

# **Implementing Protocols to Support Student-talk**

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## **Abstract**

As the number of English Learners (ELs) steadily increases in our nation's schools, the new and rigorous demands of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have placed additional academic demands on these students resulting in a widening achievement gap. The review of literature has shown that as ELs are learning a new language, they must also be able to comprehend complex texts at grade-level, acquire academic vocabulary, and support their thinking with evidence from multiple texts to be successful in school. The research has shown that engaging students in academic discourse provides students opportunities to build and challenge ideas, to practice using academic vocabulary and to process what they are learning. Although past professional development in Bayside has focused on increasing the quantity of student-talk, the teachers of Bayside have struggled to provide structures promoting quality academic discourse. As an instructional leader at Bayside, I have designed an intervention to improve teacher efficacy in designing and implementing protocols that scaffold student-talk. The intervention focused on essential elements to include in a protocol, the logical sequencing of these elements, and the implementation of protocols in the classroom to support student-talk. During the month of the intervention, teacher efficacy increased in the areas of designing and implementing protocols in their classrooms. The results of the intervention revealed the importance of teacher planning time and the need for more training for teachers about how to model new learnings for students.

## **Introduction**

Bayside School District, located in East Palo Alto, is comprised of 9 schools that include a child development center (preschool) and a charter school that serves approximately 4,200 students. Most of the schools in the district are K-8 neighborhood schools and one school is a dual immersion academy. The ethnic make-up of Bayside School District is unique in this area of San Mateo County: Hispanic (79%), African American (10%), Pacific Islander (9%) and other (2%). Bayside's mission is to work collaboratively to create quality instructional programs which empower students to make choices to achieve their personal best, to be college bound and to be productive responsible participants in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society. Our district is currently beginning the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 3-year literacy plan with the aim to increase reading achievement and to prepare students for the transition to high-school and beyond.

## **Problem of Practice**

As part of the Bayside's Literacy Plan, a focus has been to increase the number of English Learners earning Reclassification as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). Reclassification depends on a number of measures that includes the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores, reading assessment scores and English-Language Arts (ELA) grades. Too many Bayside students have struggled to be RFEP'd before reaching high school resulting in many of them being placed for yet another year or more in English Language Development (ELD) classes in high school; consequently, limiting the opportunities they have to explore their interests by taking elective courses and—more importantly—limiting the chances they have to enroll in college track courses. Furthermore, dismal results from the 2014-15 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) further emphasizes the urgency for

Bayside to strengthen instructional practices aimed at meeting the needs of our students.

According to the California Department of Education, state-wide 65% of English Learners did not meet the CCSS as indicated by the CAASPP for English Language Arts/Literacy. At the state level, this statistic is alarming. Even more alarming, 76% of the students in Bayside did not meet the CCSS for English Language Arts/Literacy. In reflecting on the results of these CAASPP scores, I began to wonder how Bayside could better support our students in meeting these new, challenging standards. For example, the new standards demand that students be able to read complex texts, to take a stance about a position, to locate supporting evidence, to weigh the strength of the evidence and to be able to write a cohesive argument citing the texts. This process proves demanding for all students, but for English Learners these challenges must seem monumental. Through observation in ELA classes last year, I had witnessed teachers modeling the process explained above using complex texts so I know that some teachers are explicitly teaching to the new standards; however, much what I saw was direct instruction. Most of the time, students sat passively. Upon further review of my observation notes, the following questions arose:

- How often do students have time to talk with each other about what they are learning?
- What does effective student-talk look like and sound like?
- How often is academic oral language production (student-talk) modeled for students?
- What kinds of structures or protocols scaffold and guide students in participating in effective oral language production?

District-wide training in oral language production, effective academic expression, has occurred in the past. During the 2014-15 school-year, middle school (grades 6-8) teachers throughout the district participated in two training workshops aimed at introducing the new California ELA/ELD Framework. The outcomes of the first sessions focused on three objectives aimed to prepare teachers for the impending changes in instruction with the shift to CCSS: reviewing the purpose and layout of the ELA/ELD Framework, unpacking the 5 key themes of ELA/Literacy and ELD instruction, and comparing and contrasting the features of “designated” and “integrated” ELD instruction. The outcomes of the second session aimed to build teachers’ understanding of Effective Expression and Collaborative Conversations as an essential practice for ELs as defined by the CA ELA/ELD Framework. The objectives of this session provided time for teachers to experience collaborative conversations integrated into the content area they teach, time for them to reflect on their students’ strengths and areas of need in collaborative conversations, and time for them to determine their next steps in building up these academic conversations in their classrooms.

As a result from the trainings, what I hoped to see at the beginning of the 2015-16 school-year in ELD classes during classroom observations was for students to be participating in effective collaborative conversations. When visiting three different designated ELD classes at one school, I observed little academic discourse and no structures to support student-talk. In one class, 100% of students were working independently via an on-line program to learn grammar. These students wore headphones and focused their attention onto the computer screen. No students were provided any opportunity to converse with one another about the things they were learning. In another class, students were watching CNN Student News. Although students were seated in table groups, students were not provided with any structures for discussing the current

events being shared in the newscast. During CNN Student News, groups of students did organically talk about the news. One table group asked the teacher a specific question about a news story. The teacher responded to their question, but did not open the discussion to the rest of the class. For the remainder of the class, students read independently. In a third class, some students were doing homework, some students were talking to each other about non-academic topics and some students were watching CNN Student News. The teacher was seated at a desk. In all three classes, there were no purposeful opportunities for students to engage in academic conversations.

To develop a bigger picture of quantity and quality of academic conversations occurring in 6-8 classrooms across the district, I created a Google Survey for teachers. This survey included the following questions:

- How do you define academic conversations in classrooms?
- What skills do students need in order to have productive academic conversations (back-and-forth conversations about content)?
- How often do you provide students structured time for academic conversations in pairs or small groups? (1=Never, 3= Sometimes, 5 =Daily)
- What do these structured academic conversations look like?
- How often do you use scaffolds or protocols to provide structures to support academic conversations? (1=Never, 3= Sometimes, 5 =Daily)
- Briefly describe the scaffolds and protocols used (sentence frames, etc.)
- How often do you model academic conversations skills for students? (1=Never, 3= Sometimes, 5 =Daily)
- What does the modeling look like?

Thirty-four middle school teachers responded to the survey representing the following content areas: ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, Designated ELD, Integrated Services, Art and Music. Responding to the question, “How do you define academic conversations in class?” many teachers defined academic conversations as “conversations around topics of academic concepts” or “conversations with a purpose or centered on student-to-student interaction

discussing material that has been presented.” Some teachers mentioned that academic conversations are structured conversations that use sentence frames and academic language. One teacher mentioned that academic conversations help students access the curriculum. If teachers have some understanding of academic conversations, how often do students purposefully engage in academic discourse? When responding to how often do you provide students structured time for academic conversations in pairs or small groups, the mean scaled score was 3.3 indicating that sometimes teachers provide students with structured time for academic conversations. According to teacher responses, the kinds of structured academic conversations include: turn-and-talks, pair-shares, and table-talk. One teacher responded, “At this point, they (academic conversations) are not as structured as I would like them to be.” The mean scaled score for how often teachers use scaffolds or protocols to provide students structures for academic conversations was 3.3 indicating that sometimes teachers provide students with supports or protocols. The majority of teachers reported that they provided students with sentence frames to support academic conversations. One teacher reported, “Scaffolds haven’t been put in place yet, but will be coming shortly.” Reviewing the written responses, I’m left to wonder—beyond sentence frames—in what ways do teachers provide structures to support oral language production. The mean scaled score for how often teachers model academic conversation skills for students was 3.36 indicating that sometimes teachers model for students the academic conversation skills. Many teachers responded they model for students how to use the sentence frames. One teacher had students model for others through “fish bowl” modeling. One teacher wrote, “I never model.” Another teacher wrote, “Modeling has been very infrequent for a number of reasons.” From the results of this survey, I can determine that academic conversations are happening sometimes in classrooms across the district, and these conversations

are sometimes supported by structures or protocols and sometimes modeled for students by teachers. Sentence frames represent majority of supports provided for students to engage in collaborative conversations. Although teachers do model for students how to use sentence frames, seldom are protocols being provided or modeled to support academic discourse.

In order to provide ELs increased access to curriculum content and to help them process what is being learned in class, it is imperative to provide structured opportunities for oral language production. These collaborative conversations provide ELs opportunities to develop the essential skills necessary for meeting the demands set-forth by CCSS. Teachers have received training in strategies that strengthen oral language production; however, the data indicates that these strategies are being inconsistently implemented. Some teachers report a need to provide students additional supports when using strategies for oral language production.

**Teachers need additional training in implementing protocols to support strategies that**

**strengthen oral language production.** Reflecting on the 2014-15 CAASPP results in ELA

from the California Department of Education, ELs in many schools and districts must be better supported by engaging in academic conversations to help them acquire the essential skills required by the new standards. From the results of the survey, I infer that teachers need more training in structures and protocols that support students as they engage in academic discourse.

For the 2015-16 school years, six professional development (PD) afternoon trainings have been established to support ELD instructions focusing on student-talk. I have contracted Dr. Jeff Zwiers, senior researcher at Stanford and supporter of the Understanding Language Initiative, to co-design and co-facilitate Bayside's 6-8 ELD PDs with our 6-8 Curriculum & Instruction team. Additionally, Dr. Zwiers and I are writing a science-based ELD program that includes a variety of structures and protocols that can support ELs during academic discourse. Protocols offer

scaffolds for students so that when they are using strategies that strengthen oral language production, they can focus on practicing the strategy without the extra burden of being confused about the process. Being only one of many districts supported by Dr. Zwiers, the goal is that the protocols to support oral language production developed for the students of Bayside will be shared with other schools and districts across the state and beyond. With the understanding that oral language production is not be adequately supporting in Bayside classrooms, this action research will show how conversation strategies can be supported with protocols to help sequence the steps for student-talk and remind students of the skills needed during these interactions.

### **Review of Literature**

Presently in Bayside, strategies supporting student engagement in oral language production are not consistently being implemented in middle school classrooms. In order to address this problem, the review of literature focuses on the effects the shift to Common Core State Standards has on English Learners, the role academic discourse plays in supporting ELs in acquiring academic language and processing content knowledge, the progression of language acquisition for ELs, the scaffolding of language acquisition, protocols to support students in engaging in meaningful academic conversations, and instructional coaching to advance teacher efficacy in designing and implementing protocols that support strategies that strengthen oral language production. In this action research, academic language refers to the words and phrases related to content-area knowledge that express complex thinking and abstract concepts; these academic words become more technical as content knowledge builds and make meaning more explicit. (Zwiers 2004, Gibbons 2015) Academic conversations or discourse, the language of the classroom and of the texts students read, are back-and-forth interaction between students during which participants build upon one another's ideas or defend their thinking by providing

evidence to support their thinking such as in a debate; in other words academic discourse depends on each participant's understanding the function of the message and terms used in articulating it to others (Schleppegrell 2009, Frey et al 2018, Zwiers 2004). Throughout this paper, I use the term student-talk synonymously with academic conversation or discourse. In this action research, I use the term "protocol" to refer to the structures and routines—including expectations and outcomes—that researchers emphasize teachers need to employ to support academic discourse and allow students to express their ideas (Calderon et al 2011, Fisher et al 2008, Gibbons 2015, Santos et al 2014). Taylor captures the definition of instructional coaching in which he refers to instructional coaching as non-evaluative individual guidance taking place in the instructional setting that promotes instructional improvement and supports teacher learning (2008).

