EXAMINING ORAL LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES AND TEACHERS' MOVES TO ENGAGE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LEARNERS IN TIER ONE READING CLASSROOMS

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by
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Abstract

Teachers must be equipped and prepared to support all students in their classes, yet teachers can feel unprepared to meet English Learners' (ELs)[1] unique needs (Pettit, 2011). While a growing demographic, ELs also often lag behind non-EL peers in reading achievement both at the national and state level (NCES, 2021a; VDOE, 2021). While numerous literacy skills and components may impact students' reading, English oral language skills are one aspect associated with stronger reading skills in ELs (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021). In this case study, I examined and described the ways teachers (n=4) integrated oral language activities and engaged ELs in those experiences during the tier one instructional reading block. This site, Downing Elementary School[2], is a diverse, mid-Atlantic school with 27% ELs that was experiencing an achievement gap in reading between ELs and non-ELs, illustrating a need to ensure teachers were prepared and supported in meeting these learners' needs. I explored the extent to which teachers implemented opportunities for ELs to apply oral language while addressing other literacy skills such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing in the tier one literacy classroom. Findings illustrate that teachers implemented oral language activities to the greatest extent during vocabulary instruction. Second, the findings highlight the impact of the curriculum, teachers' perceptions, professional learning, and teachers' moves on instructional implementation.

Keywords: English Language Learners, reading, elementary, oral language

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[1] I will utilize English Learner (EL) in this paper to refer to students who qualify as a student with limited English proficiency, as classified by the state for data reporting purposes, as that is the term used in the district described in this paper.

[2] pseudonym

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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, Examining Oral Language Activities and Teachers' Moves to Engage Elementary English Learners in Tier One Reading Classrooms, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date

DEDICATION

To my family, without whom, achieving this dream would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Public schools in the United States are tasked with engaging and meeting the needs of all learners, who bring diverse backgrounds and strengths to their classrooms. Schools, and notably the teachers in them, must be prepared to support all learners and the resources and practices they utilize should facilitate teachers' ability to meet all students' needs. English Learners (ELs) are an ever-growing demographic of students in K-12 public schools (NCES, 2020), and schools, and teachers must be prepared to support them. Nationally, just over 10% of public-school students are ELs (NCES, 2021a). The current research was conducted at Downing Elementary[3] in the mid-Atlantic district of Harper City Schools[4]. At Downing, ELs comprised 27% of the student body, more than any other school in Harper City, where 15% of the students were ELs, both higher than the state and national average. Over the last 10 years, the population of ELs in Harper City grew nearly 25%. This growing group of learners is simultaneously learning English while gaining grade level content knowledge assessed on standardized tests, just like non-ELs.

Researchers contend there are specific skills that classroom, or mainstream, teachers of ELs need; one such critical understanding is "pedagogical knowledge and skills informed by the role of language and culture in schools" (de Jong et al., 2013, p. 95). It is important that teachers understand the importance of language in instruction, as focused on in the current study, as well as ELs' unique needs and the ways to support their learning in the classroom. However, classroom teachers often feel underprepared to support ELs. In a review of the literature regarding in-service general-education teachers' beliefs about ELs and their training to support them, Pettit (2011) found that at times teachers have low expectations or negative opinions of ELs and express frustration with their own lack of preparation or training to support ELs. However, teachers can experience success in gaining skills through extensive professional learning (PL) related to ELs. When engaged in extended, ongoing professional learning to support ELs in academic discussions, schools may see significant gains for ELs, especially when many teachers in a school participate (Shea et al., 2018). While many teachers may not feel equipped to teach ELs and though teaching academic content in a language ELs are also simultaneously learning can be challenging, professional learning can be beneficial in increasing those skills in classroom teachers (Ramos, 2017; Shea et al., 2018).

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[3] pseudonym

[4] pseudonym

This challenge of equipping and preparing teachers to meet the needs of ELs was evident at Downing too. In a survey of Downing classroom teachers, more than 87% of respondents agreed that “Supporting English language learners in my classroom is challenging” and more than half of teachers noted that they needed additional professional learning related to teaching ELs (Isley, 2021). No teachers referenced receiving any formal professional learning related to ELs from instructional leadership or coordinators in Harper City, though one teacher mentioned receiving some in-service support with general strategies from ESL teachers (Isley, 2021). While the total survey respondents only represented 30% of classroom teachers at the time (n=8), these responses at the local level aligned with the research on teacher preparedness to teach ELs.

In addition to teachers’ need for additional preparedness and learning around supporting ELs, student achievement data also indicates that schools may not be meeting the needs of these students. Classroom teachers are tasked with supporting ELs in learning English while concurrently teaching them grade-level content, and often they struggle more than their non-EL peers on national and state standardized reading assessments (NCES, 2021b; VDOE, 2021). For example, ELs' performance on the National Assessment of Education Programs (NAEP) reading achievement test given to fourth graders (NCES, 2021b). While the average scaled score in 2019 for non-ELs was 224, ELs' average score was 191, well below proficient (238) and below basic (208) levels of achievement (NCES, 2021b).

At the state level 75% of all students are expected to pass the reading assessment to meet accreditation (see Table 1), yet only 35% of ELs passed the English reading assessment in 2019 (VDOE, 2021) and during the COVID-19 pandemic, this fell to 24% (VDOE, 2021). Downing Elementary saw a similar trend with only 31% of ELs passing the third or fourth grade reading state assessment in 2019 and only 23% in 2021 (VDOE, 2021).

Table 1

Comparison of State Standardized Reading Assessment Pass Rates

2019 State Standardized Reading Assessment Pass Rates			
	Downing	Harper City	State
English Learners	31%	29%	35%
All Students (ELs and Non-ELs)	70%	70%	78%
2021 State Standardized Reading Assessment Pass Rates			
	Downing	Harper City	State
English Learners	23%	15%	24%
All Students (ELs and Non-ELs)	65%	60%	69%

Note. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, no data exists for 2020.

In contrast, the overall pass rate on the reading SOLs for all students (ELs and non-ELs) was double, and at times, triple that of the ELs' pass rate, illustrating a significant achievement gap at the state, district, and Downing school level (VDOE, 2021). While the COVID-19 pandemic was likely a factor for students' performance with school closings and changes to instructional time and frequency, in 2019, prior to the pandemic, Downing had the lowest ELs' reading pass rate among all elementary schools in the district (VDOE, 2021). To be sure, high stakes, standardized tests are only one measure of ELs' achievement and may not illustrate all of ELs' academic skills and strengths (Brown et al., 2017; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006), but given the tests' impact on school accreditation, accountability, and prominence in school improvement plans, as well as the availability of data, the current study focused on these state assessments as a measure of ELs' reading achievement. To meet the needs of ELs in literacy, schools, districts, and potentially schools of education, need to be prepare teachers to support ELs in the mainstream or tier one classrooms.

ELs are expected to reach the same levels of proficiency on state assessments as their non-EL peers and teachers are held accountable for both groups, though they may be unprepared to do so. Thus, teachers need to have knowledge and strategies of how best to support these learners in the general classroom setting, specifically with effective, researched-based instructional practices in reading. The practices should not only be supportive in students' acquisition of English, but also associated with strong English reading skills like comprehension, which the state English reading assessment measures.

School leaders not only need to ensure teachers understand best practices for ELs, but also that curriculum resources reflect such practices and are implemented in classrooms as intended. That is, knowledge of evidence-based practices like opportunities to develop oral language is important, but instructional leaders, especially those in schools with high populations of ELs, must understand the degree to which such practices are evident in classrooms. Additionally, leaders should be prepared to offer needed professional learning and support teachers in developing and implementing these practices. As the instructional coach at Downing, charged with supporting teachers in implementing tier one instruction, providing professional learning, and supporting literacy Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), this knowledge and understanding will help me better plan, develop, and support teachers, as well as influence district guidance and practices around literacy instruction.

Local Context

At Downing Elementary, teachers utilized a recently adopted literacy curriculum resource, Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Into Reading (Ada et al., 2020), a comprehensive literacy program which included weekly plans and lessons aimed at multiple components of literacy instruction including but not limited to foundational skills (phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding), fluency, writing, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Additionally, the curriculum suggested activities and strategies to promote students' oral language use while engaging students in reading comprehension activities. The teachers' guides contained daily lesson plans with instructional activities addressing skills such as foundational reading skills, oral language, vocabulary, shared reading experiences, comprehension, and writing. Within those components were suggested learning activities for discussing shared texts through lengthier discussions and shorter collaborative talk strategies with partners, utilizing text-based questions. These resources not only offered suggested questions to ask students and discussion prompts about texts, but also referenced suggested discussion practices and norms within the classroom. Further, they sometimes included scaffolding such as sentence stems.

As part of a qualitative methods course, I engaged in preliminary research on the implementation of these curriculum resources at a pilot school in the district. In observing the implementation in one pilot classroom, I realized that some of the activities involving oral language, especially extended text-based dialogues, were limited and perhaps underutilized. At that time, it was unclear whether the curriculum did not include such practices, teachers did not use them or were unaware they were included, or perhaps another explanation of the lack of evidence of the practices existed.

For more than two years I observed the implementation of the adopted curriculum resources: the majority of one year in the pilot school (prior to the Covid-19 school closures) and since then at Downing once Harper City had fully implemented the resources at all schools. During this time, I observed implementation of the resources and in a subsequent doctoral Field Study, I examined the curriculum resources and found that these opportunities to develop oral language while engaging in text-based reading activities existed. Though the resources also suggested teachers support learners in discussion practices like taking turns or adding to and extending discussions and though they even included rubrics for analyzing students' participation in collaborative discussions, I did find that the routines could be more explicit and might be more useful to teachers more with greater structure, language support, and scaffolds to engage all students, including ELs, in these experiences (Isley, 2021). These extended discussions may not only support ELs' reading achievement, but that of all students (Portes & González Canché, 2016; Portes et al., 2018; Saunders & Goldberg, 1999).

During the Field Study, I also learned the district offered literacy-focused professional learning which included embedded learning about teaching ELs reading, but it was optional and often not accessed by many classroom teachers at Downing (Isley, 2021). I developed online professional learning modules specifically focused on supporting ELs while using the adopted HMH resources, including carrying out and adapting oral language activities (Isley, 2021). These became available to teachers in the 2021-2022 school year.

The district communicated several priorities regarding literacy instruction for 2021-2022 school year, one being that students read and engage in discussions or talk about complex texts and another that teachers provide scaffolding as needed so that all students can engage in and access tier one instruction. Additionally, the district's professional learning courses for that school year referenced these priorities and included the modules I developed on supporting ELs in tier one literacy, integrating oral language, and guidance on having students write about their reading for the purpose of being prepared to engage in discussion of texts. That is, not only were teachers expected to utilize the curriculum resources, but the district also gave direction on the implementation in doing so, including the expectation that teachers provide scaffolding so that all students could access the tier one instruction. The HMH resources included regular opportunities for students to develop oral language skills while supporting reading comprehension and the district provided direction on implementing the resources. However, it was important to understand how teachers engaged all learners or not, including ELs, in these activities and the extent to which teachers implemented and carried out these instructional strategies and activities in practice, which was the purpose of the current Capstone study.

Theoretical Lens

In the Capstone study, I worked from a socio-cultural lens to examine the interactions and activities occurring in the literacy classroom such as talking about texts. This perspective assumes that learning happens socially, within the context of activities and social interactions that occur in the culture of the classroom environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, studies involving ELs often make use of this sociocultural framework and highlight two aspects of Vygotsky's (1978) work, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the role of language in a child's development and learning as being especially important with ELs (Yoon & Kim, 2012).

The ZPD represents the area between the tasks the student has mastered and is able to do independently and what the student can do with support (Vygotsky, 1978). When teachers scaffold, modify activities, or put supports in place to engage ELs in complex reading while meeting their individual needs, teachers are supporting students within their ZPD. Social interactions between students in collaborative activities such as in discussions about texts or in dramatic performances, provide opportunities for students to apply oral language while also supporting students' reading or understanding of a text. As Billings and Walqui (2017) contend, "teachers have to deliberately construct these collaborative structures, ensuring that they invite students to participate in worthwhile conceptual and analytical practices while at the same time developing the English necessary to accomplish them" (p. 1). Moreover, it is essential that classroom teachers acknowledge the assets ELs bring to the classroom and maintain high expectations of students, not waiting for students to master English, but rather capitalizing on students' strengths and providing adequate supports to engage learners in complex tasks while supporting their language and understanding through social interactions (Billings & Walqui, 2017). Language is essential in these collaborative, social tasks within literacy instruction.

Conceptual Framework

To examine the ways in which teachers integrated oral language activities for ELs in tier one literacy, I first considered the components that presumably impact that implementation. The conceptual framework for this study centers around the factors potentially influencing the implementation of instructional activities promoting oral language development (Figure 1). The framework is built on the thesis that teachers' levels of implementation of an instructional practice may be influenced by the curriculum[5], including all adopted texts, resources, and the

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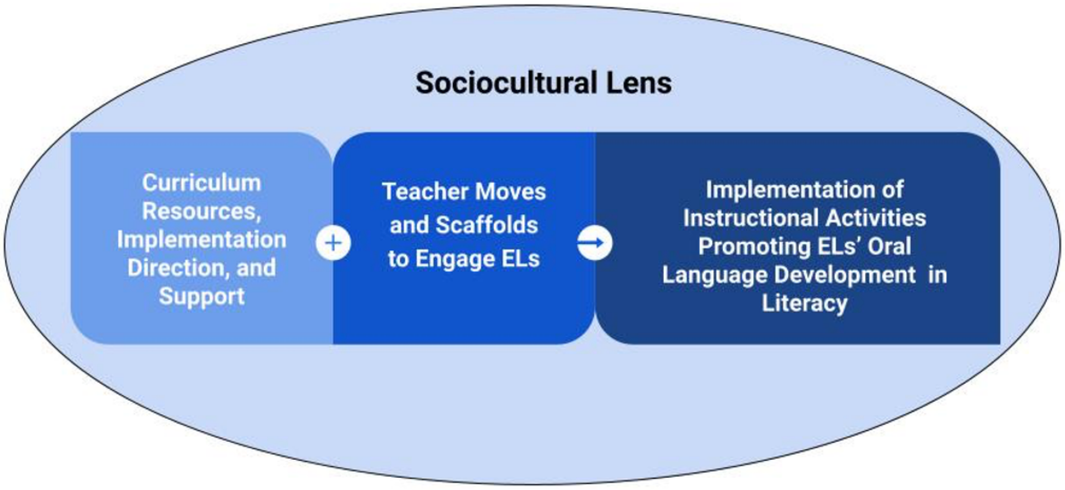
[5] In this case, "curriculum" refers to all adopted texts and curriculum resources, as well as guidance, expectations, and learning around utilizing those resources.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework


Sociocultural Lens
Curriculum Resources, Implementation Direction, and Support
+
Teacher Moves and Scaffolds to Engage ELs
Implementation of Instructional Activities Promoting ELs' Oral Language Development in Literacy

guidance in implementing these resources. This includes not only the HMH resources, but other adopted resources, as well as the provided professional learning and direction from the district in its implementation. Described as "interconnected infrastructural pillars," Woulfin and Gabriel (2020) name curriculum, professional learning, and leadership as three critical elements which must be aligned to implement effective change in reading instruction (p. S109). In the current study, the conceptual framework groups these inputs under the "curriculum," the first box on the conceptual framework diagram.

Additionally, the logic of the framework presumes that the ELs' engagement in these oral language activities also depends on teachers' instructional moves within the classroom. Together, these components of the resources including lessons, texts, professional learning, and communicated direction as well as the individual teacher's moves, likely impact the implementation of oral language activities and ELs' engagement in them. I viewed this conceptual framework through the sociocultural lens with the focus on language and learning through interactions in the context of school, specifically the tier one literacy classroom.

Curriculum Resources

The first factor in the conceptual framework is the newly adopted literacy curriculum at Downing Elementary. High-quality, comprehensive reading programs can positively impact student learning and achievement (Borman et al., 2008). That is, what is included in curriculum materials can impact what actually occurs in the classroom. For example, Cervetti et al. (2015) found that teachers utilize supports for ELs more when they are included in the curriculum resources than when resources do not contain such instructional components. That is, the degree to which the new curriculum resources at Downing include opportunities to promote oral language, such as discussions, might impact teachers' actual implementation of such practices. Through classroom observations, examinations of the curriculum resources and materials, and conversations with faculty at Downing and more broadly in Harper City, was evident that the HMH Into Reading resources do include such opportunities (Isley, 2021). However, as observed and discussed in my previous work, such practices may be less frequently utilized than other routines in the curriculum such as vocabulary or close reading (Isley, 2021).

In the 2021-2022 school year, Harper City began a full implementation of these curriculum resources. The district first piloted the resources in the 2019-2020 school year, though that pilot only included two schools, not Downing. Further, the district utilized the curriculum during the 2020-2021 school year in all schools, though that year marked atypical implementation due to the disrupted and altered instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic in which the resources were not fully utilized because of the significantly reduced instructional time, especially in virtual learning. This virtual learning lasted for all students until March 2021.

Thus, the 2021-2022 school year marked the first full implementation, and the district also gave clear directives about their expectation surrounding the implementation of resources.

Researchers contend that when experiencing a change in curriculum, two important considerations for leaders in gaining the buy-in from teachers include having a clear vision and providing support (Leithwood et al., 1994). For example, at Downing teachers received ongoing guidance and professional learning, which began with an implementation orientation and included continued access to specific self-guided modules covering various topics and instructional components to support implementation, including modules focused on supporting ELs and oral language integration. The district and school leadership provided direction and expectations that all teachers utilize the adopted resources and provide scaffolds to engage all learners in reading and understanding complex texts. Also, teachers received additional support and guidance in implementing the resources through optional individual coaching in implementing the resources and in weekly PLCs focused on literacy where teachers planned, discussed, and assessed implementation as part of their work; and in feedback on implementation from walkthroughs and observations from administrators, the district literacy coordinator, and myself, the instructional coach. Thus, the curriculum resources, including all texts, supplemental materials, resources, as well as the professional learning and directives around their implementation, likely impact the implementation of the resources and what occurs in the classroom, specifically oral language activities.

Teacher Moves

In addition to the inputs of adopted resources and the supplemental guidance and support in implementing them, this conceptual framework also assumes that teachers' instructional moves impact the implementation of oral language activities in the classroom and the ways in which ELs engage in such activities. Teacher moves—such as adjusting the group size to encourage more speaking and engagement from ELs, chunking the amount of complex text for students to discuss, or providing more wait time for students—are examples of ways teacher moves which might support ELs' engagement (Snow & O'Connor, 2016; Wilson et al., 2016; Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012). I explore these teacher moves and others in depth in the literature review. At Downing, students may benefit from teachers scaffolding collaborative discussions, as I found there was limited guidance in the curriculum resources on how students should share their responses and more scaffolding may be needed for additional language support to encourage engagement and participation, especially among students with more emergent English proficiency (Isley, 2021). Engaging ELs in oral language activities which promote their text reading and comprehension in tier one literacy first depends on the existence of such activities in the resources teachers are expected to use, but also in the ways teachers adapt, scaffold, and carry out those activities in the classroom.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

To address the challenge of preparing and supporting teachers to meet the needs of ELs in reading at Downing while implementing the newly adopted curriculum resources, in this case study, I gathered and analyzed data to identify and describe the ways in which teachers implented oral language activities and engaged ELs in them within tier one literacy. Case study offered an opportunity to fully examine and describe teachers' implementation of oral language activities, hear from teachers about their perceptions of the curriculum and supporting ELs, and examine the curriculum resources Downing utilized. As Orellana and Gutiérrez (2006) contend, when conducting research, people "must be understood in relation to the practices of which they are a part, the available resources, and the specific demands of the context" (p. 119). The findings provide suggested next steps in supporting teachers related to integrating oral language activities to support ELs in tier one literacy as well as recommendations to the district literacy coordinator and other district and school-based literacy leaders.

While significant research supports an association between strong English oral language skills and later reading skills like reading comprehension achievement (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021), less research exists describing what instructional practices promoting that oral language development look like, especially for ELs specifically. That is, how does a teacher implement activities or practices that support oral language? When working with teachers in my role as the instructional coach, I can convey the importance of such oral language activities which may support students' reading and comprehension, but I also need to be able to show and describe what those practices look like or how they might be implemented to best support ELs. In order to do that, I examined how teachers at Downing integrated opportunities for oral language activities in tier one reading instruction and the ways they engaged ELs in these activities.

Research Questions

Specific research questions this case study examined included:

- In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?
- What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are utilized throughout this proposal and are defined for clarity within the context of the current study.

English Learner (EL): This term refers to students who qualify as a student with limited English proficiency, as classified by the state for data reporting purposes, and are eligible for ESL services.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher: ESL teachers at Downing were non-classroom teachers who have an endorsement in ESL and were uniquely qualified to teach English Learners. In this case, ESL teachers either provided push-in support in tier one classrooms or pull-out support for small groups or one on one support for ELs. While the focus in this study was on general classroom teachers, I refer to ESL teachers in this paper.

Text-Based Oral Language Activity: In this paper I refer to text-based oral language activities as ones which promote oral language application and are centered around a text or support the understanding of a text. Examples of such activities could include an oral language activity centered on students using vocabulary from a text or a discussion about a shared reading experience.

Tier One Reading: Tier one reading refers to the mainstream literacy classroom taught by a general education teacher. This does not include intervention or instruction occurring with specialists such as ESL or reading specialists outside the mainstream classroom. While ESL teachers may push into tier one classrooms, this was not the case during observations for this study.

Summary

This conceptual framework assumes that the curriculum resources, including any direction or guidance in its implementation, as well as teachers' instructional moves may all impact teachers' implementation of oral language activities in tier one reading and the ways in which they engage ELs in these practices. While opportunities for text-based oral language activities appeared to be prevalent in the curriculum and though research illustrates that a correlation between oral language and strong reading comprehension exists (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021), the current study examined how teachers implemented them in the classroom. The focus was on the way in which teachers utilized these activities and the strategies and practices they used to engage ELs specifically. Because this work focused on describing the ways teachers integrated oral language activities into the classroom and centered on student talk and social interactions within the culture of the classroom, it is important to acknowledge the socio-cultural theoretical framework on which the work was founded (Vygotsky, 1978; Yoon & Kim, 2012). This theoretical lens undergirds the conceptual framework, given that interactions and language were the focus of the observed instructional practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to support ELs' reading achievement, teachers must be equipped and prepared to meet these students' needs. In my role as Downing's instructional coach, it is imperative that I support teachers in meeting the needs of all their learners and that includes helping teachers implement literacy instruction aligned with best practices for ELs. Since research indicates an association between ELs' oral language and reading achievement (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021), in the current study, I focused on better understanding the ways teachers integrated opportunities which promote oral language while supporting other reading skills during tier one literacy instruction. Through the sociocultural lens, the framework for this study is based on the assumptions that the curriculum resources and related artifacts like directives and support, as well as the teachers' moves and scaffolds to engage ELs, all impact the implementation of instructional activities promoting ELs' use of English oral language.

Thus, I begin the literature review by examining the association between oral language practices and English reading skills. I also explore general characteristics of strong academic discussions and strategies to engage all students in talking about texts. Then, I examine how teachers engage ELs in text-based activities involving oral language. That is, I explore how teachers modify or provide additional scaffolds or supports in discussions to engage ELs, as well as the characteristics of text-centered oral language activities among ELs.

To be sure, oral language activities could be viewed quite broadly, so for the purpose of this study, I narrow the scope of the literature review of oral language activities to those which are "text-based." In their review of academic discussion structures, Soter et al. (2008) selected only protocols which focused on a text. I utilized similar, but slightly different criteria. While many of these oral language practices explored in this review center around discussions, in this paper, I refer more broadly to text-based oral language activities, or opportunities to engage in talk related to texts, and interactions supporting students' reading or comprehension of texts. I focus on oral language opportunities related to texts to narrow the focus of the current research, but also because many of the opportunities for engaging students in talk-based activities in the curriculum initially appeared to involve either discussions about texts or learning vocabulary to better understand texts or make connections. Thus, it was likely that text-focused oral language activities might have been the most relevant for the current context and most aligned with the curriculum resources in place.

