, or Neutral and why?*

Jennifer: *I say Patriots because that we agree that it is unfair that we had to force to pay the taxes on tea and like and like we had to give it to the soldiers and all do was just get go in our house and interrupt us.*

Isabella: *Okay, um can you give me an example from your life?*

Jennifer: *Um, um, um, hmmm, um that like, oh yeah, um, so this one soldier came to my house. He hmm, he asked me to cook for him but, I said no because I had to cook for my family and he forced me because he will he would he would hurt me if I don't. So what do you…what about you?*

Isabella: *Um, I think, um I think um Neutral 'cause I wouldn't take either side 'cause I wouldn't really care, you know. And, um, I would yeah. I would just be like Neutral because I wouldn't really care. Because like it doesn't I think like* [undistinguishable] *I think I'd be a Neutral 'cause like they won't take either side and plus um they wouldn't even change no tea taxes for all the other side.*

Jennifer: *Okay, um, um, can you tell a little bit more?*

Isabella: *Well, I well,* [whispering between two conversants] *I want to get involved with the war and I just want I don't want to like get in like in like trouble or something.*

Table 17

*Summary of Results Post-test Isabella and Jennifer*

| Category | Score | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence of topic | 2 | This was on the higher end.  The students do not really build on each other's ideas, though. |
| Support ideas | 3 | This was on the lower end, with a mix of strong and weak examples. |
| Think & talk discipline | 2 | Jennifer gave a good life example for someone living in the time period.  There were not many instances of academic vocabulary use. |
| Comm. behaviors | 2 | No paraphrasing of partner comments occurred. |
| **Total** | **9 / 12** | |

Summary of Data

The students did learn general academic vocabulary from the *Academic*

*Vocabulary Toolkit, Grade* 5 (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015), but they did not necessarily

use those words in other contexts.  Regarding the specific academic vocabulary taught

relating to the American Revolution, students did use some of those words in

conversations, but not with great frequency.  As noted in Zwiers and Crawford (2011)

and Fisher, Rothenberg, and Frey (2008), the ELs benefited from explicit instruction and

practice in paired academic conversation skills, even with the limited amount of time

allotted to the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the results of my study.  First, the general academic vocabulary treatment and provided post-test results were discussed.  Next, I described the subject-specific academic vocabulary treatment, along with the student application in content-based paired academic conversations.  After that, results from the paired academic conversation pre-tests were given.  Finally, I gave a brief overview of the treatment and detailed results from the paired academic conversation treatment, which consisted of a mid-treatment prompt one, a mid-treatment prompt two, one other non-recorded conversation, and a post-test.  In Chapter Five I will discuss my major findings, limitations to my research, implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effects of content-based paired academic conversations on the speaking skills of fifth-grade English learners at the advanced level. I wanted to find out if the curriculum and activities implemented positively affected my students' speaking skills. At a secondary level, academic vocabulary and specific academic conversation skills were the focus of this research. This chapter will discuss the major findings of the study, looking both at academic vocabulary and academic conversation skills. It will also address limitations of this study, implications for teachers, and areas for further research.

## Major Findings

Academic Vocabulary

The supplemental general academic vocabulary curriculum *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit, grade 5* (Kinsella & Hancock, 2015) was effective in teaching general academic vocabulary. The words from Unit 8: "Argument" were taught using the curriculum. There were rich routine activities consisting of providing a definition, visual, synonyms and antonyms, sentence examples, word forms, and word partners. These activities were consistent with those supported by research from Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2010) and Freeman and Freeman (2009). Students also had practice using the words both orally and written, and working as a whole-class, in pairs, and individually. This instruction led to

an average post-test score of 90%, with students having very limited knowledge of only some of the words at the beginning of the unit.  In fact, the lowest score was 77% from Fabiana, who normally attended morning lessons only, but still managed to score well.

On the whole, students were interested in the words and in the way they were taught in the curriculum.  They communicated that they were proud when they were able to use the words in their own sentences correctly.  This has been an issue with other vocabulary curriculums where my ELs have only vaguely understood the word and used it in their own sentences incorrectly, most often using the wrong form of the word. Occasionally, students became bored with the rather rigid routine.

When it came to using these general academic vocabulary words in the American Revolution unit, there was not much success.  Despite my posting of these words on the wall, frequent usage of these words in my instruction, and my requests that they use the words during class, few of these words appeared in their content-based paired academic conversations.  Perhaps this can be attributed to the students being able to use the words in familiar contexts, but encountering difficulties when trying to apply them to academic contexts.  Moreover, during the American Revolution unit, I could have modeled using these general academic vocabulary words more frequently and with more emphasis.