In the past, professional development opportunities in Bayside have provided teachers strategies aimed to engage students in oral language production with their peers about what they are learning. Although some of these strategies taught during PD are being implemented in classrooms, teachers have reported a lack of understanding about how to scaffold these strategies that help students process the materials being learned with effective student-talk. I argue that if teachers are provided with instructional coaching connected to professional development in which they learned strategies to support student-talk and protocols to scaffold these strategies; then these teachers will increase the efficacy in which they design and implement protocols supporting oral language production.

## **Challenges of Common Core Standards for English Learners**

The move to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) presents paradigm shifts in how students learn and what they are expected to produce to demonstrate what they have learned. In addition to addressing CCSS, educators need be aware of the changing demographics composing their classrooms. English learners represent the fastest-growing student population in U.S schools. Additionally, ELs have lower academic achievement and lower graduation rates than native English speakers (Calderon et al 2011) According to Policy Analysis for California Education and other research, the enormous shift accompanying CCSS fundamentally changes the way ELs learn in school (Calderon et al, 2011, Umansky et al 2015, Zwiers 2014). The challenges set forth by the CCSS require higher levels of academic language. Receptively, students must be able to read and process complex texts. Productively, students must develop argument-based reasoning and provide evidence to support their thinking (Zwiers et al 2014). The three major shifts reflecting the move to CCSS requires the following of students:

- the ability to read and comprehend complex texts that includes academic vocabulary and addresses a variety of language functions
- the ability to build knowledge from informational texts
- the ability to produce and use evidence from multiple texts to support their thinking (Santos et al 2014).

Understanding the enormity of these shifts, educators ensuring English learners have access to the new standards is paramount for ELs success because limiting their access to grade-level reading and writing limits their future job opportunities, their earning power and dramatically

diminishes their ability to reach American Dream (August & Shanahan 2006, Umansky et al 2015, Zwiers 2014).

Although CCSS offer exciting possibilities for developing the critical thinking skills necessary for students to compete in a global society, having the additional burden of English language acquisition can pose overwhelming obstacles for ELs. “English Learners suffer from restricted educational opportunities compared to that of non-English Learners, particularly with their regard to academic learning needs” (Umansky et al 2015). In order to level the playing field for ELs, instructional practices must shift. Traditionally, classroom instruction has focused on teachers holding content knowledge and incrementally delivering that knowledge to students. Students have been viewed as vessels into which information is poured; consequently, assessments have assessed the amount of information held by students. “[Students] need to be treated like sense-makers rather than rememberers and forgetters” (Wells & Arauz 2006). During a research study to determine whether or not schools should carve time for separate English Language Development classes, (Saunders et al 2013) uncovered from the classrooms participating in their study that listening and comprehension comprised 94% of oral language activities leaving little time for student-talk, despite the importance of English oral language development for ELs. In order to help student meet CCSS challenges, teachers must equally adjust the way they teach ELs to provide them increased access to the curriculum. Many researchers agree that engaging students in academic discourse is needed to connect new information to what is known, to improve critical thinking, and to engage students with academic content (Fisher et al 2008, Gibbons 2015, McElhone 2015, Umansky et al, 2015 Wells & Arauz 2006, Zwiers 2014).

## **Increasing Academic Discourse**

The Academic Language Development Network (ALDN), a collaborative project between the University of California Davis and Stanford University, synthesized research-based instruction and assessment for developing academic language, literacy, and thinking skills needed to support the achievement of CCSS. “Explicit attention to academic language instruction, coupled with extended opportunities for students to hear and use academic language, is needed in classrooms with English Learners and other students who struggle to understand and use the language of school” (Zwiers et al 2014). Through this work, the ALDN suggests three essential and high-leverage instructional practices that facilitate the development of academic language of middle school and high school EL students. Firstly, fostering academic interactions between students with a focus on using academic language learned in class. These interactions include students responding to one another, students building and challenging ideas and students negotiating meaning. The ALDN emphasizes the need for teachers to provide scaffolds for these interactions as well as multiple opportunities for student engagement. Additionally, this study recommends fortifying academic output by focusing on structures, such as scaffolds and protocols, to support and strengthen the quality of students’ oral language production. Finally, the results of this study suggests that after reading a complex text academic discourse helps ELs develop academic language and understand the interaction of a text’s organization, syntax, and word choice to create meaning for a given purpose (Zwiers 2014). Unfortunately, despite the benefits of student-talk opportunities for oral language production are limited in many classrooms.

In a research study, Wells and Arauz (2006) sought to uncover the effects of increasing opportunities to engage students in dialogue. Wells and Arauz hypothesize that involving

students in a dialogic co-construction of meaning increases the effectiveness of learning (2006). The study makes the comparison between monologic and dialogic interaction in the classroom. Nation-wide, the one-sided nature of monologic dialogue permeates schools as the primary way teachers convey information to students (Wells & Arauz 2006). Basically, too often teachers show and tell students what they need to know leaving limited time for students to process what they are learning through talking with others. For the most part students sit passively while listening to the teacher talk. Gibbons cautions that in some classrooms students spend 90% of their time listening to the teacher talking or independently doing seat work and that this lack of interaction provides limited opportunities, if any, for ELs to interact with their peers (2015). A study of classroom experiences in 1,000 elementary schools from across the nation reported that students only spent 4.8 percent of their day engaged with others in collaborative learning, and instead spent 91 percent of the students' day was participating in whole-group or independent work (Fisher et al 2008). Although monologic interaction continues to be the prevalent mode of teaching in U.S. schools, the research shows that developing concept knowledge involves the learner becoming an active participant in exploration and social interactions about what is being learned (Wells & Arauz 2006). Dialogic interactions are much more fluid in their nature allowing participants to negotiate meaning as they build concept knowledge through their interactions with one other. In a research study conducted by Wells and Arauz, teachers created conditions for extending opportunities for dialogic interactions for their students by shifting to an inquiry-based model of instruction. The findings of this study suggest:

- When students interact to construction solutions to problems, they recognize their contributions as being consequential to the process. As a result, students are more involved in discourse and more invested in the outcome.

- Students felt more satisfaction by working together.
- The achievement of students working together was greater than the achievement of students working individually.
- “The greatest benefit of collaborative knowledge building is the reciprocal development of understanding between individuals and the group” (Wells & Arauz 2006).

Although monologic interaction does have the benefits of simultaneously conveying information to many people at the same time, this interaction provides little opportunity for student to process that information. In contrast, dialogic interactions deepen students’ ability to process information as they negotiate and make meaning of what is being learned through discourse. Some teachers as Bayside have reported that it is difficult to engage students in student-talk because student do not often effectively participate, so they choose not to provide talk-time.

Instead of eliminating classroom dialogue because students seem disinterested in participating, perhaps improving the quality of academic conversations would be a better way of engaging students in their learning.

Education should help children gain a greater awareness and appreciation of the discourse repertoire of wider society and how it is used to create knowledge and to get things done. Some valuable, practical ways of using language may not be used much in the information. ...School life should give them access of using language which their out-of-school experience may not have revealed. It should help them extend their repertoire of language genres and so enable them to use language more effectively as a means for learning, pursuing interests, developing shared understanding and—crucially—reasoning and problem-solving together (Mercer 2002).

I argue that most educators agree with the importance of engaging students in academic discourse but many teachers lack the understanding about the characteristics of quality academic conversations and how to engage student in productive quality academic conversations.

Anyone who has stepped onto a middle school campus between classes quickly grasps the high levels of interaction between students. Hallways and corridors are humming with chatter as students zip to and from classes. On the other hand, when circulating around classrooms when students are ask to turn-and-talk to a partner an observer may hear some students fumbling for words, other students talking off-topic, and a few students not talking at all (Cummings 2000, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002). Researchers make the distinction between these two different types of interaction: context-embedded vs. context reduced (Cummings 2000, Gibbons 2015). When students are talking to each other about things in their everyday lives, they find these conversations come easy because they live-the-talk. In other words, these conversations are context-embedded for they share information rooted in personal experiences. For many English Learners, context-embedded conversations appear effortlessly. On the other hand, when the same students engage in conversations about content learned in school, they often struggle because they lack the framework of schema needed to process and express newly learned information having little personal connection; this interaction reflects context-reduced (Cummings 2000, Gibbons 2015). As a result, many English Learners—who easily just recalled the events from yesterday’s soccer game—struggle to retell the events leading to the Boston Tea Party. Teachers often make two mistakes in relation to Cummings’s Theory of Context-embedded vs. Context-reduced: firstly, when teachers listen to students every-day-talk, they assume that English Learners are more proficient in English than they actually are because these kinds of conversations are context-embedded. Secondly, teachers assume English Learners chose

not to participate in academic discourse; when in reality, these students are struggling to make meaning about what they are learning because they have no foundation on which to connect their learning, context-reduced (Cummings 2000, Gibbons 2015). As a result, teachers may stop calling on ELs in class or provide time for collaborative conversations, and ELs may begin to lose interest in school. Zwiers et al (2014) states, “English learners are more likely to lose interest in school because (a) they can’t keep up with the language demands of texts and tasks each day, and (b) lessons do not connect to the students’ languages and cultures.” Employing strategies for oral language production coupled with scaffolds (protocols) to support this student-talk, provides students with the framework to process and express newly learned information during engagement with peers.

## **Language Acquisition**

### Input

Providing English Learners access to the curriculum is crucial for their academic success and language acquisition plays a major role in this process. According to Kagan (1995), language acquisition is determined by the complex interactions between input, output and context. Kagan emphasizes that for English learners input must be comprehensible, developmentally appropriate, redundant and accurate (1995).

Simplifying curricular concepts does not equate to making content comprehensible (Gibbons 2015, Kagan 1995, Krashen 1982). Gibbons asserts, “Comprehensible input is not the same as ‘simplified’ input” (2015). Krashen suggests there are two ways to support comprehension: linguistic and non-linguistic. Linguistically, teachers can slow the rate of speech and speak with clearer articulation, use more high frequency words, use fewer idioms,

and simplify syntax by using shorter sentences. Non-linguistically, teachers can provide realia and images helping to make what is being learned become more concrete (1982).

Another important part of helping English learners access comprehensible input entails introducing academic language. Zwiers defines academic language as a set of words and phrases used to describe content knowledge and procedures, used to express complex thinking and abstract concepts and used to create cohesion and clarity in oral and written communication (2014). He suggests academic language is the “linguistic glue” that holds together the comprehension of complex texts, as well as engaging in activities relating to the texts and assessing student understanding of the texts (Zwiers 2014). Similarly, Schleppegrell suggests academic language is the language used in school for the purpose of learning. It evolves overtime and across different content areas thus becoming more complex as the ideas students are learning become more abstract and advanced. Being learned in school, academic language is specialized in that it is used in texts, in contexts, in tasks, in discourse, and in assessment of what is being learned in school (2009).