In this review of the literature, I focus primarily on studies involving elementary ELs since that is the focus of my study and my professional work, though some relevant studies involving older students are also included. While the focus of my previous and current work is in tier one or mainstream literacy classrooms, I include studies of small groups or pull-out sessions with ELs in order to more comprehensively review literature on engaging ELs in text-based oral language practices, especially given that research in the mainstream setting is somewhat limited. Additionally, such pull-out small-group activities have the potential to be translated into small or whole-group activities within the mainstream classroom.

Oral Language and Reading

Research suggests a correlation between ELs' English oral language proficiency and later reading skills and achievement, especially in reading comprehension (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021). In a study of 60 bilingual first and third graders, Huang et al. (2021) found students' oral language skills predicted both their comprehension and decoding skills in each grade level. However, not all these students received English as a Second Language (ESL) services at school, as half of the students had never received these services, likely indicating stronger English oral language than those who received services (Huang et al., 2021). Other researchers found a similar correlation between English oral language skills and reading comprehension. When controlling for ELs and non-ELs' differences in English oral language skills, Babayiğit (2014, 2015) found that variances in comprehension were diminished between ELs and non-ELs. That is, ELs' comprehension was related to their oral language proficiency. In addition to associations with comprehension, Helman and Burns (2008) found that students' English oral language level also correlated with their rate of acquiring sight words, as students with the strongest oral language proficiency gained more words in single sittings than students with weaker oral language skills. Though all students in their study received additional services as EL students, the study only included Hmong-speaking students in second grade (Helman & Burns, 2008).

Additionally, in their longitudinal study involving over 1,200 Spanish speaking ELs in kindergarten through second grade, Rojas et al. (2019) found students who demonstrated weak reading skills at the end of second grade, also demonstrated a weakness in oral language at the beginning of kindergarten. The researchers gave students the letter word identification, word attack, and passage comprehension subtests of the Broad Reading Cluster in English (BRE) and the Broad Reading Cluster in Spanish (BRS) from the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery-Revised during first and second grade (Rojas et al., 2019). Additionally, they collected oral language samples measuring students' use of different words, length of utterances, and words produced per minute, in both English and in Spanish from the students beginning in kindergarten and twice a year until the end of second grade. In examining students who fell below the 20th percentile at the end of second grade on either the English or Spanish standardized reading assessment, Rojas and colleagues found that these students also demonstrated weak oral language skills in the same language at the beginning of kindergarten. Thus, the association among ELs with weaker reading skills by the end of second grade and their oral language proficiency at the beginning of kindergarten was consistent regardless of whether students were tested in English or in Spanish (Rojas et al., 2019). Further, the gaps in oral language skills did not close, but rather widened throughout students' first three years of school (Rojas et al., 2019). In another longitudinal study of Spanish-speaking ELs, Kieffer (2012) found students' English oral language skills in kindergarten, notably their vocabulary skills, predicted reading comprehension even into eighth grade.

These findings suggest that oral language skills are important for ELs' reading development and are associated with stronger reading skills such as comprehension later, which is the focus of standardized English reading assessments like state English reading assessments. Perhaps more importantly is that such reading comprehension is critical for understanding texts both in reading instruction and across academic disciplines. Because strong English oral language is associated with comprehension skills in English reading, it is important to consider in students' literacy instruction so that students are also able to access disciplinary content.

Researchers caution that while an association or correlation between oral language and other reading skills like comprehension exists, this relationship should not be confused with one of causation (August et al., 2009). That is, perhaps oral language is a support or lift for decoding and then reading comprehension; "If students do not have a word in their oral vocabulary, it takes away an anchor for their word reading development" (Helman & Burns, 2008, p. 15). Moreover, it is not the sole or primary factor in an EL's or any student's reading acquisition, as it could not be isolated as such. Researchers acknowledging the association between oral language skills and later reading achievement also advise that while an important component in elementary classrooms, oral language activities are only one part of students' literacy instruction and other early reading skills such as phonics or decoding skills are also critical (August et al., 2009; Kieffer, 2012). While not the only factor in students' reading, the association between oral language and advanced reading and comprehension is still significant and oral language activities are worth implementing in ELs' reading instruction.

Discussions Promoting Comprehension

One activity aimed at supporting students' reading and oral language might be a text-based discussion, or a collaborative conversation about a shared text. Before examining how teachers effectively engage ELs in discussions or text-based opportunities to develop oral language while addressing other reading skills, it is worthwhile to examine some characteristics of strong discussions more generally. Researchers found that quality or productive discussions supporting text comprehension are characterized by teachers' use of open-ended questions, increased and extended student talk, and less teacher talk, as students often illustrate higher levels of comprehension or reasoning when they engage in longer talking turns (Murphy et al., 2009; Soter et al., 2008, Wilkinson et al., 2015).

However, researchers also caution that longer utterances do not always mean stronger comprehension (Murphy et al., 2009). For example, in a meta-analysis of various formats of academic discussions, Soter et al. (2008) contend that "extra-textual connections--that is, affective, intertextual, and shared knowledge connections-- do not play as important a role in dialogically intensive pedagogies as others have suggested" (p. 389). However, it is important to consider how ELs engage in those experiences. Simply holding academic discussions during literacy instruction does not ensure ELs will access or engage in those experiences (Wilson, et al., 2016) and teachers need specific skills to best support and engage ELs (de Jong et al., 2013).

While many attributes of best practices in discussions with ELs mirror the general recommendations reviewed here, it is important to consider ELs' access and engagement in such text-focused oral language activities too.

Questions

Though teachers may ask many questions, researchers note that those which are especially effective in discussions are questions which promote additional discussion, connections, and higher-level thinking (Goodwin et al., 2021; Soter et al., 2008) In a study involving over 700 fourth and fifth grade teachers, teachers' use of such questions was associated with higher reading achievement on state standardized tests (Goodwin et al., 2021). In contrast to the current case study at Downing, that study was conducted on a larger-scale and included over 18,000 fourth and fifth grade students. However, the percentage of students who were ELs was 13.8%, similar to the percentage of ELs in Harper City at 15%, but fewer than Downing at 27%. In addition to open-ended questioning, giving students time to answer those questions is also critical, perhaps especially for ELs. Wait time involves waiting for several seconds of time after asking a question rather than immediately calling on or acknowledging a student to answer, which may be especially critical for ELs to give them more time to comprehend the question and to formulate a response in English (Wasik & Hindman, 2018).

Facilitation to Promote Talk and Move Discussion Forward

Effective classroom discussions include strong facilitation to move the conversation forward and to encourage participation and more student talk. By establishing and modeling clear routines and expectations, proficient teacher facilitators communicate to students what strong discussion looks like and scaffold for students to support them in engaging in discussions (Dwyer et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016). Teacher moves that facilitate discussion include revoicing (repeating or restating what has been said), clarifying ideas, or encouraging students to provide evidence for their thinking or tell more (Dwyer et al., 2016). Researchers found that use of such teacher moves correlated with stronger reading comprehension and vocabulary in a study of second and third grade teachers with similar percentages of ELs to the current study site at 18% (Dwyer et al., 2016). However, some teacher moves like revoicing or restating were rarely utilized (Dwyer et al., 2016), though they could support ELs' comprehension of conversations and engagement in them. In addition to teachers' talk moves, Galloway and McClain (2020) describe how fourth-grade students themselves can use "metatalk" by stating or commenting about the talk moves they make, to keep discussion going. For example, students might note that a peer asked a question which promoted additional language usage or contributed a noticing which built on what a previous peer shared. Uptake, defined as "when one conversant, e.g., a teacher, asks someone else, e.g. a student, about something the other person said previously" (Collins, 1982, as cited in Nystrand et al., 2001, p. 15) is another important characteristic of discussions even in early childhood language building activities when teachers try to extend turn taking in conversations with students to add more utterances (Hadley et al., 2020; Soter et al., 2008).

Literature indicates that for younger students, routine prompts are helpful when discussing texts. For example, when using four consistent prompts with first graders, researchers found that students shared more about books and talked more over time (Blum et al., 2010). Teachers posted the prompts:

- "Tell me in your own words what happened in the book."
- "Talk about your favorite parts."
- "This book reminds me of"

- “Add something new to the book” (Blum et al., 2010, p. 496)

These prompts helped students generate more to say; as students became more comfortable and open to talking about texts, they moved beyond the prompts (Blum et al., 2010).

Text-Focused Discussion Considerations for ELs

With characteristics of strong academic discussions in mind, it is important to also examine specific considerations for ELs and the ways in which teachers engage these students in text-based discussions.

Challenging Texts

The first consideration when planning for text-based discussions with ELs is the need for classroom teachers to utilize rich, challenging texts even when they may seem slightly beyond ELs’ accessibility. As researchers note, sometimes teachers give ELs simpler, less complex texts in an effort to make reading the text easier for students; however, such simpler texts do not always promote rich discussion and students may disengage from discussion with lower-level texts (Kelly, 2020; Wilson et al., 2016). For example, in a study of third-grade students who read at least one year below grade level and were either classified as ELs or former ELs (students who previously received ESL services, but no longer qualified), a teacher engaged in five discussions with books matched to readers’ instructional reading level and five more challenging texts above their grade level (Kelly, 2020). Though the texts were more challenging, and at times the ELs struggled to reread texts when supporting claims in discussion, students contributed more to conversations about the more complex texts, as they did not have much to say or discuss about the simpler texts (Kelly, 2020). Limitations of this study include the number of students (n=6) and the small-group instructional setting versus that of the mainstream classroom. However, this small-scale study highlights relevant considerations in the context of the present study in that the shared reading texts in the HMH curriculum are complex, typically written on or above grade level, and represent numerous genres. ELs may need scaffolding to access these texts but may also have more to say about them than other, simpler texts. Further, ELs need practice in learning "the language of literacy" through reading texts in which more advanced structures and academic vocabulary occur (Lupo, 2017; Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012, p. 3). Teachers may need to scaffold decoding or reading support for ELs to access the complex texts prior to discussing them.

Chunking and Combining Discussion with Close Reading

During close reading, a common practice for engaging students in comprehension work, "students extract meaning from the text by examining carefully how language is used in the passage itself...Its ultimate goal is to help students strengthen their ability to learn from complex text independently" (Snow & O'Connor, 2016, p. 1). While engaging in close reading comprehension work seems like a valuable task in literacy instruction, Snow and O'Connor (2016) contend this independent work may not be accessible and may come at the expense of valuable, rich discussions. Another theme when considering ELs' access to text-focused oral language activities involves combining close reading with discussions and chunking or limiting close reading. Researchers recommend engaging learners in a short close reading activity for under five minutes and combining that with a more in-depth discussion or selecting a single sentence from a text to examine collectively in discussion rather than independently (Snow & O'Connor, 2016; Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012). By making these slight adjustments to close reading routines and infusing more opportunities for discussion, the learning may become more accessible for ELs. They may feel more comfortable engaging as the text would still be complex and challenging, offering exposure to advanced language, yet not as daunting for more emergent readers.

Adjusting Group Size

Another consideration for engaging ELs is adjusting the group size for the discussion. Examining elementary ELs' experience in tier one literacy, Wilson et al. (2016) found ELs spoke the least in the whole-class setting; ELs only engaged in whole-group discussions 11% of the time, whereas non-ELs spoke 89% of the time. When the group size changed to small groups, ELs' talk more than doubled, accounting for 27% of the conversation and in partners, ELs contributed equally to discussion as non-ELs (Wilson et al., 2016). Researchers suggest utilizing routines like think-pair-share to engage ELs frequently in academic conversations in a less intimidating way initially and then perhaps moving to other structured small-group discussions such as literature circles where roles are established and defined (Soto-Hinman, 2011; Wilson et al., 2016). In addition to increasing low-stakes opportunities for ELs to participate in academic talk, teachers need to understand ELs' level of confidence in academic conversations, so they can scaffold and adjust group size appropriately as well as gauge ELs' comprehension by the type of discussion contributions students make.

Accepting a Wide Range of Talk

Part of increasing opportunities for ELs to engage in text-focused discussions also involves a teacher's willingness to accept a wider range of talk. While some researchers contend that affective comments or "extra-textual" contributions are less impactful (Soter et al., 2018), when examining best practices for ELs in discussions, others call for a wider acceptance of student talk (Boyd 2015; Kelly, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). This extended talk might include affective responses, connections, and talk about ideas stemming from or related to the text, but not necessarily the actual text. Three different studies examining small-group discussions about texts with ELs illustrate the need to accept and encourage a variety of talk (Boyd, 2015; Kelly, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). First, third grade ELs and former ELs in Kelly's (2020) study often engaged with the text through talking about the pictures in it and roughly half of the talk in the discussion centered around ideas students had related to the text, but not necessarily the text itself. In a similar case with fourth and fifth grade ELs, students engaged in a unit on whales, and, when examining the discussion with the most student critical turns, defined as 10 seconds or more of extended student talk, researchers found that many critical turns happened when students discussed connections to the text, rather than critical or analytical comments about the text itself (Boyd, 2015). That is, if connections or affective responses about texts had not been valued by the teachers in these cases, those ELs may not have engaged in the discussion at all and their opportunities to practice English oral language while discussing a text could have been significantly diminished.

A third study examining small group, student-led discussions with fifth grade ELs, illustrated that stronger discussion groups used more exploratory talk (Zhang et al., 2018) which Mercer et al. (1999) defined as: "that in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other's ideas…these may be challenged and counter-challenged…reasoning is visible in the talk" (p. 97). While more complex than affective talk in that students are engaged in argumentation and supporting reasoning, encouraging exploratory talk started with the teacher first releasing control of the discussion to students, which led to more talk, and then eventually more reasoning and support for their thinking (Zhang et al., 2018). Thus, accepting a wide range of talk may also mean being flexible and encouraging students taking the lead in discussions.

Discussion Structures

Another theme relating to ELs' engagement in text-based discussions involves using a routine discussion structure. While numerous discussion structures and protocols exist, here, I explore three frameworks for discussions that researchers suggest may be beneficial for ELs. The literature presented here involving these three frameworks, the Conferring with English Language Learners (CELL), literature circles, and Instructional Conversations, specifically centers on ELs' engagement and participation. That is, the research examines the discussion structures in the context of tier one literacy instruction with both ELs and non-ELs, which would also be the setting and case in the current study at Downing.

CELL. While productive academic conversations feature more student talk than teacher talk, they should be structured, which may be especially important for ELs (Soter 2009; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Terantino & Donovan, 2021; Wilson et al., 2016). Having a specific role offers the support ELs may need to participate in discussions or a focus that helps students concentrate their efforts. For example, Terantino and Donovan (2021) describe a discussion protocol, CELL, which "emphasizes ELs' conversational skills to enhance reading comprehension and shifts from a teacher-oriented lesson delivery to a reciprocal student-to-student approach" (p. 14). In the CELL structure, ELs are paired with a higher level EL or non-EL and students each take on a different role, either the "pathfinder" or the "reader" with specific responsibilities in the before, during, and after reading structure (Terantino & Donovan, 2021). For example, the "pathfinder" asks questions to initiate the conversation between partners around building background knowledge about the topic, whereas the "reader" might reread parts of a text when discussing it. The roles are differentiated, though both are important in facilitating the discussion, building rapport among partners, and engaging students in a non-threatening, social, reading comprehension activity (Terantino & Donovan, 2021). That is, the structure and roles may give clarity to each participant's responsibility in the discussion. While this study utilizing the CELL protocol referenced an approach with middle school ELs, the protocol seems applicable to upper elementary students as well which is the reason for its inclusion in this review.

Literature Circles. Literature circles are another example of a small-group discussion structure that may support ELs' engagement in text-based discussions. In these experiences, students read the same book as well as generate discussion questions and engage in different projects, roles, or assignments about the book prior to meeting to discuss the texts (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005). For example, while one student might illustrate and describe an important scene in the reading another might write questions and lead the discussion. When implementing literature circles in a mainstream, tier one fourth grade literacy classroom with about 20% ELs, researchers found that students struggled initially with the format, being prepared, and sustaining conversation during discussions (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005). Recognizing these challenges, the teacher modeled the literature circle structure and process with the entire class, illustrating each task, and modeling discussion, finding that students more easily engaged after seeing the modeling and practicing roles, tasks, and discussions as a class first (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005). Over time, ELs increased their engagement and confidence in participating in the literature circles with specific tasks and a familiar process and structure (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005). While already structured, some discussion protocols may require more scaffolding, particularly for ELs, such as modeling and practicing roles or using visual cues and language stems for discussion topics (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Terantino & Donovan, 2021).

Instructional Conversations. A third discussion structure designed to support ELs in academic discussion is Instructional Conversations (IC). The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) describes ICs as opportunities for students to engage in discussion with the teacher in small groups. These conversations are content focused, have clear academic goals, and unlike literature circles, are teacher-led, yet the students do much of the talking, as a main goal is to develop students' oral language (CREDE, 2021). Research supports IC and their impact on reading achievement. Saunders and Goldberg (1999) studied the effects of both ICs and literature logs on 116 third and fourth graders, finding that students who received instruction utilizing both strategies outperformed all other students in reading comprehension. However, students receiving the IC strategy alone demonstrated greater achievement than those only receiving the literature logs (a written reading response), or neither strategy, illustrating the value and benefit of text-based discussion opportunities for ELs in their reading comprehension. (Saunders & Goldberg, 1999). In another study, all third and fifth grade students, ELs and non-ELs, who received instruction utilizing IC, outperformed their counterparts in the control group with 14% and 10% advantages respectively (Portes & González Canché, 2016; Portes et al., 2018). These studies reinforce the importance of integrating opportunities for students to apply oral language, specifically structured conversations, in the tier one literacy classroom and their positive impact on ELs' achievement.

Using Wordless Picture Books

While these discussion structures, close reading strategies, and scaffolds for engagement described assume students have read or are reading a text, another instructional activity for promoting oral language among ELs is in using wordless picture books. Researchers describe how such picture books may lack words, but "they are not independent from language as a means of comprehension," providing a tool for teachers to use to support ELs' oral language related to texts (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015, p. 106). That is, ELs can engage in "close viewing," an activity similar to close reading, but one in which students examine the illustrations and text structures to demonstrate skills such as retelling and sequencing, discussing characters and their feelings, explaining the plot, and describing the setting (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015). According to Louie and Sierschynski (2015), ELs can even provide evidence from the text to support their thinking but refer to what they see as evidence versus what they read. This activity may be even more beneficial to ELs who are more emergent in their English acquisition or decoding skills. Students are still able to discuss texts and illustrate their knowledge of story elements or reasoning skills, and it is possible using wordless texts may even result in more discussion and oral language usage than traditional texts, as there is no text to reference and as students are not rereading text.

Incorporating the Arts

In addition, perhaps another less traditional example of effective text-based oral language activities involves integrating the arts (theater, dance, visual arts) to enhance and develop students' oral language related to literacy. In the Teaching Artist Project (TAP), a literacy program based in California in areas with high concentrations of ELs, K-2 teachers pair with a teaching artist to infuse art with literacy (Brouillette, 2011; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). While not a structured discussion, the TAP program engages students in text-based drama activities such as acting out stories, retelling, using movement to learn new vocabulary, call and response, and enhancing their knowledge in plot, storytelling, and characterization (Brouillette, 2011; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). ELs from schools using this program, based on nine, 40-minute lessons each year, saw greater gains in kindergarten and first grade students' speaking and listening subtests on the California English Language Development (CELDT) assessment for ELs compared with ELs from comparable, non-participating schools (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). Teachers and researchers also noted anecdotally the improvements in students' comprehension and increased willingness for reluctant ELs to engage more in these activities as the program progressed (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). While seemingly engaging and effective, this is a two-year program in which the classroom teacher receives significant support, professional learning, and coaching from the teaching artist, which would require significant resources, planning, and collaboration, making it harder to scale. However, the ideas of incorporating acting, movement, gestures, and retelling through acting could be incorporated into the classroom, especially with texts and stories already being utilized.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to the narrow focus of this literature review and framework worth acknowledging. First, while the work utilizes a socio-cultural lens, it only examines one small part of students' culture or classroom experience. It does not include the numerous other factors and experiences that could influence students' oral language or reading both in the classroom and outside it. In addition, much of the included literature could not study causal relationships between oral language and reading achievement, as isolating oral language is not feasible in the scope of components and factors related to a student's reading acquisition. In fact, researchers supporting oral language activities in the reading classroom caution against oral language replacing other critical components of literacy instruction, arguing oral language should be incorporated alongside those other essential components (Kieffer, 2012). Additionally, teachers' knowledge and skills about teaching ELs could certainly be a factor in ELs' experience in tier one literacy classrooms, as some teachers feel unprepared to teach ELs or have low expectations or them and some researchers contend that teaching ELs requires additional skillsets for mainstream teachers (August et al., 2009; de Jong et al., 2013; Pettit, 2011).

Summary

In this literature review I first explored the association between English oral language and ELs' reading. Then, I examined the characteristics of text-based opportunities to develop oral language in elementary literacy classrooms and particularly the practices, strategies, and scaffolds teachers utilize to engage ELs in these learning experiences. I further detailed perhaps less common text-based oral language activities like integrating the arts or using books with no text. Many of the hallmarks of strong discussions promoting comprehension such as open-ended questions, modeling, and an emphasis on student talk also mark best practices for engaging ELs as well. However, when supporting ELs in academic conversations about texts, educators should also scaffold to support students in accessing challenging texts, consider reducing the group size or quantity of text, utilize structures with predictable prompts, routines, and roles, and accept a wide range of talk to engage ELs and to build confidence in academic conversations. Teachers should also consider integrating theater-based activities or wordless picture books to engage ELs in talking about and interpreting texts. In the current study, understanding and describing text-based oral language activities in literacy and the ways teachers engage ELs in those learning experiences could guide future teacher support at Downing.

Chapter 3: Methods

I begin the methods section by revisiting the problem of practice and the purpose of the study, as outlined earlier in this paper. Though researchers contend that classroom teachers need specific skillsets for teaching ELs (de Jong et al., 2013), teachers often note that they feel unprepared to teach these students (Pettit, 2011). However, teachers must be prepared and equipped to teach ELs' reading as ELs are an increasing demographic of K-12 students whose achievement on standardized reading assessments lags significantly behind their non-EL peers (NCES, 2021b, VDOE, 2021). Pass rates on the English reading state assessments in third and fourth grades at Downing Elementary illustrate this significant gap in achievement, as well as a declining performance among ELs (VDOE, 2021). Further, as illustrated in the previous chapter, oral language skills are positively associated with later reading skills like comprehension (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021). Additionally, one district literacy priority was for students to engage in reading and discussing complex texts. In the current school year, teachers received direction from district and school leaders as well as professional learning support in implementing newly adopted curriculum resources.

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe how teachers implemented oral language activities in tier one reading instruction and the ways in which they engaged ELs in these activities. This included exploring how teachers drew upon and implemented the oral language activities in the HMH reading resources and the ways, if any, they adapted these lessons for ELs and engaged them in oral language activities. While research supports that oral language is related to stronger comprehension and advanced reading skills for ELs (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021), it is less evident in the research how these activities might be practically implemented, or more generally, the ways oral language activities are scaffolded to promote ELs' engagement. In this work, I sought to describe ways teachers engaged ELs in oral language activities. By describing how teachers engaged students in these practices, instructional leaders, like the district literacy coordinator and school-based instructional leaders like coaches and reading specialists, may better understand how to support teachers in implementing oral language activities and in meeting the needs of ELs during literacy instruction. Specific research questions included:

1. In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?

Study Design

The study utilized a case study approach. Case study methods work well when researchers want to engage in an in-depth study of a single, bounded situation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Additionally, case studies allow researchers to make recommendations or affect policies or change (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). In this case, I limited the research to K-4, tier one, literacy classrooms at Downing Elementary School. While the challenge of preparing and supporting teachers in meeting the needs of ELs in literacy and increasing students' reading achievement is evident nationwide, case study was an appropriate method to explore the challenge at a single site, where I work, and where I will use the findings to further support teachers. This challenge of supporting teachers in meeting ELs' literacy needs and increasing reading achievement was evident across multiple years at Downing. As the researcher, I had established relationships with the teachers from my role as the instructional coach and was regularly in classrooms. My familiarity with the literacy curriculum not only stemmed from the support I provided Downing teachers, but also from my work to plan and support implementation across the district.