This study utilized a content-based instructional approach (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012).  Students did better with the subject-specific vocabulary drawn from the *Avenues* curriculum (Schifini, et al. 2004) and the mainstream curriculum (Viola, et al. 2008). The teaching of academic content vocabulary and giving students opportunities to practice the words yielded some positive results (see Perez, 1996).  Out of the twenty-

three total words intentionally taught, students frequently used ten of them in their paired academic conversations. The subject-specific vocabulary words that were frequently used were king, soldiers, colony, colonist, taxes, Patriot, Loyalist, Neutral, representative, and tea. Repeal, government, and Parliament were also used at least one time. It looks like these terms were the easiest for the students to use in the conversations, based on the prompts given. They were also some of the less academic and more general terms from our study, although they are still subject-specific and not words that they often encounter and use in their daily lives.

Conversation Skills

The direct teaching of conversation skills modeled after Zwiers and Crawford's *Academic Conversations* (2011), coupled with the teaching of the content of the American Revolution produced favorable results. Overall, the conversations that occurred later in the study were longer in length. The activities designed to build paired academic conversation skills were effective, but were limited in how much progress was made. Utilizing the twelve-points total in the "Rubric for Academic Conversation Skills," the average score for the pre-test was 6.37 points, the mid-treatment one score was 7.45 points, the mid-treatment two score was 8.17, and the post-test score was 8.83 points. Although the total was only about two and a half points more between the pre-test and the post-test, one should be reminded of the limited time for this part of the study. The findings in this area are consistent with those detailed in Pontecorvo and Giradet (1993).

The viewing of videos, modeling, and practicing of appropriate communication behaviors was quite effective. When looking at the rubric, the vast majority of pairs exhibited all of the appropriate communication skills, except paraphrasing a partner's comments. (This was an area in which I needed to improve my teaching.) Going beyond the rubric, students were respectful, took turns, made eye-contact, sat up straight, and usually stayed on topic. Three of the twelve students did not do very well with using an appropriate voice volume, and one spoke so softly that it was difficult to hear the majority of his talking.

Pairs did fairly well supporting their ideas with examples and clarifications. Even extending into whole-group discussion and writing, this was something I reinforced throughout the school year, so I was not surprised by the result. Students could have been even more specific and provided more examples to make their arguments stronger. One aspect that was very difficult for all of the students was that of analogies. I taught a mini-lesson on analogies when we were discussing the conversation skill of "clarify." They were able to understand some examples I gave of analogies, but they just could not create their own orally in an academic context.

Teaching the conversation skills of "clarify" and "fortify" with the cards (with prompt starters and response starters) produced mixed results. While a few pairs did not even try to use the starters from the cards, many did. Those pairs or individuals who used the response or prompt starters sometimes used them incorrectly. The results in this area were like those discussed in Lam and Wong (2000), where students did exhibit an increased use of discussion strategies with more authentic interaction, but they also used

some strategies ineffectively.  In this study, with the academic paired conversations, the prompt starters were used with greater frequency than the response starters.

As promoted by Kinsella (2012), teachers need to model academic English and require students to respond in an academic manner.  One area where all students could improve in is thinking and talking like experts in the discipline.  Much of the academic expressions and vocabulary produced by the students in the paired academic conversations were general and social (stuff, weird, and happy).  There were also numerous fillers, such as like, um, yeah, and ok.  Some of these fillers were merely pauses for their thinking, but they could detract from the points of the academic conversation.  On the same note, students did not always understand the historical background for the conversations and this lead to some confusing responses.  There were some instances of applying the historical concepts to their lives, like paying taxes today, but these instances were not very common.  In general, I have found that my ELs are quite interested in history, but they have an extremely inadequate exposure to the subject.  A large amount of their exposure has been in ESL class, and only really starting in their mainstream classroom this year.  Thus, it is challenging for them to think and talk like historians.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

The greatest limitation of this study was missed ESL class time.  Until this study commenced, normal pull-out ESL class time was from 10:00-10:35 AM every day.  At this beginning of the year, this time worked perfectly and we had no issues with having the class.  At my school, we cluster ELs so that they are in one mainstream classroom,

facilitating co-teaching and scheduling of ESL service time. This year we had so many new fifth-graders that we had to place one new student, Moua, in another classroom. We had many days of state-mandated reading and math testing, and we even had practice tests for these tests, amounting to numerous lost class time. Mid-year I found out that all fifth-graders had to participate in a drug-abuse awareness class and that it would be during my ESL time once a week. Also, every Tuesday three students had to leave for orchestra lessons. Pretty soon, just as I was about to begin the study, I found myself with some students being absent three out of five days a week. I was understandably worried, but was able to convince my two mainstream colleagues to let me teach the students in the afternoons as well. The afternoons also were difficult as there were whole-orchestra rehearsals every week, troupe or elective art lessons every six days, and Fabiana was involved in a math intervention every afternoon until the last week of school. Because of all of these absences, I almost never had all twelve students present at the same time. This was a slight issue for our pairings as they could really never be kept the same, due to all of the absences.