Students do not come into the classroom as empty vessels waiting to be filled; on the contrary, students enter classrooms having a range of experiences and knowledge about the world. In order to stimulate comprehensible input, teachers must create activities in which a student’s thinking is revealed (Wells & Arauz 2006). Teachers should take advantage of the benefits of having a diverse make-up of students in their classroom by understanding their students’ culture, background knowledge and experiences (Santo & Darling-Hammond 2014). Unfortunately, many English Learners enter the classroom lacking background knowledge. Migrant students and new immigrants may arrive with little formal education.

In other words, teachers cannot assume students come into the classroom as vessels brimming with the range of experiences suggested by Wells and Arauz.

Before diving into new content or complex texts, teachers need to build students' knowledge-base in order to facilitate comprehensible input. The Schema Theory suggests that readers draw on existing knowledge and language to guide their comprehension, and building that knowledge prior to reading helps a student access the text (Gibbons 2015). Tapping into and building students' existing knowledge during pre-reading activities aims to develop students' knowledge in relation to the overall meaning of a text; therefore, teachers can better prepare students by previewing new vocabulary, by anchoring a cultural context, by reminding students what they already know, and by supporting students in making predictions about the text prior to reading (Gibbons, 2015, Santo & Darling-Hammond 2014, Zwiers 2014). Activities to support comprehensible input include, but are not limited to:

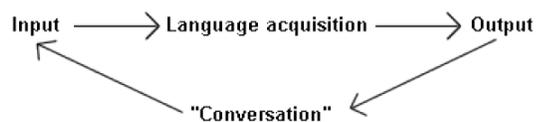
- Showing students illustrations from a text and asking them to share with a partner their ideas about what a story will be about or some things about which they may be learning.
- Sharing with students a few key words or phrases and asking them to share predictions with a partner about the content of a text.
- Providing student pairs a set of pictures related to a topic and asking them to sequence them in order of events or steps.
- Giving students key words and phrases, such as a title or section subtitles, and asking them to pose questions they would like to have answered as they read (Gibbons 2015).

Although these activities are initially teacher lead, the collaborative nature of students working together builds upon existing knowledge. In other words, output activities promote comprehensible input.

According to Kagan redundancy represents a component of input, “A student may receive comprehensive input in the zone of proximal development, but that will not ensure language acquisition unless the input is received repeatedly from a variety of sources” (1995).

Cooperative learning provides redundancy in learning. Krashen asserts that academic conversation is a good way for English learners to retain comprehensible input.

Output plays a key role in retentions.



(Krasen 1982)

Through oral language production students express what they are learning to others, which in turn helps them negotiate both meaning and language acquisition; furthermore, in listening to others, students strengthen their own ideas and understanding about how language is used. For English Learners, student-talk offers them a safe place to make errors in language acquisition and through correction of these errors the mental representations about what is being learned becomes more clear and refined (Krashen 1982).

## Output

Input alone does not facilitate learning. Oral language production—through both oral output and academic discourse—is the catalyst that cements comprehension. L. S. Vygotsky, the founding father of sociocultural research, suggests “that the individual develops what he/she is by what he/she produces for others.” (Vygotsky 1978) By teaching others we teach ourselves. Furthermore, Vygotsky asserts that higher forms of internal mental functions are formed through external processing (1978). This assertion supports the notion that comprehensible input is supported by output. Vygotsky states, “Any higher mental function was external because it was social at some point before becoming an internal, truly mental function. It was first a social relationship between two people” (1978). Meaning-making becomes a joint activity in which knowledge is constructed and reconstructed as individuals negotiate the terms of new knowledge. For example, two students grapple with making meaning about the concept of cloning animals. As one speaker shares his/her ideas, the listener has to make sense of what is being discussed. In order to make meaning of what is being said the listener must temporarily adopt the speaker’s stance. They may ask questions to clarify what the speaker is saying or to probe for more details. When disagreements occur students must negotiate meaning and in the process they both build their conceptual knowledge.

Swain suggests three functions of output. The first function, ‘noticing/triggering’ brings input information into consciousness so that an individual can begin making meaning. Output can trigger these noticings (bring them to consciousness) and raise awareness of knowledge gaps. During the second function, hypothesis-testing, an individual receives feedback from others allowing him/her to verify the accuracy of their inferred meaning. The third function, metalinguistic, is sometimes referred to as the reflective role where deeper cognitive processing

(solidifying meaning) occurs strengthening existing knowledge and clarifying syntactic structures (1995). By engaging students in quality academic conversations, I argue we provide them opportunities...

- to make meaning about what they are learning
- to test their inferred meaning against the ideas of others
- to better understand the structures of language
- to strengthen existing schemata
- to take responsibility for their own learning.

Swain emphasizes, “Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. Students’ meaningful production of language—output—would thus seem to have a potentially significant role in language development” (Swain 2000).

Wells & Arauz states, “Language plays a key role, providing the means for both for coordinating action and for thinking together...language is central in developing humans’ higher mental functions” (2006). Mercer affirms, “Using language, children can actively test their understanding against that of others, and may use argument to elicit relevant information and explanation from adults and other children about what they perceive and what they want to know” (2002). Frey and Fisher state, “...academic talk opportunities allow students to apply their conceptual knowledge to deepen understanding (2010). Gibbons asserts, “If we accept the premise that external dialogue is a major resource for the development of thinking, and that interaction is also integral to language learning, then it follows that we must consider very seriously the nature of talk in which learners are engaged in the classroom” (2015). If language

plays a crucial part in our navigating and interacting in the world, and if being successful in an increasingly global society is intricately tied to having a college education; it behooves educators to provide students opportunities to engage in dialogue that requires them to develop concepts through interaction with others as well as to problem-solve while cooperating with others and to defend their thinking to others.

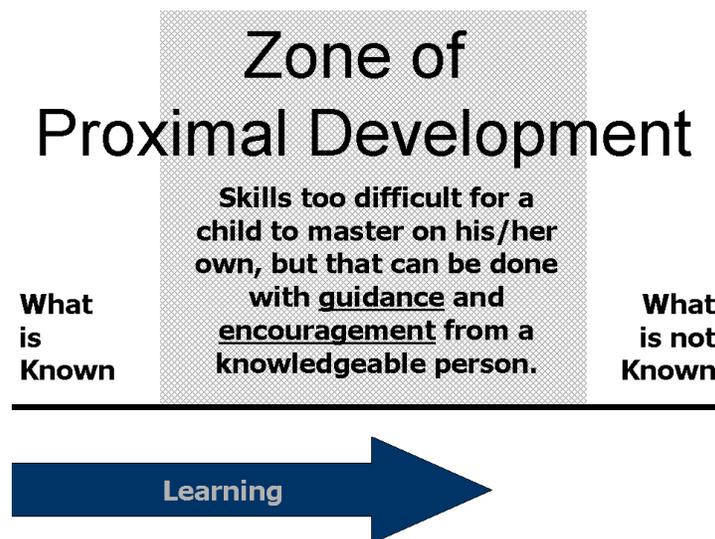
Researchers in the ALDN concluded that structured academic interactions supporting student-to-student discussions facilitate the strengthening and challenging of ideas because during discourse students must negotiate meaning (Zwiers et al 2014). Input and output are intricately connected in promoting language acquisition and comprehension, but I argue that simply providing more opportunities for student-talk is not sufficient. Opportunities for oral language production must include scaffolds to support output.

### **Scaffolding Output**

The research suggests that in order for learning to occur, learners need opportunities to process and grapple with new concepts; however, simply providing opportunities for output is not enough, especially for English Learners. Teachers must also provide the scaffolds needed to support students as they wrestle through this process (Calderon 2011, Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg 2008, Frey & Fisher 2010, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002, and Santos & Darling-Hammond 2014). Swain argues that “output pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—than does input” (2000). Engaging English Learners in oral language production in which they communicate about a text or concept using academic language strengthens comprehensible input. Kagan suggests language acquisition is nurtured when output is functional and frequent (1995). Teachers who provide students with scaffolds to support

interactions when they employ strategies to strengthen language acquisition increase the functionality of output.

For optimal language acquisition to occur, English learners must engage with developmentally appropriate materials. Kagan states, “Even if language is comprehended it will not stimulate the next step in language acquisition if it is not in the zone of proximal development.” According to the ALDN, English learners should be using grade-level texts and should be engaging in intellectually challenging activities with the appropriate language supports (Zwiers et al 2014). Vygotsky’s notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests the ZPD is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978).



(McLeod 2012)

In other words, English Learners need to be working in the sweet spot of learning. Engaging students in previously known content knowledge has little effect on learning; similarly, engaging students in content knowledge beyond their capabilities only leads to frustration and learned helplessness. Instead, students learn best in the Zone of Proximal Development in which they can access knowledge with support. Wood, Bruner and Ross further explored the ZPD. These researchers coined the term ‘scaffolding’ and define it as “a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, to carry out a task or to achieve a goal which would be beyond his/her unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult ‘controlling’ those elements of a task that are initially beyond the learners capacity, thus permitting him/her to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his/her range of competence” (1979). Wood, Bruner and Ross describe six functions to scaffold an activity for a learner with the ZPD:

1. Recruitment: Orient the learner to the task to be learned.
2. Reduction in Degrees of Freedom: Reduce and sequence the number of steps required to complete the tasks so the learner can better focus on individual steps of a process rather than being overwhelmed with the entire process.
3. Direction Maintenance: Keep the learner focused on the activity to be learned through motivation and/or redirection.
4. Marking Critical Features: Emphasis for the learner the relevant features of an activity needing to be accomplished.
5. Frustration Control: Control the level of frustration felt from a learner to reduce the risk of failure.
6. Demonstration: Model the task to be accomplished for the learner (Wood et al 1979).

Similarly to the scaffolds supporting an architectural structure under construction, academic scaffolds support student learning within the ZPD. Without these supports, the increased stress accompanying the new area of learning that is above a student's current foundational knowledge may result in frustration and failure. With these supports, a student can explore new areas of learning without the burden of being overwhelmed by the complexity of the overall cognitive tasks.

Understanding the importance for English Learners to be exposed to complex texts and ideas at their developmental level, scaffolding can increase comprehensive input for them. Gibbons shares ways that teachers can make academic content and language more comprehensible for English learners:

- Model for students what is to be learned.
- Use familiar language to talk about new ideas before introducing academic language and abstractions.
- Connect the new knowledge to something students have already experienced.
- Use images, realia, or graphic organizers to illustrate complex ideas.
- Use technology, including interactive texts.
- Express the same idea being learned in more than one way.
- Build background knowledge before introducing a complex text (2015).

Kagan asserts language acquisition requires accurate input referring to communication that is grammatically correct, uses academic language, proper transitions, etc. (1995). The use of complex texts provides models of accurate input for ELs, but the previous research suggests input alone is not enough; students need to talk about what they are learning. Scaffolds, such as

sentence frames, can help to clarify grammatical structures for students as they participate in academic discourse.