Through classroom observations, curriculum review, and teacher interviews, I sought to better understand teachers' practices regarding oral language activities including the ways in which teachers integrated such activities while implementing the HMH resources and the strategies and moves they employed to engage ELs in the activities. I engaged in this work with the goal of ultimately making recommendations to school and district literacy leaders about next steps related to ELs' reading instruction, including future teacher support and direction around curriculum implementation. Gaining an understanding of existing oral language practices and needed next steps to support teachers in meeting ELs' literacy needs, was helpful given my role as the instructional coach at Downing.

Case

This study was situated at Downing Elementary School, a preschool through fourth grade Title I school within Harper City Schools, in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. At the district level, 15% of students were ELs, whereas 27% of students were ELs at Downing. District resources indicated that 51 languages were spoken across the district. Table 2 illustrates the percentage of ELs and additional demographic data of students at the district level in Harper City compared to that of Downing. Though the study occurred during the 2021-2022 school year, available demographic data was based on the previous, 2020-2021 school year.

Table 2

Comparison of Student Demographic Data at the District and School Level

	Harper City	Downing
English Learners	15.0%	27.0%
Non-English Learners	85.0%	73.0%
Students with Disabilities	13.7%	6.9%
Students Without Disabilities	86.3%	93.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	45.9%	41.5%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	54.1%	58.5%

Note. Data is based on the 2020-2021 school year.

Additionally, Table 3 compares the student racial and ethnic data between the district and the school as well.

Table 3

Comparison of Student Racial and Ethnicity Data

	Harper City	Downing
Black	32.0%	17.9%
Hispanic	13.2%	14.5%
White	39.6%	43.4%
Asian	6.0%	11.3%
Multiple Races	9.2%	12.6%
American Indian	0.0%	0.3%
Native Hawaiian	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%

Note. Data is based on the 2020-2021 school year.

Regarding teachers, 65% of teachers in Harper City and 70% at Downing specifically held advanced degrees of a master's or higher. No teachers at Downing were teaching out-of-field. Across Harper City, teachers had an average of 11 years of experience.

Instructional Literacy Block

All grade levels, kindergarten through fourth grade, had a two-hour literacy block. Of that two-hour block, 90 minutes were uninterrupted, grade level, tier one instruction. The literacy block was generally broken into four components: shared reading, writing, foundational skills, and differentiated foundational skills. Within each of these instructional blocks, specific components, routines, practices, and instructional activities occurred. Figure 2 provides a visual of this breakdown of the literacy block and components. This uninterrupted 90-minute tier one literacy block allowed for ample time to observe learning activities and interactions across multiple components of the literacy block including vocabulary instruction, shared reading, writing, and foundational skills. Understanding what occurred in classrooms at this specific site was critical to better understanding the challenge of supporting teachers in implementing best practices for ELs in literacy to encourage ELs' growth and achievement in reading.

Figure 2

Sample Daily Literacy Block at Downing

Sample Daily Literacy Block (2 hours) K-4 Each of the four components lasted approximately 30 minutes.	
Reading and Writing	
Shared Reading	○ Vocabulary/Oral language ○ Shared reading (read aloud, close reading, rereading) ○ Reading response/discussion (writing in response to text, discussion, questions)
Writing	○ Writing workshop ○ Grammar ○ Handwriting
Foundational Skills	
Whole Class Grade Level Foundational Skills	○ Grade level foundational skills ○ Phonemic and phonological awareness/ Decoding/ Phonics work ○ Spelling ○ Fluency ○ Reading decodable text
Differentiated Small Groups and Foundational Skills Practice	○ Differentiated foundational skills (decoding, fluency, spelling) practice in flexible small groups or independent activities ○ Fluency ○ Book clubs ○ Reading and rereading decodable books ○ Students who receive additional support from reading specialists or interventionists typically meet with students during this time.

Note. The observations occurred during the first three components of the block.

Sampling

Though the site was already identified, I chose the specific teacher participants through criterion sampling, narrowing the focus and inviting only the 12 classroom teachers in grades K-4 who were not in their first or second year of teaching and who were not new to the school district (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the instructional coach, I am required to individually coach novice teachers in their first and second years of teaching and those new to the district. Thus, I did not invite novice teachers to participate in the study to avoid any sense of coercion because the study was voluntary. Also, including novice or beginning teachers would not support my goal of understanding what occurred with regard to oral language activities in a "typical classroom" or with a "typical teacher." I also did not include preschool teachers since they did not utilize the HMH curriculum. I chose not to include ESL teachers or other specialists either, as they had specific training to support ELs and because the focus of the study was on general education teachers' practices during tier one instruction, where ELs spent much of their time.

The study sought to address the problem of practice centered on supporting ELs' reading achievement and though only third and fourth graders at the school took state reading assessments, the study also included primary grade classrooms for multiple reasons. First, students acquire English oral language, comprehension, and other reading skills not only in these testing grades, but across their elementary schooling. Also, oral language activities were evident in the adopted curriculum throughout grades K-4. Literature supports that students' oral language as early as kindergarten can be associated with later reading comprehension in upper elementary and even in middle school (Kieffer, 2012; Rojas et al., 2019) Thus, in this study, I examined the ways teachers implemented oral language activities in tier one reading instruction across a sampling of four classrooms throughout grades K-4 at this one site, rather than only those grade levels which took the state reading assessments.

While all classroom teachers at Downing implemented the HMH curriculum, and all had ELs in their classrooms, it was possible that the ways in which teachers integrated opportunities to develop students' oral language to support access to and engagement in texts differed in early and upper elementary grades. Thus, it was important to describe the practices teachers used in primary grades instruction (K-1) as well as the middle elementary grades (2nd-4th). Two participating primary grades teachers and two middle grades teachers provided rich description of the implementation of oral language activities and the ways teachers engaged ELs in tier one literacy across grade levels at Downing. Having four participating teachers not only allowed for variety across grade levels, but also supported my understanding of what happened in a “typical classroom” or how a “typical teacher” implemented the instructional resources and integrated oral language activities and engaged ELs. Four classroom observations, lesson reviews, and interviews were also manageable for the scope of the research project and timeframe.

Upon receiving IRB and school district approval, I invited the 12 eligible teachers to participate in the study via email. I sent a follow-up email one week later as well. Four teachers who agreed to participate served as a balanced representation across four grade levels with one teacher from kindergarten, first, third, and fourth grades. The average of the teachers’ years of experience was 12 years, similar to that of the average experience of teachers across Harper City at 11 years. Additionally, each teacher had EL students in their classroom. ELs comprised an average of 29% of each class’s makeup, with a range across classrooms of 24 to 38% of the class being ELs. There were seven different home languages represented among the EL students in participating classes. ELs’ English Language Proficiency levels ranged from one to four across the participating teachers' classrooms with an average level of 1.6 across the primary grades (K-1st) and an average of 2.1 across the middle grades (3rd-4th).

Data Tools

To collect data, I conducted classroom observations, interviewed teachers, and reviewed curriculum. All three data sources contributed to answering the research question, "In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?" By observing the lessons and being in the classroom space, I captured the interactions between students as well as those with their teacher within the learning environment. I observed the lesson activities and the presence of specific strategies, including activities that promoted oral language. I reviewed the curriculum and conducted teacher interviews to solidify the evidence of those practices supporting ELs and to answer the second research question, "What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?" Figure 3 illustrates which research question was answered by each of these data tools.

Figure 3

Research Questions and Methods Alignment Chart

Research Question	Classroom Observation	Semi-Structured Teacher Interview	Curriculum Review
1. In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?	X	X	X
2. What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?		X	X

Note. An "X" indicates the data tool is designed to answer the research question.

Observation Protocol

To describe the ways that teachers engaged ELs in oral language activities, I observed what happened in the classroom. The observation protocol (see appendix A) began with logistical information including the teacher number, date and time of the observations, as well as the number of total students and ELs. Because of my work in the school, I was aware of who the EL students were. Next, I included a setting diagram to capture the classroom design and layout. I also included a general observations section to note what occurred in the lesson and the general components and practices which may not have fit in one of the subsequent, more specific sections of the protocol. Each section included a reflexive notes field for the researcher so that notes could be added during the observation in addition to after it (Patton, 2015).

Following the general components of the observation protocol, I included four additional sections. First, the protocol had a section for "descriptions of observed oral language activities" to describe specific instructional activities involving oral language use or application. I included common practices referenced in this paper and evident in the HMH curriculum like turn-and-talk, think-pair-share, discussions and an “other” category for any additional, perhaps unanticipated activities. The subsequent sections included “discussion moves” and “considerations, scaffolds, and supports for ELs”, each of which had subsections identifying specific strategies and key look-fors included in the literature review such as group sizes, questions and wait time, and accepting a wide range of talk. That is, these sections provided opportunities to describe in depth what occurred during oral language activities and to note specific practices commonly used in productive academic conversations and those which were beneficial for engaging ELs in such discussions or oral language activities. Also, there was a section to note any additional interactions between ELs and their teacher and peers which may have been relevant but not captured in other components of the protocol. The protocol was meant to be utilized electronically so that fields could be expanded as note-taking occurred. In creating this observation protocol, I followed many of Hatch’s (2002) recommendations for collecting field notes including understanding and describing the classroom context of the observation, starting broadly with descriptions of the physical space, and then moving to more specific details including interactions and teacher moves, while keeping the research questions in mind, which aids the researcher in later analysis.

Curriculum Review Protocol

Prior to and following the lesson observation, I reviewed the observed lesson plans in the HMH materials to gain more context around the activities included in the curriculum and to compare them to teachers’ actual practice. In order to compare the lesson components in the curriculum to what actually occurred in practice, I developed a curriculum review protocol. The curriculum review protocol (see appendix B) was a two-column chart including one column for listing oral language activities from the observed lesson as described in the curriculum resource. The second column provided a space to note how these activities were implemented and ways in which teachers may have adapted or scaffolded the activities to engage ELs. I used the curriculum review protocol before and after each lesson observation.

Interview Protocol

Interviews were semi-structured one-on-one with the teacher and researcher. To conduct interviews, I developed an interview protocol (see appendix C) that included eight questions for each teacher. The protocol included questions about the teacher's years of experience, their experience teaching ELs, and any PL they received about ELs. The protocol also incorporated questions about the ways teachers supported ELs and their practices and perceptions around oral language activities. In addition to these questions, after each classroom observation, I added questions to the protocol about specific practices, teacher moves, or instructional activities I observed.

Prior to conducting teacher interviews, I piloted the interview protocol with an ineligible teacher to determine if the approximate interview duration of 30 minutes was reasonable and if the questions provided the information I was seeking. Because I did not observe the teacher with whom I piloted the interview, I only asked the first eight questions. As a result of the pilot interview, I determined that the time approximation of 30 minutes and questions were appropriate. I did not make changes to the interview protocol following the pilot interview.

Data Collection Procedures

I followed the procedures outlined in this section of the paper to conduct observations and interviews as well as review curriculum artifacts in a systematic way.

Research Procedures

Once IRB approval, school district approval, and participant consents were obtained, I briefly met with each participant and discussed the purpose of the research again and to answer any questions participants may have. I also scheduled the 90-minute classroom observations as well as the follow-up interviews and verified the lessons teachers would be teaching on the selected observation day based on their instructional planning and pacing.

Classroom Observations. Observations occurred over a two-week period. They lasted 90-minutes each and I observed the shared reading (which included the vocabulary component), writing, and tier one foundational skills instructional blocks.

Role of the Researcher. Hatch (2002) describes how the researcher should consider the level of intrusiveness during an observation and cautions researchers about fully participating in the setting as well but given my regular presence in classrooms and relationships with students and teachers, maintaining a non-participant role would have been challenging. Thus, my role was that of a participant-observer. Throughout the four observations, I typically sat in the back of the classroom so that I could see all students and the teacher. I occasionally moved around the classroom to better hear a teacher working with an individual student or small group or when students worked in small groups. While I did not frequently engage in interactions with students, occasionally students asked me questions or talked with me. In these cases, I engaged with them, responding, as I typically would when in classrooms. I did not initiate interactions with the students or teacher, however.

During classroom observations, I utilized the observation protocol to capture and describe in detail the lessons including oral language activities, teachers' moves and scaffolds they employed. I described visuals and other resources teachers referenced as well as the interactions between the teacher and students as well as those between students. I observed the teachers' use of oral language activities including collaborative activities and negotiations and discussions over joint assignments, turn and talks with student pairs or small group discussions with peers, and whole-class discussions. I listened for students' opportunities to apply oral language even while engaging in work related to other literacy skills like comprehension. While the focus of the study was on understanding the ways teachers implemented oral language activities, it was also important to observe what happened as a result of those opportunities, or the way students engaged in them. When observing, I focused to turn taking (Bloome et al., 2004) as well as the quality of the talk (Gibbons, 2015). While I observed the whole class, when groupings shifted away from whole group to partner or small group structures, I focused my attention more to groups with ELs when observing all groups simultaneously was not possible.

It should be noted that across all four observations all students and teachers wore masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The masks made it challenging to determine whether a student was talking at times and to hear student responses. In some classrooms or groups this was easier than in others. When observing turn taking and discussions, researchers would likely watch students' mouths to determine when they were speaking. This would be especially necessary when observing an entire class turning and talking in partners. However, in this study, I was often unable to ascertain the number of talking turns, the quantity of talk, and sometimes the quality of talk due to masking. While this was easier to do in the whole group setting, when students engaged in turn and talks or small group conversations with peers, it was challenging to hear students and to determine whether their mouths were moving.

Curriculum Review. After confirming which lessons teachers would implement on the observation day, I reviewed the lesson plans in HMH. This involved accessing the online resources and reading the lessons using the digital teachers' manuals. These online curriculum resources allowed me to click and open supplemental resources such as visuals or worksheets as well. I also accessed and reviewed the texts and activities from students' consumable anthologies of shared texts, which were also available online. When conducting the initial curriculum review, I used the curriculum review protocol to indicate practices evident in the curriculum. I listed instructional activities across each component of the literacy block for the specific day's lesson that I observed. Following each observation, I revisited the curriculum review protocol and referenced the resources to note what actually occurred in the second column of the protocol. I indicated whether the instructional activity was implemented and described, if any, ways the teacher adjusted a lesson or provided additional scaffolding from the lesson plan.

During the data analysis process, I continued to refer to the curriculum resources and lesson plans to gain clarity and to answer questions emerging from other data sources or from my own analysis.

Teacher Interviews. Teacher interviews were semi-structured. While I had already created and piloted the interview protocol, including eight questions for all participants, I also added unique questions for each teacher. Holding the interviews after the observations and curriculum review provided the opportunity to add additional questions related to themes and questions emerging from the observations. For example, I added specific questions about the learning activities I observed and around discrepancies or adjustments to activities in the curriculum and the actual implementation in the classroom. To write these questions, I reviewed my observation protocols and notes to identify practices I wanted to learn more about or questions I had. Prior to the interview, I added these questions to a copy of the interview protocol. The interviews were audio-recorded with the teacher's permission using my personal computer. Interviews took place in my office, which was not shared with any other employees, affording confidentiality. I transcribed each interview and shared it with the teacher inviting them to verify that it accurately captured their responses.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data from this case study in a systematic way involved an iterative process of rounds of coding, organizing and reorganizing data, writing memos, and drawing themes from the data across each of the data sources to answer my research questions. Even while observing lessons, analysis began as I wrote reflexive notes on the protocol, summarizing noticings, asking questions, or identifying themes I saw during observations. Throughout the coding process, all codes were added to the codebook which was refined and updated throughout the coding process (see appendix D). I utilized Microsoft Excel during the coding and analysis processes, which was not only a program I am familiar with using, but also one which allowed me to sort data with ease.

Classroom Observations

To analyze the abundance of data from classroom observations, I began by assigning and sorting data based on code categories. I initially assigned three code categories, “oral language activity,” a “scaffold for ELs,” or “general teacher moves” which allowed me to sort data more easily. Next, I coded this sorted data with *a priori* codes within those categories which were aligned with the conceptual framework and my own research questions (Bazeley, 2013). When developing the observation protocol, I designed it with *a priori* codes in mind, dividing the protocol into anticipated oral language practices such as “turn and talks” or “discussion” based on the literature and my own knowledge of the curriculum resources and activities I expected to see from the curriculum. I also assigned *a priori* codes relating to scaffolds for ELs based in practices outlined in the literature review and those I incorporated into the observation protocol such as “adjusting group size” or incorporating the “arts” or “accepting a wide range of talk.”

That is, the *a priori* codes were based on the literature, my research questions, and were built into the design of the observation protocol which facilitated that coding process. I also added codes to the codebook when examining oral language activities which I did not anticipate as *a priori* codes. For example, I did not expect to find an oral language activity like conferencing during writing instruction, nor did I anticipate it being such a prevalent practice. Thus, I added the “conferencing” code to distinguish such instructional activities from other oral language practices. Sometimes assigning these *a priori* codes was challenging. For example, I grappled with differentiating between turn and talks and lengthier conversations teachers incorporated during close reading, as evidenced during this excerpt from a memo I wrote during the coding and analysis process:

> What would be a “turn and talk” and what would classify as “discussion and closer reading?” Often the teacher might say “turn and talk,” to the partner or small groups, but in some cases, these sessions were far longer than typical turn and talks. I ultimately decided that a turn and talk was for around 1-2 minutes or less and was more for the purposes of sharing out students’ responses, thoughts, answers, or connections. In the cases where I counted “discussion with close reading,” the original intent of the lesson was as a close reading. Additionally, students had to reread text, answer a text-based question either on their own first or as part of the conversation and then met with and discussed it with their partner/group.

During the data analysis process, I reflected on both the data and the process, noting, and documenting such reflections in memos like the one above (Patton, 2015).

Following initial rounds of coding, I sorted data by the codes in Excel and examined and coded data. To facilitate organizing, sorting, and analyzing data in different ways, I added a “group size” code to each piece of data as well as a “lesson component” code. First, I identified each coded piece of data describing an oral language activity or scaffold with codes like “small group” or “one-on-one” or “whole group” to distinguish and label the data by group size. I also assigned lesson component codes as I realized in initial analysis that patterns and themes seemed to exist with regard to when oral language activities occurred. In this subsequent round of coding, I added codes based on the instructional components within the literacy block at Downing. For example, I assigned codes like “shared reading” or “vocabulary” or “writing” to coded data. In sorting the data this way, I was able to analyze it by the instructional component during which the practices occurred and could draw themes from what oral language activities were evident during the various components of the literacy block.

To illustrate this systematic coding process, consider the following data excerpt from a vocabulary activity during an observed lesson. In this lesson, students applied their knowledge of vocabulary terms like “invisible” and “lurking” by discussing questions related to their level of worry in situations that include the vocabulary word.

> **Teacher**: How worried would you be if you suddenly became invisible?
> Students raise their hand ranking 1-3 on their level of worry after which the teacher directs students to turn and talk.
> Three ELs are turning and talking with their partners.
> **Teacher**: How worried would you be if you saw a fox lurking behind a bush? (Students answer by holding up a number, 1-3, ranking their worry.) Turn and tell neighbor.
> 3/3 ELs are sharing again. Turn and talks range from 30 seconds to one minute.

Following the iterative coding process above, this excerpt was labeled as “observation” and included the code for the teacher. I initially categorized the data as “oral language activity” and assigned the *a priori* code of “turn and talk.” Next, I added the codes of “partners” to represent the group size of this activity and “vocabulary” to illustrate the instructional component during which the activity occurred in the classroom.

When I began to recognize and draw initial themes from my analysis, I documented them by charting in Word the emerging theme, notes about the theme, data, or codes, to support the theme, specific examples, and connections to other data. See appendix E for a sample chart of what I used during this process.

Curriculum Review

I also coded the curriculum review protocol using the same codes related to the types of oral language activities present in the curriculum and then coded data as either “included,” “not-included,” or “added/replaced.” These codes indicated whether the teacher implemented an activity or practice outlined in the curriculum review protocol or not. I also used the “added/replaced” code to indicate occasions when the teacher changed the instructional activity or added in an oral language activity. That is, sometimes teachers adapted a lesson or implemented it in a different way such as when a planned turn and talk became a whole group discussion. Other times, teachers added in an oral language activity. On multiple occasions the curriculum did not include turn and talks but teachers added them.

After this initial coding cycle, I engaged in a subsequent round of coding with emergent codes, relating to the data coded as “added/replaced.” After identifying patterns or trends among activities and practices with that code, I recoded all data with the initial “added/replaced” code to more specific codes, “added scaffold,” “added oral language activity,” “replaced oral language activity with another oral language activity.” These codes differentiated the data and helped me better understand occasions when teachers added supports or oral language activities and times when they substituted one activity for another. I could then sort the data accordingly based on these codes and target analysis within these categories. As with observational data, I revised my codebook to include these more specific, emergent codes.

Initially I included all coded data from observations, curriculum reviews, and interviews in one file and labeled data with the data source (observation, curriculum review, or interview) and the teacher code. However, once data from multiple sources were combined, it was challenging to sort and analyze due to the volume. Thus, I sorted all data by the data source and then made separate sheets within Excel for each source.

Additionally, during the analysis process, I realized that in order to more comprehensively represent what was included in the curriculum, I needed to examine more lessons than the one day I observed. That is, since the curriculum was organized into modules with weekly lesson plans where shared texts were utilized across days, I expanded my curriculum review to include the week of lessons during which the observation occurred. Often, the weekly plans were organized in a predictable pattern from week to week. For example, after an initial reading of a shared text and a collaborative discussion on day one, on the second day of the week the plans called for a close reading of the same text. Because I observed third and fourth grade on close reading days, I would not have captured the collaborative discussion activity because it was not typically paired with a second, close read lesson. Thus, to accurately capture the typical activities in HMH plans, I needed to look across the week, rather than simply on one day.

By this point in the analysis process, I had identified themes related to oral language activities during three components of instruction (vocabulary, shared reading, and writing) so I created a chart (see appendix F) with each of these three components and the four grade levels. Researchers note that this type of matrix can be "used to condense qualitative data into simple categories" and "facilitate the coding and categorization process" (Check & Schutt, 2017, p. 8). I then examined the lessons in each grade level across a week of instruction and noted oral language practices on the chart. I also added a section to the chart for collaborative discussions since this was the target oral language activity I sought to better understand. Since I examined data across a week, I needed a different tool from the curriculum protocol which was designed for a single day's lesson review and for the purpose of comparing the curriculum to actual implementation. I examined the evidence on the chart to identify more representative themes related to evidence of oral language practices in the curriculum and to compare the presentation of such practices across grade levels.

On another occasion when I wanted to dig deeper into the curriculum to better understand a teacher's perceptions around whether the curriculum included a specific oral language practice or not, I not only examined a variety of lessons related to that specific practice of collaborative discussions, but also supplemental teacher resources included with the curriculum. I examined these resources to gain understanding in how HMH supported teachers' practical implementation and the guidance the resource offered. Though curriculum review began as a focus on examining the lesson plans for the day of classroom observation in each grade, it expanded to include analysis of the curriculum across a week of instruction and a deeper examination of specific oral language practices in HMH through examining supplemental resources. As Check and Schutt (2017) contend, "When it appears that additional concepts need to be investigated or new relationships explored, the analyst adjusts the data collection itself" (p. 4).

Teacher Interviews

I coded the interviews using a different set of codes but following the same process of beginning with *a priori* codes including "explanation of move or practice," "challenge," and "teacher perception" (Bazeley, 2013). While the interviews provided the opportunity to gain insight into teachers' knowledge and skills related to engaging ELs and implementing oral language activities in literacy instruction, these interviews also provided a chance to learn about teachers' perceptions regarding oral language activities, the curriculum, and their teacher moves to engage and support ELs. Following a similar coding process to the observations and curriculum review, I engaged in subsequent rounds of coding which further coded teachers' explanation of practice as either an explanation of a scaffold or of an oral language activity. The interview data sometimes offered explanations for why a teacher included a practice or why they did not include a practice. I would not have understood this perspective had I not spoken with the teacher. Interviews also helped me understand teachers' reasoning for incorporating certain oral language activities such as the influence of professional learning or lack of time. In other cases, hearing from the teacher raised additional questions about the curriculum or their perceptions of it which prompted me to examine and evaluate the resources further.

