

5-2015

## Effective Practices for Developing Academic Language and Writing Skills in English Language Learners in the Elementary School Setting

Jenna N. Emadzadeh  
*Dominican University of California*

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2015.edu.02>

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

---

### Recommended Citation

Emadzadeh, Jenna N., "Effective Practices for Developing Academic Language and Writing Skills in English Language Learners in the Elementary School Setting" (2015). *Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects*. 158.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2015.edu.02>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

Title Page

Effective Practices for Developing Academic Language and Writing Skills in English Language Learners in the Elementary School Setting

Jenna Emadzadeh

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2015

## Effective Practices for Teaching English Language Learners 2

### Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Jenna Emadzadeh  
Candidate

May 1, 2015  
Date

Madalienne F. Peters, Ed.D.  
Thesis Advisor

May 1, 2015  
Date

Elizabeth Truesdell, Ph.D.  
Program Chair

May 1, 2015  
Date

Copyright 2015 by Jenna Emadzadeh.  
All rights reserved.

Acknowledgments

Madalienne Peters, thank you for your sincere care and help from day one. I truly appreciate your willingness to help and support me through this process (as well as pushing us through our research). Suzanne Roybal, you have such incredible patience and attention to detail. Thank you for your help and direction in regards to research and navigating the Dominican Library online tools. Thank you for taking the time to review all of my references and in-text citations – you are amazing!

K.O.D., E.E., and K.J. - thank you for supporting me as a first year teacher and making me feel at home from day one. I truly appreciate your patience, guidance, and willingness to answer all my questions. E.P. – thank you for allowing me to interview you and for your insight. You are a true role model in regards to teaching ELLs. Molly and Amanda - I am so grateful that we went through our journey towards education together and that we have one another throughout this road ahead. Mom and Baba, thank you for supporting me throughout my life. To my dear teachers - Ms. Cowell, Ms. Miller, Ms. Else, Mrs. Tinnel, thank you for inspiring me to become a teacher. I am so grateful to have had you as a teacher and as a role model. I hope to one day have a similar positive impact on my own students as you had on me.

To all my students, and my English Language Learners - thank you for being the inspiration in my focus and research.

Table of Contents

TITLE PAGE.....	1
SIGNATURE SHEET .....	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	5
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	9
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM .....	9
PURPOSE STATEMENT .....	10
THEORETICAL RATIONALE.....	11
ASSUMPTIONS .....	13
BACKGROUND AND NEED .....	14
SUMMARY .....	15
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	16
INTRODUCTION .....	16
REVIEW OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH.....	20
PERSONAL COMMUNICATION/INTERVIEW WITH AN EXPERT .....	29
CHAPTER 3 METHOD.....	31
RESEARCH APPROACH .....	31
QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTED.....	31
ETHICAL STANDARDS .....	32
SAMPLE AND SITE .....	32
ACCESS AND PERMISSIONS .....	33

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURES .....	34
DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH.....	34
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	36
THEMES .....	38
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION /ANALYSIS.....	39
SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS.....	39
COMPARISON OF FINDINGS TO THE LITERATURE.....	39
LIMITATIONS/GAPS IN THE RESEARCH.....	41
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	42
OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	42
REFERENCES .....	44

Abstract

With an increased population of English Language Learners (ELLs), educators are in need of programs and strategies that help their students learn academic content while learning to understand, speak, read, and write English (Duessen, Autio, Roccegrandi & Hanita, 2014). ELLs face several obstacles while learning in an elementary school classroom.

Studies have shown the positive effects of word analysis and vocabulary learning strategies on student achievement (Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively & White, 2004). Project GLAD is a model of professional development in the area of language acquisition and literacy that focuses on such instruction. According to Echevarria and Short (2000), ELLs have an “added complexity of having to learn and use high-level academic English as they study challenging content in a new language” (p. 1). The purpose of this study is to identify effective practices for teaching English-Language Arts to elementary school children who are ELLs and struggling to build literacy skills.

This teacher action research project involved 20 students at the fifth grade level, at varying levels of English language proficiency. Qualitative data were gathered on the students using writing samples collected over a one-month period where students receive targeted instruction on writing in connection with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This instruction took place during ELD instruction time for 45-minutes each day, for four days a week. The researcher compared student rubric scores from the writing prompts before and after the received explicit instruction.

Results indicate that direct and explicit instruction involving academic vocabulary and instruction targeting specific writing strategies can help improve student’s writing abilities.



The researcher believes there are gaps in the research in regards to teaching students who face multiple challenges, for example, students who are both ELLs and who have learning disabilities and/or Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Implications of the findings suggest that there should be specific programs and strategies for students who are Newcomers, as well as specific strategies for teaching students with multiple learning needs. Additionally, it would be beneficial to have additional research and strategies for upper grades in regards to teaching ELLs.

### Conclusion

Studies have shown that “students achieve significantly better in programs that teach language through cognitively complex academic content;” additionally, “ESL pullout in the early grades, is the least successful program model for students’ long term academic achievement” (Project GLAD, 2014, p. 4). This study involves students working in an intact classroom setting using a rotation model versus a pullout program; the study also incorporates the use of teaching language and writing in conjunction with academic content of the students’ grade level. Students in the 21st century are reading more non-fiction texts and writing more expository pieces that are integrated into their content curriculum. With the new Common Core State Standards, a change in testing, an increase in the use of technology, and overall higher expected levels of critical thinking, collaboration and discussion, ELLs have an increased difficulty in comprehending the material and showing academic achievement. Educators must support these students in order for successful learning to occur.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

It is common for teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to teach in a classroom with English Language Learners (ELLs) and possibly even students who are Newcomers. This is especially apparent in California. Many teachers already have experience working with ELLs, have taken one or more courses on teaching ELLs, and may have completed Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD) Training, or an equivalent training for teaching ELLs. However, even through this education, training, and experience, teachers may not feel prepared to teach ELLs in their classroom. In addition, it is evident that these students are frustrated and becoming unengaged due to the curriculum. On the other hand, several of them are motivated to learn more and simply need a “plus one.” Educators have the opportunity to positively impact this population, enhance student learning and engagement, as well as make content more comprehensible through implementing best practices for teaching English Language Learners.

### Statement of Problem

With the growing number of ELLs in our state, teachers must know and understand effective practices for teaching ELLs. There is an achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers. Moreover, ELLs continue to score lower in assessments and show less growth in regards to reaching content standards. Understanding effective teaching methods and strategies is not only significant for the teacher, but also helpful for ELLs; “it is currently not possible to conclude that any of these approaches consistently confer an advantage to learners” (Shanahan & Beck, as cited in Kim, Olson, Scarcella, Kramer, Pearson, VanDyk, Collins & Land, 2011, p. 29). With an increase in literacy demands for teachers, preparation is necessary of mainstream general education teachers to teach ELLs. In addition to teacher training, teachers can benefit from taking time to get to know their students, understanding English Language

Development and language acquisition, as well as learning and utilizing effective practices for teaching ELL student's literacy skills.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine and identify effective practices for teaching ELLs in the elementary school setting. This study focuses on teaching English language arts and building literacy skills, specifically academic language and vocabulary, to ELLs in order to enhance their expository writing abilities based on the CCSS. It has become essential for ELLs to gain proficiency in their literacy skills, especially in regards to writing, since the shift to CCSS and 21st century learning. Students are expected to think critically, communicate, and collaborate. These are tasks that are difficult for many ELLs who are not only struggling to comprehend the content, but who are also working towards learning the language and building their literacy skills. Furthermore, students are expected to read non-fiction text and to write expository text. With this change and expectation, there is a greater importance in educators understanding effective teaching methods for English Language Learners, especially in regards to writing and enhancing their literacy skills.