Researchers argue that the quality of classroom dialogue can have a positive effect on the development of students' communication and thinking skills (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg 2008, Frey & Fisher 2010, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002, and Zwiers 2014). Mercer states, "Students usually seem expected to work out the 'ground rules' of effective discussion for themselves" (2002). Although many educators may agree about the importance engaging students in academic discourse, some of them may not be able to express the characteristics of quality academic conversations and many more may not be able to create the conditions that foster quality academic conversations. According to Mercer, quality conversations include, but are not limited to, the following characteristics:

- Participation from all group members
- Participants stay on topic
- Everyone has a chance to express themselves and are encouraged to do so
- Participants share relevant information and are open to new ideas
- If something is not clear, participants ask a question or get clarification
- Dialogue and body language show a respect for others, their opinions and their feelings
- When participants challenge ideas they do so respectfully and with good reason
- Participants clearly explain their ideas and provide reasons for their point of view

(2002).

Understanding the complexity of what entails quality conversations, it's no wonder teachers struggle to provide student-talk opportunities for students. According to Mercer there are ways for teachers to engage students in quality academic conversations:

- Model for students how to participate in exploratory talk
- Engage students in academic conversations often
- Establish rules for academic talk with their students around what makes a “good discussion”
- Collaborative activities should be designed that require students not only to interact but also “interthink” (2002).

Frey and Fisher (2008) assert that in reality students do not engage in quality academic conversations without guidance. Simply, telling your student to turn-and-talk is not enough to illicit academic discourse. As a teacher, I recall my circulating between students during student-talk only to be disappointed by having to redirect them back on topic or coaxing them into saying anything at all. Most students may wish to participate in talking about what is being learned with a partner but they are not clear about what to do during these discussions. Although sentence frames do provide student supports for getting started in these discussions, in isolation, these scaffolds are not enough to build meaningful dialogue. At best, many students read the sentence frames, fill in the blanks and consider the student-talk completed. According to Frey and Fisher, providing a purpose for discussions around learning is essential because it provides the framework needed for students to build a common understanding about topics being discussed (2008). For example, before asking student to turn-and-talk to a partner about the parts of cells, teachers should establish a purpose for their conversations: As you talk with your partner, determine the role each organelle plays in the life of the cell. Additionally, Frey and Fisher

(2008) suggest including a language purpose has shown to be helpful for English Learners: As you talk with your partner about the role each organelle plays in the role the life of a cell use scientific terms (nucleus, mitochondria). Finally, Frey and Fisher recommend adding a social purpose for students during their partner talk: As you talk with your partner about the role each organelle plays in the role the life of a cell, use scientific terms (nucleus, mitochondria), and practice active listening skills as your partner explains his/her thinking. In well-designed collaborative interactions, something happens as a result of the language being used and there will be an outcome expected as a result of the information that has been exchanged between students (2008). Gibbons asserts that student collaborations should require participation from all participants. Gibbons suggest that often English Learners feel more comfortable working with a peer than speaking in front of the whole class allowing them to learn English in safe context with their peers (2015). I argue that designing protocols that embed and sequence these kinds of output strategies facilitate students in language acquisition and in comprehension because these structures free students to stay focused on the learning itself as opposed to being focused on the process of what should happen during the learning.

### **Protocols Provide Structures for Student Oral Language Production**

Providing prompts, such as sentence starters and sentence frames, for students to use while participating in oral output activities or academic conversations helps them practice effective communication (Calderon 2011, Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg 2008, Frey & Fisher 2010, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002, Santos & Darling-Hammond 2014, and Zwiers 2014). Bayside teachers have reported that they do use sentence frames. These teachers also report that academic conversations in their classrooms are not as structured as they would like for them to be. I argue that simply providing sentences frames and offering time for students to talk is not

enough. Teachers need to provide protocols to structure and guide the function of student-talk in order to enhance learning.

Teachers have and need many strategies for engaging with students, and clearly a language focus alone is not enough for good teaching. But language has been a neglected area in our schools, and bringing a functional perspective on language to the classroom provides a needed tool that teachers can use to enrich the teaching and learning experience. Language is powerful in social life, and helping students recognize and get control of that power can enable them to participate in and contribute to the many context of advanced learning where we need a diversity of voices and perspectives (Schleppegrell 2006).

Using language to collaborate with others is a learned skill. Well-designed and well-structured interactions offer many opportunities for second language oral development. By supporting collaboration, students take on more responsibility in using English to clarify ideas, to ask questions and to solve problems (Gibbons 2015). In order for these kinds of oral production activities to occur, teachers must plan for them. Teachers need to “create engagement and discussion opportunities that socialize students to the language of the discipline through structures and routines that develop skills in disciplinary discourse” (Santo et al 2014). As part of planning, Calderon emphasizes the importance of creating structures for learning, she suggests that students may have difficulty learning if there is a lack of structures in place, such as established rules, routines, or protocols for an academic tasks (2011). Calderon states, “Cooperative learning norms and protocols help us teach and reach students in content and language classrooms” (2011). Keeping in mind that one of the more difficult things for English Learners is remembering a string of instructions they have heard, written instructions will help keep students on task (Gibbons 2015). Visual protocols remind students what is expected during student-talk as they speak to one another. Calderon asserts that incorporating structures to

support learning, such as protocols, support student success (2011). Students not only need to be provided opportunities for oral language production, they also need to be provided with supports during these interactions. “Teachers need to learn how to develop scaffolds with attention to their purpose: to support both comprehension and student production of language that allows them (students) to express their ideas” (Santo et al 2014).

Protocols, sequenced scaffolds, structure academic discourse so that students are more focused on expressing their ideas during interactions and less focused on the process of those interactions. Setting clear expectations and outcomes for what students are expected to do during collaborative talk-time is essential. (Fisher et al 2008, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2008) Protocols, by their nature, provide students with the purpose (outcomes) and procedures (expectations) during interactions. According to Expeditionary Learning (2011), protocols provide the structures for building the skills and culture necessary for collaborative work. By following a protocol for student-talk, students understand what to do during an interaction in which they are talking with another student. Additionally, protocols offer opportunities to address equity of voice in classrooms. “A protocol consist of agreed upon guidelines for conversations ensuring equal participation, and it is the existence of this structure—which everyone understands and has agreed to –that permits certain kind of conversation to occur—often a kind of conversation which people are not in the habit of having” (Expeditionary Learning 2011). Protocols help to ensure that all students’ voices are heard. Furthermore, structures can be built into protocols to guide students in building on each other’s ideas, reflecting upon what someone has said, and even offering differing opinions or asking questions that challenge. According to Expeditionary Learning, protocols offer students a “license to listen” without having to constantly feel the need to respond. Providing teachers training, in both

the strategies that strengthen oral language production and in protocols that support these strategies, will build teacher efficacy in their ability to design and implement the scaffolds needed to support student interactions aimed at increasing language acquisition and comprehension (2011).

### **Instructional Coaching**

According to Ball and Forzani, more than ever—in the age of CCSS—all students are expected to achieve ambitious goals that include reading complex texts, critical thinking, problem solving and reasoning (2011) If English Learners are to be successful, teachers need to provide them access to rigorous coursework that engages them in the learning process.

According to Hawley and Valli (1999), “students should be expected to achieve much higher standards of performance, which include a capacity for complex and collaborative problem solving.” The previous research has suggested that, especially for English Learners, having access to grade level concepts and complex texts is crucial for their intellectual development. In other words, simplifying concepts as a way of providing access to the curriculum for English Learners has devastating consequences for them. On the contrary, the research suggests ELs need to be learning grade levels concepts and reading complex texts, and that engaging English Learners in meaningful conversations about what they are learning facilitates academic growth and language acquisition (Calderon 2011, Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg 2008, Frey & Fisher 2010, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002, Santos & Darling-Hammond 2014, Umansky et al 2015, and Zwiers 2014). Unfortunately, many teachers continue simplifying content as a means for providing ELs access to the curriculum. As a result, even if a school does offer quality programing, many students are not receiving equal opportunity to these programs because his/her teacher may lack training in how to provide them equitable access. Hawley and Valli assert that

when examining the factors that affect student achievement, teachers prove to have a greater impact than programming. Furthermore, teachers make substantial impact in efforts to change schools (1999). In order for students to access complex texts and concepts, students need to have opportunities to engage with other students to strengthen their ideas, to process new information and to test their reasoning against others; therefore, teachers need to be trained in skills that build conversations to increase the quality of academic discourse, thus providing ELs better access to grade-level texts and content. The Instructional Core asserts that an increase in student learning occurs only as a result of improvements in the level of what is being taught, a teacher's content knowledge and pedagogical prowess, and the level of student engagement (Elmore 2009). Elmore's Instructional Core also assumes that if you change any component of the Instructional Core, then you must change the other two components to positively affect student learning. (2009) In other words, by providing English Learners access to a rigorous curriculum and providing them time to turn-and-talk about what they are learning will not increase student achievement, if teachers lack training about how to support students in academic discourse. Ball and Forzani state, "...we owe it to ourselves to ensure that those who teach our youth have appropriate opportunities to develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Students whose teachers do not develop these qualities lose out" (2011). Winging it is not enough, teachers have to be explicitly taught the strategies to strengthen oral language production and how to sequence the strategies needed to build meaningful interactions between their students. The American Federation of Teachers states,

...without professional development school reform will not happen...The nation can adopt rigorous standards, set forth a visionary scenario, compile the best research about how students learn, change the nature of textbooks and assessment, promote teaching strategies that have been successful with a wide range of students, and change all other elements involved in systematic reform. But, unless the classroom teacher

understands and is committed to the plan and knows how to make it happen, the dream will come to not (1995).

“Professional development opportunities need to be designed to build the knowledge, strategies and skills of all teachers of ELs to integrate language development scaffolds for students at varying level of English proficiency with a classroom” (Santo/Darling-Hammond 2011).

According to the Instructional Core, “the real accountability system is in the task that students are asked to do” (Elmore 2009). A teacher simply understanding the essence of quality conversations is not enough if teacher lacks the skills needed to model, structure and scaffold these conversations. The heart of teaching requires a person being able to “unpack” something he or she knows well and make that knowledge accessible for someone else. (Ball & Forzani 2011) Optimal professional development for teachers will impart in them the ability to break down the skills of academic conversation into manageable chunks that build upon one another helping students, not only clarify and strengthen ideas, but also be able to evaluate those ideas and explain their thinking. To make this task more manageable for teachers, professional development needs to facilitate the teachers’ ability to identify those high leverage skills that build academic conversations and then provide training about how to sequence these strategies in the classroom in form of protocols.

The Sixth Principle of Instructional Core suggests that learning occurs only by doing the work. Learning does not occur by others telling us how to do the work, nor does learning occur by having done the work at some time in the past, nor does learning occur by others doing the work for us (Elmore 2009). Talking at students does not translate into student learning. The position of this action research is that until teachers receive training about how to build output skills that support quality academic conversations then English Learners will not be able to access complex texts and academic concepts. Therefore, a major emphasis of the professional

development in Bayside is to train teachers in the strategies needed to produce quality student-talk, including how to design protocols to sequence the steps of supports needed for student-to-student engage in these interactions. However, professional development alone will not be sufficient to ensure the work is done. Hawley and Valli state, “teachers are often asked to change their instruction in isolation and without support” (1999). Although professional development may provide training for teachers about strategies needed for effective oral language production, if teachers are not able scaffold these strategies, then students will never be able to do the “heavy lifting” themselves. I argue that professional development—alone—is not sufficient for teachers to build efficacy in designing and implementing protocols that scaffold strategies for effective output. Teachers need to be supported as they plan and implement these strategies into their classrooms. Hawley and Valli assert that teachers need assistance from peer coaches to support them with the implementation of new instructional strategies (1999).