I coded interview data on a separate Excel document from other data to limit the quantity of data to sort and analyze at one time. I also sorted the interview data by interview question. The teachers were all asked eight questions that were the same. Thus, I created a spreadsheet with the questions and each teacher's response to a specific question listed below it. Organizing the data this way made sense as one way to examine it since I could compare and analyze responses from each teacher to the same question at once (Check & Schutt, 2017). This formatting was applicable only for those questions I asked all teachers.

The data analysis process described with observations was similar to that across data sources. While I outlined some unique ways of sorting or organizing data respective to each of the individual data sources, generally the analysis process was common across data sources. The process involved iterative coding, organizing data to facilitate analysis or to narrow the focus of analysis, and reflecting and refining the process throughout analysis through memos and identifying emerging themes (Bazeley, 2013; Check & Schutt, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Positionality of the Researcher

As with any study, it was important to consider my own positionality and bias related to this study of teachers' use of oral language activities and the ways in which they engaged ELs in tier one reading instruction at Downing. First, my own learning from the literature on the association of English oral language skills and reading comprehension presented in this paper and the culmination of learning and work on this topic throughout my doctoral study could have influenced my bias and view regarding the importance of oral language development in literacy instruction. My own use of text-based discussions and discussion structures such as literature circles and my positive experiences around them in my own classrooms as a teacher also may have influenced my support of these strategies as being beneficial to students.

Also, my extended employment in Harper City and continued desire to support the district through implementation of instructional priorities and curriculum resources, as well as my closeness to this specific work of implementing the HMH resources and supporting ELs in that process, also may have impacted my bias towards this importance of this work. This was my 15th year as an educator in Harper City Schools, where I spent seven years as a third-grade teacher in one school, six years as a building level administrator in a second school, and was in my second year as the instructional coach at Downing, a third Harper City School. I also have served on multiple district level curriculum teams, and I also work closely with the district literacy coordinator and collaborated with her on developing professional learning around implementing the current adopted curriculum resources in reading as well. Not only was I familiar with the curriculum resources and district goals, but also worked to promote the implementation of adopted resources and the goals of engaging all learners in tier one instruction. I supported their implementation and valued what the adopted resources offer. These biases could have impacted the value I placed on certain instructional practices over others and influenced my interpretation of the data.

Trustworthiness

In this study I took a comprehensive approach to examine and describe how teachers implemented oral language activities and engaged ELs in those learning experiences in tier one literacy instruction and several aspects of the study including triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member-checking increased the trustworthiness of it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). First, Lincoln and Guba suggest that prolonged engagement within the research context establishes familiarity, relationships, and trust, which I have done through my work with Downing teachers as the instructional coach, but also within the district. I was familiar with the school and had established relationships and trust with teachers.

Additionally, I conducted observations in multiple classrooms across grade levels to gain a more comprehensive view of teachers' implementation at Downing. This helped me understand a "typical classroom." By interviewing teachers and asking follow-up questions about their implementation of specific activities and their own teacher moves, as well as in reviewing curriculum resources, I triangulated data across multiple sources and examined classroom practices from multiple angles which Lincoln & Guba contend provide more complete description. Triangulation helped clarify teachers' intentions, instructional moves, and intentionality in implementation. I also used member-checking (Lincoln & Guba) by asking teachers about specific teacher moves and activities within their classroom and by providing a copy of the transcribed interview to teachers before data analysis to ensure their responses were captured accurately.

Ethical Considerations

While being an employee of the school provided prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the study setting, given these established relationships with participants, it is also important to consider any potential ethical issues. Though I am perceived as an instructional leader in the school, I do not evaluate teachers in my role as instructional coach. Nonetheless, I reiterated in the recruitment process, including in emails sent to teachers, that the study was voluntary and that observations were non-evaluative. Also, since I am required to work individually in coaching work with novice or new to district teachers, I did not invite them to participate in the study. All other individual coaching is optional so any sense of a potential power differential should have been minimized.

Teachers received a consent form attached to their email. I offered multiple ways for teachers to return consents without turning them in directly to me, including a large envelope in my mailbox at school or giving the sealed consent to the administrative technician so she could put it in a similar large envelope for me. Ensuring teachers felt comfortable and not pressured to participate in the observation and interview was critical.

Regarding the interviews, participants were again told participation was voluntary and that they could skip any questions. I asked for verbal consent to participating in the interview in addition to signed consent for the study. Participants were also told that data would be kept confidential. I secured all data on a password protected computer and I also password protected individual data collection tools and documents as well. Documents did not include teachers' names and pseudonyms were used for the school and district. Teachers' names and pronouns were not utilized in this Capstone.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this study, I observed and interviewed four teachers in four elementary grade levels and reviewed HMH curriculum resources for the purpose of better understanding the ways classroom teachers at Downing Elementary currently implement oral language activities in their tier one literacy blocks and the ways they engage ELs in those learning experiences. I also sought to understand teachers' perceptions around implementing those activities. Gaining this knowledge better prepares me, as the instructional coach, to support teachers in literacy-based professional learning and effective strategies to meet the needs of our EL students. Further, it will help me understand the ways in which we might adapt or augment components of the adopted curriculum resources to best equip teachers for meeting the needs of ELs. Specific research questions that guided this study were:

- In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?
- What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?

In analyzing the data, two significant findings emerged. First, teachers incorporated oral language activities across the reading and writing portion of the literacy block during vocabulary, shared reading, and writing, though they were most prevalent during vocabulary instruction. I illustrate this finding by outlining the oral language activities and the scaffolds teachers use in each of these three components of the literacy block. Second, the curriculum resources, PL, and teachers' perceptions impacted actual instructional implementation of oral language activities.

Finding 1: Teachers integrated oral language activities across multiple components of the literacy block, though these practices and scaffolds to implement them were most evident in vocabulary instruction.

Through observing and interviewing teachers across four grade levels, it was evident that teachers integrated opportunities for students to use and apply oral language activities across three components of the language comprehension portion of the literacy block including vocabulary, shared reading, and writing. However, teachers implemented these practices as well as scaffolds to engage all students, including ELs, to varying degrees across the components. For example, these oral language activities and scaffolds were most prevalent during vocabulary instruction. Additionally, some evidence of incorporating oral language activities existed during shared reading and writing. Though some of the oral language activities were text-based like those during close reading or when learning vocabulary words embedded in shared texts, others were not text-focused, but rather simply provided students opportunities to engage in discussion while working on other literacy skills like writing.

Vocabulary Instruction

The clearest and most consistent example of teachers integrating oral language activities across grade levels was in the vocabulary instruction portion of the literacy block. Explicit vocabulary instruction and application of “power words” was a routine component of the shared reading portion of the literacy block. These “power words” were embedded in the common, shared texts that students read or those they listen to teachers read aloud. Thus, understanding the meaning of the vocabulary terms supported students’ comprehension of the texts. In the two middle elementary classrooms (3rd-4th), teachers reviewed the vocabulary they previously introduced earlier in the week. In the two primary classrooms (K-1st), teachers introduced the vocabulary terms for the first time. Across the grade levels, each teacher integrated at least one oral language activity including turn and talks and discussions, small group collaborative activities, and a language usage activity when either introducing or reviewing this text-embedded vocabulary. These activities allowed students to apply and use a variety of oral language while learning and applying their understanding of the vocabulary terms. I also observed that each teacher utilized four to five scaffolds during the vocabulary component of the instructional block. I share these examples by examining the oral language activities and scaffolds in each grade level.

Kindergarten. In kindergarten, the teacher began the vocabulary lesson by introducing and saying one of three vocabulary words (disability, hero, and respectful) one at a time. Each of these terms came from the HMH shared read aloud, *Emmanuel's Dream*, which the teacher started reading the day before and finished reading after the vocabulary lesson. Students repeated the word and the teacher showed students the HMH vocabulary card, a visual resource, which included the word and an image to represent the word on it. The teacher then engaged students in a turn and talk to discuss the vocabulary term. Generally, students participated in the turn and talk with a partner, although I also observed the turn and talk with one small group of four students. Student partners sat on the rug in the front of the classroom and turned knee to knee to a peer for each turn and talk. It was clear the partnerships were already established as students turned to the same partner or group each time and the teacher did not specifically pair students. Turn and talks lasted approximately one to two minutes. During each of these three turn and talks, students discussed examples of the word, the meaning, and they made connections to the word after the teacher gave a prompt. They were prompted to use the visual to think about what "disability" might mean, students were asked to explain the meaning of "hero" and they were prompted to share an example of being “respectful.” After each prompt and subsequent turn and talk, the teacher regrouped the students to share out and further discussed the vocabulary terms.

The teacher specifically supported one group during the turn and talks as a scaffold to support their engagement. For example, the teacher introduced the word “respectful.” After introducing the word and beginning the turn and talk, the teacher joined one group of four students, three of whom were ELs. The group initially had three students, but another EL joined the group. The teacher began each of the turn and talks with this group. The exchange below illustrates the way the teacher restated the question to the group, while relating the question to their own experiences, and how the teacher restated students’ responses to provide more clarity on what the student shared. The example also highlights how the teacher accepted a wide range of talk, including statements which did not directly answer the question.

> **Teacher**: Respectful. When you turn, what’s an example of being respectful?
>
> (Students turned to talk. The teacher sat with group of four students, including three ELs.)
>
> **Teacher**: When have you been respectful, or someone has been respectful to you?
>
> **EL Student:** When they’re listening.
>
> **Teacher**: Yes, being a listener is being respectful. (Teacher turned to another student). What does the word respectful mean to you? Can you think of an example?
>
> **Non-EL Student**: It means kind.
>
> **Second EL Student**: You’re being respectful.
>
> **Teacher**: Yes, are you being respectful right now? Are we all being respectful? Yes! Look at the picture (shows vocabulary card with visual image of a teacher and his class). Students are raising their hand, sitting on the rug. Someone who is respectful is polite and kind to others.

In this example, the teacher used multiple scaffolds to support ELs including reducing the group size from the whole group into the partner and small group turn and talks, grouping specific students together, providing additional prompts, and beginning the group with a teacher check-in. Moreover, in each of the three turn and talks, the teacher started the turn and talk with this small group before checking in with other groups. Though other students worked in pairs, the teacher was deliberate in the reasoning behind the group, stating,

> I usually hang out with those three guys at the beginning of the turn and talk and then move around afterwards. And that's because (Student) is best able to communicate in Spanish to (Student) if I need that. Also (Student) needs a lot of support as well. And (another student) sits close to them and so I kind of incorporate him and bring him in and he is an English speaker so he has that but he also needs support as well. If I kind of sit with that group and when I think they had it, I could move around to other kiddos.

The teacher purposefully checked in with that group first before circulating to other groups during the turn and talk to get them started. In doing so, the teacher restated and reframed the question to ask the EL a similar question to the original prompt but focused the question around personal experiences. The teacher accepted and welcomed a wide range of talk and followed up student comments that were somewhat unclear like "You're being respectful" with clarity using a visual and more specific examples. The second EL student who spoke in this group had seemingly not answered a question or shared prior to this turn and talk.

Following the turn and talk, the students had an opportunity to share out with the entire class in a discussion about the meaning of the words. However, the turn and talk gave every student the chance to discuss the word, apply their understanding, make connections, and talk about the word before the class discussion.

Third Grade. In third grade, the teacher also utilized turn and talks as an application activity during vocabulary as well. However, to review the words with students prior to the turn and talk activity, the teacher revisited each of four terms, (flexible, siphon, lurking, and invisible), through movements and discussion, having each student make a movement or signal for the word as she said it. For example, the teacher asked questions like "How could you show me lurking with your body?" or "What would be a movement for siphon?" The teacher asked follow-up questions like “How come you hid behind your desk for invisible?” or “Why are you two doing this?” regarding the movements to check for student understanding during the movement review. Students explained their reasoning for the movements and how they represented the word.

After the warmup and movement activity, the teacher gave students the tasks of “determining how worried they would be” in various scenarios, each of which involved one of the vocabulary words. Students ranked their level of worry for each of these scenarios as either a one, two, or three in intensity of worry and explained why to their partner in a turn and talk. For example, the teacher asked students “How worried would you be if you saw a fox lurking behind a bush?” and “How worried would you be if there was a hole in the siphon? Students ranked their level of worry by holding up a one, two, or three on their fingers and then they turned and talked with their partner. The turn and talks lasted approximately 30 seconds to one minute each. Students consistently turned to the same partner, and it appeared these partnerships were already established. While students engaged in turn and talks, the teacher circulated around the room checking in with groups. All students were actively engaged, raising their hands with a number for their level of worry ranking and then appearing to talk with their partner during every turn and talk, including three ELs in the room at the time who were expected to participate. (Two other ELs who had just recently arrived at the school and spoke little to no English waited to be picked up by ESL specialists and followed a visual schedule of accessible activities at the back table while the class engaged in this activity.) The turn and talks gave students an opportunity to review the meaning of the vocabulary words and to apply their knowledge in each of the scenario prompts provided. While practicing and applying their knowledge of vocabulary, students had the opportunity to apply oral language through a conversation with their partner.

The teacher utilized multiple scaffolds to engage and support all students, including ELs in this activity. First, the teacher reviewed the vocabulary to activate students' knowledge of the words before engaging in the application activity. In the review, the teacher incorporated movement to represent each word, supporting students' understanding of the word. Second, the teacher had digital versions of the HMH vocabulary cards with the words and pictures projected on the board as well as the 1-3 ranking system for students to see while doing the turn and talks. That is, these visuals gave students cues to both the content and meaning of the vocabulary terms as well as the prompt and focus of the turn and talk. The teacher circulated and checked in with different partner groups during the turn and talks as well, listening to students' understanding of the words.

The teacher shared that while this vocabulary activity was included in the curriculum, it was not designated for this particular day, but the teacher chose it because it would take less time than the proposed activity, which included having students complete a four-square graphic organizer of a word. This four-square activity involved students writing the word, its meaning, a sentence, drawing a picture of it, and then sharing their sentence with a partner. While the teacher named time as the factor influencing the decision to use this oral language activity over another, it is important to note that through the turn and talks students applied oral language and engaged in conversation throughout the vocabulary activity whereas the four-square graphic organizer task would have only included one opportunity for students to share a sentence orally. Additionally, the teacher noted that generally turn and talks were added throughout the literacy block for multiple reasons including engagement, accountability, building students' oral language, and to provide opportunities for students to learn from one another. While engaging in the vocabulary turn and talks, students demonstrated their understanding of the vocabulary words through an application task, and they shared their thinking with a partner. The activity provided an opportunity for students to use oral language while applying their knowledge of new vocabulary.

Fourth Grade. While not a turn and talk, the fourth-grade teacher engaged students in another small group, collaborative vocabulary application activity involving art, which allowed students to engage in discussion with peers and apply their understanding of vocabulary terms. Students had already learned the vocabulary terms earlier in the week. At the start of the vocabulary activity, students were seated in their small collaborative groups from a previous learning experience. Student groups typically included four students. Three groups included EL students. The teacher gave each group of four students two vocabulary words and their task was to create an emoji to represent that word. They were given a card on which to draw an emoji representation of the word, thinking about how to visually represent the meaning of the word so that a peer would be able to identify the vocabulary term simply from looking at the picture emoji. Student groups in this classroom were given two words each, so they split their group of four into two groups of pairs. I stationed myself near the group comprised of two ELs and two non-ELs. Two ELs split off into a partnership and the two non-ELs decided to work together, each taking one of the vocabulary words, though the four students still consulted with each other throughout the activity. One EL, who had limited engagement in a previous small group activity immediately took on a leadership role in the partnership with this vocabulary activity. The other EL, while in more of a support role, also engaged with the art-based activity and discussion with a peer about what they would draw. The pair discussed the word between them and checked in with their non-EL group members as well to get their opinion of what they were going to draw. This resulted in several back-and-forth whispering exchanges to first ensure the students were accurate in their understanding of what the word meant and then to discuss what they would draw for the emoji to represent the vocabulary word. Because the students were trying to keep their emoji and discussion of the word secret from other peers they whispered to each other, which, when combined with masking, meant I was not able to hear exactly what they said.

In another group, two ELs worked with a third non-EL partner. The teacher checked in with that group at the start of the activity and I observed the three students and teacher discussing the word and possible ideas for what to draw after some discussion and exchanges back and forth. As observed throughout the block, it seemed the teacher typically checked in with this group first. However, the teacher also circulated to the other groups to check for student understanding. Collaboratively, students discussed the vocabulary words, identified a visual representation for their word, and drew their emojis. The teacher collected the cards for the next day when students would try to guess their peers' words based on the visual depiction.

Integrating art seemed to spark interest in multiple ELs as well as a sense of leadership in one student in overseeing the activity. The EL pairing I observed had limited participation previously, however, with this activity, the students, especially one, seemed excited, laughed, and engaged in multiple verbal exchanges with her partner and the rest of the group. In addition to incorporating art and utilizing small groups, the teacher also circulated to check in with groups individually and appeared to provide targeted support at the start of the activity to one group. Moreover, the teacher utilized these small groups throughout the literacy block and welcomed a wide range of talk. Regarding the use of collaborative small groups in the vocabulary activity and across components of the literacy block, the teacher indicated they valued the conversation related to the assigned tasks as well as other talk between students:

> Instead of the adult hovering over them, they get to talk…What I did yesterday afternoon is going to come out in there whether we like it or not, no matter what. That's OK. They're communicating with each other.

The emoji collaborative vocabulary activity was not included in the curriculum. Rather the vocabulary task included in the curriculum involved students writing the word, the meaning, a sentence using the word, and drawing a picture. Students would share sentences with a partner after completing the chart. While both the vocabulary activity included in the curriculum and the emoji one the teacher actually utilized promoted students' application of their understanding of vocabulary and incorporated some element of peer interaction, the emoji activity gave students an opportunity to use oral language, both academic and non-academic, and art throughout the activity.

First Grade. The first-grade teacher integrated whole class oral language activities during the vocabulary portion of the literacy block as well. These activities included a whole class discussion with questioning while the teacher introduced the words as well as an oral language "owl hunt" activity created by the teacher to promote students' application and practice with the words.

Similar to kindergarten, the first-grade teacher introduced the vocabulary words during a whole class discussion. The teacher showed the vocabulary card for each of the words (scene, monuments, sights, grouchy, freedom and symbol) during the discussion. Students discussed the words, made connections, acted out the words, shared examples, and used the visuals on the HMH vocabulary cards to generate definitions of the words. For example, the teacher introduced the word "monuments," and the students repeated the word. Then the teacher modeled and prompted students to pretend to be the Washington Monument, standing tall and straight with their hands raised above their heads in a pointed shape. The teacher referenced the card with Mount Rushmore on it and shared that it is a monument too. One EL eagerly shared about the museums and monuments he visited, naming several including the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. When discussing the word “grouchy” the teacher asked students to make a grouchy face, explained the meaning of the word, and then asked an EL student what made the student grouchy, which she answered. Throughout the vocabulary introduction and discussion, the teacher incorporated movement and acting out the words as well as students’ experiences in the discussion. While not every student engaged in the discussion, the teacher accepted a wide range of talk and some students, including ELs, talked about their connections to the words and their observations of the visuals.

The first-grade teacher also incorporated a follow-up activity for the purpose of having students apply vocabulary and high frequency words and for students to practice oral language. This activity replaced some of the vocabulary application tasks and foundational skills activities from the curriculum. The teacher displayed a pocket chart with high frequency word cards from the week’s lesson that students had already practiced, the word cards of the new vocabulary or “power words” as well as some of the words that students learned in previous weeks in the module. The pocket chart also included cards with question words like where, when, how, what. Students were to practice asking questions and to use one of the question words and either a high frequency word or a vocabulary word to create a sentence and share it aloud. When the student used either a high frequency word or vocabulary word, the teacher removed that card from the pocket chart. A few owl die cut shapes were hidden behind some of the words and the goal of the activity was for students to “uncover” or find all of the owls. To reveal the owls, students had to use the words in sentences.

To start the owl activity, the teacher led students in chorally reading aloud all of the question words (who, what, where, why, and how), high frequency words (read, house, water, over, gave, white, own, and another) and vocabulary words (sights, forever, freedom, peace, participate, brag, scene, monuments, and grouchy) on the chart. One at a time, the teacher called on students to create a question using the words. Students were eager to participate. Each student chose the vocabulary word they wanted to use and then shared their question. The teacher scaffolded and supported each student based on their needs. For example, one EL student was unable to read the vocabulary word she wanted to use. The student read the letters of the word to identify which one she wanted to use in a question. The teacher told her the word was “scene” and asked her to create a sentence with it. The student said, “What scene do you like?” While it is unclear whether the student knew the meaning of this word based on the context of the question, she used it in a sentence and the teacher accepted her answer. Later in the lesson, after all students had an opportunity to participate, this student volunteered to do another question. The student again could not read the word, so she pointed to it. The teacher told her the word was “monuments” and when the student seemed puzzled, the teacher provided a scaffold, saying, “You can use ‘where.’” The student then said, “Where are the monuments?” which the teacher affirmed and repeated. The teacher provided a similar prompt for a student who selected the word “house” and shared a sentence, rather than a question, “I got a brand-new house.” The teacher responded with excitement, “Yes!” and the instructional assistant prompted the student, “Try starting it with ‘where.’” The student then replied, “Where is my house?” The teacher affirmed this question and repeated it as well. These examples highlight ways the teacher accepted a wide range of talk and how the teacher scaffolded with to use question words even when students shared a declarative sentence.

Another example of an EL engaging in this oral language and vocabulary task is outlined below. The student began by stating the word she wanted to use in a sentence “read.”

EL Student: read

Teacher: Use ‘read’ in a sentence.

EL Student: I read a book.

Teacher: Yes, I read a book. Can we try an asking sentence?

(Student does not respond.)

Teacher: Can you use “what?”

(Student does not respond.)

Teacher: How about, “What did you read?”

EL Student: What did you read?

This example illustrates the teacher’s use of scaffolds to encourage the student to generate a question rather than a declarative sentence. In a follow-up interview, the teacher shared how the activity was highly engaging for students as they were eager to find the owls behind the words. The teacher referenced the scaffolding for students, noting that they wanted all students to participate and provided the scaffolding necessary for them to engage, including modeling the question and having the student repeat it. In addition to providing prompts, modeling for students, and accepting a wide range of talk, in the owl hunt activity, the teacher supported students in generating more talk and modeled extended utterances, as illustrated in the example below:

Student: Freedom

Teacher: Use the word in an asking sentence.

(The student is not responding and appears stuck. The teacher gives more wait time.)

Teacher: You can also use ‘can’ and ‘do’ (as question words).

Student: Do we have freedom?

Teacher: Do we have freedom? Where?

Student: Do we have freedom outside?

Teacher: Yes, do we have freedom outside at recess?

The owl hunt was highly motivating for students. All students, including all four ELs, participated and generated a question using the words. Some students did multiple words until all owls were found. This oral language activity provided an opportunity for students to apply and practice oral language while reviewing vocabulary and high frequency words.

All four teachers incorporated oral language activities in the vocabulary portion of the literacy block and utilized scaffolds to engage all students, including ELs, in these learning experiences, resulting in strong participation across classrooms. By incorporating turn and talks, discussions, collaborative activities, and language practice, students applied oral language, both academic and non-academic, while engaging in tasks aimed at increasing their vocabulary knowledge and understanding. Table 4 summarizes the oral language practices teachers employed during vocabulary instruction. Each teacher utilized at least one oral language activity during vocabulary instruction.

Table 4

Oral Language Activities Teachers Use During Vocabulary Instruction

	Teachers Who Implemented the Activity
Turn and Talks	2
Whole Class Discussion and Questioning	2
Discussion through Collaborative Activity	1
Language Modeling and Usage	1

Note. Observed integration is based on a single classroom observation with each of four teachers.

Teachers also employed numerous scaffolds to engage students, including ELs, in oral language activities during vocabulary instruction. Teachers provided scaffolded support through reducing the group size, accepting a wide range of talk, incorporating art and movement, using visuals, providing check-ins, and in using discussion moves that resulted in additional talk or modeled oral language. Across the oral language activities during the vocabulary instructional component, teachers incorporated between four and five scaffolds each. Table 5 illustrates these scaffolds and the ways teachers engaged all students, including ELs, in oral language activities occurring during vocabulary instruction.