### Research Question

*What practices are effective for teaching English language learners (ELLs) academic language and vocabulary, as well as writing skills, specifically expository writing connected to the Common Core State Standards, in the upper elementary school setting?*

### Key Words Defined

**ELL:** English language learners are students who are learning English in addition to their native language. They may or may not be literate in their native language, and they have varying levels of proficiency in regards to the English language.

**Newcomer:** A student who is new to the United States of America and who is currently learning English and beginning to acquire language. These students have been in the U.S. for less than three academic school years.

**Instructional practices:** Instructional practices include tools, strategies, methods, etc. that teachers use within the classroom to enhance student learning.

**Effective:** Effective means that the intended or desired result had a successful outcome.

**Academic Language:** Academic language refers to the language students use in class, for example, vocabulary specific to the curriculum, content-area related language, etc.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching:** “defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2010, p. 31).

### Theoretical Rationale

The key theories behind the research question include Gay’s Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010), Chomsky’s Theory on Language Development (Lemetyinen, 2012), and other Cognitive Learning Theories. This research also heavily focuses on the evidence behind Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD) strategies for teaching ELLs (Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD, 2014). The foundation of GLAD is based on extensive research and learning theories.

Gay (2010) explains the importance of “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity...ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnicity diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106). In addition to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment, teachers can also benefit from understanding language acquisition and cognitive learning theories. Lemetyinen (2012) states, “Chomsky argued that children will never acquire the tools needed for processing an infinite number of sentences if the language acquisition mechanism was dependent on language input alone” (Lemetyinen, 2012, para. 6). Cognitive Learning Theory demonstrates moving beyond language input alone and explains human behavior by understanding thought processes. Furthermore, the theory discusses learning that is concerned with acquisition of problem-solving abilities and information about the environment (Sincero, 2011).

The main focus of this research is founded on the GLAD model. Project GLAD is based on current areas of research including: “Teaching to the Highest,” “Brain research- metacognition,” “brain research- second language acquisition,” “reading and writing to, with, and by students,” “active participation in all components of the unit, negotiating for meaning, comprehensible output personal interactions and 10/2,” “a theme, year planning, and strategies that foster standards-based learning respect, trust, identity, and voice,” “the use of personal interaction values oral ideas and cross-cultural respect,” and finally, “ongoing assessment and evaluation using a variety of tools to provide reflection on what has been learned, how it was learned and what will be done with the information” (Bay Area GLAD & BE GLAD, 2014, para. 11).

“Project GLAD is a model of professional development in the area of language acquisition and literacy. The strategies and model promote English

language acquisition, academic achievement, and cross-cultural skills. Project GLAD was developed and field tested for nine years in the Fountain Valley School District and is based on years of experience with integrated approaches for teaching language. Tied to the Common Core State Standards and State Standards, the model trains teachers to provide access to core curriculum using local district guidelines and curriculum” (Bay Area GLAD & BE GLAD, 2014, para. 1).

### Assumptions

The researcher’s assumptions are that ELLs will learn best when given clear, explicit, and differentiated instruction, as well as hands-on learning techniques paired with visual and auditory means. The researcher believes that implementing GLAD strategies into the curriculum will be beneficial for the ELLs. Additionally, that ELLs can benefit from instruction provided in an integrated way, for example integrating language and content to help build both language skills in the classroom as well as content knowledge and comprehension. This is especially important in regards to 21st century learning and the CCSS, and in order for these students to be successful on their road to college and career. In regards to literacy skills, and moreover, writing skills with a focus in writing expository/informative pieces, the researcher assumes that ELL students will be more successful if and when they receive instruction using “proven” effective practices based on previous research for teaching ELLs, for example, using GLAD strategies. Direct and explicit instruction focused on academic vocabulary may also improve students’ writing. Additionally, teaching specific writing skills and providing a writing checklist may also help students show improvement in their writing abilities. The researcher assumes that the Newcomers will show less progress in their writing than other ELLs, but that they will show progress nonetheless. The

researcher also believes that there may be less growth shown in students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and who are in Resource. Additionally, the researcher believes incorporating key aspects of culturally responsive teaching will have positive outcomes in the classroom as well as on student learning.

### Background and Need

According to the California Department of Education, in the 2013-2014 year, there were approximately 1.4 million English Language Learners in California public schools, and the 1,413,549 students who are ELLs constitute 22.7 percent of the total enrollment in California public schools (California Department of Education, 2014). Additionally, since Proposition 227, it is mandated in most schools and districts that English Language Learners be taught in Sheltered Content Instruction for forty-five minutes per day. That being said, the number of English Language Learners in the California education system is large and growing, and educators must acknowledge and take action on learning and utilizing instructional practices that will yield positive outcomes for their students. In California, the goal is to ensure ELLs acquire full proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible. An additional school and district goal, as suggested by the California Department of Education, is to have ELLs achieve the same rigorous grade-level academic standards expected of all students within a reasonable period of time. “Meeting these two goals will help close the achievement gap that separates English learners from their native English-speaking peers. In order to accomplish these goals, all English learners are provided with English language development (ELD) instruction targeted to their English proficiency level and appropriate academic instruction” (California Department of Education, 2014, para. 5). ELD instruction can happen in one of three settings: Structured English Immersion, English Language Mainstream, or Alternative Program. The education

system can benefit from research in what type of program is effective, as well as what strategies will yield the most success in ELL students.

### Summary

It is evident that there is a need for educators to learn how to effectively teach English Language Learners. For ELLs, academic language is both abstract and complex. Additionally, the structure of language can be sophisticated and furthermore, challenging. With the CCSS, there is a renewed focus on teaching academic English (AE) across the curriculum (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014). Language and literacy play an important role in building students' writing abilities. Due to this, and the fact that the number of ELL students in our nation is large and growing, identifying effective practices for teaching ELLs in the elementary general education school setting is imperative. It is also necessary for Newcomer programs to be implemented and to see what available strategies are and are not effective for Newcomers, especially in the upper elementary grades. This study focuses on teaching English language arts and building literacy skills, specifically academic language and vocabulary, to ELLs in order to enhance their expository/informative writing abilities based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).