The space in which the study was conducted was also a limitation. This study was carried out in half of a regular-sized classroom, often with another class taking place on the other side of furniture that was meant to decrease potential distractions. Physically, the size of the available area was small, and the number of tables with which to put the iPads on to record was too low. So, I used portable metal carts on which some of the pairs recorded their conversations. The recordings from these pairs often had banging metal noises, which made it difficult for me to transcribe and required me to

replay them numerous times to ensure accuracy.  A regular-sized classroom devoted only to our class may have improved the results.

Another major limitation was total time for the study.  I knew that I wanted to conduct the study after the winter break and decided to wait until after ACCESS for ELLs testing, which lasted from mid-February to mid-March.  Right around this time, I found out that Hamline was now requiring all requests to go through the School of Education's Human Subjects Committee, instead of by individual departments.  These reviews were only done once a month and took ten business days to get a response, thus my time for the study was decreased in this process.  It would have been beneficial to have a few more weeks, or even an entire school year, for this study as I could have been able to see more of a progression of the students' skills.

With twelve students making up the study, this was admittedly a small number.  A larger number of participants might have yielded different results, but it may have also decreased the comfort level of the students.  The students were all at an advanced level of English and I do not think that this would be an easy project to carry out with newcomers as the level of language needed to have the content-based paired academic conversations is high.

The post-test prompt asked the students to take on the role of a non-famous historical person.  In hindsight, this might have been difficult for students to conceptualize, adding a layer to the paired academic conversations that could have negatively impacted their results.  These students were fairly young and perhaps this specific prompt would have been more appropriate for older students.  We also could

have practiced first so that understanding the concept of a role play would not have possibly hindered the conversations.

As noted by Kong (2009), learning of content will be hampered if students lack the language needed for comprehension. Because of this, I chose to teach the content along with the language needed for comprehension, although, possibly it would have been more efficient to have the students learning the content in the mainstream classroom. The challenge with this particular project was that the mainstream teachers were supposed to teach rotating science, health, and social studies units at the end of the day. There simply was not enough time to get to this history unit in the mainstream classroom and since I am also licensed to teach fifth-grade history I was confident in additionally teaching the content.

A final limitation involved observing students while conducting their academic paired conversations, specifically filling-out the "Observation Form for Academic Conversation Skills." It was almost impossible to fill-out this form when my fifth-graders were having the conversations. During the pilot study with my sixth-graders, I quickly realized that I could only focus on one pair with which to fill-out the form, during one academic paired conversation. Even that was extremely difficult as students frequently had difficulties with the iPad recording correctly, or were nervous and simply wanted me walking around to encourage and reassure them. I was only able to complete two of the observational forms during this study, which I included in chapter four.

Implications

General and specific academic vocabulary should be directly taught and opportunities to use these words integrated into the content curriculum. According to Scarcella (2003), this is not being done in classrooms. Even with the limited time allotted for this study, students showed a marked increase in general academic vocabulary comprehension and some increase in subject-specific vocabulary comprehension. This study showed that students need a large amount of time to practice using these words in meaningful, academic contexts; otherwise, they resort to using basic social language (Cummins, 1980). This study suggests that academic vocabulary taught be revisited frequently to help aid with student retention of the words.

Many students already have a good grasp of appropriate communication behaviors and know how to listen to a partner and take turns talking. This research shows that teachers need to take this to the next level and intentionally teach how to have a paired academic conversation (see Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994; Lam & Wong, 2000; Lam, 2010; and Reese & Wells, 2007). Regarding appropriate communication behaviors, many pairs at the end of the study still approached a paired academic conversation like a question and answer session or interview.

In this study, a number of academic conversation skills proved more difficult for the students to learn. Looking at the results of this study, teachers should concentrate on the following: teach and practice response starters. Students were fairly skilled at using the prompt starters, but were either hesitant or just incorrect in using the majority of the response starters. Many pairs avoided using response starters altogether. As noted in

Zwiers and Crawford (2011), another area for explicit instruction is teaching how to build on one another's comments. Students were polite and each "took their turn," but they did not build on each other's ideas and it really weakened those conversations. Additionally, teachers need to intentionally teach how to support ideas. Supporting ideas with examples and evidence is a major emphasis of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Students could often state their opinions, but when it came to supporting their ideas and opinions with examples, analogies, and clarification, this was a great challenge to all of the students. Creating analogies using content from the academic topic being studied was very difficult for the students in this study, and analogies could be an area for deeper focus. A final area in which instruction is needed is in paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is a versatile skill used in speaking and writing, and it is crucial that students learn this skill. In this study the teacher did not do sufficient instruction in paraphrasing and participants did not paraphrase what their partners said. If they had done so, this would have assisted in the communication of ideas.