Although teachers have been introduced to strategies to strengthen oral language production and to protocols that support student-talk, teachers optimally need additional support in planning lessons that incorporate these protocols and in teaching students how to use these protocols. Teachers will also need to reflect on their own efficacy in designing and implementing protocols. Taylor asserts that professional development is often overly generalized and consists of loosely connected activities, but by paring these PDs with instructional coaching teacher learning is extended into the classroom promoting the transfer of new knowledge into classroom implementation (2011). Findings of a study by the Institute of Educational Sciences, as reported in the Executive Summary, found professional development to be most effective when teachers have the opportunities to implement what is being learned during training in their classrooms while being supported by an instructional coach (August &

Shanahan 2006). This action research asserts instructional coaching to be the key component of teacher training. Instructional coaching offers differentiated learning opportunities for teachers that cannot be accomplished during the professional development alone. Through a coaching cycle, individual teachers collaborate with a coach at their current level of knowledge.

According to *How to People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*, those having expertise in a field notice key features and patterns not noticed by novices (Bransford et al 1999). For veteran teachers, who have a foundational understanding prior to training, schemata is already arranged and organized in meaningful ways providing a deeper understanding of the subject matter to be taught (Bransford et al 1999). When coaching these “expert” teachers, a coach can meet these teachers at their level of expertise enriching what is learned during training as opposed to providing redundant training. Instructional coaching affords these “experts” opportunities to refine their instructional practices in ways that cannot be reached through professional development. For novice teachers, a coach can engage them at their level, as well, to help them build meaningful patterns of understanding and develop the metacognition necessary for future growth. In this case, an instructional coach may help a novice teacher develop foundational skills that may have been out of reach through professional development training alone.

For the purpose of this action research instructional coaching has the following characteristics:

- A non-evaluative stance
- Working one-on-one with a teacher within a classroom setting

- Working with teachers through co-planning lessons, modeling lessons, co-teaching, and observing instruction (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013, Taylor 2007).

Sullivan and Glanz share three stages of a coaching cycle: the planning phase, the observation phase and the feedback conference (2013). In the planning phase, an instructional coach and the teacher being coached—the coachee—develop a shared model of teaching. While co-constructing this shared model of observation, the coachee is encouraged to describe the skills and strategies—learned during professional development—that will be implemented in the classroom. During this phase, an instructional coach may help a teacher decide on strategies to support learning and help them plan how to employ these strategies to promote learning. Another step during the planning phase is determining an observation tool that records what is happening in the classroom as it relates to the shared model of instruction. The final step of the planning stage entails scheduling times for the observation and post-observation conference (Sullivan & Glanz 2013).

During the second phase—the observational phase, an instructional coach observes a lesson and captures relevant, low-inference data about the chosen model of instruction with the pre-determined observation tool. Having a pre-determined observation tool helps to reduce a teacher’s anxiety about the observation because the coachee is familiar with the kinds of data being recorded (Sullivan & Glanz 2013).

During the final phase of the coaching cycle—the post-conference, the instructional coach guides a teacher through the reflection and analysis of data revealing details about the teacher’s implementation of the model of instruction. A post-conference can be broken into 4

stages: the opening, bringing focus, moving practice and closure (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013). Accepting that for many teachers having an instructional coach observe them teaching a lesson brings anxiety even with a shared understanding of the observational tool; the “Opening” begins with a coach establishing a trusting rapport with the coachee before clarifying the purpose and goals of this conference (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013). Additionally, this stage provides time for the coach and coachee to recalibrate thinking in relationship to the indicators described in the model of instruction. Revisiting the model of instruction during the “Bringing Focus” stage helps to provide a frame for which evidence to focus during the post-conference (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013). Using low-inference data within this frame acts as a mirror of instruction during the next stage.

Once data has been collected and clarified, analysis of the evidence begins in the “Moving Practice” stage (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013). During this stage, an instructional coach will ask questions about the low-inference data so that a coachee can analyze instructional strengths and weaknesses in relation to the model of instruction. A coach facilitates the conversation as a teacher begins exploring next steps that are within that his or her personal ZPD. During the final stage, “The Closure”, a list of clear and reachable next steps is established. Accountability is promoted by determining measures of success (Blasé & Blasé 2004, Sullivan & Glanz 2013). I argue that teachers who receive instructional coaching building on professional development in protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language productions will develop increased efficacy in designing and implementing these protocols.

## **Literary Review: Conclusion**

In order to support English Learners in achieving the lofty goals set by the rigors of CCSS, these students need ample opportunities to acquire academic language and to process what is being learned through academic discourse. Academic discourse is most effective when students are engaged in responding to one another as they build and challenge one another's ideas while using academic language learned in class. Through academic discourse students are able to enhance meaning-making, to better understand language structures, to strengthen academic concepts and to practice using academic language in context. English Learners need to be supported in academic discourse. Providing sentence frames does support student-talk, but simply providing sentence frames is not sufficient to fully support the complexity of academic discourse. Students need to understand the purpose and outcome of student-talk. Student-talk needs to be sequenced in steps that logically unfold and build academic knowledge. Protocols support academic discourse by incorporating a range of supports into a packaged list of steps that are easily followed by students, thus freeing students from the burden of learning the process of talking and allowing them to focus on the art of effective discourse. Teachers need professional development in implementing protocols to support student-talk. Professional development is most effective when paired with instructional coaching. I argue that by receive instructional coaching teachers will increase the efficacy in which they implement protocols to support strategies for academic discourse.

## **Theory of Action**

The problem of practice shows that teachers need training in implementing protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language production. To address the problem of practice my theory of action aims to support teachers through instructional coaching in order to build

their efficacy in identifying skills that can be integrated into protocols to scaffold oral language production strategies being taught during this PD arc, to support teachers in designing lessons that employ these protocols, and to increase teacher efficacy in implementing protocols into lessons.

**Theory of Action**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Goals</b>
<p><b>Teachers need training in implementing protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language production.</b></p>	<p><b>English Learners-</b> Have lower academic and graduation rates</p> <p>Engaging in academic discourse improves meaning making and access to CCSS</p> <p>Need more opportunities to hear and use academic language in context</p> <p><b>Professional Development-</b> Strengthening input through output and academic discourse to support language acquisition</p> <p>Strategies for strengthening academic language production and processing of grade-level content</p> <p>Protocols scaffold strategies that</p>	<p><b>Instructional Coaching the builds on professional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 teachers</li> <li>• 2-3 coaching cycles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers will...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify skills to be integrated into protocols that scaffold and support strategies to strengthen oral language production</li> <li>• Design and implement lesson plans that integrate protocols</li> <li>• Increase efficacy in designing lessons that integrate protocols</li> </ul>

	<p>strengthen oral language production</p> <p><b>Instructional Coaching</b> Context-embedded and differentiated support for teachers to build efficacy in instructional practice</p>		
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The intervention follows professional development for 45 teachers who teach one or more core content classes: ELA, mathematics, science and social studies. This intervention builds on four previous professional development trainings that included reviewing academic data about English Learners in Bayside, identifying language targets, building a common understanding around the components of academic language acquisition, teaching strategies that strengthen oral language production and designing protocols to scaffold these strategies. The intervention begins with three teachers who will receive two or three cycles of instructional coaching to support what is being learning during PD. Each of these coaching cycles will include a pre-observational meeting, an observation of practice and a post-observational meeting. During the pre-observation, teachers may be provided additional support in refining their lesson plans began during PD training. Teachers will be provided the option of having a lesson modeled by their coach or the option of co-teaching the lesson with their coach. During the classroom observation, video recordings of the lessons will capture data about how protocols were introduced to students and how they were used by students. During the post-observation, teachers will use this low-inference data to analyze the areas of strength as well as areas of growth in the implementation protocols into this lesson before determining next steps for future lessons. The recursive nature of instructional coaching builds teacher efficacy in planning and

refining lessons that employ protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language production.

### **Intervention Plan**

#### Intervention

To improve teacher efficacy in creating lesson plans incorporating protocols to scaffold and support strategies that strengthen oral language production, three teachers will engage in two or more coaching cycles that augment teacher learning during professional development.

#### Pre-Intervention Profession Development

- 8-14-15: Define oral language production and introduce strategies that strengthen student-talk and a tool for formative evaluation
- 9-9-15: Student-talk Strategies of focus—Transition Improv and Stronger & Clearer
- 10-21-15: Student-talk Strategy of focus—Constructive Conversation
- 1-20-16: Student-talk Strategy of Focus—Argument Balance Scale
- 2-17-16: Teachers research and agree on essential elements to include in protocols and co-create a protocol to support one of the strategies learned during PD

#### Intervention: Instructional Coaching

Window of Intervention: March 7, 2016-April 1, 2016

Pre-intervention interview with each participant prior to coaching

#### Coaching

Teacher A Coaching Schedule:

- Cycle 1-March 7, 2016
- Cycle 2- March 8-11, 2016
- Cycle 3-March 23, 2016

Teacher B Coaching Schedule:

- Cycle 1-March 14, 2016
- Cycle 2-March 21, 2016

Teacher C Coaching Schedule:

- Cycle 1-March 24, 2016
- Cycle 2-March 25, 2016

Post-intervention interview completed after final coaching cycle

Researcher Journal on-going throughout intervention

<u>Post-Intervention Professional Development</u>
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5-4-16: Sharing an artifact of practice that implements protocols to support a strategy learned during the PD arc
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### **Research Methods**

Due to the nature of the research questions, brevity of the intervention, and availability of resources for this action research, qualitative data represents the majority of data collected for this research study; however, quantitative data was also utilized to measure the impact of the intervention.

### **Data Collection**

The ultimate goal of this research is for teachers to effectively implement protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language production. Logistical and contractual barriers of collecting lesson plans from 45 teachers participating in the year-long professional training prohibited me from collecting data from all the teachers. Additionally, providing instructional coaching to all the PD participants would be impossible for me. Despite these limitations, I sought to examine the impact that instructional coaching tied to the PD would have on teacher efficacy in implementing protocols; consequently, I have chosen to collect and examine lesson plans from the three teachers who will receive instructional coaching to examine changes in efficacy. In addition to lesson plans, I will gather video records of classroom observations that offer low-inference data teachers can use to analyze their own instructional practices and provide evidence of growth as a result of the intervention. In a research journal, I will record insight about teacher learning and track trends in data. Teacher pre and post-interviews will be

conducted for those teachers receiving instructional coaching about their perceptions of efficacy in implementing protocols as a result of the coaching.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Expected Outcomes</b>
<p>Do teachers who receive coaching in the design and implementation of protocols build efficacy in their use of protocols to support strategies that strengthen oral language production?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher Interview: Pre/Post-intervention</li> <li>• Artifacts of Practice: lesson plans, graphic organizers, student work, recordings of student talk</li> <li>• Research Journal</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers will...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify skills to be integrated into protocols that scaffold and support strategies to strengthen oral language production</li> <li>• Design and implement lesson plans that integrate protocols</li> <li>• Increase efficacy in designing lessons that integrate protocols</li> </ul>

### **Intervention and Data Collection Plan**

The intervention includes three teachers who have participated in a year-long professional development series focused on strengthening student-talk in the classroom. These teachers' names have been changed for the reporting of the results in this intervention. Ms. Ginger is an experienced teacher who teaches three sections of 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and an AVID elective class. Mr. Green is a first-year 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who teaches two sections of science and two sections of social studies; additionally, he teaches a designated ELD class. Mr. Armstrong is an experienced teacher, who is new to the district. He teaches three sections of 7<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and one designated ELD class. At the time of this research, these teachers have had attended five trainings co-facilitated by Dr. Jeff Zwiers and me.