# Effective Practices for Teaching English Language Learners 16

## Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

### Introduction

This section is an examination of the research literature on effective practices for teaching ELLs. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context, Framework and Standards (Culturally Responsive Teaching, Collaboration, and Language Acquisition), Review of the Academic Research (Project GLAD, Academic Vocabulary Instruction, writing Strategies for Teaching ELLs, and Additional Strategies for Teaching ELLs), Statistical Information, and Personal Communication/Interview with an Expert.

### **Historical Context**

English Language Development instruction and requirements have changed over the years in the state of California. Due to Proposition 227, also known as the “English Language in Public Schools Statue,” the way LEP, “Limited English Proficient” students are taught in California has changed. Almost all bilingual education programs and classes were eliminated due to Prop. 227, and all public school instruction is required to be in English. Currently, it is mandated that English Language Learners be taught in Sheltered Content and instruction for forty-five minutes per day. “ELs who lack reasonable fluency in English, as defined by the district, must be placed in a SEI program unless their parent/guardian requests placement in an English language mainstream classroom or is granted a parental exception waiver for an alternative program. Of course, all ELs must receive additional and appropriate educational services until they are reclassified (*EC 305, CCR, Title 5, sections 11301 and 11302*)” (California Department of Education, 2006, para. 14).

Goldenberg (2013) synthesizes research on English Language Learners and reveals what we already know, and what we have yet to learn in regards to effective instruction. Although publications focused on improving instruction for ELLs has soared since the early 2000s, with more than 5 million ELL students in our nation's schools, there is "surprisingly little research on common practices or recommendations for practice" (Goldenberg, 2013, p. 4). Research shows that: 1. Generally effective practices are likely to be effective for ELLs, 2. ELLs require additional instructional supports, 3. The home language can be used to promote academic development, and 4. ELLs need early and ample opportunities to develop proficiency in English (Goldenberg, 2013).

There has been an increasingly growing number of ELLs in the United States of America, particularly in California. This makes closing these gaps in research even more imperative. Additionally, with the switch to Common Core State Standards, instructional expectations can be more difficult for ELLs, this is even more apparent in regards to English Language Arts, and moreover, in writing.

### **Frameworks and Standards**

The shift to Common Core State Standards and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning has created higher expectations for students to think crucially, communicate, and collaborate with one another.

Echevarria (2000), a professor of Education Psychology at Cal State, Long Beach, discusses how many students today struggle to meet high academic standards and how ELLs have an "added complexity of having to learn and use high-level academic English as they study challenging content in a new language" (p. 1). She provides four "best practices" to use with ELLs to make content more comprehensible as well as to provide opportunities for practice using academic English. These include: 1. Using supplementary materials to make lesson clear and meaningful,

2. Providing opportunities for interaction, 3. Explicitly linking content concepts to students' background experiences, and 4. Using a variety of techniques to make the content concepts clear (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). These strategies can help provide more opportunities for students to collaborate with one another while making content more comprehensible, which aligns with both CCSS and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

The WestEd Framework is a framework focused on developing English Language proficiency in correspondence with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Their goal is to provide guidance for teachers on how to use the CCSS and NGSS as a tool when creating and evaluating English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards. This framework connects with Echevarria's beliefs in regards to instructing ELLs, "English language learners (ELLs) thus face a double challenge: they must simultaneously learn how to acquire enough of a second language to participate in an academic setting while gaining an understanding of the knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines through that second language" (p. ii). This framework provides strategies to support ELLs access grade-level content while simultaneously building their language proficiency (WestEd., 2003). Research has shown both the importance and need for teacher training in regards to teaching ELLs and in regards to teaching specific strategies.

Halladay and Moses (2013) also discuss how to use the Common Core Standards to meet the needs of diverse learners. Due to the fact that English learners are a growing demographic in US schools and CCSS are being implemented in schools across the nation, the two are important to connect. In regards to academic assessments, studies show that native English speakers outperform English learners. Also, comprehension challenges in English can be attributed to the limited background knowledge and underdeveloped vocabulary of ELLs. The authors point out

the importance of not categorizing ELLs into one homogenous group, but to rather consider the population ranges - age, interest, cultural background, linguistic background, SES, literacy experiences outside of school, etc. (Halladay & Moses, 2013). Student grouping approaches can play an important role in instruction as well as student's success, as can recognizing students and practicing culturally responsive teaching.

### Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teachers must learn to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of their students into their instruction. There is great significance to reversing the underachievement of students of color (Gay, 2010). Gay explains how culturally responsive teaching is a dynamic process and she divides the book into four sections in order to convey these goals - the importance of story making, achievement problems encountered by students of color, a discussion of national achievement trends among these students, and finally, assertions about how student achievement can be improved. "Culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities" (Gay, 2010, p. 21). This connects greatly to GLAD's belief in celebrating student's native home language and diversity within the classroom.

### Collaboration

In relation to Culturally responsive teaching, students acquiring language can greatly benefit from working with their peers, having oral discourse, and collaborating with one another. Nagle (2013) discusses the importance of collaboration "in reading, writing, and talking about science with English learners" and their work "illustrates the importance of

affordances of opportunities to talk and work together, enabling us to recognize

each other's strengths and expertise and seek to broaden the understandings of one another's teaching contexts, thereby developing our mutual trust. Such mutual trust came from the accumulated opportunities for working and talking together in order to share our knowledge, ideas, expertise, responsibilities, and anxieties in making our research project work" (p. 6). Providing time for collaboration within the school day can help ELLs in their English language acquisition process.

### Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning are two processes that are extremely important for educators to understand when teaching ELLs. Krashen's work on Second Language Acquisition has been a basis for Project GLAD. "Language acquisition is very similar to the process used in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language—natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances by which the messages they are conveying and understanding" (p. 1). Important factors that are critical when planning instruction for ELLs are: formal and informal linguistic environments, the domain of conscious grammar, the role of the first language, routines and patterns, and theory to practice (Krashen, 1981).

## **Review of Academic Research**

### Project Glad

Project GLAD is a model of professional development in the area of language acquisition and literacy. These strategies are created for promoting English language acquisition, academic achievement, and cross-cultural skills. They focus on ELLs, but are beneficial for all students. Their project is based on research findings that include: teaching to the highest, brain research on

metacognition, modeling, second language acquisition, reading and writing to, with, and by students, active participation in all components of the unit, and ongoing assessment and evaluation using a variety of tools to provide reflection on what is learned (Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD, 2014). A key factor in the GLAD model is thematic instruction and teaching skills and content together rather than teaching skills and content in isolation from one another. GLAD is an instructional model that provides clear and practical strategies that not only develop metacognitive use of higher-level language and literacy, but also provides students with opportunities to interact with one another.

The strategies set forth by Project GLAD are based on current areas of research. Goodman, Cummins, Smith, & Collier, as cited in Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD (2014), explain the importance of creating a classroom environment that values the students, allows for authentic use of academic language, and teaches to the highest standards and expectations for all students, not just ELLs. GLAD also focuses on several brain research, both metacognition and Second Language Acquisition. Krashen, Collier, and Vygotsky as cited in Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD (2014), suggest insuring a common base of understanding and scaffolding. Costa, Rico, Krashen, Long, Gardner, and Lazear as cited in Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD (2014), believe that students should be taught how and encouraged to organize their thoughts through employing multiple intelligences, for example: graphic organizers, summaries, visuals, etc. Research on Second Language Acquisition states the significance of providing students with a purpose of learning, a state result or goal, choice, inquiry, and opportunities for cooperative activities involving problem solving, social skills, and in heterogeneous groupings (Long, Kagan, vygotsky, Cummins, Shefelbine as cited in Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD, 2014). Exploring studies that have examined the effects and results in using GLAD strategies is imperative.