Table 5

Scaffolds Teachers Use During Vocabulary Instruction

	Number of Teachers Who Implemented the Activity
Group Size Adjustment (small group or partners)	3
Integrating Arts, Acting or Movement	3
Using Visuals	3
Conferencing and Check-ins	3
Accepting a Wide Range of Talk	3
Using Discussion Moves, Prompts or Stems	3
Language Modeling and Repeating	1

Note. Observed integration is based on a single classroom observation with each of four teachers

Close and Shared Reading

While text-based oral language activities were prevalent and thoroughly implemented across the four classrooms during vocabulary instruction, often through turn and talks, there was less consistent evidence of these practices in close and shared reading experiences. That is, teachers integrated some text-based oral language activities during shared and close reading, but they were less universal and comprehensively utilized. For example, in third and fourth grade, both close reading lesson plans from the curriculum did not involve oral language activities while rereading and answering the close reading questions. However, teachers in these grade levels added opportunities for partner and small group interactions. Though they incorporated these experiences, these oral language activities did not always represent characteristics of extended discussions. Moreover, in the primary grades, these oral language opportunities were even less evident.

Close Reading. In both third and fourth grade, observations occurred later in the week after the class had already read the shared reading for the first time. In a typical lesson plan, the HMH program includes an initial reading of the shared text first followed by close reading activities for more in depth, rereading, analysis, and comprehension work related to these complex texts in subsequent lessons. I observed close reading in both grades, as students had previously read the text earlier in the week. On each of the observation days, teachers engaged students in a close reading activity, but rather than following the HMH plan of conducting close reading in a whole group lesson, the teachers incorporated oral language activities as part of this close reading routine. These close read discussions differed from other turn and talks in that they involved rereading the text and providing text evidence, tasks beyond simply sharing ideas with a partner. In both grade levels, students reread the text from their own "My Book," a consumable anthology of shared texts which each student has and can write in. Combining close reading and discussion took approximately four to five minutes for each question and discussion. The practice of combining close reading and discussion allowed students to apply oral language while engaging in close reading.

Third Grade. The focus of the close reading lesson in third grade centered on examining the text and graphic features the author used and the information readers could glean from those features. The teacher began the close reading activity by first reviewing text features, engaging students in a text feature hunt to activate students' background knowledge and prior learning. The teacher directed students to "star" or mark every text feature within the common text, *Octopus Escapes Again!* in their consumable My Book. After one minute, the teacher asked students to respond with specific movements and exercises to illustrate that they found a text feature. For example, the teacher said, "Stand up if you found a diagram." The teacher would then call on a student to cite a page where they found the text feature and all students turned to that page to find it. In a few cases, some students found a text or graphic feature and others did not. For example, the teacher asked if anyone found "italics" and only a few students responded with the movement. The teacher used that opportunity to find and highlight examples of italics from the text, so all students were clear on what italics were. Though the review was not an oral language activity, it activated students' background knowledge and prior learning around text features, providing a review and arguably a scaffold for students prior to the more rigorous close reading and discussion activity began.

After the text feature review, the teacher began the close reading activity, directing students to reread a particular page and then answer a question about a text feature and the information the reader could gain from that feature. Then students engaged in discussion with their partner. In the first close reading and discussion question, the teacher asked students to reread page 62 and to answer two questions: "What are the two types of texts on this page?" and "What type of information does each type of text present (or give us)?" The students turned to page 62 and the teacher gave them a couple of minutes to reread the page and answer the question on their own first. Then the teacher told the students, "You're going to be turning and talking. You're going to be sharing out what your partner said" following the partner discussion in the whole group. While students discussed the question with their partner, the teacher circulated to check-in on student pairs. The teacher sometimes interjected questions like “Do you agree with him?” to encourage further discussion or “Why would the author change the writing here though?” to help students think deeply about the close reading question. The actual discussion portion of this close reading activity was about the same length as the turn and talks during vocabulary, or around one minute, though the whole process of asking the question, rereading the text, answering the question, and discussing it with a partner took more like four to five minutes for each question. Following the partner discussion, the teacher restated the initial discussion questions, and a few students shared the answers they discussed in their partnerships.

In the second close reading question, the teacher directed students to reread page 72 and answer the question, “How is the information in the sidebar different from the story?” After the teacher clarified what the sidebar was, students engaged in independent work for a few minutes to reread the page in their copy of the text and to answer the question on their own. While the students worked, the teacher circulated and checked-in on students. For example, the teacher provided scaffolded support to one EL student by rereading the text aloud for her. With this support, the student was still able to engage in the close reading activity and discussion with a complex text even though she was unable to read the text independently. After rereading the page to the EL student, the teacher asked, “Are you already starting to think about ways it’s different from the story?” restating the initial discussion question. After the student answered, the teacher further modified and scaffolded the question about the sidebar by asking, “Is this telling us the story or giving us extra information?” This time the question was less open-ended, but when presented as such, the EL identified that the sidebar provided additional information. After working individually to reread the text and answer the question, the students again discussed their answers with their partners with all students, including ELs, participating in the partner discussions. The second close reading and discussion ended again with a whole group share out of responses discussed in the partner discussions.

While the teacher checked in with students as they reread and answered the close questions independently, the teacher was not able check in with every student with the time allotted. During the whole group share out after the partner discussions, where the teacher restated the question, only a few students answered. Thus, by adding in the partner discussions before having students answer to the whole group, the teacher engaged all students in discussing the close reading questions and their answers rather than having only a few students share out or check in with the teacher. According to the teacher, the reasoning for incorporating the partner discussions into the close reading,

> was to give those kiddos who I didn't get a chance to conference or talk to a chance to maybe hear from a friend if they had no idea what was going on, to help clarify, and to help them spark some ideas before sharing out with us.

After two rounds of close reading questions and partner discussions, the third-grade teacher added in a third discussion question which was not included in the lesson plan, asking students, "If you got to join the author, what extra text feature would you add? What would it be? Where would it be? Why would you add it?" Students did not have any text to reread this time and immediately engaged in a turn and talk, sharing their responses with their partner. The teacher checked in with student groups and restated the questions as needed to prompt students' discussion. All students, including ELs, participated. The excerpt below illustrates the discussion around this question when the teacher reconvened the group after the turn and talk:

> **Teacher**: Let's hear. What extra text feature would you add?
>
> **EL Student**: I'd put it in the back of the book, a map of where it got attacked.

> **Teacher**: She said she'd add a map of where the octopus started and where it ended up after it escaped.
>
> **Teacher**: Did anyone think they'd add a chart or a table?
>
> **Non-EL Student**: I'd add a chart of animals at the end with fun facts about them.
>
> (A student gives the connection or "me too" signal to the peer.)
>
> **Non-EL Student #2**: I'd add a map with the octopus's home, where it found food, so I could see how long it'd traveled.
>
> **Non-EL Student #3**: Pretty much the same thing as (last student speaker), a map of different sites.
>
> **Teacher**: So on your map you'd have different photos of the places?
>
> **Non-EL Student #4**: Oh now I might switch mine. It says on the last page there's many different species so I'd add a list of them.

In this final five-minute turn and talk and whole class discussion, the teacher asked a question which integrated the students' own thoughts about what they would do as an author. While all students, including ELs, engaged in all previous partner discussions, the follow-up whole class sharing after this third question included more student talk that built on peer responses and was voluntary without teacher prompting or calling on students first. Throughout the entire close reading lesson, the teacher incorporated check-ins and scaffolded support such as reading the text aloud to an EL. The teacher provided an additional scaffold of activating background knowledge before the close reading to remind all students of what text features were and to find them within the current text they were reading. By combining partner discussions with close reading, students engaged in oral language application while addressing comprehension skills.

Fourth Grade. Much like the third-grade example, in fourth grade the teacher also integrated discussion with close reading, chunking the tasks with one question at a time. First, the teacher introduced the close reading focus of author's craft, projecting an anchor chart on the board. The anchor chart included various author’s craft techniques such as voice, mood, and language. Then the teacher directed students to reread their text, a collection of poems titled *Nature’s Wonders*, in their individual copies of their anthology while having snack. This lasted for approximately eight minutes. While some students appeared to be rereading, others seemed to focus more on snack. Students were also not directed to read a specific page at this time, but rather the entire collection of poems. Following snack, the teacher asked the students to move into their small groups. Students knew these groups and moved to them. These were the same groups in which students worked during the vocabulary lesson. Once in the group, the teacher asked a close reading question one at a time including, “What words tell how the poet feels about the Great Barrier Reef?” and “How does the poet use imagery to tell you about the experience of climbing Mount Everest?”

Perhaps less systematically than what was observed in the third-grade class (where students reread the page and answered the question themselves first and then engaged in discussion with a peer), in fourth grade, the teacher gave students the question while they were in their groups. Within the groups, students turned to the page related to the question for rereading and answering the question. The teacher directed students to talk within their group and to ensure everyone in the group knew the answer. While most students worked in groups of four, including one group of four with one EL, and one group of four with two ELs, one EL was by herself, as her group members were absent or not in the room at that time. She discussed the questions with the teacher.

Within the two groups I observed the most, it was clear that one student per group took on a leadership role, checking in with group members to get their input if they did not readily share, asking the other members of the group what they thought in response to the question, sometimes collectively and sometimes individually. The teacher confirmed the structure within the group in a follow-up interview, sharing about the intentional placement of a strong leader in each group who could support others, ask their opinions, and ensure everyone understood the task. This student was not referred to as a leader, but rather they acted in that facilitator role. In one group, the EL student was the facilitator, asking others about their responses to the question and checking in with each student.

Participation varied among students in the groups observed, though the presumed leaders did try to engage their peers in sharing. For example, student leaders restated the question, asking it to the group as a whole and then to individual members who had not yet responded. In one group, a perceived leader asked her group what they thought about the question the teacher asked. One EL in the group said she underlined some things but did not mention a specific response to the question. The perceived leader then asked a second EL in the group what she thought. This second EL tried to repeat the question. The student leader realized the EL student was on the wrong page and supported her in navigating to the correct page. The facilitator then asked her the question again about how the author felt about the Great Barrier Reef. The student then said, “I think he feels good about it.” This segment of one small group discussion illustrates that though the opportunity to engage in oral language was added to the close reading, and though attempts were made by peer leaders to engage each student, including ELs, even when students did respond, they did not consistently reference the text or provide specific answers that addressed the question. The group discussions provided opportunities for students to share out, but students did not truly engage in discussion with back-and-forth exchanges, building on what others said, or asking each other questions.

While the teacher concentrated their support on the EL student without group members, they also circulated and checked in with other groups too. The teacher provided scaffolds, follow-up questions, and ensured the students understood not only the activity, but the content as well. For example, during one check-in, the teacher provided additional support to an EL who was unsure of a word meaning, by rephrasing the question, referring her to the HMH vocabulary card with a visual of the word, and by prompting the student to act out the word to better understand the author's meaning of a phrase which utilized that vocabulary term. Following each of the two small group close read discussions, the teacher called on students to share out their answers with the whole class.

Both the third and fourth grade teachers cited increased engagement as a significant factor in having students work with a peer or small group to answer these questions and they both indicated that the discussions provided opportunities for students to gain additional clarity or to better understand the content. That is, the third-grade teacher wanted to give all students an opportunity to hear others' thinking before sharing out responses in the whole class and the fourth-grade teacher directed student groups to make sure every student knew the answers to the questions by the end of the group discussion. The peer and small group discussions associated with close reading did not promote extended student talk, back-and-forth exchanges, and opportunities for students to build on, debate, or question each other. There was no observed evidence of utilizing discussion protocols or incorporating roles or structures to discussions which may have extended dialogue and increased engagement. However, the interactions during close reading did provide an opportunity for students to use oral language while focusing on developing their comprehension skills and teachers utilized scaffolds to engage all learners in these activities. Table 6 illustrates the oral language activities and scaffolds teachers utilized during close reading.

Table 6

Oral Language Activities, Scaffolds, and Teacher Moves During Close Reading

	3rd Grade	**4th Grade**
Combined Oral Language Activities with Close Reading	X	X
Adjusted Group Size to Small Groups		X
Adjusted Group Size to Partners	X	
Chunked Close Reading, Asking One Question at a Time	X	X
Accepted a Wide Range of Talk	X	X
Teacher Check-ins with Students	X	X
Teacher Rephrased Questions to Scaffold for ELs	X	X
Utilized Student Leaders to Engage Peers		X

Note. Observed integration is based on a single classroom observation.

Shared Reading. Unlike the observations in the middle grades which took place later in the week, the observations in kindergarten and first grade occurred during the initial reads of shared texts. Thus, the lessons did not include close reading exercises, but rather whole group discussions with comprehension questions and turn and talks in both grades. I observed teachers asking students comprehension questions throughout the whole group read aloud during the shared reading portion of the block. On one occasion the kindergarten teacher incorporated a turn and talk.

Both primary grades teachers incorporated questions during the read alouds. In kindergarten, as the teacher read aloud the text, *Emmanuel's Dream*, the teacher paused periodically to ask students questions. In one instance, the teacher engaged students in a turn and talk so all students could discuss a comprehension question about a character's belief with a peer.

In this turn and talk the teacher provided scaffolded support to one student group with ELs, as this teacher did during vocabulary turn and talks. The teacher also checked-in with other pairs during the turn and talk. The turn and talk occurred once during shared reading. While the teacher asked many questions while reading aloud the text, outside of the turn and talk, exchanges were generally between the student responding to the question and the teacher and did not result in continued exchanges beyond the student's first response. That is, these were not necessarily discussions, but rather questions which a few students answered aloud in the group.

In first grade, while reading the shared text, *Monument City*, a play about visiting Washington D.C., the teacher asked students questions. These questions and answers were primarily exchanges between the teacher and one student at a time, versus a class discussion that engaged all students to share without being prompted with a question before each response. Additionally, the questions were sometimes closed-ended. Even though the questions primarily involved interactions between the teacher and one student at a time, the teacher did employ some discussion moves like follow-up questions to help students clarify their response and to encourage students to add more or provide evidence to support their thinking. For example, the following exchange illustrates the teacher encouraging a student to share more:

> **Teacher**: What are Deb and Grandma doing?
> **Student**: Looking out.
> **Teacher**: Looking out the what? Where do you think they are?
> **Student**: They're in the Washington Monument and they're looking down.

This example also illustrates "close viewing," a practice similar to close reading, but one in which students provide text evidence to support their thinking by carefully examining and referencing illustrations while discussing literary elements and comprehension skills such as characterization or story elements (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015). The teacher asked multiple questions that could be answered by examining the illustrations such as “Which one do you think is Jeff? Why do you think that’s Jeff?” The students often referenced the illustrations when answering the questions. On multiple occasions, students supported their thinking by describing the characters’ facial expressions. The teacher often asked follow-up questions such as “How do you know?” or “How can you tell?” to also encourage students to add more to their responses and to provide text or visual support for their thinking. The HMH lesson plan included a turn and talk at the end of the first-grade shared reading for students to engage in discussion about the text. However, this did not occur in the lesson, as the teacher opted to replace the turn and talk by asking the question with the whole group, citing time constraints as the reason for not utilizing the turn and talk.

While primary teachers incorporated questions during read alouds and sometimes added in turn and talks or used moves to elicit more talk, these exchanges were primarily between the teacher and individual students in whole group instruction. That is, whole group questions did not promote discussions which engaged each learner, nor did they promote back-and-forth exchanges amongst peers or within groups. Nonetheless, the questions and oral language practices the teachers did utilize allowed for some student engagement and application of oral language during shared reading. Table 7 illustrates the oral language activities and scaffolds teachers utilized.

Table 7

Oral Language Activities, Scaffolds, and Teacher Moves During Shared Reading

	Kindergarten	**1st Grade**
Incorporated Questioning	X	X
Incorporated Turn and Talks	X	
Incorporated Close Viewing		X
Used Conferencing and Check-Ins	X	
Utilized Moves to Elicit More Talk		X

Note. Observed integration is based on a single classroom observation with each of four teachers.

Writing

While the most evidence for integrating oral language activities occurred during the vocabulary and shared reading portion of the instructional block, all teachers integrated oral language activities during the writing block as well. In some cases, I observed writing connected to research skills or writing as a connection or extension of the shared reading experience, thus the oral language activity connected indirectly to reading in this way. Generally, opportunities to use oral language during writing involved non-academic discussions. All four grade levels incorporated individual writing conferences during the writer's workshop portion of the literacy block and third grade also integrated a sharing strategy during writing.

Kindergarten. In kindergarten, students engaged in a writing workshop activity connected to the *Emmanuel's Dream* text from shared reading, a text in which the main character overcame a challenge without giving up. In this writing assignment, students were asked to write about a time they did something hard but did not give up. After brainstorming together as a class about times students did not quit, each student began writing on their own. During the writing time, the teacher and instructional assistant conferenced with students individually. In these one-on-one conversations, the teacher engaged in dialogue with students about their writing, supporting them in generating an idea, asking questions about their writing, or clarifying what they wrote. Again, while not directly related to reading, the writing assignment was an extension of the shared reading experience and may have helped students connect to the text. The conferences not only allowed the teacher an opportunity to check-in and informally assess students' writing, but also to engage in casual conversation about students' personal experiences about which they wrote. In a follow-up interview, the teacher shared that when conferencing did not occur, they tried to have students turn and share with each other. To fully engage all students, the teacher and instructional assistant also utilized translators during this time and scribed for some ELs.

Third Grade. In third grade, the teacher utilized a similar conferencing structure and circulated while students worked to provide one-on-one check-ins and scaffolded support. In third grade, students engaged in an ongoing biographical research project during writing. They read from various resources and sites and took notes on a graphic organizer notes page. That is, students had various topics about which to research related to their biography project and they read or listened to sources to find information and to take notes on their recording sheet. During the check-ins or conferences, the teacher asked clarifying questions, addressed misconceptions, and the teacher and student discussed the research and the students' process. For example, an EL student misunderstood the research prompt regarding a challenge their famous person faced, and instead read about and cited how the person inspired others. The teacher asked clarifying and scaffolded questions to help the student understand what a challenge was and through back-and-forth discussion with the student, helped the child identify a challenge their person had faced. While the content of the conferences centered around students' writing, and though opportunities to apply oral language during independent writing were unexpected, these conferences provided opportunities for students to use a variety of language. Additionally, the teacher included a partner sharing activity at the end of writing block during which students each shared two things they learned about their famous person. This sharing routine, like a turn and talk, provided an opportunity for students to use oral language.

Fourth Grade. In fourth grade, students engaged in a biographical research assignment as well as part of a Black History Month project. On the board, the teacher listed the topics students should research about their famous person as part of the assignment including qualities or traits about the person, challenges they overcame, their childhood, education, personal or family life, accomplishments, and their later life. Students were at various stages of the process, some still researching and taking notes, others writing, and some were finished. The teacher incorporated one-on-one conferences with students similar to those described in third grade, yet the teacher also had a "consultancy" structure in place for students who were finished to support their peers. Thus, students engaged in peer conferences in which they supported their classmates by engaging in discussions related to accessing sources, avoiding plagiarism, setting up a Google Doc, reading and understanding the research sources, note-taking, and turning notes into paragraphs. ELs engaged in this structure as both consultants and as those utilizing or conferencing with the consultants. For example, on EL "consultant" supported another EL peer in navigating to the research site. The supporting consultant and the peer both read from the research site. When the student began note-taking, the EL consultant explained that he could not copy words directly from Pebble Go, the research site, and needed to change the words he wrote down from what was on the site. During the supportive discussion, the EL consultant directed the peer to the board with the research components, pointing to what the student needed to include next. The EL consultant also explained the use of transition words and how the student needed to incorporate words like “first, second, third” in his writing. In this example, the peer to peer and teacher to student conferences allowed for back-and-forth exchanges where students applied oral language while working on writing and research.

First Grade. In first grade, students brainstormed about their favorite tradition during writing workshop. Students planned their writing piece using a graphic organizer. After students began, the teacher directed three EL students to join the instructional assistant at her table. In the small group, these ELs engaged in dialogue with the instructional assistant and with each other. The structure provided an opportunity to talk through the prompt and to brainstorm together while others in the class worked individually. The assistant asked students questions about their traditions or holidays to help them think of what to say. As students talked, the educator asked more questions and modeled extending the utterances and turning students’ comments into sentences. These writing conferences essentially turned into an oral language activity in which ELs talked and the instructional assistant wrote down what the student said on the graphic organizer. The instructional assistant also reiterated and repeated what the student said, notably at the end of the conversation. In a follow-up interview, the teacher noted how these scaffolded conferences allowed students who are more reluctant to talk to generate and share their ideas. Here the oral language activity, or planning conference, was a scaffold to support three students in engaging in the writing task, but it also provided an opportunity for ELs and the instructional assistant to engage in back-and-forth dialogue.

Teachers in each grade level integrated oral language activities during writing instruction, involving conferencing, sharing, or scaffolded brainstorming in a small group. While the oral language activities in the vocabulary and shared reading components of the instructional block more directly supported and enhanced students' understanding of and engagement with texts, and while they focused more on applying language related to texts or content, incorporating sharing and conferencing in writing offered an opportunity to build students' oral language as well while supporting their writing, which in cases I observed, also included their research skills and connections to shared texts. Thus, integrating oral language activities in writing should not be overlooked as another way for students to apply oral language while addressing other literacy-related content.

Summary of Finding 1

Through observations, curriculum review, and interviews, I gained an understanding of the oral language activities teachers integrated at Downing during tier one literacy instruction and the ways teachers engaged all students, including ELs, in these activities. As described here in finding one, teachers incorporated oral language activities to varying degrees across three components of the literacy block, vocabulary, shared reading, and writing. However, the oral language practices, as well as the scaffolds to engage ELs in those activities, were most evident during vocabulary instruction where they were prevalent across grade levels. During vocabulary instruction, teachers incorporated turn and talks, collaborative activities involving art, and whole class language games. In shared reading, teachers incorporated some oral language activities into close reading and read aloud lessons, the practices did not promote in depth discussions involving back-and-forth exchanges, in which students added on to what others said, asked questions, agreed or disagreed, made connections with each other, or summarized their thinking as a group. Notably, I did not observe teachers' use of discussion protocols or structures. Opportunities for students to apply oral language also occurred during writing instruction through teacher and student conferences and partner sharing, but these activities did not support students' reading of and understanding of texts directly.

Finding 2: The curriculum resources, teachers' perceptions, and professional learning all impacted teachers' implementation of oral language activities during tier one literacy instruction.

My observations of literacy blocks illustrated that teachers drew heavily on the HMH resources, especially when implementing oral language activities within vocabulary instruction. However, through curriculum reviews and in my follow-up interviews with teachers, I noted the level of adherence to the HMH curriculum. It was clear that teachers used the adopted curriculum resources as they planned and implemented literacy instruction. Just as the implementation of oral language activities varied across three instructional components within the literacy block, so too did the curriculum vary in the degree to which oral language activities were evident in vocabulary, shared reading, and writing. At times, evidence of the practices and the clarity around implementing them varied by grade level too. There was also evidence that teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, oral language activities, and the literacy block all influenced their practice. Multiple examples in this study illustrated that PL also impacted what occurred in the classroom, as teachers referenced PL or implemented practices highlighted in professional learning. This finding is significant for district and school-based instructional leaders who plan curriculum implementation, rollout, and support for teachers, including myself and the leadership at Downing. The finding is important to consider when planning continued teacher support related to instructional implementation, and in this case, specifically oral language activities. To illustrate this finding, I first present examples of how the curriculum impacted what transpired in classrooms and second, I examine teachers' perceptions around the curriculum, oral language activities, and the literacy block itself. Third, I share examples illustrating how the PL also impacted classroom implementation.

Curriculum Resources

Through curriculum review, I found that HMH contained opportunities for students to apply oral language throughout the vocabulary, shared reading, and writing blocks of literacy instruction. Some activities were clearly rooted in oral language such as discussions, while others provided opportunities for conversations, collaborative groupings, and students' application of oral language while addressing other literacy skills. Next, I describe all these types of oral language activities I found in the curriculum, including their prevalence in lessons, by examining the activities described in each of three components of the literacy block: vocabulary, shared reading, and writing.

Vocabulary

Through curriculum review, I found that across all four grade levels, the curriculum included oral language activities during vocabulary instruction in lessons plans throughout the instructional week. In first through fourth grade, HMH contained a daily vocabulary component in the lesson plans. Some of these oral language activities embedded into vocabulary lessons included turn and talks, collaborative activities involving partners or small groups working together to complete assignments based on the words, and activities using sentence stems to support students in generating sentences with the words. Additionally, the resource included opportunities for students to share sentences they created with the words, and to draw, discuss, or act out words.