<div align="center">Further Research</div>

As discussed in Chapter Two, more research is needed on academic conversations at the elementary level. There is research being done, but it seems to be only by a handful of researchers (such as Zwiers). In this era, the emphasis on standardized testing is leaving little room for academic conversations in elementary classrooms. Although academic conversation is in the standards, teachers are choosing to focus more on the standards that are directly tested. One wonders if using conversation as a teaching tool

could more effectively prepare students for standardized testing, than worksheets do. This could be an intriguing area of research.

Research specifically on paired academic conversations, versus whole-group or small-group, would be an additional area for further research. It would be interesting to see how the size of the group affects content and academic language acquisition. One could hypothesize that pairs allow students more talk time, and thus, more learning, but this is another area that could benefit from further study.

As noted in Saunders and Goldberg (2010), much of a school day for an EL is spent in reading and math, with little time for speaking. It would be beneficial to study the effects of infusing literature comprehension strategies with academic conversations. Students could "talk through" their comprehension of stories and discuss support for their thinking, using a structure similar to the one in this study. Academic vocabulary in math, along with academic conversations in math class is another area of research that is gaining in interest. Math could be another avenue for expanding student access to academic conversations.

Collaborative research between ESL and mainstream teachers on paired academic conversations would also be valuable. For example, in this study, the mainstream teachers could have taught all the content, perhaps utilizing the SIOP model, while I pre-taught relevant academic vocabulary and focused on the conversation skill instruction (see Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010). This would have afforded me more time to truly focus on building my students' language abilities.

A last consideration is a call for more teacher-researchers doing classroom-based research. Much of the research published is written by professors. While this is obviously valuable, these types of researchers do not always understand the complexities of doing research in a classroom, especially an ESL classroom with a variety of languages, cultures, and economic backgrounds. More teacher-researchers conducting research that is applicable to "real" classrooms is needed.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF GRADES 3-5 WIDA ACCESS for ELLs

SPEAKING TEST

*Student View*



Alicia's Heart Rate
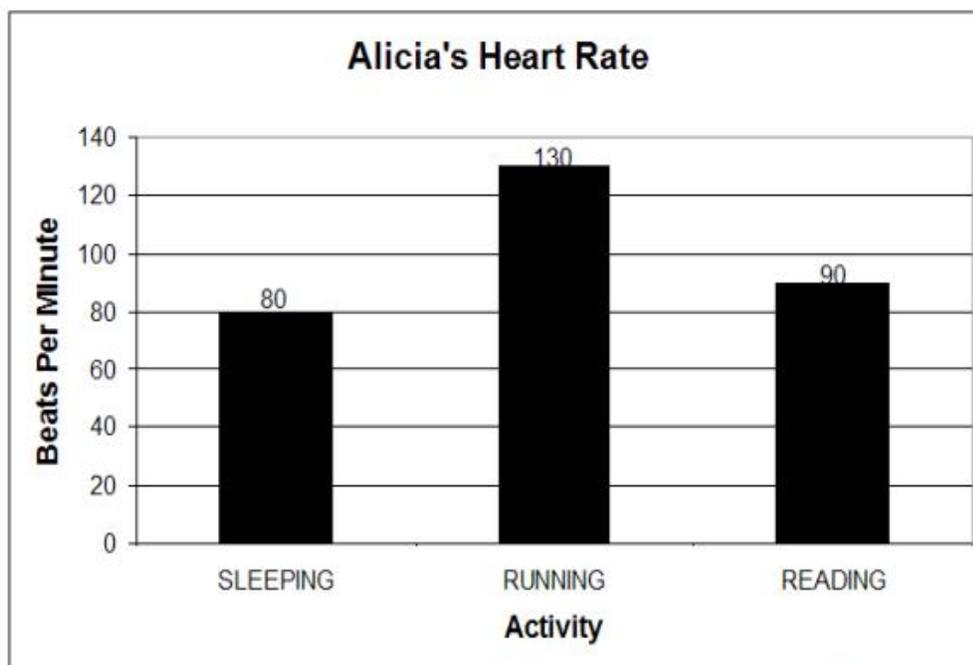
*Accompanying Teacher View*



| **Standard** | **Proficiency level** | **Model Performance Indicators** |
|---|---|---|
| Language of Science | 5 | Hypothesize or describe the causes or effects of changes in organisms or systems |
| Language of Math | 5 | Create word problems involving large whole numbers presented orally from grade level math texts |

(Note: Picture is repeated for student.)