A study by Deussen, Autio, Roccograndi, and Hanita (2014) focuses on the impact of Project GLAD; specifically, the main focus was on the impact of GLAD on students' literacy and science learning. The study was a "cluster-randomized trial of sheltered instruction." Research has shown a need for more programs that help students access academic content while simultaneously learning to better understand English, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is especially important with the increased population of ELLs. Their study showed that sheltered instruction taught by a mainstream classroom teacher can meet ELLs' instructional needs. No significant treatment effect was found for the general student population in the first year of implementation; however, they found marginally significant results for ELLs, mainly in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing traits of "ideas and organization." It should be noted that this study was a fifth grade teachers implementation of Project GLAD; the researchers propose that a second year of implementation may reveal more about GLADs impact on student achievement (Deussen, Autio, Roccograndi, Hanita, 2014).

#### Academic Vocabulary Instruction

DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera (2014) focused on what is known about Academic English (AE) within the context of K-12 education. The authors discuss "how AE is conceptualized in the education research literature, how these conceptualizations are realized in instructional practices, and the implications of these conceptualizations for teacher education and professional development" (p. 446). Through this review, their hope is to "shed light" on practices that allow ELLs and other students the opportunity to learn academic language. They collected and analyzed literature from the U.S. Department of Education, research published in journals, books, handbooks, policy documents, and other such scholarly works and they authors used both quantitative and qualitative studies, expert opinions, etc. Their conclusions explain that

instruction is influenced by the view of academic vocabulary, improving students' AE is a concern for educators of not only ELLs, but of educators of all subjects. Finally, they concluded that "there are differences in AE across content areas that must be accounted for in instruction...classroom discussions, teachers can support their students' development of Academic English to not only clarify their thinking, but also to make connections to both written and oral texts" (p. 473). These classroom interactions can have a great effect on the acquisition of AE. The authors suggestions include several research priorities, and note that "research has 'barely begun to investigate' the ways in which AE can be instructed or developed for the broad range of learners of English" (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker & Rivera, 2014, p. 475).

Although there is a need for more research on Academic English instruction for diverse learners, it is evident that academic vocabulary instruction is a key component in teaching ELLs. A study by Stahl and Fairbanks (1989) examined the effects of comprehensive vocabulary instruction on Title 1 students' metacognitive word-learning skills and reading comprehension. The students in the study were 5th grade children in a low performing Title 1 school in California. The study used intervention strategies that focused on multifaceted metacognitive vocabulary. Specifically, the study design's purpose was to facilitate encoding words, clarifying strategies, and implementing strategies that maximize word-learning proficiency. The intervention consisted of a 12-week vocabulary intervention. The focus of the research was to help children monitor comprehension of words and to internalize and implement word-learning strategies to increase comprehension of natural texts. Their results showed strong gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary achievement as well as increased metacognitive skills. Additionally, the results show a narrowing of the achievement gap between the Title 1 school and in an above-average performing school (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1989).



Another study by Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, and White (2004) also focuses on an intervention that was designed to enhance 5th graders' academic vocabulary. In this intervention, academic vocabulary was taught in conjunction with strategies for using information from context, morphology, knowledge about multiple meanings, and from cognates to infer word meaning. This resembles Project GLAD's vocabulary instruction strategies, for example, the Cognitive Content Dictionary. The results of this study concluded that the students who were in the intervention group showed greater growth than the comparison group on knowledge of the words taught, on depth of vocabulary knowledge, on understanding multiple meanings, and on reading comprehension. Additionally, these results were not only positive for the ELLs, but also for English-only speakers. These results show that teaching word analysis and vocabulary learning strategies can have a positive effect on student achievement (Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, & White, 2004).

Khan, Majoka, and Ashfaq (2013) conducted a study with the purpose of examining the effect of vocabulary building activities on ELL students' academic achievement at the elementary level. The authors' objectives were "to examine the difference between academic achievements of elementary level students in English taught by vocabulary building activities, and by traditional method for teaching English" and "to examine the difference between academic performance in vocabulary, comprehension, creative writing and language translation of students taught by vocabulary building activities and traditional lecture method for teaching English" (para. 2). This was an experimental study that included a pre and posttest. The researchers conclude that "activity based method for teaching vocabulary is very effective method of teaching at elementary level. It does not strengthen only the vocabulary, but also it accelerates students' learning in comprehension, creative writing and language translation" (para.

6). The authors also make further recommendations for research: the importance of activity based method, teachers being provided with training on vocabulary building activities, and implementing this teaching technique into curriculum for teacher training programs. They also recommend teachers using such activities for increased learning by students and that additional research should be conducted using activity methods for teaching language in classrooms to see its effect on other aspects of learning language (Khan, Majoka & Ashfaq, 2013). Academic vocabulary instruction can affect other aspects of learning language, such as students' writing abilities.

#### Writing Strategies for Teaching ELLs

“Although explicit grammar instruction has been a source of considerable debate in second-language teaching, increasingly educational linguists assert instruction in academic language is critical... of particular concern is that contemporary English-Language-Learner (ELL) instruction focuses on making the content comprehensible to ELLs in a manner that may lead to inadequate exposure to academic language, which is considered paramount to ELLs' educational success” (Aguirre-Muñoz, Z., Park, J., Amabisca, A., & Boscardin, C. K., 2009, p. 1). With this in mind, the authors believe it is necessary to develop methods for increasing teachers' capacity to address this issue instructionally. They conclude that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and professional development programs can help teachers better analyze student writing, which is significant for addressing instructional needs. “Classroom observations and teacher interviews also suggest that the training impacted teacher practice in writing instruction. Writing instruction that explicitly focuses on language is needed to develop ELLs' skills in academic genres and is essential in moving them to more-advanced levels of English proficiency” (Aguirre-Muñoz, Z., Park, J., Amabisca, A., & Boscardin, C. K., 2009, p. 1). This

shows the importance of both academic language instruction as well as teacher training in teaching writing strategies.