During the first training session on August 14, 2015, teachers received an overview of concepts related to promoting academic language acquisition. Key components of this training included: identifying targeted language skill(s), choosing strategies to target the language skill(s), introducing the strategies to students, providing appropriate scaffolding, and assessing learning with formative assessments. During the subsequent PD sessions, teachers received more in-depth trainings on individual student-talk strategies and were provided with planning time to implement a strategy in their classrooms. Teachers were asked to bring an artifact of practice (video clips, graphic organizers, visual charts, etc.) to each training session sharing a strategy that they tried out with their students. With each training sessions, another component to promote language acquisition was added. By the 5<sup>th</sup> PD on February 17, 2016, teachers had already explored elements to scaffold student-talk. The next step was to provide training about how to design a systematic way to sequence and deliver these scaffolds; therefore, the February PD focused on essential elements to include in designing protocol to support a student-talk strategy. Teachers worked collaboratively to design a protocol to support a student-talk strategy within their content area. This intervention begins with my providing instructional coaching for three teachers to support their on-going planning and implementing protocols that support student-talk in their classrooms.

The literature review led me to argue that instructional coaching will have a positive impact on teacher efficacy regarding the planning and implementation of protocols to support strategies that strengthened student-talk. To measure the effect of this intervention, I collected data from three different sources: teacher interviews, lesson plans and my research journal. The first data source provided impact data, a pre and post-interview for the participating teachers. (See Appendix A) These interviews were video recorded and transcribed word-for-word to

measure the impact of the intervention on teachers' feeling of efficacy. Part of the interview included three quantitative questions in which teachers rated their feelings of efficacy on a Likert Scale in these areas: identifying essential elements to be included in a protocol, designing an effective protocol, and introducing a protocol to support student-talk. The pre and post-interviews also included qualitative data, open-ended questions for teachers to describe student-talk in their classroom, to elaborate about how they planned for and introduced protocols to support student-talk, and for them to report about how their planning and implementing protocols has been impacted by instructional coaching. The pre-intervention interviews were conducted in late February and early March after the teachers had receive professional training in designing protocols to support student-talk, but before teachers had received any coaching to support their professional growth. The post-intervention interviews were completed within one week of the final coaching session for each teacher. The post-interview questions were composed of the same quantitative questions connected to the Likert Scale and had same or similar open-ended qualitative questions.

In reviewing the pre and post-interview questions, I began by analyzing the quantitative data. The measures for the Likert Scale questions were all given the same values: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. By measuring the change in these numbers, I was able to look for changes in reported feelings of efficacy as a result of the instructional coaching for each of the teachers. By calculating the mean response for each pre and post-interview question, I was able to compare the mean for each question to identify shifts in feeling of efficacy over the time of the intervention. Analyzing the qualitative data took a more strategic approach. I began by creating five major categories representing possible themes to investigate: Planning for Protocols, Executing (Implementing) Protocols, Knowledge of

Protocols, Ability to Create Next Steps around Using Protocols and Observation Data. Each category was assigned a color so that as I read through the transcriptions, I could identify each sentence with a color or multiple colors corresponding to the themes of this intervention. For further analysis within each of these categories, I created specific codes based on the expected results. Using 30 different codes, I reviewed the transcripts to look for more detailed indicators of efficacy within the major categories. For example, within the Planning for Protocols category, I coded information about teacher planning in the areas of sequencing steps for student-talk, including sentence frames, using academic language, creating a graphic organizer, and providing visual representation of the protocol. By doing so, I was able to was not only able to look for over-arching trends but also able to look at more specific patterns in the data that may help me better identify if indicators about which a teacher spoke during the interviews were common to all teachers participating in the intervention or just one teacher.

The second method of data collection measured both impact and process data. During the coaching cycle, I collected artifacts of practice such as lesson plans, graphic organizers, visual representations of the protocols, student work, and recordings of student-talk. Over the course of the intervention, later artifacts were compared with earlier artifacts for each teacher to see how instructional coaching impacted their planning in relation to using protocols to support student-talk. During a coach cycle, teachers reflected on his/her planning and implementing protocols to determine their next steps in refining these protocols to support student-talk. This process data guided teachers in reflecting on their instruction and provided evidence to support next steps to improve instruction. In collecting the process data, teacher reflections during the post-observational coaching meetings were recorded and transcribed word-by-word. These reflections were coded using the same categories and codes as used for the pre and post-

interviews allowing me to analyze patterns and trends, which in turn helped in identify my next steps needed to support teachers.

The third method of data collection, an Investigator's Research Journal, also measured process data. After each coaching cycle, I answered my own reflections questions about a coaching cycle to help inform planning for future coaching cycles. (See Appendix B) The reflections recorded in the journal were coded using the same colors and codes described in the pre and post-interview. By using the same coding system for all three data collection instruments, I was able to look across these data sets to compare the results from all the tools.

### **Analysis and Findings**

This research examined the impact of instructional coaching in building teacher efficacy in the following capacities: identifying essential skills to include in protocols, designing protocols to scaffold and strengthen strategies that support student-talk, and effectively implementing these protocols in classrooms. The impact data did indicate increased feelings of efficacy in these three areas; however, the data also revealed discrepancies between feelings of efficacy and actual instructional practices that will be further explored. Following trends in the data, I also tracked a couple related issues: whether the teachers' overall planning process improved and whether teachers' overall implementation of these protocols improved. These are the three major themes emerging from this research: teachers do benefit when they receive instructional coaching, teacher planning time is important, and teachers need more training in how to model for students what they are expected to do during student-talk.

## **Impact Data: Overview**

According to the data, instructional coaching improves teachers' efficacy in planning protocols to support oral language production. The basic premise behind this research is that when teachers receive in instructional coaching to support what is learned during professional development instruction improves. Although student achievement was not a measurement in this research, the ultimate goal is to provide English Learners more structured opportunities to process what they are learning through their interaction with peers. I assert that building teacher efficacy in supporting academic discourse will help English Learners better access grade-level content resulting in increased student achievement. In other words, a teachers' pedagogical prowess and content knowledge improves students learning (Elmore 2009), so to improve student learning I sought to improve teacher efficacy. Ball and Forzani assert that educators must provide appropriate opportunities for students to develop necessary skills and knowledge, and students whose teachers cannot provide these opportunities are at a disadvantage (2010). As indicated by the problem of practice, although the teachers of Bayside were sometimes providing students with opportunities for student-talk, these student-talk opportunities were seldom logically sequenced and lacked the scaffolds to support students. According to the American Federation of Teachers (1995), unless a teacher understands an instructional vision, is committed to the plan and knows how to make it happen, the vision cannot come to fruition. As part of better reaching the needs of Bayside's English Learners, the professional development I designed for teachers included trainings about how to layer and scaffold strategies to support student-talk in processing content knowledge. Having knowledge of these strategies and how to scaffold them is not enough if teachers lack the skills needed to structure and model these scaffolds; the key to success requires a teacher to be able to unpack these strategies so that they are accessible

for students (Ball & Forzani 2010). The literature review for this action research suggests professional development alone does not provide enough support for teachers to carry-out the complexities of implementing what is learned during training. Teachers need to be supported during the planning and execution phases with instructional coaching. Instructional coaches offer the support teachers need to implement new instructional strategies (Hawley & Valli 1999, Taylor 2007). An instruction coach promotes accountability (Taylor 2007) The findings from this action research reflect the previous research.

### **Impact Data: Instructional Coaching & Teacher Efficacy**

According to the results of this action research, instructional coaching in conjunction with professional development does have a positive effect on teachers' feelings of efficacy in their ability to plan for and execute protocols that support student-talk. Teachers participating in this study were asked to rate themselves on a 4 point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree) regarding the following statement: "Right now, I believe that I can identify essential elements to include in a protocol to support student talk." (See Appendix A) The results showed a slight increase in feelings of efficacy from a mean of 3 on the pre-intervention survey to a mean of 3.33 on the post-intervention survey. The slight—but significant—positive shift may have been due to the point that going into the interventions teachers already felt comfortable in being able to identify elements to include in protocol; being supported by a coach made them feel even more comfortable in identifying these elements. Mr. Green states, "Sure I felt comfortable picking out things that go into an effective protocol, but now I know why these elements are important." The next two statements measuring the impact of the intervention did show more significant shifts in feelings of efficacy. When rating teacher efficacy in designing an effective protocol to support students in successful student-talk, the data shows an increase in the

average response from an efficacy rating of 2.6 pre-intervention to 3.3 post-intervention (1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree). One teacher reported at the beginning of the intervention, “My weakness is knowing how to develop a protocol. I have some good tools that I know how to use from the past or have gotten from this PD, but I am still struggling putting them into practice.” When considering teachers’ feeling of efficacy in effectively introducing a protocol to support student-talk on the same rating scale, the pre-intervention mean was 2.3 and the post- intervention mean increased to 3.3. The data indicates that there was an increase in teachers’ feeling of efficacy as a result of the instructional coaching in aiding their ability to design and execute protocols with their students to support student-talk. The teacher interviews provide a more detailed explanation about how instructional coaching pushed their capacity to plan for and implement protocols. (See Appendix A) During the post-interview Ms. Ginger made the following comment:

Whenever someone comes into watch your classroom, it holds you much more accountable and so that helps a lot just knowing that—hey—we talked about this and now I'm going to try something new—which is taking a risk. And you're going to come in and see how it goes and we're going to talk about it afterwards. It lowers the risk because those conversations are so supportive. And then, I'm going and see how it goes and we're going to talk about it afterwards. It lowers the risk because those conversations are so supportive. And then, I'm going to go back and make those changes and you'll come back to see what those changes are...it keeps me accountable about growing my practice.