Q1: Why do you think Alicia's heart rate changes when she is doing these different activities? (OR) In general, what do you think is the relationship between Alicia's heart rate and her activities? (OR) Can you see any relationship between Alicia's heart rate being lower and higher and what she does? (Pause.) Explain that to me.

Q2: Now imagine that Alicia wants to ride her bike. (About) what number do you think her heart rate will be?

Q3: Explain to me why you say that. (OR) Why do you say that?

Q4. (As necessary) Can you elaborate? (OR) Can you give me more details? (OR) Can you be more specific? (OR) Can you give me an example?

**Alicia's Heart Rate**

Source: http://www.wida.us/assessment/access/access_sample_items.pdf

APPENDIX B: RUBRIC FOR ACADEMIC CONVERSATION SKILLS

**Rubric for Academic Conversation Skills**

**Level**

| Skill | 1: Below standard | 2: Approach standard | 3: Meet or exceed standard |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Maintain coherence of topic.** | Use disconnected, random ideas; go off on many tangents. | Mostly stay on topic with a few tangents; demonstrate some building of an idea. | Generate logical theme(s); stay on topic; build on one another's comments. |
| **Support ideas with explanations and examples.** | Provide little or no support of ideas and themes; fail to use appropriate prompting. | Provide some support of ideas with examples and clarifications; use some prompts to encourage support. | Appropriately prompt for and offer explanations, elaborations, and examples. |
| **Think and talk like experts in the discipline.** | Remain at retell level; give few or no interpretations; fail to extend conversation; use social language. | Provide some interpretations and applications to life; use some of discipline's language and thinking. | Appropriately interpret and apply ideas; use academic expressions and vocabulary; use other thinking skills. |
| **Use appropriate communication behaviors**. | Fail to focus on partner; interrupt; dominate conversation. | Use some appropriate listening and turn-taking behaviors. | Actively listen, take turns, paraphrase partner comments. |

Created by Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford to accompany "How to Start Academic Conversations," *Educational Leadership*, *66(7)*, 70-73.
http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200904_zwiers_rubric.pdf

APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION FORM FOR ACADEMIC CONVERSATION SKILLS

**Observation Form for Academic Conversation Skills**

Prompt: _____

_____

Students: _____

Date: _____

| Skill | Notes |
|---|---|
| **Maintain coherence of topic.** | |
| **Support ideas with explanations and examples.** | |
| **Think and talk like experts in the discipline.** | |
| **Use appropriate communication behaviors.** | |

APPENDIX D: PAIRED ACADEMIC CONVERSATION INSTRUCTION

Day One of the Treatment- Monday, May 4, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can create a new note, correctly title a note, make a recording, and AirDrop it to my teacher.  I demonstrated a finished recorded note in Notability.  Next, I modeled how to make a recorded note with the students.  Finally, students created their own practice recorded notes in partners.

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can review the people and events surrounding the Columbian Exchange, orally and by reading.  We reviewed and I read to the class a section on the Columbian Exchange (in their mainstream textbooks).  This was a section they had previously read and had already tested on it; it was from the previous unit in their social studies class.  The conversation prompt was "Was the Columbian Exchange helpful or harmful to the world?"  Students were put into pairs, with one group of three, and instructed to use *Notability* to record their conversations.  Students did okay with one group actually seeming like they were doing, more or less, what I was expecting of an academic conversation.   One group was simply reading from the book and another group was picking up the iPad and stopping after each turn as they were talking.  I made them redo that, as I did model how to just leave the iPad on the table in the middle of the group, and not to press stop.  They were supposed to just record naturally so for the one group that did not do that I had them go back and restart.  The conversations were AirDropped to me.  Fabiana was absent.

Day Two of the Treatment- Tuesday, May 5, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can build my background of people, places, things, and

events relating to the American Revolution using picture cards and the textbook as

resources.  I held up and passed around picture cards of people, places, things, and events

relating to the American Revolution.  The cards were from the teacher's set of materials

for Hampton-Brown *Avenues*.  Students repeated the terms and discussed their prior

knowledge of the words and connections to them.  I guided students in reading the

introduction to the unit in Avenues pages 182-185.  Mai was absent.