Instruction on academic vocabulary can help ELLs better understand and comprehend the curriculum. Additionally, it can help enhance student's writing abilities. The UCI Writing Project (UCIWP) is based on the University of California Irvine campus. Its focus is on engaged research in English Language Arts and academic writing instruction. Specifically, it focuses on text-based analytical writing for students who are Latino English Language Learners and mainstreamed in upper grade and secondary classrooms. The researchers used a "multi-site cluster randomized controlled trial of a cognitive strategies approach to teaching text-based analytical writing" for these students (p. 3). The study consisted of 103 English teachers - either assigned to the intervention or control group. The intervention group used instructional frameworks that were well-documented for teaching ELLs who are mainstreamed in the classroom and these frameworks "emphasize the merits of a cognitive strategies approach that supports these learners' English language development" (p. 3) The teachers participated in several hours of training and learned how to apply these strategies with the use of write assessments to help their students. The study results revealed significant effects on an on-demand writing assessment. Students in the Pathway classrooms scored higher than students in the control classrooms in regards to their posttest (Kim, Olson, Scarcella, Kramer, Pearson, VanDyk, Collins, Land, 2011). An important fact to note is that teachers involved in this study went through several hours of training, a factor that is key in regards to teaching ELLs.

Project GLAD has an extensive training program for teachers; it includes a two-day workshop, four days of demonstrations, and additional follow up meetings and workshops. GLAD strategies involving writing activities include the use of: total class modeling, small group

team tasks, flexible heterogeneous groupings, the use of choice, individual practice, and writer's workshop. However, there are still gaps in research in regards to revealing specific strategies can help ELLs become better writers. Nonetheless, several researchers and educators share similar beliefs in regards to modeling and collaboration to help improve writing skills.

Nagle (2013) worked in a group to design writing lessons "that could take place within the constraints of limited time spent on science teaching, an unfortunate but common issue in elementary classrooms" (p. 8). The basis of their project comes from research by Rose and Martin, called the "teaching/learning cycle" (Nagle, 2013, p.8). This cycle enables the to guide and support students to develop knowledge through three phases of activity: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. This allows teacher "guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience" (Martin & Rose, as cited in Nagel, 2013, p.8). Such practices have shown support of academic writing development in ELLs. This also connects with research on the importance of Culturally responsive teaching, collaboration and shared experiences in the classroom, as well as GLAD's motto of "I do, we do, they do," meaning the teacher modeling the activity first, then students working whole class and/or in groups or partners, and finally, students working independently to complete the task at hand. Both modeling expectations and allowing for students to work and collaborate with others can create more confidence and heightening success in student understanding of the material as well as success in activities.

#### Additional Strategies for Teaching ELLs

Peterson and Salas (2004) provide additional strategies for teaching English Language Learners. They recommend focusing on teaching both academic content and language skills to ELLs. The authors explain that regardless of the program, the goal is to "deliver instruction to these students in a way that is understandable" (para. 3). Their strategies include: speaking

slowly, audibly, and clearly, preparing ELLs for whole-class lessons ahead of time, minimizing the use of lecture and verbal instruction as little as possible, and limiting whole class instruction. They also recommend using literature that features the students' language and culture group, encouraging students to maintain the development of their first language. The authors also stress the importance of learning about their culture and finding ways to communicate with their family (Peterson & Salas, 2004). Their beliefs on teaching ELLs connects with both Gay's Culturally Responsive Teaching and Project GLAD.

Cruz and Thornton (2009) also provide significant information as well as helpful tools and strategies, and resources for teaching ELLs. They provide information on the process of English language learning and what to expect with ELLs in the classroom. They review teaching for English Language Development, culturally pedagogy, and principles of Social Studies teaching and learning. In regards to teaching Social Studies, the tools include Social Studies-Focused ESOL research on the classroom environment, pedagogical orientation and practice, culturally sensitive pedagogy, general approaches to use, language use, sheltered instruction, individualized instruction, discussion and questioning in the classroom, discovery and exploration, and cooperative learning skills. The authors also provide resources for enacting the Social Studies curriculum - through the use of textbooks, graphic organizers, role play and simulations, visual resources, assessment, etc. (Cruz & Thornton, 2009). These additional strategies can be coupled with specific strategies during instruction with ELLs to increase comprehension of the content as well as academic achievement.

### **Statistical Information**

According the California Department of Education, in the 2013-2014 year, there were approximately 1.4 million English Language Learners in California public schools (California Department of Education, 2014). "The number of ELL students continues to grow both in terms

of total numbers and as a percentage of the total student population in the United States” (Cruz & Thornton, 2009, p. 3). It is also important to note that although the CDE collects data on 60 language groups, 95 percent of students in California speak one of ten top languages in the state. In California, 82.4% of students speak Spanish, followed by smaller percentages of: Vietnamese, Pilipino (Filipino or Tagalog), Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic, Hmong, Korean, Punjabi, and Russian (California Department of Education, 2014).

### **Personal Communication/Interview with an Expert**

The researcher interviewed a veteran teacher, E.P. (personal communication, April 22, 2015) on teaching English Language Learners. E.P. has been teaching for the past 29 years. She is bilingual, has taught bilingual education, and has always taught a student population with ELLs. Her beliefs on teaching ELLs are in line with the Statement of Problem at the heart of this research. E.P. believes that “we have failed them for the past 30 years,” and that “the people who created the Common Core State Standards did not have the ELD child in mind, especially in regards to testing.” She adds, “we are testing them with a biased-culture, and not considering that they do not have the same prior knowledge.” In addition, she believes it is important to incorporate visuals for ELLs, to focus on vocabulary and meaning, to break down the material, and model expectations. She talked about her experiences using GLAD strategies, SADAIE, and a more recent SEAL training she went through. She believes the strategies she has learned to use and uses with ELLs are good strategies, but they are “not *the* answer;” however, they are “one of many.”

### **Summary**

The research shows that there are several strategies to use when teaching ELLs. It is clear that culturally responsive teaching can have a positive effect on students. Through using cultural

characteristics, experiences, and perspective of ethnically diverse students in the classroom, teachers can create a safe, comfortable, and inclusive environment. Teachers can develop a knowledge base about cultural diversity, implement ethnic and cultural diversity content into the curriculum, and ultimately, demonstrating caring and building learning communities.

Additionally, there is an abundance of research that focuses on academic vocabulary instruction, and its significance for ELLs. Researchers have found that teaching writing skills in conjunction with content can also be beneficial for ELLs, however, there are gaps in the research in regards to what specific writing skills and strategies are most advantageous for showing improvement in writing abilities and outcomes. There is also limited research on teacher upper grade ELLs, especially students who have been in the U.S. education system since kindergarten, yet who are still below proficiency levels in regards to their CELDT (California English Language Development Test) scores. As more research is conducted, and as teachers learn, understand, and implement effective strategies and models into their classrooms, ELL students can not only improve their academic vocabulary, but they can also enhance their writing abilities, and overall, gain more language proficiency.

## Chapter 3 Method

### Research Approach

The study is a teacher action research project involving 20 students at the fifth grade level, at varying levels of proficiency. Qualitative data was gathered on the students using writing samples collected over a one-month period where students received targeted instruction on writing in connection with the Common Core State Standards. This instruction took place during ELD instruction time at the end of the school day. Instruction occurred for approximately 45-minutes, four days a week.

The researcher introduced a 5th grade content topic to the students and asked them to write everything they know about it (one paragraph, using a writing checklist). The researcher assessed these writing samples using a self-created rubric. Next, she implemented GLAD strategies and explicit instruction involving the academic vocabulary and skills for reading and responding to non-fiction text. Finally, the researcher assessed the students again prior to instruction using the same writing prompt and rubric.