While the curriculum incorporated a daily vocabulary routine in first through fourth grades, kindergarten did not include vocabulary activities as often. In kindergarten, vocabulary lessons occurred twice per week in the curriculum under the umbrella of a daily “oral language” routine. That is, the curriculum viewed the vocabulary lesson as part of the oral language component which also included other activities in addition to vocabulary instruction such as collaborative discussions. Other than being less frequent in kindergarten, the vocabulary routines included similar components as other grades such as repeating words, sentence stems prompting students to create sentences, and think-pair-share collaborative activities. One kindergarten vocabulary lesson I examined did not include turn and talks in the main description of the lesson, but rather in a text box listing possible supports for ELs in the teacher’s manual at the bottom of the page. A suggested practice to support ELs was to integrate turn and talks with each vocabulary word.

These examples highlight the ways the curriculum included oral language activities in the vocabulary lessons. These practices were evident throughout the week and in all grade levels. In actual practice, the lessons I observed had the most consistent evidence of oral language activities during vocabulary instruction across all grade levels. Similarly, the evidence of oral language activities in the curriculum was most comprehensive across grade levels during the vocabulary component. Oral language activities like turn and talks, discussion questions involving the vocabulary, incorporating movement, and discussing the words, their meanings, and examples were all evident in the curriculum and in observed classroom practice. In cases where teachers substituted lessons from the curriculum or enhanced lessons, they did so by adding in other oral language activities.

Though oral language activities were evident throughout the vocabulary curriculum, in the middle elementary grades (3rd-4th grades) some vocabulary lessons referenced having students use turn and talks to follow the "routines" on the vocabulary cards. I did not observe this practice but reviewed the lesson in the curriculum. The cards were part of the curriculum and a teaching resource that provided visuals of the words, definitions, and prompts or activities for both the teacher and students. The tasks in the curriculum that directed teachers to implement partner turn and talks using the vocabulary cards were confusing to interpret because the lesson description said, "turn and talk" but the student prompts on the cards said, "collaborative discussion." Because the curriculum differentiated collaborative discussion and turn and talk routines in the teacher resources where routines were introduced, it was unclear why they were seemingly used interchangeably with regard to these particular vocabulary activities.

Additionally, the curriculum resources only included one vocabulary card for each word so implementing this activity could have been challenging without presumably enough cards to go around, though they could have been projected one at a time for the entire class to see. This concern of the number of cards was not addressed in the curriculum from what I observed in my review. While this one oral language activity seemed confusing to implement, other suggested oral language activities in vocabulary lessons seemed clear. After a thorough review of the curriculum, examining vocabulary routines across the instructional week of the observed lesson, evidence supports that the curriculum integrated oral language activities within the vocabulary instructional component and teachers leaned on those lessons in their instructional delivery.

Shared Reading

During the shared reading component of literacy instruction, the curriculum review highlighted some integrated oral language activities within HMH. For example, in the primary grades (K-1st) such oral language activities included turn and talks, think pair shares, and whole class discussions (sometimes referred to as “accountable talk”) during shared reading experiences. Sometimes practices like turn and talks were not evident in the main description of the lesson but were listed as a possible scaffold or support for ELs, along with strategies like using sentence stems, in the text box for EL support at the bottom of the lesson plan in the teacher’s guide. Also, the curriculum did not combine partner or small group conversations, turn and talks, or discussions with close reading in the core lesson descriptions, though reducing the group size and incorporating discussions were sometimes recommended practices to support ELs in close reading. These suggestions were located outside of the main lesson in the EL support text box in the teacher’s guide. The curriculum sometimes included writing response activities to shared texts with opportunities for students to share their responses with peers as well.

Collaborative Discussions

In third and fourth grades, oral language activities referenced in the curriculum during shared reading were primarily collaborative discussions. Lessons contained collaborative discussions as follow-up activities after the first read of shared texts. In these cases, collaborative discussions were the core, post-reading lesson activity and involved answering discussion questions in the consumable student anthologies. However, student directions in their anthology were somewhat vague and the resources included limited directions for teachers. For example, in one lesson, the directions for students indicated that they should share with a partner what they learned about octopuses and, “Then work with a group to discuss the questions below. Use details in *Octopus Escapes Again!* to explain your answers. Take notes for your responses” (Ada et al., 2020). The page included three questions for students to answer and a “listening tip” that prompted students to “Look at each speaker in your group. Show that you understand or agree with a nod or a smile." The page also included a "speaking tip" which reminded students "If someone shares an idea that isn't quite clear, say what you think you heard. Use complete sentences, and ask, 'Is that right?'" (Ada et al., 2020). The teacher directions for this follow-up collaborative discussion activity indicated that students should answer the questions in their anthology, annotating their book with evidence from the text to support their thinking. It directed the teacher to review the speaking and listening tips as well. However, the resource lacked guidance on the size of the groups, how to engage students in productive discussion, or structures for those discussions.

A collaborative discussion routine model highlighted in a teacher resource book gave slightly more guidance about how to implement discussions, but still simply explained that students should reread or revisit the text, answer the questions, write their answers down, and discuss the answers with their group (Ada et al., 2020). The resources included teacher language to use with students such as, "If you agree with their answers, see if you can add information to support their points" but HMH did not illustrate how to teach students to add onto what others said (Ada et al., 2020). The resources did not illustrate how to set up these group discussions. At times, partners were referenced while other times it appeared these activities should happen in a group. Supplemental resources also included rubrics for collaborative discussions, but these only indicated what discussions should look like, not how to implement them.

While frequently collaborative discussions were included in lessons after the first read of a shared text, other times, collaborative discussions were also listed as a reading response activity after close reading. This was the case for the lesson plan that I observed in third grade. In these cases, the teacher's guide included general topics to discuss such as "other examples of text and graphic features in the selection" or "how these text and graphic features help them better understand the narrative", but not necessarily specific questions like those presented following a first reading of a shared text (Ada et al., 2020).

The term collaborative discussion seemed to refer to various practices throughout the curriculum. As described in the previous vocabulary section of this finding, the term collaborative discussions seemed to be used interchangeably with turn and talk during vocabulary. In that component collaborative discussion referred to working with a partner to discuss prompts about vocabulary words. During shared reading, collaborative discussions referred to working in a group to answer and discuss comprehension questions after first reads of a text. In other shared reading activities, collaborative discussions seemed more like follow-up response activities to shared or close reading but did not involve a set of questions to discuss after the first read of a shared text.

Collaborative discussions were also referenced in the kindergarten curriculum as one of the "oral language" activities. In addition to those vocabulary activities included in the oral language component of the kindergarten curriculum, during the weekly plans, the curriculum also included a collaborative discussion. In the teacher's guide, this example included a detailed outline and routine of how to introduce and teach discussion skills. The routine began by introducing the question and then indicated the teacher should teach, discuss, and model the discussion skill. Then the teacher was to model the discussion or "lead partner talk," giving students sentence stems to frame their responses to peers (Ada et a., 2020). After that, some students would share out. The lesson in kindergarten provided very clear guidance on what teachers should do and even included language for the teacher to use when introducing the discussion move. This clarity stood in contrast to the lack of direction around implementing collaborative discussions in the middle grades.

While collaborative discussions were embedded consistently in the curriculum after reading shared texts for the first time in the middle grades, the lack of clarity around what collaborative discussions were, how they differed from turn and talks, and how to teach them was evident across the curriculum. In short, it seemed “collaborative discussion” referred to too many different practices and was vague, which could impact teachers’ use of the activity. The resource provided inconsistent levels of clarity, with specified, detailed routines in kindergarten and more generalized descriptions in the middle grades that seemingly assumed teachers and students would already know how to establish and implement the discussion practice.

Primarily in kindergarten and first grade, oral language activities during shared reading included turn and talks, think-pair-shares, and opportunities to discuss the text with a partner or with the whole group during a read aloud. In the middle elementary grades, oral language activities in reading focused more on collaborative discussions. Sometimes suggestions of using turn and talks or partner work were evident in the EL scaffolds and supports in the teacher guide. As outlined in the first finding, the degree to which teachers implemented oral language activities varied across instructional components within the literacy block. That is, oral language activities during shared reading were less prevalent in practice than vocabulary ones. The same was true in reviewing the curriculum; oral language activities were less prevalent in shared reading. Additionally, sometimes teachers integrated or added oral language activities into practices like close reading which were not included in HMH, but they did not carry out other oral language activities like collaborative discussions which were in the curriculum.

Writing

Through curriculum review, I also identified oral language activities embedded in the curriculum within the writing component of the literacy block, though these were more limited in the middle elementary grades than they were in the primary grades. In actual practice, the writing instruction I observed in third and fourth grades was based on a Black History Month research writing project in each grade that teachers substituted for the HMH writing lessons for that particular module. Outside of this substitution, teachers typically implemented the writing curriculum from HMH, so I reviewed oral language activities within the lessons the teachers would have been scheduled to teach in HMH if they had not substituted the project.

In both grade levels, the lessons focused on the drafting and revision stages of the writing process. Each grade level's curriculum included lessons with small group conferences. In fourth grade, these peer conferences involved students sharing their writing, giving each other feedback in partners, discussing the feedback, and then switching partners to repeat the process. In third grade the small group conferences were also structured with each student sharing an animal-themed writing piece they wrote (without saying the name of the animal) and other students giving feedback, but also trying to guess what animal the student wrote about based on the writing. The curriculum in both third and fourth grades also mentioned the teacher circulating to check in with students and to see if they needed support, but these check-ins were not referred to as conferences, rather more as opportunities to provide support. Though the teachers engaged in a different writing project not associated with HMH, I still observed conferences happening in both grade levels with one-on-one conferences with the teacher in third grade and one-on-one conferences and support with peers and the teacher in fourth grade. The examples of oral language practices in the writing block highlighted in the curriculum in these middle grades were also evident in the classroom, though the content of the writing and assignment differed. While not text-based oral language activities, these conferences provided an opportunity for students to apply oral language while addressing another literacy skill.

In first grade, I reviewed a week of writing lessons which focused on brainstorming around a topic and engaging with a mentor or focal text. Oral language activities across one week, including the lesson I observed, contained partner conversations and collaborative activities, whole group discussions about the focal text, and partner shares about brainstorming. Through observation, I saw small group conferencing related to brainstorming used as a scaffold to support ELs in generating ideas.

In kindergarten, the writing lessons in the HMH curriculum included think-pair-share during a brainstorming session as well as one-on-one conferences between a student and teacher about their writing for the lesson I observed. The resources contained possible feedback points and questions to focus the conferences. The brainstorming took place as a whole group, but the conferencing did occur in practice. Additionally, throughout the kindergarten plans, when conferencing was part of the writing lesson, the curriculum included prompts, questions, and focal points for the teacher to use in those conferences. I did not observe such detailed samples and prompts related to conferencing in any other grade level, though the practice of conferencing was included. The curriculum also contained a peer feedback lesson which the resources explained through a clear routine and process. That is, the curriculum detailed how to implement the peer feedback routine:

> 1) Assign a revision focus. Tell children to focus on how their partner put the story events in order. *Does the order make sense?*
> 2) Read the draft. Designate which partner will read aloud first.
> 3) Provide language to give feedback. Give children sentence frames: I like the part when_____. You could make your story stronger by____.
> 4) Switch roles. Have the other partner read his or her draft or feedback. (Ada et a., 2020).

In this example, the curriculum outlined an activity which both addressed the writing content of giving feedback, but also promoted students' use of oral language while doing so. The routine provided prompts and language support as well as steps for implementing the activity. In addition to conferencing and peer feedback, other kindergarten writing lessons across the week in the curriculum included sharing opportunities and turn and talks.

The evidence of oral language activities and the types of those activities in the curriculum seemed to depend on what part of the writing process the lessons covered. For example, in the middle grades, the reviewed lessons included conferencing which was appropriate as the lessons focused on revisions. However, the first-grade lessons I reviewed were based more on brainstorming and generating ideas because that was the focus based on where students were in the writing process for the current project. In first grade, oral language practices such as collaborative or partner brainstorming were evident in the curriculum. In kindergarten, the writing process, including all components of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and sharing, were included in the writing plans, as these components all occurred within one week's worth of lessons rather than across the three-week module which occurred in all other grades. There was more variety in the types of oral language activities observed across one week of writing instruction in kindergarten since the curriculum moved through the writing process faster. The routines, such as giving peer feedback or holding conferences with students, were also more explicit and detailed in kindergarten. The kindergarten curriculum provided more guidance and clarity for teachers in terms of implementation.

The curriculum resources impacted what occurred in the classrooms. Where curriculum contained more oral language activities and those practices were presented in ways that were easy to follow and implement, such as in vocabulary lessons or conferences in writing, those practices were evident in the classroom. The curriculum contained oral language activities to varying extents across different components of the literacy block and sometimes the evidence of those practices seemed to depend on the curriculum pacing and location within the curriculum during the reviewed lessons. For example, during a first-grade lesson, the curriculum included a collaborative discussion, but not during some close reading days. When revising writing, lessons included conferencing, but not when brainstorming lessons. Some oral language activities were less evident in practice like extended collaborative discussions that represented lengthier back-and-forth exchanges between students beyond turn and talks. However, the curriculum lacked clarity at times in how to implement collaborative discussions, and the resources provided less guidance for teachers. In those cases where practices were less clear, evidence of implementation was also more limited.

Teachers' Perceptions

Through interviews with teachers, I gained understanding about their perceptions of the curriculum, oral language activities, and the literacy block structure. These perceptions seemed to impact actual implementation. Several examples emerged from the data that illustrate the impact of teachers' perceptions on instructional implementation. Next, I outline teachers' perceptions around the curriculum, oral language activities, and the literacy block and time.

Perceptions of the Curriculum

Teachers' perceptions of the curriculum resources and what they included or did not include impacted instructional implementation. All four teachers referenced the curriculum, either directly or indirectly, when describing how they integrated oral language activities or when discussing specific oral language activities. First, when asked "In what ways, if any, do you incorporate oral language activities into your literacy block?" one teacher responded, "It is all pretty much in the basal that we use. Vocabulary, using things in context with the book, personal experiences as well." That is, the teacher indicated that the oral language activities they used existed in the curriculum, and thus, those were the activities the teacher integrated. A different teacher also described how they incorporated oral language activities, “When I go over vocabulary words…a lot of questions. The shared reading is a constant back and forth with kids.” While this teacher did not specifically reference HMH by name, the teacher referred to two specific components within the curriculum in the vocabulary and shared reading components as places they integrated oral language.

In a third example, I asked another teacher who integrated multiple turn and talks if there were other opportunities that students had for extended collaborative discussions or those longer than a turn and talk. I asked this since I observed the teacher incorporating multiple oral language activities and I sought to better understand if there were other practices the teacher utilized as well that I did not observe on that particular day of observation. However, the teacher responded indicating, “Depending on the lesson, I don’t really think HMH does a lot of it, but I mean in the past before HMH there would be a lot…with HMH there aren’t many opportunities and it’s [time] also so short.” In this third example, the teacher’s perception that the curriculum did not include opportunities for extended discussions impacted what happened in the classroom. That is, I did not observe extended discussions nor did the teacher mention extended collaborative discussions when talking about oral language activities they implemented. The teacher’s perception was that they were not evident in the curriculum. The teacher also said such practices occurred before the resources were adopted and the teacher even described how they incorporated discussion previously. In all three examples, the teachers’ perceptions about what was included or not in the curriculum or the components of the curriculum impacted what they did.

Though the fourth teacher shared about oral language activities that occurred during the differentiated foundational skills block of literacy, which was not observed, in their description of incorporating oral language activities, the teacher still referenced HMH and the way they used the resources to engage students in an oral language activity involving oral reading and response to comprehension questions in students' own words within small groups. The teacher referenced HMH resources when describing oral language practices that they implemented.

Perceptions of Oral Language Activities

In addition to teachers' perceptions of the curriculum itself, during interviews, one theme related to teachers' perceptions of oral language activities and their reasoning for incorporating these practices emerged across all four teachers. These perceptions about the benefits of oral language activities impacted teachers' use of these practices. At various points in the lessons, all four teachers integrated oral language activities which were not part of the core HMH lesson. That is, they either substituted one oral language activity in the curriculum for another or added an oral language activity to the lesson. These activities included turn and talks, the owl hunt language activity, and combining close reading with discussion or group conversations. When asked to share about these specific oral language activities that teachers incorporated, all four teachers referenced student engagement as a factor around enhancing HMH lessons with these practices.

For example, one teacher noted that students loved the owl activity, which was a regular, weekly practice in their classroom, stating, "They're all into it because they want to know if the owl is going to be found. I can keep them interested and they love it." Two teachers mentioned collaborative structures would keep students engaged. One of these teachers said they used turn and talks to keep up engagement and the other teacher noted that students wanted to talk with their friends and work collaboratively, sharing that collaboration would improve engagement. A fourth teacher referenced a school goal of engaging students more and increasing participation, when they described the reason for incorporating turn and talks. When enhancing lessons with more opportunities for oral language activities like turn and talks, the owl hunt, or collaborative work in teams, teachers saw these added oral language activities as ways to increase student engagement.

Perceptions of the Literacy Block and Time

Some teachers referenced the nature of the literacy block and the constraint of time when they shared limitations related to oral language activities. Teachers perceived time as a barrier. One teacher mentioned time as a factor related to implementing oral language activities multiple times during the interview. First, when asked about whether there were opportunities for extended discussions during the literacy block the teacher referenced time as a constraint. This teacher also mentioned that one of the reasons they integrated turn and talks throughout tier one reading instruction was to keep students engaged since the entire literacy block was so lengthy. The teacher also indicated time was a factor in opting to replace one vocabulary activity with another. Though both activities included oral language components, the teacher perceived the replacement activity involving turn and talks as taking less time and named time as a reason for not implementing the original activity.

Additionally, a different teacher also mentioned time as a reason for shifting a turn and talk included in the curriculum during shared reading to a whole group discussion. That is, the teacher said they were already behind in the lesson's pacing, and they wanted to make sure they had some time for writing, the next instructional block. The teacher noted that, "We were deeply running into writing time…In shared reading, sometimes we really want to spend time, so we have to make decisions." The teacher referenced the competing priorities of the instructional blocks and the time as a barrier to the turn and talk. Two teachers' perceptions about limitations to implementing oral language activities included time and the literacy block structure.

Through interviews, it was evident that teachers' perceptions about the curriculum, oral language activities and their reasons for implementing them, the literacy block, and time all impacted their actual instructional practice. When planning for continued implementation and future support, these trends related to teachers' perceptions highlighted the need for understanding teachers' interpretation of the resources and their practices rather than assuming those from observations or simply reviewing the curriculum.

Professional Learning

In addition to the curriculum and teachers' perceptions, evidence emerged in the study to indicate that professional learning also influenced what occurred in the classroom regarding teachers' implementation of oral language activities. For example, as described, all four teachers named increased engagement as a reason for adding additional oral language activities or replacing ones in the curriculum. Over the last few months during the time of this study, teachers received bite-sized PL sessions in PLCs on increasing total participation in literacy. While not all teachers referenced this PL, their reasoning was noteworthy given the recent PL focus. Next, I will illustrate three specific examples highlighting the role of PL in teachers' implementation of oral language activities.

First, one teacher integrated the emoji vocabulary collaborative activity, replacing the vocabulary activity from HMH. This emoji activity was recently highlighted during one of the bite-sized PL sessions in PLCs on increasing students' active engagement during literacy instruction. That PL session focused on engaging students more during the vocabulary component of the literacy block. Several strategies were shared including the emoji task. In a second example, when asked about why they added turn and talks into the vocabulary lesson when they were not in the core HMH plan, a teacher referenced the instructional coach (and presumably recent PL) and a school goal of increasing engagement during the literacy block as the reasoning for incorporating the oral language activity. To be sure, there are some limitations with both examples. Regarding the emoji activity, I delivered the PL in my role as the instructional coach, and the teacher knew I was observing the class for this study, so it could be inferred that the teacher wanted to use the activity when I observed. In a similar way, it could be inferred that the teacher implemented or referenced the turn and talks because they knew I was coming to observe and because I had recently suggested adding in turn and talks during a recent PL. Nonetheless, on both occasions the PL impacted what occurred in the classrooms.

In another example, a third teacher referenced new learning from a Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) course the teacher was taking in the district at the time of the interview, sharing that their learning from that course prompted them to integrate a new routine in the foundational skills block. Though that example of PL influencing practice did not reference an oral language activity, it did reinforce the notion that Downing teachers applied PL and that it impacted actual practice. In this example, I did not provide the PL the teacher referenced nor did anyone else from Downing lead it. Understanding that PL impacted Downing teachers' instructional implementation of oral language activities, and of instructional practices in general is an important consideration when planning future teacher support involving incorporating oral language activities and in scaffolding these experiences to engage all students, including ELs. This is especially critical when helping teachers support ELs in literacy, since teachers cited receiving limited PL related to ELs.

Though teachers utilized PL and incorporated strategies they learned into their practice, teachers received limited professional learning related to ELs' reading. When asked about PL related to teaching ELs reading, two teachers indicated they had never received any such PL either in their pre-service or in-service experience. Another teacher shared that any PL related to ELs was integrated into more general literacy PL, but the teacher had received nothing specifically related to ELs. The fourth teacher indicated they took a course in graduate school on ELs' reading, but they had not received specific PL related to ELs in their in-service experience. Though I created PL modules on supporting ELs while using the HMH curriculum and on integrating oral language into literacy during my Field Study which were available to teachers on the district Canvas PL page, these courses were optional, and teachers did not engage in those learning experiences as a school or within PLCs. The oral language activities from PL sessions that I observed teachers implementing came from bite-sized PL presented during PLCs not from the lengthier modules in Canvas. The mode of PL delivery may also be an important consideration when planning future PL and teacher support.

Summary of Finding 2

Through interviews and curriculum review, it was evident that Downing teachers drew heavily on HMH, implementing the curriculum resources. When teachers did substitute or add oral language activities, these replacement or modified activities often provided more opportunities for students to apply oral language and to engage in dialogue. Teachers' perceptions of these activities, including their degree of prevalence in the curriculum, varied among teachers. These perceptions also impacted what oral language practices teachers implemented in practice and their reasoning for integrating those activities. In addition to the curriculum and teachers' perceptions of it, the data also pointed to PL as a factor in teachers' implementation of oral language activities. In exploring the utility of these findings, including future PL and support for teachers, it was important to examine the PL structure and delivery mode that led to teacher integration and implementation, especially in light of teachers' limited PL directly related to ELs.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Next Steps

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways teachers at Downing Elementary implemented oral language activities into their tier one literacy instruction and how they engaged ELs in these learning experiences. The study involved four classroom observations of different teachers across four grade levels (kindergarten, first, third, and fourth grades) as well as teacher interviews and curriculum review. As outlined in the previous chapter, two major findings emerged from the study. First, teachers at Downing integrated oral language activities across the reading and writing components of the instructional literacy block to various extents. Yet, these practices and the scaffolds to engage ELs in them, were consistently evident in all observed classes during vocabulary instruction. More complex oral language practices like discussions with back-and-forth exchanges were less evident. Second, the adopted curriculum resources and teachers' perceptions of those resources as well as professional learning, all impacted actual instructional implementation. Evidence also supports that teachers had different perceptions of the curriculum related to oral language activities and that teachers experienced very little PL directly related to ELs. Next, I contextualize these findings within the literature explored in chapter two and the conceptual framework.

Contextualizing the Findings

Across the literacy block, teachers integrated oral language activities while addressing other literacy skills including vocabulary instruction, shared and close reading experiences where comprehension was the focus, and in writing conferences as well. While the focus of such activities was not students' oral language application, through activities like turn and talks, students gained an opportunity to apply oral language while addressing other skills. Incorporating opportunities for students, notably ELs, to apply oral language in reading may be beneficial to students' reading. Research suggests an association between ELs' English oral language proficiency and their reading achievement (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021). Oral language may serve as a foundation for reading, as being able to say and use a word orally could provide schema on which students could draw from when then reading that word in context (Helman & Burns, 2008). Even early in their schooling, oral language may be an indicator or predictor of later achievement in reading comprehension, and weaker oral language may be associated with weaker reading skills (Kieffer, 2012; Rojas et al., 2019). Thus, the study was rooted in the assumption that teachers might support ELs' literacy by providing opportunities to support students' use of oral language even while the focus of such activities might be on other content like writing or comprehension.