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can identify and discuss aspects of good conversational

skills and poor conversational skills using videos for context. I showed several YouTube

videos of good and poor conversations. (For a couple of examples, see:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmsjShvyglA and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz-zRJzK9Xw.)  The groupings in the videos were

pairs, small groups, and whole-class.  After each group in each video, I paused the video

and asked the students what they thought about each group's conversation skills.  A brief

discussion ensued after each pause.  After all the videos were viewed, I led the students in

a short whole-class discussion of what are some positive aspects of conversations.  An

anchor chart on academic conversation norms was started with the SLANT section filled-

in with the assistance of the students.  (SLANT stands for sit up, look at the person

talking, act like you care, nod your head, and take turns talking.)  Mai and Fabiana were

absent.

Day Three of the Treatment- Wednesday, May 6, 2015

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can identify and discuss aspects of good conversational skills and poor conversational skills using videos for context.  I can practice good conversational skills with a partner, speaking on familiar topics.  We finished the anchor chart together- "What Good Conversation Is and Isn't" (T-chart). We added points about being respectful, making eye contact, listening, staying on topic, and using an appropriate voice volume.  I picked student volunteers to model conversations with me.  We modeled two good conversations and two poor conversations.  After each conversation, I "debriefed" with the whole-class.  Students then chose their own partners (one group of three) and practiced having good conversations with prompts on familiar topics- "What do you like to do in your free time?" and "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I had one volunteer pair model the second prompt in the front of the class.  I discussed with the whole-class what the pair did well in the conversation and what they could improve on.  Absent students were Mai, Fabiana, and Chue.

Day Four of the Treatment- Thursday, May 7, 2015

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can orally discuss why we use academic conversations for learning.  I led the activity "Take a Side" from Zwier's and Crawfords's text, *Academic Conversations*.  The prompt was "Should junk food be sold in middle schools?"  I reminded students to practice good conversation skills, referring back to the anchor chart and the learning from our previous lessons.

Day Five of the Treatment- Friday, May 8, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can use content vocabulary in new contexts, orally and written. The students and I read and discussed as a whole-group pages 186-187, which were the content words from *Avenues*. Students used whiteboards as I did a simple quiz game. The game had students writing the correct word for the definition and writing the words in new sentences that they had created. Students completed practice book page 62 where a reading was given where students had to replace the underlined group of words with one of the content vocabulary terms.

3:05-3:50- We continued with the lesson from the morning. Fabiana and Moua were absent.

Day Six of the Treatment- Monday, May 11, 2015

10:00-10:35- We reviewed together the first three words from *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit*.

3:05-3:50- We reviewed together the last three words from the *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit*.

Day Seven of the Treatment- Tuesday, May 12, 2015

3:05-3:50- Students completed the test for the academic vocabulary from the "Argument" unit in *Academic Vocabulary Toolkit*.

Days Eight and Nine of the Treatment- Wednesday, May 13, 2015 and Thursday, May 14, 2015

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can use sequencing words to take notes on the main events of the French and Indian War. To preview the reading section, I showed a picture card

that accompanied the mainstream text *Houghton Mifflin social studies: United States history, The early years*.  On the card was a cartoon of a disjointed snake with the phrase "Join or Die" and a painting showing George Washington capturing a French fort.  Students worked in pairs to discuss the visuals, using prompts from *Academic Conversations*.  (The activity was called "Conversing About Images.")  With the whole-class, pairs talked about what they thought the pictures showed, what their messages were, and how they related to our unit of study.  I clarified as needed, but the students got the gist of the pictures.  I introduced a section from the students' mainstream textbook on the French and Indian War.  We then listened to the section on Compact Disc as a whole-class.  After that, I taught a mini-lesson on sequencing words, using the whiteboard to show visuals. Students worked in pairs to complete a guided notes handout combining the sequencing words with the main events of the French and Indian War, which were detailed in the text.  On Wednesday, Fabiana, Mai, Jennifer, and Edward were absent.  On Thursday, Fabiana, Moua, and Sua were absent.

Day Ten of the Treatment- Friday, May 15, 2015

10:00-10:35 and 3:05-3:50- I can statements: I can build my background on the reasons some colonists were upset with the British.  I can read a cartoon/script with fluency and appropriate voice volume.  I previewed a reading titled "Joining the Boston Tea Party" from the *Avenues* text.  Students volunteered to read sections of the text.  As they read, we stopped at points to orally discuss comprehension questions as a whole-class or I had pairs converse about the questions.  Fabiana was absent in the afternoon.

Day Eleven of Treatment- Monday, May 18, 2015

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can identify problems and solutions in a social studies text and discuss them with a partner.  I did a short mini-lesson/review on problem and solution in text.  I modeled a few real-life examples and we tried some together as a whole-class.  Students were put into pairs to pick-out problems and accompanying solutions from the *Avenues* text that we read on Friday.  Each student recorded the problems and solutions on a graphic organizer. We then came back as a whole-group and discussed our work.