### Qualitative Data Collected

The researcher collected writing samples before and after implemented instruction. The same teacher created rubric was used to score both writing samples. The pre- and post- writing sample scores were compared. These scores showed the difference in student writing abilities before and after the explicit instruction. The researcher also made note of what improvements were made, what writing checklist criteria showed development, and how their writing changed from the pre- and posttest. Additionally, she made informal observations of students during instructional time.



## Observations

The researcher made note of classroom climate, student interactions, and student behavior during instruction. The researcher noted a more positive classroom environment during ELD “Wheel” instruction time. Student who did not participate as much during general instruction time with all classroom students, participated more when interacting and sharing with 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELD students. Applying culturally responsive teaching and implementing curriculum, instruction, and strategies at the students’ level and with appropriate scaffolding also showed encouraging outcomes. Students not only participated more, but they asked more questions, and provided more detailed responses. The researcher believes that students felt more comfortable in this setting and were more willing to take risks. On the other hand, these students needed guidance when working in groups. The researcher noted that they felt comfortable discussing and sharing in their groups, but that they are still developing some of their English “speaking” skills as exemplified in the English Language Development California State Standards. Nonetheless, students were overall more responsive during this instruction time.

## Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number #10348.

## Sample and Site

The participants in this study are 20 fifth grade English Language Learners in a suburban elementary school in the Bay Area. Students are in an intact group in a self-contained class. Students’ ages range from 10-11 years old. There are 6 males and 14 females. Students in this

class are classified as 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELLs based on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Students' CELDT scores range from Beginning to Advanced. There are 5 students at the "Beginning" level, 1 student at the "Early Intermediate" level, 6 students at the "Intermediate" level, 7 students at the "Early Advanced" level, and 1 student at the "Advanced" level. There are four Newcomers in the classroom; a newcomer is defined as a student who is new to the United States of America and who is currently learning English and beginning to acquire language. These students have been in the U.S. for less than three academic school years. There are also four students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in the classroom.

\*Note: There were four students who were reclassified before the study began and were transferred into a different class during this "Wheel" time. These students were at the "Advanced" proficiency level based on their CELDT test scores and showed readiness to be reclassified.

#### Access and Permissions

The researcher is the teacher of record. The participants/students were a mix of both the teacher's students as well as other 5th grade teacher's students. The students in this class are in a "wheel" program with all the fourth and fifth grade students at the school site. These students are in this class because they are "English Language Learners" and still below or at the beginning stages of the "Advanced" level placement based on CELDT test scores – they have not been reclassified as English Language Proficient. This purpose of this "wheel" program class is to teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum standards (English language arts in addition to Social Studies and Science) with a focus on building and enhancing academic vocabulary and literacy skills.

Parents of students were given an informational letter in regards to the study. Due to the fact that this is an intact group and normal instruction, with the addition of more focused GLAD

strategies, remained - there was no additional consent needed. The principal was also informed, given an informational letter, and gave permission for the study to take place at the school site.

### Data Gathering Procedures

The data of this study included both informal observations and student writing samples. These writing samples were expository writing pieces answering a focus question based on 5<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies standards. The students were taught the content using the Social Studies text and wrote a response. Next, students were given specific instruction in academic vocabulary, and they were given writing tools and explicit instruction in writing strategies. After implemented instruction, students wrote another response to the same focus question (but in regards to a different Colonial Region). The researcher gathered both writing samples and used the same rubric to grade the students' pre- and post- instruction writing pieces. The assessments were scored at separate times, before and after instruction. They were also scored in a random order. Furthermore, the rubric used scored student writing at a fifth grade level and in conjunction with 5<sup>th</sup> grade writing expectations and standards. For the post- writing, students were able to use a provided Writing Checklist to help guide them in their writing process. The writing checklist was teacher and student created and based on the GLAD writing checklist.

### Data Analysis Approach

Data includes student writing samples, both a "pre" and "post" writing assessment. Data was analyzed using a rubric created by the researcher. The rubric measured students writing samples using the following categories: Paragraph Construction/Organization, Amount of Information, Quality of Information (including the use of academic vocabulary related to the topic), and Writing Mechanics. The same rubric was used for the Pre- and Post- writing assessment. The same rubric was used for both the "pre" and "post" writing assessment. After

writing samples were scored, each writing piece was analyzed based on the writing checklist students were taught to use and completed with their post assessment. Researcher examined writing samples for specific criteria taught during instruction, on the writing list checklist, and in coordination with 5<sup>th</sup> grade standards and ELD standards. The researcher also made note of writing development between the pre- and posttest, as well as the students' use of academic vocabulary in their writing.

Finally, the researcher compared "pre" and "post" notes and scores for each student. After each student's individual scores were compared, the researcher measured the difference in class average totals for the "pre" and "post" assessments. This analysis shows if the implemented strategies helped students improve their understanding of the content and writing abilities and skills. It also shows common trends with the students, what needs to be re-visited and/or re-taught, and what worked well. Analyzing the data can also show differences and similarities between students in the same CELDT level, students who are newcomers, and students with an IEP. The results reveal limitations in the study, suggestions for future implications, as well as areas where more research can be focused.

## Chapter 4 Findings

The study site was a suburban elementary school in the Bay Area. The study included an intact group in a self-contained class. The individuals participating in the study are 20 fifth grade English Language Learners. The participant's ages range from 10-11 years old and there were 8 males and 12 females. Students' CELDT scores ranged from Below Basic to Advanced.

**Research Findings Based on Explicit Instruction in Academic Vocabulary and Focused Writing Skills and Strategies (Based on Pre- and Post- Writing Assessment Scores)**

Participant	ELL	New Comer	RSP	CELDT Score	Pre - Writing Assessment Rubric Score	Post - Writing Assessment Rubric Score	Score Difference between Pre- and Post- Writing Assessments
1 AA	Yes	No	No	Level 4	2.5	3.13	+0.63
2 JB	Yes	No	*SST	Level 4	3	3.38	+0.38
3 AB	Yes	No	No	Level 4	ABSENT	3	NO SCORE
4 BH	Yes	No	No	Level 3	2.5	2.88	+0.38
5 JG	Yes	Yes 2	Yes	Level 1	1.25	1.5	+0.25
6 ADe	Yes	No	No	Level 4	2	2	=
7 DC	Yes	No	Yes	Level 3	1.5	1.75	+0.25
8 BR	Yes	No	No	Level 4	2	2.25	+0.25
9 ADi	Yes	No	*SST	Level 3	2.13	3	+0.87
10 JS	Yes	Yes 2	No	Level 1	1.75	1.63	-0.12
11 JM	Yes	No	Yes	Level 3	1.88	2.13	+0.25
12 WL	Yes	Yes 1	No	Level 1	1	1.75	+0.75
13 JF	Yes	Yes 1	No	Level 1	1.25	1.63	+0.38
14 MR	Yes	No	Yes	Level 3	1.63	2.38	+0.75
15 ZB	Yes	Yes 1	No	Level 1	2	2.13	+0.13
16 LR	Yes	No	No	Level 4	3.25	3	-0.25
17 TC	Yes	Yes 1	No	Level 3	2.5	3.13	+0.63
18 YG	Yes	Yes 2	No	Level 2	2.13	3.38	+1.25
19 EG	Yes	No	No	Level 4	3	3.38	+0.38
20 AA	Yes	No	No	Level 5	2.63	3	+0.37

The data shows an improvement in writing based on rubric scores between pre- and post-writing assessments. The average rubric score (out of 4) was 2.1 for the pretest. The average rubric score (same rubric, out of 4) was 2.5. The post-assessment writing samples imply that

students were able to understand and utilize some of the strategies taught explicitly during instruction, for example, those taught when reviewing the writing checklist and the edit and revision process.