Teachers provided such opportunities to apply oral language during partner turn and talks, collaborative conversations combined with close reading, and in one-on-one conferencing or sharing. In implementing these practices, the teachers not only integrated oral language activities, but also incorporated research-based strategies and scaffolds to engage ELs in discussions. For example, researchers contend that integrating discussion with close reading and limiting or chunking that reading, as teachers did by presenting questions one at a time for partners or groups to discuss, may support ELs' engagement (Snow & O'Connor, 2016; Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012). Teachers reduced the group size to partners or small groups in these activities, a recommended practice for increasing ELs' participation in discussions (Wilson et al., 2016).

However, while teachers integrated oral language activities like turn and talks, small group or partner discussions during close reading or conferencing about writing, these exchanges and others in whole group learning did not consistently represent the characteristics of strong discussions outlined in chapter two. Sometimes teachers asked students to provide supporting evidence, but discussions did not include evidence of clear routines, structures, or prompts to help students engage in the discussion (Blum et al., 2010; Dwyer et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016). Observed discussions were not extended back-and-forth exchanges in which students or teachers consistently used moves to extend conversations (Hadley et al., 2020; Soter et al., 2008) nor did they reference their own talk moves throughs "metatalk" to acknowledge how they extended or kept the conversations going (Galloway & McClain, 2020). In the whole-group discussions, often teacher's interactions with students appeared to produce a more traditional I-R-E exchange in that the teacher *initiated* the question, the student *responded*, and the teacher *evaluated* or gave feedback rather than a less controlled conversation where students have more extended opportunities to talk, make meaning, and collaborate, which may be more beneficial to ELs' oral language development (Bloome et al., 2004; Gibbons, 2015). Students were not observed working together to develop or critique arguments like discussions featuring exploratory talk (Mercer et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2016). Additionally, these discussions did not follow a clear structure outside of each person in the group or partnership sharing.

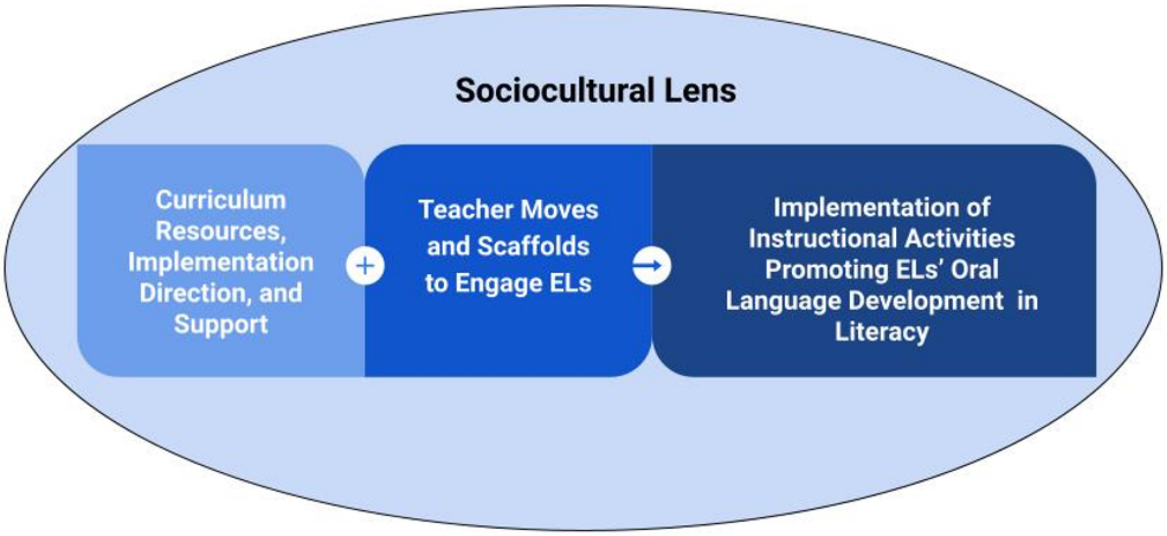
In some ways, the absence of extended discussions in practice made sense. First, teachers shared they had little PL directly related to supporting students in reading, yet researchers stress that teachers need learning in building skills to support ELs and engage them (de Jong et al., 2013). Second, the curriculum provided limited examples of routines around discussions or guidance for teachers on how to establish and sustain discussion practices. Rather, the resources simply stated or listed discussion practices outside of the kindergarten resources (Ada et al., 2020). Research illustrates that discussion structures can be supportive of engaging ELs in discussions, but they take time to teach, model, and implement (Carrison & Ernst-Slavit, 2005; Soter 2009; Soto-Hinman, 2011; Terantino & Donovan, 2021; Wilson et al., 2016). It takes time to teach these discussion practices, but "as students become more skillful in managing their own discussions and developing a sound argument schema, they gradually appropriate exploratory talk" (Zhang et al., 2016). Third, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum included varying perspectives related to the extent to which the curriculum included such opportunities and that time allowed for it.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 4) centered on two factors impacting implementation of activities to promote ELs' oral language use during literacy—curriculum resources (including all professional learning, support, and direction around its implementation) and teachers' moves to engage ELs in these oral language activities.

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework

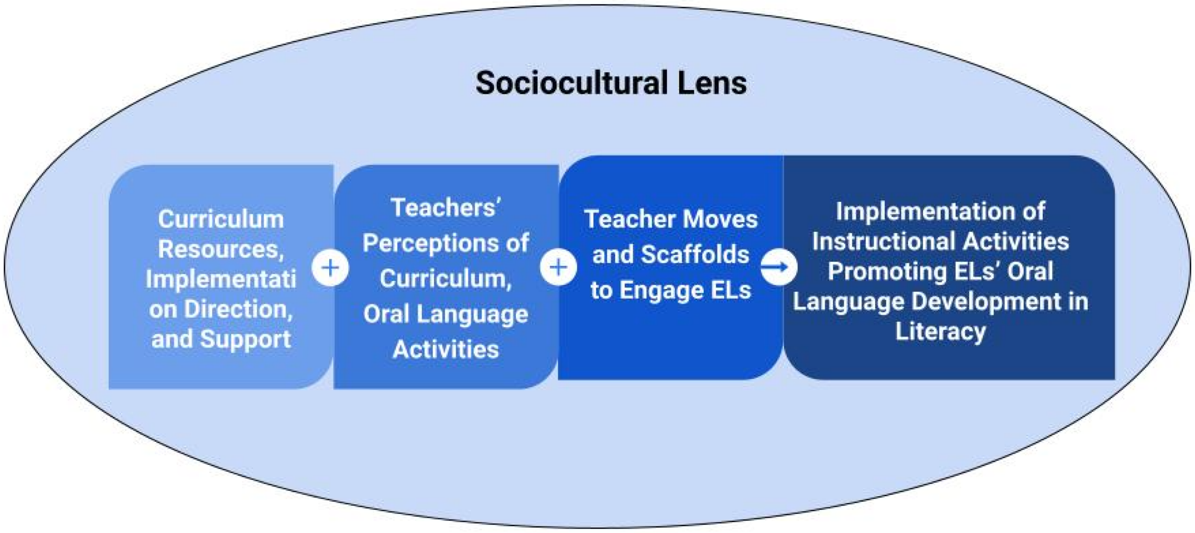

Sociocultural Lens
Curriculum Resources, Implementation Direction, and Support
+
Teacher Moves and Scaffolds to Engage ELs
→
Implementation of Instructional Activities Promoting ELs' Oral Language Development in Literacy

As described in chapter four, both the curriculum and PL impacted the implementation of oral language activities. Teachers utilized and referenced oral language activities from a recent PL on increasing student engagement during vocabulary instruction. In addition to PL, the findings illustrate that the curriculum itself impacted classroom practice and teachers' implementation of oral language activities. That is, what was included in the curriculum impacted what occurred in the classroom just as Cervetti et al. (2015) argue.

However, the findings in this study highlight a third factor that also impacted teachers' implementation of oral language activities. In addition, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum and of implementing oral language activities also impacted what occurred in the classroom. For example, teachers' perceptions about what was included or not included in the curriculum impacted what they did in practice. When teachers discussed the ways they implemented oral language activities, they referenced the curriculum resources, either specific practices within the curriculum, components of the literacy block common to the curriculum, or resources within the curriculum they used. Within the context of this study, a new factor emerged as one impacting classroom practice and implementation with oral language activities. As such, I developed a new conceptual framework (see Figure 5) combining both the original framework and this emerging factor of teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, oral language activities, and the instructional literacy block.

Figure 5

Revised Conceptual Framework Based on Study Findings


Sociocultural Lens
Curriculum Resources, Implementation Direction, and Support
+
Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum, Oral Language Activities
+
Teacher Moves and Scaffolds to Engage ELs
Implementation of Instructional Activities Promoting ELs' Oral Language Development in Literacy

Note. The revised conceptual framework includes the added factor of teachers' perceptions.

Whereas the original conceptual framework included just two factors impacting implementation of instructional activities promoting ELs' oral language application, this new conceptual framework includes the previous factors and the emerging one from this study, teachers' perceptions of the curriculum and oral language activities.

These two findings led to implications for Downing and Harper City more broadly as the school and district move forward with curriculum implementation and continue to seek ways to support teachers in meeting the needs of ELs in reading. Next, I outline implications for instructional leaders both at the district and school level.

Implication 1: Teachers need additional resources, professional learning, and implementation support related to integrating discussions during tier one literacy.

While evidence illustrates that teachers implemented oral language activities across the literacy block, these practices, and teachers' scaffolds to engage ELs in them were most evident during vocabulary instruction. These oral language activities often came in the form of turn and talks or small group collaborative activities rather than extended discussions. Arguably, these short turn and talks or sharing strategies are easier and faster to implement than extended, back-and-forth discussion routines and practices, though they still provide opportunities for peers, including ELs to engage in conversation and meaning making. Recommended next steps within Harper City, and specifically for Downing, first include developing resources to augment discussion routines and practices currently in the curriculum. Second, in addition to developing supplemental resources, teachers need continued professional learning around discussions and supporting ELs in those activities as well. Third, eliminating potential barriers to implementing discussions and providing continued implementation support should also be an area of focus in this work.

Though this study focused solely on Downing, direction on curriculum implementation came first from the district level, specifically the literacy coordinator, and then local, school-based leaders like instructional coaches and reading specialists, support that implementation. Any supplemental materials to clarify routines in HMH would likely be beneficial for all schools, not just Downing. If the resources are lacking in a particular area, like clarity around how to implement discussions, that would be the case for all schools, not just one. Also, though Downing had the highest percentage of ELs at the time of the study at 27%, the percent of EL students in the district was 15% and all elementary schools have ELs. Additionally, extended academic conversations have been found to be beneficial for all students' reading growth, not just ELs (Portes & González Canché, 2016; Portes et al., 2018; Saunders & Goldberg, 1999). Thus, the recommendations may be useful for all elementary schools in Harper City, not just Downing. Next, I examine each of these recommendations as part of the implication that teachers need additional support around implementing discussions.

Recommendation 1: Provide Supplemental Resources and Guidance Related to Discussions to Teachers

In order to provide teachers with guidance and support related to integrating more complex oral language activities like discussions, it is recommended that the district literacy coordinator, in collaboration with other leaders such as the district literacy implementation team, instructional coaches, or reading specialists, develop supplemental resources related to establishing and maintaining discussion routines and practices during literacy, building on existing structures.

Augmenting Collaborative Discussions. Collaborative discussions are already part of the curriculum and are a logical starting place for developing supplemental resources. Since the questions for these discussions already exist following each shared text in grades two through four, leaders can focus supplemental supports on how to establish and teach discussion routines. Ultimately, teachers might benefit from a grade level specific, step-by-step guide on what collaborative discussions in the middle elementary grades look like in practice, building on the skeletal structure presented in HMH. While only lists of discussions moves or reminders of them were evident in the curriculum resources in the middle grades, where one teacher mentioned that the curriculum did not include opportunities for extended discussions, the HMH resources in kindergarten provided much more detailed and specific routines around discussions.

Additionally, the kindergarten teacher was the teacher who specifically described how oral language activities were, “all pretty much in the basal we use.” Perhaps one reason this teacher described the evidence of oral language activities as being clearly evident in the curriculum, was because in kindergarten the routines for having a discussion were so clearly outlined and described for the teacher.

While the kindergarten discussions did not include close reading questions about texts like the middle grade resources, the procedural directions and guidance around establishing, teaching, and modeling discussion moves in kindergarten would likely be a helpful structure for middle grades teachers. As part of creating supplemental resources for other grades related to how to establish and implement discussion routines and practices, literacy leaders should refer to the kindergarten routines as a model and to present the information clearly to teachers. The collaborative discussions were already accounted for and included in shared reading lesson plans in the middle grades. Thus, if teachers know what these practices look like and how to implement them with direction from district leadership, then they can merge the guidance around routines and norms for discussions with the existing questions and content for the discussions already present in the curriculum.

This disconnect between the absence of routines in middle elementary grades and the presence of them in kindergarten may be related to an assumption in the resources that by the time students enter third or fourth grade they will have already had the experience of learning discussion routines and practices in kindergarten. However, with a new curriculum adoption, it will take years before the students who were in kindergarten during the time of the study to be in the middle grades. Also, the resources do not account for the development of the teachers’ knowledge, practice, and skills related to implementing discussions in these middle grades when guidance is absent from them, thus teachers need supplemental resources.

Discussion Norms. First, this collaborative team involving the district literacy coordinator and other instructional leaders should develop basic norms around how long collaborative discussions should last and how many students should be involved. These aspects of the discussions were unclear from the materials. For example, sometimes discussions referenced partners and other times a small group. Clarity around the preparation for the discussion including whether students answer questions collaboratively or come to the discussion group with the questions already answered would also be helpful. These norms are important in planning subsequent support around roles or structures within the group. For example, if students answer questions prior to coming to the group, that will impact the structure of the group discussion, whereas if answering the questions and discussing them simultaneously is part of the routine, then roles or structures could change. Since the resource was inconsistent and unclear about these procedures, guidance from district or school-based leaders might help teachers clarify discussion norms, or at the very least, help teachers think through developing a plan for discussion routines within their classroom.

Expectations for Each Grade Level. In addition to basic discussion norms, literacy leaders should consider guidance around grade level expectations for discussions. Grade level collaborative discussion rubrics existed within HMH, but further work to determine the degree to which these rubrics aligned with state standards around oral language skills is needed. Using the discussion rubrics included in HMH as well as the state standards for oral language, district leaders can develop benchmarks or goals for what these discussions should look like in practice at each grade level. Starting with that end in mind, instructional leaders can ensure routines and discussion practices align with and will support students in achieving those goals.

Discussion Moves Pacing and Sequence. Next, leaders can use those discussion goals to establish a pacing guide for introducing discussion skills and teaching them to students so that they may become typical classroom practice. If thoroughly introduced, practiced, and built into discussion expectations, such moves become part of the routine and teachers could effectively carry out the discussion activities that HMH included. The routines HMH described do not include guidance on how to establish them. The resources seemingly assumed middle grades students can already do these practices and simply provided reminders or cues for students but lacked support for teachers in establishing the routines. For example, in a discussion pacing, the teacher might start with more basic concepts like looking at the speaker or talking one at a time and then build to more advanced skills like adding on to what a peer says or asking follow-up questions. This type of pacing guide would likely help teachers understand the sequence of teaching discussion moves. Additionally, since teachers used collaborative structures across disciplines, such guidance could promote discussion and collaborative conversations across subject areas with consistent procedures.

With an understanding of discussion routine norms, goals for collaborative discussions, and sequencing and pacing around implementing those practices with students, district literacy leadership can then prepare teachers to implement and lead these discussions in their classrooms through PL and continued support around specific discussion moves, roles, and implementation. That is, after understanding what the discussions look like, what the goals of them are, and how introducing discussion skills and routines are paced out, then teachers can learn how to implement each specific discussion move, role, or practice. Such PL will be explored in the second recommendation.

Introduce and Give Guidance Around Other Discussion Structures. While starting with collaborative discussions is a logical step for sharing guidance around incorporating discussions since these practices were already embedded in HMH, literacy leaders could also consider introducing and providing direction around incorporating discussion structures such as CELL in these middle grades as well. Structured discussion practices using roles for each participant were not observed during classroom observations nor were they referenced in conversations with teachers about oral language activities they integrated or evident in curriculum resources. These discussion structures were not evident in the curriculum nor have teachers had recent PL on them so it is understandable they were not evident, yet they could be beneficial structures to engage all students, including ELs, in discussions.

Given that the CELL structure involves specific roles for partners during close reading or other comprehension activities, it is a structure which may be beneficial for ELs (Terantino & Donovan, 2021). In CELL, each partner has a defined role including one person who rereads text and another who leads discussion between the pairs. Evidence from this Capstone study shows that though teachers incorporated collaboration and interactions during close reading, these conversations did not include sustained back-and-forth dialogue and sometimes student engagement in them varied. The CELL structure may provide more defined roles for discussion engagement and additional clarity to students on what to do during this close reading discussion time. It is also a partner structure, which can result in greater engagement for ELs as Wilson et al. (2016) describe. While it is commendable that Downing teachers incorporated opportunities for oral language and discussion during close reading, students might engage in additional text-based dialogue with a more structured interaction such as one using the CELL protocol.

Incorporating Discussion Structures in the Primary Grades. While collaborative discussions and structures like CELL assume that students can read independently, opportunities exist in the primary grades to integrate more extended discussions as well. In addition to supplemental resources and guidance for the middle grades, the district literacy leadership should provide these for primary grades too to capitalize on opportunities to build in oral language activities while addressing other literacy skills like comprehension. Leaders should examine collaborative discussion rubrics and state standards for oral language to develop goals related to discussions for primary students. Leaders can determine activities within the curriculum and existing structures in primary classrooms where incorporating discussion structures and moves could be beneficial. Such activities might involve incorporating turn and talks into shared reading, as these were limited in primary grades outside of vocabulary instruction. This would allow more students to participate and answer discussion questions rather than just one student answering a teacher's question at a time. During and after shared reading experiences teachers could use discussion prompt cards or stems to support student engagement in discussing texts. Prompt cards or sentence stems may not only support students with topics about texts to discuss during discussions, but they could also encourage more discussion (Blum et al., 2010) such as back-and-forth exchanges, asking each other questions, agreeing with each other, or adding to discussions While there was some limited evidence of teachers incorporating turn and talks or using discussion moves to elicit more talk during whole class questioning in shared reading, evidence of those practice was limited. District leaders can provide guidance on how to augment these existing practices and integrate more discussion moves and practices. The HMH resources do provide an opportunity in kindergarten to teach foundational discussion skills in the primary grades so these practices will be more familiar as students progress through the elementary grades.

Recommendation 2: Provide Professional Learning on Integrating Discussions

In addition to providing supplemental resources and guidance, the district literacy coordinator and other literacy leaders like instructional coaches and reading specialists, should provide teachers with continued professional learning on integrating oral language activities and engaging ELs in them during literacy instruction. Evidence of the wide-spread integration of oral language activities in vocabulary instruction, including some practices which were highlighted in recent PL sessions, suggests that future PL should center on instructional components other than vocabulary, notably discussions. Teachers need PL around establishing and implementing discussions, discussion moves, structures, and using the supplemental resources from district leaders described above. However, before designing additional PL, district literacy leaders should consider the PL that led to instructional implementation at Downing.

PL Leading to Instructional Implementation. As finding two in the previous chapter describes, evidence supports that PL mattered in terms of teacher implementation, as multiple teachers either referenced PL as a reason for integrating oral language activities or incorporated strategies recently shared in PL in their practice. Two of these examples included PL which I delivered in PLCs, and in a third case, a teacher referenced incorporating a foundational skills practice after new learning in an optional PL course offered by the district. In examining characteristics of PL that led to instructional implementation or impacted practice, in one case enrolling in the optional, ongoing PL course lasting throughout the school year was the teacher’s choice and with regard to the other two PLs, they were bite-sized sessions that occurred during PLCs. That is, teachers were already attending PLCs and the PL occurred during that structure.

These bite-sized PL sessions on integrating turn and talks and collaborative activities like the emoji task during vocabulary instruction were a school-wide response based on feedback from district leadership during a cycle of walkthrough observations earlier in the school year. That is, the PL was a response to a perceived need and feedback from the district, which was shared with teachers. In the case of the optional PL course where learning led to instructional impact, the teacher noted in an interview that they noticed the curriculum did not include a particular practice and they learned it was an important component of foundational reading skills. While unrelated to oral language or engagement, the teacher incorporated the PL into practice due to a perceived need. In addition to all three cases being based in a need, two examples of PL integration were quick, ready to implement strategies presented in a five-minute segment of PLCs and part of a multi-part series on engagement in reading. The third example was part of an ongoing, optional course provided to teachers through the district. Though only three examples, it is important when planning future PL, to consider what types of PL led to implementation. While more analysis is needed, some evidence points to need-based PL which is quick and embedded in existing PLC structures or ongoing experiences in which the teacher chooses to engage.

PL on Discussions. Planning and developing supplemental resources and goals around discussions as described above will help district literacy leaders determine exactly which discussion structures and moves to engage students need to be incorporated into PL. For example, in addition to PL around the guidance and supplemental resources, teachers would likely benefit from support with how to implement specific discussion tools, moves, or structures. While introducing and explaining supplemental resources and learning around expectations for discussions may require lengthier sessions early in the school year, one strategy for PL on specific discussion tools, moves, or structures that district leaders should consider is bite-sized PL within PLCs. Integrating five-to-ten-minute bite-sized PL into PLCs was beneficial for teachers based on their feedback to me in a coaching survey and as observed in their implementation of the shared strategies and practices. This PL structure lends itself particularly well for enhancing discussions by introducing moves or practices one at a time to build on what teachers already have in place. All schools have regular literacy-focused PLCs and teachers already attend these sessions. The regular schedule of literacy PLCs, which were weekly at Downing, also provide a follow-up or check-in on PL implementation as well as sharing opportunities for teachers.

District literacy leaders should collaborate and determine guidance and direction around discussions as well as specific tools, moves, and structures to include in PL. However, Figure 6 includes potential topics for mini-PL sessions based on strategies presented in chapter two of this study and a preliminary review of collaborative discussion rubrics from HMH. For example, topics could include how to integrate consistent discussion prompts like those utilized in primary classrooms that Blum et al. (2010) describe, incorporating sentence stem responses to questions teachers will already use in discussion, or how to respond back to what a peer says. In the middle grades, these mini-PL topics might include how to support students in using discussion moves like adding on to what a peer says, ways to communicate you disagree with a peer, or asking a peer a question about their response. Some bite-sized PLs like one on the CELL discussion (Terantino & Donovan, 2021) structure could be presented in multiple bite-sized sessions across multiple PLCs. For example, one five-minute session might be on what the structure is and what it looks like in practice and subsequent sessions could include introducing or setting up the routine, carrying it out, and another on sharing about implementation.

Figure 6

Topic Ideas for Future Bite-Sized PL

Topic Ideas for Bite-Sized PL on Integrating Discussion Structures, Roles, Prompts, or Skills in Existing Oral Language Activities at Downing

- Integrating consistent discussion prompts or sentence stems
  - Utilizing visual or prompt cards for these with primary students
- Incorporating turn and talks or small group discussion during whole group discussions
- Moves for eliciting more talk:
  - Adding on to what a peer says during discussion
  - Asking questions during discussions
  - Summarizing discussions
  - Using "metalk" (Galloway & McClain, 2020)
  - Uptake (Collins, 1982)
  - Exploratory talk (Mercer et al., 1999)
- Student roles during discussions
- Using the CELL discussion structure (Terantino & Donovan, 2021)
- Planning structures for teaching routines: introducing, modeling, practicing, implementing
- Sustaining discussion practices and structures

Moving to Implementation. Introducing a discussion skill or topic in PLCs does not immediately lead to implementation. In addition to learning about the skill or practice during PL, teachers might benefit from a planning routine to think through how they will implement a specific practice. A short planning guide or set of guiding questions may be useful for instructional coaches or reading specialists in helping teachers think through how to add in discussion components, focusing on one discussion move or topic listed above at a time. For example, guiding questions teams could discuss in PLCs or those individual teachers could consider might include:

- How will you introduce the talk move?
- How will you model it for students?
- How will you provide practice for all students?
- How will you consistently implement and sustain the practice with students?