Day Twelve of Treatment- Tuesday, May 19, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: During an academic conversation, I can ask for clarification of points, and clarify my own and a partner's points.  I did a mini-lesson on clarifying one's ideas and asking for clarification from a partner when having an academic conversation.   I made a "clarify" card that individual students could hold and refer to when having academic conversations.  On the card were prompt starters to ask for clarification and response starters to clarify their own or partner's points.  We went over each prompt and starter and I clarified and modeled when necessary.  I spent considerable time teaching about analogies and how to create them to make your point.  The creation of analogies was extremely difficult for them.  After noting that the students were overwhelmed with too many options, I had them highlight specific prompt starters and response starters that I thought would be the most user-friendly for them.  We practiced having conversations in pairs using familiar contexts to get comfortable with the prompt starters and the response starters.  Mai, Edward, and Jennifer were absent.

3:05-3:50- I can statements: During an academic conversation, I can ask for clarification of points, and clarify my own and a partner's points.  I can have an academic conversation on problems and solutions in history.  Students reviewed their graphic organizers with the problems and solutions from the *Avenues* text.   I assigned the prompt: "What were some problems the colonists faced?  How did they solve their problems?  Were their solutions reasonable?"  Students were instructed to use their "clarify" cards for assistance during the conversation, and were allowed to refer to their problem/solution graphic organizer. (They were not allowed to simply read off the chart, though.)  Mai, Isabella, Fabiana, Gabriele, and Chue were absent.

Day Thirteen of Treatment- Wednesday, May 20, 2015

3:05-3:50: I was absent due to attendance at a mandatory meeting.  The substitute teacher began reading with the students the second and third sections of the mainstream text *Houghton Mifflin social studies: United States history, The early years*.  The second and third sections were titled "Early Conflicts with Britain" and "Conflicts Grow."

Day Fourteen of Treatment- Thursday, May 21, 2015

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can review historical events and order them on a timeline.  As a class, we continued reading together and discussing sections two and three.  Before the lesson, I prepared materials for a timeline activity.  I wrote one main event from the two sections with a short description on each page and mixed up the events.  At the end of the readings, I guided students in ordering the events and reviewing as we completed the activity.  Students absent were Fabiana, Edward, Mai, Bee, and Hunter.

Day Fifteen of Treatment- Friday, May 22, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can review historical events and order them on a timeline. We finished the timeline ordering activity from yesterday. I hung the events in order above the chalkboard for future reference for the students. I also led a mini-lesson on Patriots and Loyalists with students conversing in partners about aspects for both sides. Moua, Gabriela, and Isabella were absent.

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can identify arguments in a social studies text. We listened to a Compact Disc recording of the *Avenues* text "A tax on tea: Fair or unfair?" We then read aloud the text again together as a class. Students formed two groups, a boys' group and a girls' group. Each group received a piece of chart paper and markers. Each group reread/scanned the text, picked out, and wrote down arguments for one of the sides on the chart paper. Absent students were Fabiana, Isabella, and Gabriela.

Day Sixteen of Treatment- Tuesday, May 26, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can review and categorize historical arguments. Students who were present for the lesson on Friday afternoon came up to the front of the class and presented their arguments from the text "A tax on tea: Fair or unfair," written on the chart paper. (This served as a review and gave some information to students who were absent.) The charts were then put away and students were put into pairs, with each pair having at least one student who was present for Friday afternoon's lesson. I handed out cut-up cards with the arguments presented by the students on them, one argument per card. Students then had to talk with their partner and decide if the argument was saying the tea tax was fair or unfair. During this activity, pairs also had to sort the cards into two non-

stacked piles.  Groups shared-out their sorts and we clarified together if there were any

difficulties.

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can consider arguments for two sides of an issue, select one,

and support it.  I reviewed the academic conversation norms anchor chart with the class.

We talked about and modeled what academic interaction looks like.  I drew sticks for

partners and gave pairs a few minutes to review together the cut-up cards with the

arguments for both sides on the tea tax.  I gave students the following prompt and gave

them some time to think of their answer: "What were some arguments for each side of the

tea tax issue.  What is your personal position?  Support it with examples."   Students had

some time individually to write a rough response in their notebook and several volunteers

shared their writing towards the end of class.

Day Seventeen of Treatment- Wednesday, May 27, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: I can consider arguments for two sides of an issue, select

one, and support it.  I can make my academic conversation better subsequent times.  I

reviewed the prompt with the whole-class and reminded students of their partners.