Analysis of the data displays: 80% of students' scores increased (16 students), 10 % of students' scores decreased (2 students), and 5% (1 student's) score stayed the same, and 5 % (1 student) missed one of the assessments, so her data was dropped. The rubric score data between the pre and post writing samples shows an overall average improvement with the whole class, however, the results did not show any significant findings based on student CELDT levels and their scores. CELDT levels are: Level 1 – Beginning, Level 2 – Early Intermediate, Level 3 – Intermediate, Level 4 – Early Advanced, and Level 5 – Advanced. Students with a Level 1 CELDT score (as measured by a Fall 2014 CELDT assessment), had an average rubric score of 1.45 in the pre and 1.73 in the post, showing an average increase of 0.28 in their scores. The one student in Level 2 scored 2.13 in the pre and 3.38 in the post, showing a 1.25 increase. Students in Level 3 scored 2.02 in the pre and 2.55 in the post, showing a 0.53 improvement in their scores. Students in Level 4 scored 2.73 in their pre and 2.86 in their post, showing a 0.13 increase. Finally, the student in Level 5 scored a 2.63 in their pre and a 3 in their post, showing a 0.37 increase in their score. Although the average score in each CELDT level increased between pre- and posttest writing assessments, there were no significant findings in which CELDT level group showed the greatest improvement or growth.

In regards to ELLs who are also newcomers, the average increase was 0.57, with one decrease of 0.12, making the average score difference 0.46. Six of the seven newcomers showed an increase in their posttest writing assessment score. All students with an IEP showed an increase in their score, with an average increase of 0.42. The one student who is an ELL,

newcomer, and has an IEP showed an increase of 0.25. This can imply that strategies for teaching ELLs can also have a positive impact on newcomers and students with other diverse learning needs.

In regards to the use of academic vocabulary, students were able to show understanding of vocabulary when studying and discussing it. Students used more academic vocabulary in their post-writing samples, after explicit instruction, than in their pre-writing samples. However, very few of them provided definitions of the words or showed clear understanding in their writing of the academic vocabulary words in their writing.

### Themes

Themes in this study connect with several themes found in the literature. ELD Standards focus on Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Writing. As students develop language skills when listening, speaking, and reading during classroom instructional time, they are also building skills that will help them with their writing. The writing checklist seemed to help students' writing improve from the pre- to posttest, students were able to make improvements with writing mechanics such as capitalization, punctuation, etc. However, more students struggled with sentence structure and paragraph organization. Several students separated their topic and concluding sentence from their paragraph, even though they were explicitly taught the organization of a paragraph with an indent, topic sentence, detail/supporting sentences, and conclusion. Several of the students also struggled with spelling and grammar. Furthermore, the majority of the students were not able to define the academic vocabulary in their writing or provide details when explaining the vocabulary. This implies that more instruction is necessary in order to help these ELLs continue to grow toward 5<sup>th</sup> grade level standards and expectations, as well as show development in their language proficiency.

### Summary of Major Findings

The findings of this study show a positive outcome in regards to explicit instruction in academic vocabulary related to the content in addition to teaching specific writing skills and strategies. Although most students were still writing below grade level, almost all students showed some growth in their writing following explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and focusing on teaching specific writing skills and strategies. Students who are newcomers also showed progress, as did students with IEPs. There were no significant findings that showed a difference in rubric scores based on CELDT level, whether or not a student was a newcomer, and/or if they had an IEP. Overall, teaching academic vocabulary and word analysis instruction as well as specific writing strategies simultaneously with content standards and curriculum can have a positive effect on students.

### Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The results of this study compares to that of the literature. The literature reports there are approximately 1.4 million ELLs in California public schools. The literature also explains the difficulties ELLs face when trying to learn new content while still trying to meet language proficiency in English. Using Gay's (2010) culturally responsive teaching during instruction time showed positive outcomes within this study. The researcher noted that students were more open to share with one another, participated more, and seemed to have higher levels of motivation and excitement about their learning.

Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2000), recommend providing opportunities for interaction, explicitly linking content concepts to students' background experiences, as well as using a variety of techniques to help make the content concepts clearer to ELLs. In this study, several



techniques were used, students' background knowledge was activated through the use of several GLAD strategies such as Inquiry and Observation Charts, connections were made, and the majority of their time was spent communicating and collaborating with their peers. The findings of this study relate to the effective practices set forth by this research. Through informal observations in this study, the students seemed to benefit from these practices and showed growth throughout the instructional study time period. Nagle (2013) also discusses the importance of providing several opportunities to talk and work together. Additionally, he points out the importance of collaboration in reading, writing, and talking about content with ELLs. In this study, students worked whole class, in groups, partners, and independently to better understand the current 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies standards. Collaborating with one another, reading about the topic, writing about it, and talking about it, provided students with not only several input methods, but also gave them more time working with the content in a variety of ways. This also allowed students to simultaneously learn content standards while also improving their ELD standard expectations as well as their language acquisition.

In regards to Project GLAD, the researcher found the strategies to be beneficial. However, there can be more research and strategies provided that focus on the upper grades and helping upper grade students improve their writing abilities. The findings on academic vocabulary in this study relates to the literature as well. It is evident that focusing on academic vocabulary and word analysis is extremely important for ELLs. However, there is a need for strategies to teach students how to connect this knowledge and demonstrate their understanding in their writing. Students in this study understood the academic vocabulary when discussing it, studying it, etc., however, very few of them provided definitions of the words or showed clear understanding in their writing. Nonetheless, there was improvements from the pre- and posttest

writing samples in regards to the use of academic vocabulary after explicit instruction. This connects to the literature in that there needs to be more teacher training on teaching writing to ELLs as well as additional effective strategies for connecting academic vocabulary and writing in ELD instruction.

With this in mind, it is also important to remember the research from Kim, Olson, Scarcella, Kramer, Pearson, VanDyk, Collins, and Land (2011), who explain “the complex nature of language development and its effect on strategy use and writing development require further exploration. Students’ ability to benefit from strategy instruction might vary as a function of English proficiency” (p. 30). The practices used showed positive results (an increase in rubric scores) for students with diverse learning needs, for example, newcomers and students who have an IEP. Thus, implying that these strategies may also help other students, not just those who are classified as ELLs. This is inline with GLAD’s belief in teaching to the highest and with high expectations and that their practices are beneficial for all learners. Nonetheless, as stated in the literature, teacher training is an important factor in teaching ELLs. Additionally, although these strategies had a positive impact on students with diverse learning needs, there is still a need for specific strategies and/or programs in regards to teaching newcomers and students with multiple diverse learning needs.