Ms. Ginger’s comment summarizes the research; instructional coaching has a positive impact on growing a teacher’s instructional practices. Mr. Armstrong shared, “Coaching has a lot to do with the structures that I am providing for student-talk making me aware that I cannot wing-it and go trudging off into the woods without a compass.” Mr. Green expressed that instructional coaching helped to move his practice forward as well, “I think through coaching I improved my

planning; we gave students multiple ways of seeing the protocol. A short listing of steps in the protocol I designed made it easy for them to see and follow when they were talking.” From my researcher journal, I recorded that all teachers designed protocols that included essential elements to scaffold student talk such as short and concise directions, a sequence of steps that build upon one another, the application of academic language, and the inclusion of graphic organizers and sentence frames. (See Appendix B)

### **Impact/Process Data: Teacher Planning**

According to my research journal, the best indicator of teacher’s instructional growth during the interventions was the preparation of their lesson plans and corresponding materials. All teachers went through the process of identifying a language target for students before planning a lesson. Afterward, they selected essential items to include in a protocol to aid student-talk. Each of the protocols created by teachers unfolded in a logical sequence and was written on a poster or handout for students to reference during student-talk. After each coaching cycle, process data, such as low-inference observational data collected during classroom observations, was used by teachers in refining the protocol for the next rounds of student-talk. In addition to planning the protocol itself, the teachers in this intervention also spent a lot of time designing and redesigning the parallel materials accompanying the protocol.

Teachers dedicated a lot of planning time into creating graphic organizers to accompany the protocols. Ms. Ginger states:

The biggest growth, is feeling very comfortable creating a graphic organizer for the protocol. Thinking about the protocol determines how the lesson is going to unfold and the lesson determines the graphic organizer. Planning becomes super intentional. With each lesson, I am able to refine the graphic organizer so that student responses become richer.

Ms. Ginger was not alone in this assumption; all the teachers made revisions to their graphic organizers. If the protocol was the map for how to navigate student-talk, the graphic organizer was the vehicle that supported the interaction. Using process data, Ms. Ginger and Mr. Green came to the conclusion that a graphic organizer that had been provided during the PD to support student-talk was confusing for their students. (See Appendix C) During the post-observation, the majority of conversations about the data focused about how to improve supports for students during their discourse. Both teachers reported that their students spent more time fumbling with graphic organizer itself, than talking about the intended topic. The original graphic organizer had been designed from a teacher's perspective with two writing boxes on the back of the paper. In the first box, students were instructed to write a paragraph—about a topic which they were learning or had read—before talking with others. In the second box, students were to write a new paragraph about the same topic adding any new ideas they had gathered after talking with other students. The rationale for having the paragraphs on the same side of the paper was for students to be able to see the growth in their writing and to make assessing the students' writing easier for teachers. On the front of this graphic organizer, boxes were provided for students to brainstorm their ideas before writing their first paragraph (which required them to flip the paper to the back to write their first paragraph). Additional boxes were created for students to write down ideas gathered when talking with others on the front page (which required them to flip the paper again after writing the first paragraph to write those new ideas gathered from others and then flip to the back to write their second paragraph). Needless to say there was a lot of flipping back-and-forth between the front and the back of the papers. Mr. Green reported that his students struggled with the graphic organizer. He states, "The graphic organizer was confusing for my 6<sup>th</sup> graders; they kept flipping it back-and-forth but did little writing. I want to make it

more student-friendly.” Mr. Green’s revisions included clearly identifying the steps for students to follow by numbering these steps on the graphic organizer, such as “Step 1, Step 2…” and adding a grading system to hold students accountable for the work they did for each step. Although the students still had to do a lot of flipping back-and-forth, Mr. Green reported that from his perspective the new system was much more student friendly. Although I understood Mr. Green’s rationale for adding the steps to the organizer, I wondered how adding a grading system would improve student engagement. From my perspective, in this instance the students were more confused about the content than they were about the process. If I were to repeat this coaching cycle, I would definitely rethink the direction of this post-conference conversation. The data revealed that most students had written little—if any—information during Step 1 (Brainstorming) because they were asked to take notes on a video that was their first exposure to a new topic. The video was full of academic vocabulary. The video also moved quickly making it difficult for students to comprehend the information being presented and making it practically impossible to jot down information. As a result, when meeting with a partner, most students had little to say. In retrospect, I should have focused the conversation in the direction of things such as frontloading academic vocabulary prior to showing the video, bringing in realia or other ways to introduce the topic before showing the video, and incrementally pausing the video to talk with or have students talk about segments of the video.

Ms. Ginger had introduced academic vocabulary and built background knowledge with her students prior to the student-talk activity. I felt that having a conversation about the “problematic” graphic organizer was a logical next step. The data indicated that her 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were also struggling to follow the graphic organizer even though the student-talk was appropriate. In this case, the data indicated that students were not recording their partner’s ideas,

so when they went back to revise their own thinking; it may have been difficult to remember what had been shared. She decided to completely rearrange the graphic organizer so that it visually followed the steps of the protocol. As the protocol unfolded, the graphic organizer harmoniously followed. On the front page of the revised organizer was now a box for brainstorming, the essential question, and the pre-writing activity. On the back of the organizer were boxes to record ideas after meeting to talk with 2 different partners and a box for the post-writing activity. (See Appendix D) Ms. Ginger's rationale was that the new graphic organizer would better support student-talk because it was much easier for student to follow. After introducing the revised graphic organizer to her students, she reported an increase in the ideas that students were recording on the graphic organizers obtained from their partners. Additionally, she shared her students post-writing pieces included those new ideas gathered during student-talk. A big take-away for my own instructional leadership gleaned from these coaching cycles was that the data can be interpreted differently. While Ms. Ginger's next steps were logically supported by the data, Mr. Green missed interpreted the data. In supporting his assumption that the graphic organizer was the sole obstacle of effective student-talk, we missed an opportunity to improve his practice in supporting language acquisition, specifically input, for his ELs because the chosen next steps focused only on output.

### **Impact/Process Data: Implementing Protocols**

The data from this research showed that when teachers took time to plan for protocols, they were able to design effective protocols. On the other hand, when teachers did not have time to plan for certain aspects of the protocols those element were never effectively implemented. In fact, the data indicated that the teachers spent more time in the actual planning of protocols than in how to introduce the protocols to students. As indicated in my research journal, 2 of the 3

teachers did not effectively plan for how to introduce the protocols to their students during the first coaching cycle. Although the protocol was clearly written and posted as a visual reminder for students, and the accompanying materials were provided, these teachers shared that they didn't have time to plan for how they would introduce the protocols to students. In reflecting on observational data, Mr. Armstrong came to the conclusion that his students were not effectively using their talk-time. "I found that my students didn't feel an urgency during their student-talk time. They'd meet with a partner and talk about unrelated things." In reflection, Mr. Armstrong came to the realization that he had not effectively introduced the protocol to his students. Mr. Armstrong self-reports, "Sometimes my ideas are too spontaneous and students need more explanation of the protocols, sometimes I do too much improvisations. I need to do a better job introducing the protocols to students." Furthermore, Mr. Armstrong stated, "I need to take more time for planning. I need to ask myself, 'What do I want the outcome to be?' and knowing these kids, I have to really structure talking time to support them. Above all, I have to show them how to use the protocol."

In terms of taking the time to plan for how to introduce the protocol, Ms. Ginger was the exception; she did create a plan for introducing protocols. In the plan, she decided that she would introduce the steps of the protocol in conjunction with introducing the steps of the newly revised graphic organizer. The steps of the protocol would be verbally introduced while referring to the posted protocol and graphic organizer. After introducing each step of the protocol, she would provide student "talk-time" to reiterate with each other what they would be doing for that step of the protocol. If needed, Ms. Ginger decided that she would go back and model any parts of the protocol for the students. As indicated by the observational data, her plan unfolded exactly as intended.

## **Impact Data: Teacher Model**

An alarming trend surfacing from the data showed a disconnection between the teachers' intentions about modeling protocols for students and the teachers' actions in modeling these protocols. Despite their intentions to model the protocol as part the next steps from the post-observational conferences, none of the teachers modeled for the students how to use the protocol. Even when teachers did plan for introducing the protocols to students, the sharing of the steps of the protocols was always verbally articulated rather than the teachers actually modeling for students how to follow the steps of the protocol. The research shows that for English learners, verbal directions are not enough, teachers need to show and tell students what students need to know. Optimally, teachers need to model for students what they are expected to produce (Gibbons 2015, Wells & Arauz 2006). Mr. Green did ask me to come-in to help him to help him plan for modeling the protocol for students; however, I received an email from Mr. Green on the morning of our meeting explaining that he was called in for an school meeting so he would not be able to meet with me. Consequently, we never planned a lesson that modeled the protocol for students and the protocol was verbally introduced in the subsequent lesson.

## **Implications and Conclusions**

Providing teachers instructional coaching does have a positive impact on teachers' feelings of efficacy in being able to plan for and implement protocols to support strategies that strengthen student-talk. Through this action research, I witnessed success in the teachers intentionally planning for protocols, specifically being able to identify essential elements to include in a protocol and creating visual representations of the protocol that can be posted for students to see and follow during their discourse. I also saw success in the teachers' planning of

ancillary materials to accompany the protocols such as graphic organizers and sentence frames. Perhaps, the strongest outcome gleaned from the process data of this researcher project was the redesigning of the “Stronger and Clearer” graphic organizer to parallel the protocol. As a result of the instructional coaching teachers were more intentional in identifying language targets prior to designing protocols to support these targets. Teachers reported have more confidence in creating protocols to support student-talk and teachers were becoming more aware that more planning was needed about how protocols will be introduced to students. All teachers became more purposeful in introducing the protocols to students—even though the most common instruction was explaining each step of the protocol to students while referring to the protocol. Finally, teachers reported that instructional coaching helped them to become more reflective about their own instructional practices and they would like to receive more coaching in the future in refining their craft to better meet the needs of the range of students in their classrooms.

The implications of these findings suggest that teacher training through professional development is most effective when coupled with instructional coaching. Firstly, by receiving instructional coaching teachers do change the ways in which they plan for engaging students in oral language production activities. As a result of the instructional coaching teachers are much more intentional about the planning. Secondly, these findings suggest that teacher efficacy increases as a result of receiving instructional coaching. Thirdly, instructional coaching supports teachers in identifying areas of growth and the next steps in improving instruction.

### **Possible Limitations of the Study and Ideas for Further Research**

In reflection of this research, the findings showed that instructional coaching has a positive impact on teacher’s feeling of efficacy in planning and implementing protocols to

support student-talk; however, the results also revealed discrepancies in what was planned for and what was implemented by teachers. A reason for this discrepancy may have been the timing of the intervention. My original plan for the intervention provided each teacher with 4 coaching cycles over a 6 week period. There were several factors that prohibited this timeline: a new ELA/ELD adoption, the state testing timeline and a lack of self-reported teacher planning time. As I begin the intervention in early March 2016, concerns about our current ELA and ELD curriculum reached a climax. Student data, teacher and administrator input, and a directive from the Superintendent meant that I would be overseeing an ELA/ELD Pilot Adoption between March 2016 and June 2016. Though I fully supported the pilot adoption, managing this tremendous undertaking meant that I would need to curtail the time I could commit to instructional coaching. Additionally, with the window of the end-of-the-year state test opened in April. As a result, the timeline of the intervention was reduced from 6 weeks to 4 weeks, and I had to settle on 2-3 coaching cycles per teacher. I found that once the momentum around planning for protocols took hold and teachers started to refine the process of implementing these protocols, the intervention ended; therefore, I was never able to push teachers to plan for how to model of a protocol for their students. This may explain the discrepancy between teachers' growth in designing protocols and their inability to effectively introduce these protocols by modeling them. Another limitation of the study (out of my control) was the lack of time teachers spent in planning how to implement the protocol in the classroom. The findings revealed that the majority of planning time was spent designing protocol, whereas little time was spent on planning for how to introduce these protocols. The reason for this finding may be that teachers just don't have enough time to plan. Each of these teachers had other responsibilities competing with their instructional prep time, such as SST meetings, site and district leadership

responsibilities as well as planning for other content areas they teach. Right before this intervention began, I even asked Mr. Armstrong to be an ELA/ELD adoption pilot teacher. Possible areas of future research may focus on the amount of planning time for teachers and how that planning time is used.