Students then had an academic conversation with that partner.  During the conversations,

they were allowed to use their "arguments" cards and their "clarify" cards.  At the end of

the conversation, we came back as a whole-group and we debriefed on what went well

and what could be improved on.  We also talked about getting ideas from a partner that

one could use with a subsequent partner.  I then drew sticks for new pairs and instructed

them to have an academic conversation on the same prompt.  After that second round we

debriefed again and drew sticks for final pairings.  The pairs then had academic

conversations on the same prompt. The final two academic conversations were recorded

on the iPads using the app *Notability* and then AirDropped to the teacher.

3:05-3:50- The lesson continued from the morning. As a whole-class, we discussed what

went well with the academic conversations and what needed to be improved. Several

students came up to the front of the class and modeled with the teacher, conversing on the

same prompt. We debriefed these academic conversations as well.

Day Eighteen of the Treatment- Thursday, May 28, 2015

10:00-10:35: I can statement: With support, I can identify causes and effects in a social

studies text. I handed out a blank cause and effect graphic organizer and modeled with

the document camera. As a whole-group, we reviewed our timeline, the *Avenues* text,

and the mainstream text and decided on the top five most impactful events leading up to

the American Revolution. Along with me, each student recorded these on their graphic

organizer. Next, students chose their own partners and used the two textbooks to review,

recording on their graphic organizers the immediate effects of the events. Towards the

end of class, we came back together and discussed what we believed the immediate

effects to be. We came to a consensus and students modified their sheets, if needed.

Day Nineteen of the Treatment- Monday, June 1, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: With visual support, I can have a paired academic

conversation using pro and con arguments. I prepared some visuals to be projected the

previous day and used them in explaining and modeling the "Pro-Con" activity from

*Academic Conversations*. We focused on transition words and phrases for the "con" part

like "however" and "on the other hand." We also used frames such as "One advantage

is…for example." Several students modeled the Pro-Con activity with me, using familiar topics and one pair volunteered to model for the class. Students were put into pairs and had an academic conversation, using the Pro-Con manner, on the prompt "School should be year-round." Students could refer to and use the transition words and phrases and frames projected in the academic conversations.

3:05-3:50- The lesson continued from the morning. We then debriefed on the first round as a whole-class. After that, students were put into new pairs and had an academic conversation on the prompt "Middle school students must take gym class," utilizing the Pro-Con manner. We debriefed after this round as well. I reviewed the "clarify" cards and students chose their own pairs and own topics to practice having a conversation using these prompt starters and response starters.

Day Twenty of the Treatment- Tuesday, June 2, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: With written support, I can defend and support my argument in a paired academic conversation. We reviewed the transitions and sentence frames (from yesterday) and the "clarify" prompt starters and response starters. I gave a challenge to students, to have a paired academic conversation lasting at least three minutes. I gave the prompt "What do you think was the greatest cause of the American Revolution? Why?" I put students into pairs and instructed them have the conversation two times with their partner and to record both conversations on one note in *Notability*. When finished with the recorded conversations, pairs AirDropped their recordings to me.

3:05-3:50- I can statement: I can identify characteristics of Patriots, Loyalists, and Neutrals and explain why colonists chose certain sides. We read together and discussed a

short section of their mainstream text titled "Taking Sides," which described Patriots, Loyalists, and Neutrals during the American Revolution. Students had some time to work with a partner to complete a three-column chart graphic organizer on Patriots, Loyalists, and Neutrals. We came back as a class and used the document camera to share answers and make sure all students had correct information. We also read a Readers' Theater titled "Patriot or Loyalist," which further presented information about the types of people who chose one of these sides or remained neutral. As a whole-class, we discussed why a colonist would choose one side over another.

Day Twenty-One of the Treatment- Wednesday, June 3, 2015

10:00-10:35- I can statement: Using what I learned from the texts, I can choose a side and justify my choice. Students had a few minutes to individually review the three-column chart graphic organizer we worked on yesterday. Individual students then received a role-play card with a description of a colonist. Descriptions included details such as place of residence, occupation, wealth, and social status. I purposefully gave each role-play card to two students with different academic strengths. The students then found the other student with the same role-play card and had a conversation about what side they felt that colonist would take- Patriot, Loyalist, or Neutral. The pairs had to justify their reasoning with support from the texts we read. This activity was difficult for them and I circled around the room and gave some assistance where needed. After that, I did a mini-lesson on the academic conversation skill of "fortify." I went over the card with them on the document camera and modeled two times with two different students using familiar contexts.

<u>Day Twenty-Two of the Treatment- Thursday, June 4, 2015</u>

Today was the post-test.  I instructed students to use their "fortify" cards, along with their colonist role-play cards and have an academic paired conversation on the prompt "Who is more right- the Patriots, Loyalists, or Neutrals?  Why?"  Pairs recorded their academic conversations using the iPad app *Notability*.  When finished with the recorded conversations, pairs AirDropped their recordings to me.

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