#### Limitations/Gaps in the Research

The literature shows the gaps in research and as mentioned above, that “research has ‘barely begun to investigate’ the ways in which AE can be instructed or developed for the broad range of learners of English” (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker & Rivera, 2014, p. 475). In comparison, while there were positive outcomes in the study, there are still remaining gaps. There is a need for more research on ELD instructional time and what ELD instruction model is most effective

for teaching ELLs. This is necessary to know if the model used in this study is the most efficient for ELLs. There were several students who were re-classified as English Language Proficient at the start of the study, making the study population smaller in size. Throughout the time of the study, there were several time restrictions and schedule changes to our Wheel Program (for example, field trips, assemblies, Spring Break, etc.). Reflecting on the study, it is apparent that a pre-, mid-, and posttest would have been beneficial to mark student success (diagnostic, summative, and formative). The study could have taken place over the entire thematic unit as well. Finally, the researcher would have liked to spend more time focused on certain strategies and re-visiting certain strategies, especially in regards to teaching specific writing skills. Filling these gaps in the research, as well as this study in particular, can have a positive impact on the future of ELLs.

#### Implications for Future Research

There are several implications for future research. When synthesizing the findings of this study and gaps in the literature and other research, conclusions can be drawn to help guide action and future research. With this knowledge, educators will be able to better support their ELLs, newcomers, and students with multiple diverse learning needs. If educators are able to better serve these students, they will be able to show greater success and have brighter futures, and in their road to college and career.

#### Overall Significance of the Study

This study illustrated the significance of teaching ELLs explicit vocabulary instruction and word analysis skills. It also examined specific writing strategies and ways in which teaching these skills can help improve upper grade ELL students' writing abilities. Moreover, it highlights

the importance of creating a positive classroom environment, implementing culturally responsive teaching, modeling expectations for students, and allowing for collaboration between peers.

Overall, it is key for educators to get to know their students, to practice culturally responsive teaching, and to provide opportunities for collaboration and discourse with their peers. Additionally, positive benefits can occur from teaching explicit instruction in academic vocabulary, implementing strategies for teaching ELLs, and focusing on specific writing skills and strategies. Although these strategies and practices can have a positive impact on student achievement and success, there is still more research and areas of teaching ELLs to explore. This is especially significant with the implementation of CCSS as well as 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. It is imperative for the education world to continue to explore effective strategies for teaching ELLs how to be successful critical thinkers, communicators, and collaborators.

#### About the Author

Jenna Emadzadeh is a 5th grade teacher in the Bay Area. She grew up in Marin County and graduated from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo with a Bachelor of Science in Child Development and a minor in Psychology and Communication Studies. Following graduation, she moved back to Marin and attended Dominican University of California for her teaching credential. She is currently completing her Master of Science in Education at Dominican with a focus on teacher leadership. She enjoys baking, reading, hiking, traveling, and trying new things.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Aguirre-Muñoz, Z., Park, J., Amabisca, A., & Boscardin, C. K. (2009). Developing teacher capacity for serving ELLs' writing instructional needs: A case for systemic functional linguistics. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 31(1-2), 295-322.  
doi:10.1080/15235880802640755
- Bay Area GLAD & Be GLAD. (2014). Project GLAD. Retrieved October 9, 2014 from <http://projectglad.com>
- California Department of Education. (2006). English learners in California frequently asked questions. Retrieved April 12, 2015, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/elfaq.doc>
- California Department of Education. (2014). Facts about English language learners in California – CalEdFacts. Retrieved March 9, 2015, from <http://cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefelfacts.asp>
- Carlo, M.S., August, D., McLaughlin, B., Snow, C.E., Dressler, C., Lippman, D.N., Lively, T.J., & White, C.E. (2004). Closing the gap: Addressing the vocabulary needs of English-language learners in bilingual and mainstream classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39 (2), 188-215. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>
- Cruz, B. & Thornton, S. (2009). Teaching social studies to English language learners. *Teaching English language learners across the curriculum*, retrieved March 9, 2015, from <http://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/se/7306/7306271.pdf>

- Deussen, T., Autio, E., Roccograndi, A., & Hanita, M. (2014, April). *The impact of Project GLAD on students' literacy and science learning; Year 1 results from a cluster-randomized trial of sheltered instruction*. Paper presented at AERA Conference, Portland, Oregon. Retrieved from <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/Deussen%20Handout%20Impact%20of%20Project%20GLAD%20on%20Literacy%20Science.pdf>
- DiCerbo, P.A., Anstrom, K.A., Baker, L.L., & Rivera, C. (2014). A review of the literature on teaching academic English to English language learners. *Review of Educational Research, 84* (3), 446. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2000). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching-theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goldenberg, C., (2013). Unlocking the research on English learners: What we know—and don't yet know—about effective instruction. *American Educator, 37* (2):4-12. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Halladay, J.L., & Moses, L. (2013). Using the common core standards to meet the needs of diverse learners: Challenges and opportunities. *New England Reading Association Journal, 49* (1), 33-44. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Khan, K., Majoka, M. I., & Ashfaq, U. (2013). The effect of vocabulary building on students academic achievement in English language at elementary level. *Language in India, 13*(1), 192-215. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>

- Kim, J. S, Olson, C.B., Scarcella, R., Kramer, J.S., Pearson, M., VanDyk, D., Collins, P., & Land, R. (2011). A randomized experiment of a cognitive strategies approach to text-based analytical writing for mainstreamed Latino English language learners in grades 6-12. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 4(3), 231-263. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Pergamon Press Inc.
- Lemetyinen, H. (2012). *Language Acquisition*. Retrieved from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/language.html>
- Nagle, J. F. (2013). *English learner instruction through collaboration and inquiry in teacher education*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.dominican.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=649369&site=eds-live>
- Peterson, B., & Salas, D. (2004). *Working effectively with English Language Learners. Rethinking Schools Online*. Retrieved January 5, 2009, from <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/publication/newteacher/NTBilingual.shtml>
- Project GLAD. (2014). *Glad training model 2-day workshop outcomes*. Project GLAD, San Rafael, CA.
- Sincero, S.M. (Mar 11, 2011). *Cognitive learning theory*. Explorable.com. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from <https://explorable.com/cognitive-learning-theory>
- Stahl, S., & Fairbanks, M. (1989). The effects of vocabulary instruction: a model based meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(1), 72-110. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com>

WestEd. (2003). The map of standards for English learners: A tool for integrating instruction and assessment of English language development and English language arts standards in California. San Francisco, CA; WestED. Retrieved June 25, 2009, from <http://wested.org/onlinepubs/ELD/carr/carmap4thINTRO.pdf>