Assuming teachers do have enough planning time, another reason that may have contributed to teachers' inability to consistently introduce protocols to support student-talk may be that "introducing protocols to students" was never addressed during this professional development training. Perhaps, the teachers chose to focus on planning for elements of the PD in which they felt comfortable, such as designing the sequence the of steps of a protocol and creating supplementary materials, in lieu of addressing those elements in which they did not feel comfortable, such as modeling the protocol for their students. The research suggests one of the most effect way of building successful student-talk is modeling for students what student-talk looks like and sounds like (Frey & Fisher 2010, Gibbons 2015, Mercer 2002, Santos & Darling-Hammond 2014, Zwiers 2014). During future PDs, I will include in the training how to introduce protocols, specifically, how to model protocols for students.

This action research suggests a few areas of further exploration. The first area to explore is the amount time teachers spend participating in instructional coaching. In other words, what is the minimum number of coaching cycles a teacher needs to positively impact the effectiveness of implementing what is learned through professional development? Another area to explore relates to a facilitator's planning for professional development. If teachers are expected to implement what is learned in training, what do trainers need to know about teachers' levels of efficacy going into the training? How can the trainings be tailored to meet the range of knowledge held by participating teachers so that content is meaningful for all teachers? Should

pre-professional development surveys be a regular practice in PD so that trainings can be tailored to fit the needs of teachers? Finally, how are teachers being asked to use their planning time?

Should planning time be a non-negotiable part of professional development?

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## Appendices

### Appendix A:

#### Pre-intervention Teacher Survey

##### Perceptions of Efficacy

Please rate how strongly you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Right now, I believe that I can identify essential elements to include in a protocol to support student-talk.				
Right now, I believe that I can design an effective protocol to support students in successful student-talk.				
Right now, I believe I can effectively introduce a protocol to students to support student-talk.				

1. How would you describe student-talk in your classroom at the present time? (areas of strength/areas of growth)
2. Tell me about your areas of strength and area growth when planning for student-talk?
3. Before you received training in protocols during PD in February, describe your understanding about using protocols?
4. As a result of the PD, how has your understanding of protocols changed?
5. Before receiving training in protocols, what kinds of supports did you provide for students to help them during student-talk?
6. What supports do you think would help you plan and implement protocols into lessons to support student-talk?

#### Post-intervention Teacher Survey

##### Perceptions of Efficacy

Please rate how strongly you agree with the following statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Right now, I believe that I can identify essential elements to include in a protocol to support student-talk				

Right now, I believe that I can design an effective protocol to support students in successful student-talk.				
Right now, I believe I can effectively introduce a protocol to students to support student-talk.				

1. How would you describe student-talk in your classroom at the present time? (areas of strength/areas of growth)
2. Tell me about your areas of strength and area growth when planning for student-talk?
3. As a result of these coaching sessions, how have your perceptions about using protocols to support student talk changed?
4. As a result of these coaching sessions, what has changed about the way you plan for student-talk?
5. Did these coach sessions help you to build efficacy in planning and implementing protocols to support student-talk? Please explain...

## **Appendix B:**

### **Research Journal Questions**

#### Pre-observation

1. What oral language strategy has Teacher \_\_\_\_ identified that will be used during this lesson?
2. What skills has Teacher \_\_\_\_ identified that students need to successfully use this strategy?
3. What essential elements had Teacher \_\_\_\_ identified that will need to be in a protocol to support students using this strategy?
4. Describe the protocol that Teacher \_\_\_\_ created to support the \_\_\_\_\_ strategy.
5. How does the teacher plan to introduce this protocol to students?
6. How will Teacher \_\_\_\_ support students in following this protocol?
7. How will Teacher \_\_\_\_ evaluate the effectiveness of this protocol in supporting this strategy to strengthen student-talk?

#### Post-Observation

1. How effectively did Teacher \_\_\_\_ plan for implementing a protocol to support the \_\_\_\_\_ strategy?
2. How effectively did Teacher \_\_\_\_ introduce the protocol to students?
3. How effective was protocol in supporting the \_\_\_\_\_ strategy.
4. What changes could be made in planning or implementing this protocol?

#### Post-coaching

1. Were the goals of this coaching cycle met? How effectively?
2. What next steps were established?
3. What changes in this coaching cycle would better support the teacher?
4. What are my next steps in supporting this teacher?

## Appendix C: Graphic Organizer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic**

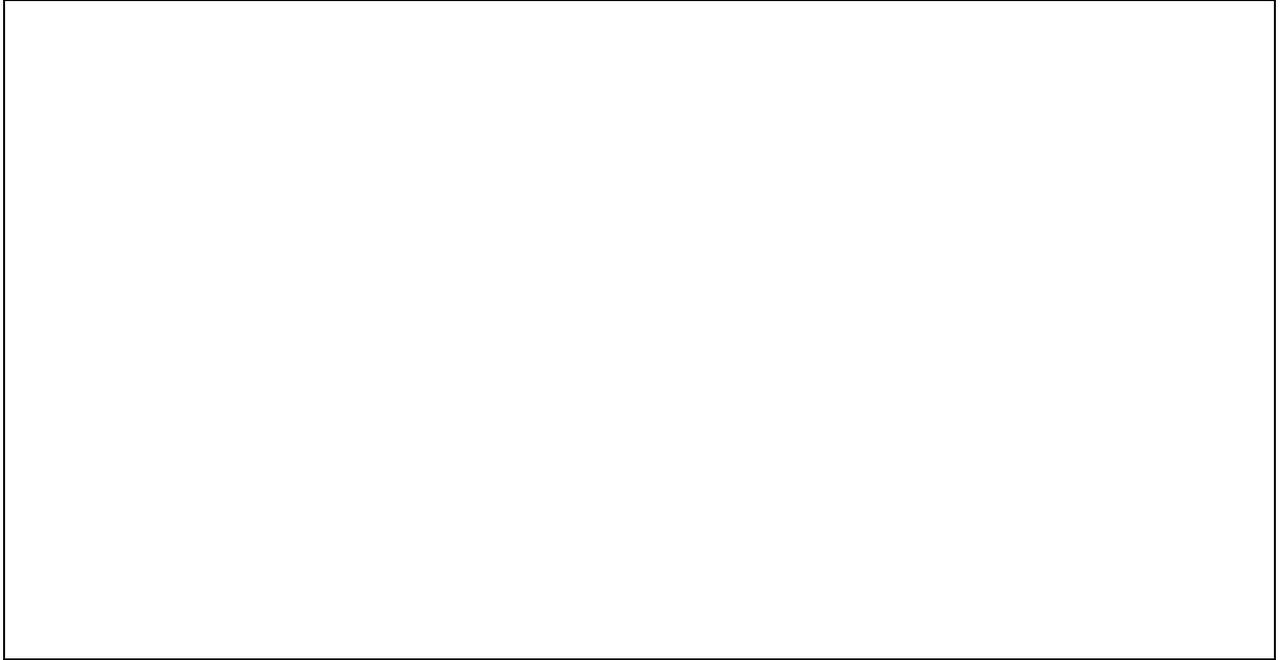
My arguments:

Additional arguments from 1<sup>st</sup> meeting...

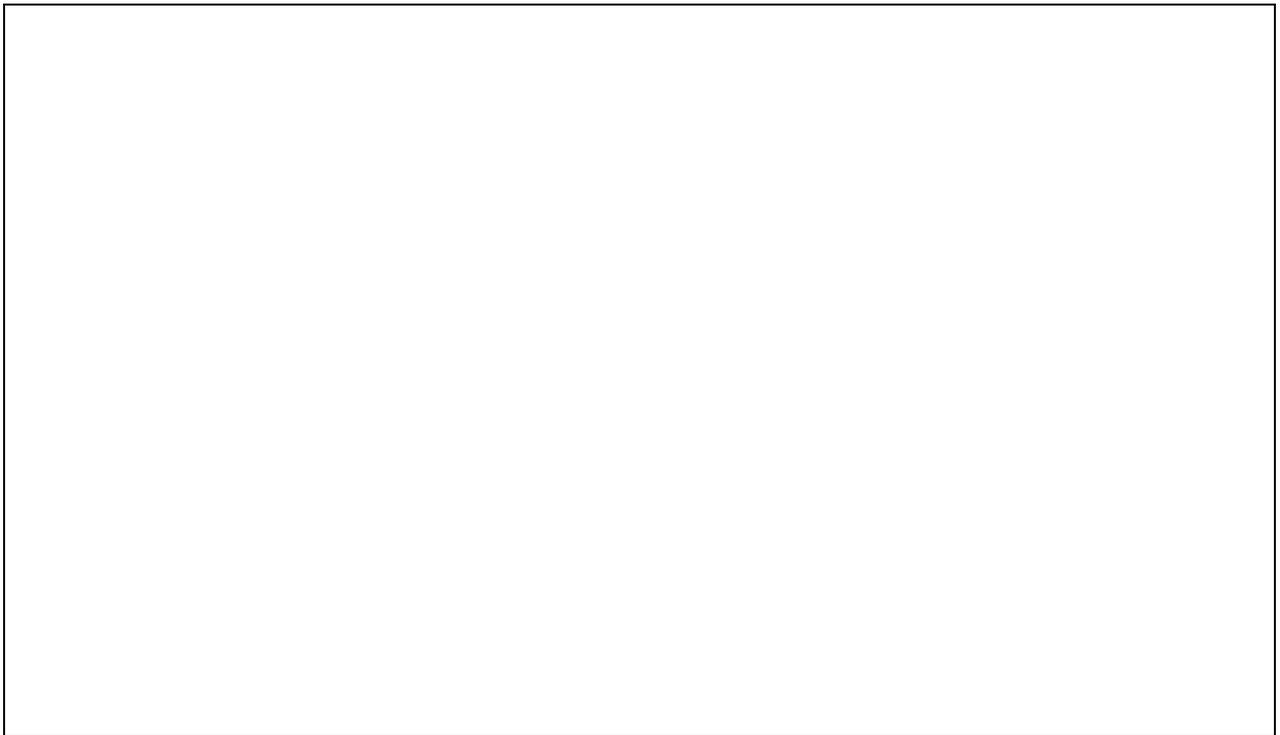
Additional arguments from 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting...

**What is your stance on ...?**

Pre-writing

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for pre-writing notes.

Post Writing (Fold paper in half/Write the post without looking to the Pre-write)

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for post-writing notes.