As Carrison and Ernst (2005) describe, modeling discussion structures and practicing each structure or role is important before differentiating roles or expecting students to implement practices while in small groups. A planning resource used in conjunction with teaching these practices and moves may support teachers in brainstorming how integration of new routines connects with what they already have in place. In addition to supporting teachers in sharing these practices and helping them to plan integration, it is important to continue to highlight practices as they are implemented, provide cyclical feedback, suggestions, and check-ins to maintain the sustainability of such practices

Additional PL. In addition to PL specifically related to discussions, evidence from this study highlights that teachers received limited explicit PL related to supporting ELs in reading. One optional module in the district PL library in Canvas is specifically geared towards supporting ELs in HMH and another two are centered on incorporating oral language into literacy. Downing teachers had not engaged in these courses as PLC teams, which makes sense given that these were more advanced course offerings to take once teams had completed foundational HMH PL and had more comprehensive understanding of the resources and district literacy expectations in general. However, in future years, district literacy leaders should examine teachers' enrollment in these specific PL modules and evaluate the current PL delivery mode and structure. One future consideration is that these existing, lengthier PL offerings centered on EL support with HMH and oral language could be chunked into mini-PL sessions, and incorporated into five to ten-minute PL offerings during PLCs which all classroom teachers attended and would not require additional time to complete on their own.

Recommendation 3: Provide Ongoing Implementation Support and Address Barriers to Implementation

In addition to providing supplemental resources and PL related to discussions and supporting ELs in HMH, district and school leaders must also consider implementation and ongoing support. While teachers may learn about discussions and moves or how to teach students discussion routines, these oral language practices must also fit within the context of the literacy block and be integrated while maintaining other components of literacy instruction. Part of that implementation support involves ongoing PL as previously described, but additionally, it includes eliminating barriers to implementation as well.

Two barriers emerged from the data as limitations to teachers' implementation of oral language activities, a lack of presence in the curriculum and time. By creating supplemental resources around incorporating discussions and providing discussion-focused PL, district literacy leaders will address the lack of clarity within the HMH resources on implementing discussions and provide greater guidance in what collaborative discussions look like in the classroom. Additionally, multiple teachers referenced time as a limitation to integrating oral language practices. As described, one recommendation related to time is to build onto existing structures and practices within the literacy block. For example, teachers already incorporated opportunities to collaborate and converse with peers during shared reading. Leaders can support teachers with how to integrate discussion moves and structures within that existing oral language activity, enhancing it, rather than trying to make space for additional discussions. Integrating more discussion structures and talk moves could start by augmenting the practices already in place. By tweaking the structures and routines around existing oral language activities, teachers may elicit even more talk and oral language application while being mindful of the time and other competing priorities during the instructional literacy block.

Beyond Downing. The focus of this study was on Downing and the recommendations are based on data that emerged from this school, though they are likely relevant across the district. However, while likely pertinent for all schools, integrating discussions is a more complex process than other oral language activities that are already evident at Downing such as turn and talks or conferencing. It is possible that other schools within Harper City may also benefit from PL and support related to more basic oral language activities like those evident at Downing. If so, collaboration between Downing instructional leaders and coaches, reading specialists, or teachers at other schools may be beneficial as well.

Summary of Implication 1

In this section I presented recommendations around developing supplemental resources on integrating collaborative discussions and extended oral language activities to augment the existing curriculum, and guidance to teachers around these practices. Possible structures for PL support were also presented, as well as strategically focusing future PL on developing teachers' capacity to incorporate discussion structures, moves, and protocols, building on existing practices to further enhance discussions and opportunities for students to apply oral language. One such possible structure includes utilizing mini-PL sessions at Downing focusing on one discussion strategy or practice at a time. Additionally, teachers need ongoing implementation support including considerations for eliminating barriers to implementing more comprehensive oral language activities such as time or inadequate direction on how to incorporate such practices in the curriculum resources.

Implication 2: District leaders should continue to evaluate curriculum resources after adoption and seek to understand teachers' perceptions around those resources to inform implementation needs and support.

As illustrated in chapter four, the curriculum, teachers' perceptions of it, and PL mattered in terms of the oral language practices teachers implemented during tier one literacy. Because these factors impacted actual implementation, it is critical for district leaders charged with literacy curriculum implementation and designing supports like those described above to understand their impact. While this implication could relate specifically to oral language activities and supporting ELs, as is the case in this study at Downing, it could also include other literacy components and practices beyond oral language in the future.

Recommendation 1: Build time and space to examine the curriculum thoroughly and to observe implementation.

The first recommendation to district literacy leaders is to make time and space to continue to analyze the curriculum resources to better understand where they may need supplementing or where teachers may need additional support. Asking questions about where the resources need supplementing or how to clarify practices within the resources may support stronger implementation and instruction in reading. For example, in the case of Downing, while I previously engaged in examining the curriculum as part of my professional work and doctoral coursework, it was through this extensive and targeted curriculum review in this current study where I realized the extent to which these resources needed supplementing. Only in extensive review did I understand how limited the guidance was and how the routines could be confusing to interpret and to put into practice. That is, only in this purposeful examination—to analyze oral language activities and better understand teachers' perceptions about them—did I fully grasp some of the limitations in the core teaching resources and supplemental materials. Since district leaders like the literacy coordinator gave direction on implementation and school-based leaders like instructional coaches and reading specialists provided building level support, it is important that these leaders have the time to continue to examine and analyze resources after adoption. This may not only lead to identifying areas where supplemental resources or guidance could be beneficial, as was the case with this study, but also conceivably recognizing underutilized resources or practices which could be highlighted for teachers' future use.

Recommendation 2: Continue to observe instruction and talk with teachers about their perspectives related to the resources and implementation

During the 2021-2022 school year, the district literacy coordinator observed and periodically conducted walkthroughs at elementary schools across the district, including Downing. I recommend that this practice continues as it is important to see how the curriculum, guidance around it, and routines play out in actual instruction. Observing implementation is not only important during the initial stages like this school year, but also, continued observations allow leaders to understand the extent to which future guidance and supporting resources like those described in the previous implication are evident in actual practice. That is, as curriculum resources, direction, and PL are continuously refined, it is critical to continue to understand how those factors impact actual practice. Additionally, district literacy leaders could better understand barriers to implementation as well by observing actual practice. District leaders might also refine observations, honing in on specific practices, such as implementing collaborative discussions, rather than observing for more general or overall implementation, especially as teachers grow more comfortable with the resources and structure of the current instructional literacy block.

While observing classroom practice is not a recommended new practice, as it already occurs, it is recommended that it continue.

In addition to observing classroom practice, district leaders should talk with teachers to learn their perspectives about the curriculum resources, specific components or practices, and instructional implementation. In the current study at Downing, without talking to teachers, I might have assumed about their perceptions or intentions related to integrating oral language practices. I would not have realized that while one teacher cited the curriculum as the reason they incorporated oral language practices, another noted the absence of discussions as the reason they did not integrate them. Teachers' perspectives could vary across classrooms and grade levels but hearing them may likely help district literacy leaders better understand how teachers interpret and use the resources as well as barriers they may face to implementation. Without talking to teachers in this study, I may not have fully grasped the impact of time on instructional decisions teachers made or their varying perceptions of what was included in the curriculum even though I collaborated with them regularly in weekly literacy PLCs and through coaching.

District leaders, including the literacy coordinator, should consider visiting PLCs to gain this feedback. Given schools and grade level teams have unique needs, PLCs seem appropriate for these conversations so leaders can differentiate support, but also identify trends across schools and the district. District leaders, school administrators, and coaches like myself, observe instructional implementation and offer feedback to teachers. While this practice is beneficial, teachers are typically on the receiving end of this feedback, listening to what others observed or hearing suggestions for their future practice. Thus, building time and space to understand teachers' perspectives means not only continuing to offer teachers feedback, but also providing opportunities for teachers to explain their instructional decisions, moves, and perceptions about the curriculum and their teaching versus simply hearing feedback on their implementation from others.

Summary of Implication 2

Findings from the current study at Downing illustrate the need for continuing to examine and analyze the curriculum resources and observe instructional implementation. Even after extended examination and analysis of curriculum resources, in the current study I continued to deepen my understanding and evaluation of not only the contents of the resources, but also the strengths and limitations of them as well. In this case, that involved examining them through the lens of oral language activities and even more specifically around collaborative discussions as well. Literacy leaders like the district coordinator, instructional coaches, and reading specialists should continue this work of understanding the resources to better inform teacher support. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of listening to teachers' perspectives and perceptions around the curriculum and implementing it, barriers to implementation, and future needs. In this study, teachers' perceptions helped explain observed practices and shed light on what implementing the curriculum was like.

Limitations

Several limitations of this work existed. First, while Downing Elementary was uniquely suited and representative for this research as a case study based on its demographic, teachers' needs, ELs' reading achievement, and the utility of the findings in supporting teachers in meeting the needs of ELs, ultimately, the research was limited only to this single site. In addition, as the instructional coach at the school and researcher, it was possible teachers tried to show their best or go above what they normally would during observations or perhaps felt they could not be truthful during interviews. However, I regularly walk through and observe in classrooms, so teachers and students were used to my presence. Also, it was likely teacher behavior might be altered somewhat with anyone different in the classroom as a researcher, not just me.

Another limitation was that I only observed and interviewed teachers once so I may not have observed practices which occurred regularly and consistently in the classroom. Since the curriculum is organized into modules and weeks of instruction, extended observations over time may highlight practices that were included in the curriculum and ones that teachers implemented regularly, but that simply were not part of the lesson plan on the day I observed. While subsequent observations might provide evidence that practices were more consistently implemented versus a single lesson, the interview provided opportunities for teachers to describe these practices and activities from the observed lesson, but other lessons as well. The focus of the research was to gain a broader understanding of ways teachers implemented oral language activities in tier one literacy instruction and engaged ELs in these learning opportunities. Thus, the study design involving multiple teachers provided a breadth of understanding across the school.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to better understand Downing teachers' use of oral language activities in tier one literacy and the ways in which they engaged ELs in those experiences as well as teachers' perceptions of implementing oral language activities. This study focused on oral language as one skill positively associated with strong reading in ELs', particularly with comprehension (August et al., 2009; Babayiğit, 2014, 2015; Huang et al., 2021). I saw evidence of oral language activities and specifically text-based ones as opportunities to embed oral language application and practice while addressing other skills to support ELs' reading. Using case study to gain descriptive data from one site, I examined oral language activities in tier one literacy from a variety of perspectives from observing classroom practices, talking with teachers, and reviewing curriculum. The design provided an opportunity to examine the context around ELs' reading experience including the resources, structures, and practices in place to support them, as Orellana and Gutiérrez (2006) claim are necessary when framing studies involving ELs. Two significant findings related to the evidence of oral language activities and the factors impacting implementation emerged from the study. These findings informed recommendations to district and school-based literacy leaders to prepare teachers to meet the needs of ELs and to continuously examine and refine resources, structures, and practices to meet the needs of all learners in literacy instruction.

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Appendix A

Observation Protocol

This protocol is to be utilized as a digital protocol so fields can expand.

Research Questions:

- In what ways, if any, do teachers integrate oral language activities with ELs in tier one, elementary literacy instruction?
- What are teachers' perceptions about implementing oral language activities and their instructional moves to engage ELs in tier one literacy?

Logistical Information (Who, What, When, Where):
Teacher #:
Date:
Time:
Number of Students:
Number of ELs:

Setting Diagram:

	Reflexive Notes

General Observations:

	Reflexive Notes

Descriptions of Observed Oral Language Activities		
Example	*Observations*	*Reflexive Notes*
Turn-and-Talks		
Think-Pair-Shares		

Discussions		
Other		
Discussion Moves		
Example	*Observations*	*Reflexive Notes*
Questions		
Facilitation to Promote More Talk	☐ Revoicing/Restating ☐ Uptake (Collins, 1982) ☐ Asking students for supporting evidence or to explain their thinking ☐ Metatalk (Galloway & McCalin, 2020)	
Discussion Prompts or Stems		
Other		
Considerations/Scaffolds/Supports for ELs		
Example	*Observations*	*Reflexive Notes*
Use of challenging texts		

Combining close reading and discussions or limiting close reading		
Adjusting group size		
Accepting a wide range of talk		
Using a familiar, routine discussion structure	☐ **CELL (**Terantino & Donovan, 2021) ☐ **Literature Circles** ☐ **Instructional Conversation** (CREDE, 2021) ☐ **Other**	
Using wordless picture books		
Incorporating the arts		
Other		

Other Relevant Observed Interactions Between ELs and Their Peers and Teacher:

Observations	*Reflexive Notes*

Appendix B
Curriculum Review Protocol

Date of Observation:
Grade Level:
Teacher:
Lesson from HMH:

Oral Language Activities Included in Lesson in HMH	Notes on Implementation

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me today and thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the ways teachers support English Learners (ELs) in their tier one reading classrooms, specifically with the way they implement opportunities to develop oral language. Also, the interview seeks to understand teachers' perceptions around implementing these activities and supporting ELs. The survey should take around 30 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions. Do you consent to participation in the interview?

Interviewer: With your permission, I will audio record the interview to ensure your responses are fully captured and to support my analysis later. The recording will be kept secure and will not be shared. In any analysis, I will use a pseudonym so you will remain anonymous. Following the completion of my coursework, I will permanently delete recorded files. Do I have your permission to record the interview?

Questions:

1) How many years have you been a teacher?
2) Tell me about your experience teaching ELs.
3) How do you support ELs in your tier one instructional literacy block?
4) What are some of the challenges you've experienced in teaching ELs?
    a) How do you try to meet or overcome those challenges?
5) Tell me about any professional learning you have had related to teaching ELs reading either during pre-service coursework or since becoming a teacher.
6) Describe the role of English oral language skills in ELs' reading and literacy skills.
7) In what ways, if any, do you incorporate oral language activities into your literacy block?
8) What strategies, scaffolds, or teacher moves do you find helpful in engaging ELs in these activities?

Following these questions, or as opportunities arise throughout the interview, I will ask more specific questions related to the observed lesson and corresponding curriculum review.

Appendix D

Codebook

Code Category	Code Name	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Example	Research Questions
Oral Language Activity	Turn and Talk	Relates to an opportunity for students to engage in a Turn and Talk with peers to discuss a text or an aspect of it	Includes short Turn and Talks or table talks of less than two minutes. Could involve partners or a small group.	Does not include individual students sharing answers or being called on by the teacher. Does not include conversations lasting more than two mins or shorter conversations which require close reading, answering questions in the text, or rereading prior to or during discussion.	“There were 3 turn and talks during the vocabulary time. Students turn knee-to-knee.” “How worried would you be if you saw a fox lurking behind a bush? Students answer with number. Turn and tell neighbor. 3/3 ELs are sharing again. Turn and talks range from 30 seconds to one minute.”	1
Oral Language Activity	Discussion and Close Reading	Refers to combining close reading learning activities and discussion	Includes discussion in whole or small groups or partners involving close reading questions and lasting longer than two minutes. This code is applied to middle grade (3rd/4th) learning activities since close reading routines require students to engage in reading themselves.	Does not include shorter turn and talks of fewer than two minutes or general conversation.	“9:32 What words tell how the poet feels about the Great Barrier Reef? Talk to your group to make sure everyone in your group knows.”	1
Oral Language Activity	Discussion and Close Viewing	Refers to discussion questions around closely viewing texts and answering questions with visual evidence	Includes discussion and questions which require students to examine and analyze visuals in texts. This code is applied to primary grade (K/1) learning activities since shared reading experiences are teacher read alouds.	Does not include close reading discussions in middle grades where students are reading themselves.	“Which one do you think is Jeff? Why do you think that’s Jeff? Student explains his eyebrows…” “Do they look excited? How do you know? How can you tell? A student holds her hands	1

					up like the student in the picture.”	
Oral Language Activity	Discussion and questions	Refers to discussion among students and teacher	Includes general, whole group discussion as a class (read aloud, vocabulary meanings, introduction to a learning activity). Also includes questioning to determine students’ understanding.	Does not include partnering or turn and talks. Does not include close reading routines or questions.	“What’s a hero? (non-El answers). Someone who helps you. T: “I heard someone say they put out fires which is true. Is that the only thing they do? Someone else said they fly around and have superpowers. Is that true? S: They do something brave to help someone else. T: Can you think of another hero that isn’t a firefighter?	1
Oral Language Activity	Oral Reading	Refers to students reading aloud for the purpose of decoding or fluency practice	Includes oral reading related to fluency work or practicing decoding. Includes learning activities in a small group or with the teacher.	Does not include teacher read aloud.	“Students read chorally aloud”	1
Oral Language Activity	Language Usage	Refers to specific opportunities for students to practice using language orally	Includes oral language activities specifically addressing students’ oral language usage and ones which provide practice in using specific language.	Does not include sharing r turning and talking, informal conversation or discussions where the primary goal is determine students’ level of understanding.	“Tells kids they’re going on an owl hunt. Students are to use a question word and either a high frequency word or vocabulary word in an "asking sentence" or question.”	1
Oral Language Activity	Discussion through Collaborative Activity	Refers to a collaborative activity which includes opportunities for student discussion	Includes collaborative activities where students talk with one another while engaging in an activity in partners or in a group. The discussion is part of or occurs within the activity.	Does not include a whole class discussion or simply a discussion involving questions.	“Vocabulary activity. Students will work in a team to create an emoji for their vocabulary word. They’re given a vocab word.”	1
Scaffold	Visuals	Refers to the use of visual supports	Includes times when teachers show visuals to help students understand a	Does not include student drawing or art activities	“Visual of the anchor charts and title of text	1

			concept such as a vocabulary word or the use of visuals to remind or cue students of the assignment or expectations		on screen."	
Scaffold	Acting/ arts	Referring to an activity which incorporates art, acting, or movement as a support to students' understanding.	Includes times when students act out vocabulary terms or engage in Reader's Theater or reading a play.	Does not include non-instructional opportunities such as a free drawing time or a movement break for the sole purpose of having students exercise.	"The teacher explain the meaning of the words, has students generate connections, has students act out the words. All students participate in acting out and making the motions"	1
Scaffold	Conferencing	Relates to individual or small group conferences or check ins with students	Includes writing conferences or differentiation to provide conferencing about assignments and checking for student understanding or clarifying	Does not include back-and-forth exchanges between students and the teacher during whole group instruction	"Sample writing conference with EL: T approaches #4 Have you ever had something that was hard? Did you give up? What did you do that was hard? Student talks to teacher. T: Can you say it louder? T: You were playing a game? S talking. T: Oh, so you were playing outside? You didn't give up, did you? Show me that in your picture."	1, 2
Scaffold	Translation	Refers to teachers' use of translation support	Includes another person such as a peer translating, use of translation technology		"Translator during writing: IA: using phone translator for El #3 with very limited English."	1, 2
Scaffold	Scribe	Refers to a teacher or peer serving as a scribe for the student and writing for them	Includes scribe support during any part of the instructional block for the purpose of scaffolding to help a student share ideas when writing or spelling may be	Does not include teacher or peer writing on board or for the purposes of a whole group visual	"IA writes for #1 adding to what she has."	1, 2

			emergent. Includes times when a scribe writes or deciphers and writes next to student writing to clarify meaning			
Scaffold	Accepting a wide range of talk	Refers to accepting multiple languages and “translanguaging” in responses as well as personal connections or affective responses	Includes affective responses which may be less text-based and include more connections or personal experiences. Includes accepting answers, sharing, or dialogue in multiple languages or languages other than English	Does not represent a quantity of talk	“In owl hunt when students use a declarative sentence, the teacher reminds them to use a question, but she also acknowledges the sentence.”	1, 2
Scaffold	Language modeling/ repeating	Refers to teacher moves involving modeling language for students that they repeat or utilize	Includes teacher read aloud and student repeating, teacher saying a response and the student repeating	Does not include fluency practice or choral reading together	“El #2 Says ‘I read a book.’ Teacher: ‘Yes, ‘I read a book.’ Can we try an asking sentence?’ Teacher gives some examples. Student does not generate a sentence, but the teacher says, how about, ‘What book did you read?’ El #2 then repeats that sentence.”	1, 2
Scaffold	Sentence stems/prompt	Refers to the use of sentence stems or prompts to support students in sharing orally	Includes visual prompts (i.e. sentence stems on the board) or cloze activities where students complete or finish a statement to share. Includes prompts to support student sharing.	Does not include questions.	“EL #4: I got a brand-new house. Yes! IA: Try starting it with Where… EL #4: “Where is my house?””	1, 2
Scaffold	Proximity	Refers to teacher proximity to ELs for additional support	Includes teachers’ reference to proximity as a scaffold for ELs or an observation of ELs’ proximity to teacher during whole group or small group activities	Does not include proximity as a result of conferencing such as writing conference when a teacher approaches a student’s individual desk to check-in.	“I just make sure I have the two that I would want to monitor the closest right in the front row and so I know when I’m doing the tier one activities, whether it’s shared	1, 2

					reading, I do a visual check in often with them”	
Group Size	Whole group	Relates to an instructional activity occurring during whole group learning when the class is attending to the teacher as a whole group.	Includes whole class discussion and reading activities. Includes times when students answer questions and engage in back-and-forth exchanges with the teacher that occur during whole group instruction.	Does not include turn and talks or partnering activities that happen during the whole group. That is, students’ focus and interactions are primarily with the teacher or in discussion among the class with the teachers’ direction.	“Yesterday we learned 4 new vocabulary words. Show me with your body what flexible means. Students stand and act out.”	1, 2
Group Size	Small group	Relates to an instructional activity during which teachers work in small groups	Includes times when students work in groups of three to no more than half the class.	Does not include partner activities.	“Reader’s theater- practicing fluency. Students are in small groups of 4-5 students.”	1, 2
Group Size	Partners	Relates to an instructional activity during which students are grouped in pairs.	May refer to times within a whole group setting when teachers ask students to turn and talk to a partner or pair up to share.	Does not include groups larger than two or students working on their own.	“There were 3 turn and talks during the vocabulary time. Students turn knee-to-knee.” “	1, 2
Group Size	One-on-one	Relates to a teacher working one-on-one with a student	Includes individualized teacher support or check-ins with one student such as during a writing conference.	Does not include back-and-forth discussion between the teacher and one student when answering a question or sharing during a whole group discussion	To EL #6-How is it different? Teacher goes over to her while she’s working independently. She reads the text to the student. Are you already starting to think about ways it’s different from the story? S talks.	1, 2
Lesson Component	Vocabulary	Refers to an activity occurring during explicit vocabulary	Includes vocabulary introduction and application activities	Does not include other parts of the literacy block or reading the vocabulary	“Vocabulary activity. Students will work in a team to create an emoji	1, 2

		instruction		word in context while reading	for their vocabulary word. They're given a vocab word. EL #1 works with a partner within her group of 4.	
Lesson Component	Shared Reading	Refers to an activity occurring during the shared reading portion of the literacy block	Includes lessons in the shared reading portion of the block. Includes teacher read aloud or student/close reading. Includes students reading a common text with others.	Does not include other parts of the literacy block or independent reading	"Students engage in turn and talk discussion while close reading. You're going to do some rereading- Page 62. Two questions—What are the two types of texts on this page? What type of information does each type of text present (or give us)? S turn to page 62. Gives students a couple of minutes to work. You're going to be turning and talking. You're going to be sharing what your partner said. 3/3 ELs talking."	1, 2
Lesson Component	Writing	Refers to the writing component of the literacy block	Includes conferencing, whole group writing activities, and individual writing time. Refers to any activity occurring during the writing block.	Does not include other parts of the literacy block or students writing responses to questions during other portions of the block such as answering questions after reading a story.	"During writing, using the "consultant" structure, allowed students who were finished writing to support peers in the research and writing process."	1, 2
Lesson Component	Foundational Skills	Refers to an activity occurring during the foundational skills	Includes instructional activities occurring during the foundational skills portion of the literacy block.	Does not include other parts of the literacy block.	"Oral reading: 8:17 Following morning meeting, students echo	1, 2

		portion of the literacy block.			read the words of the week. Then students read them aloud. (have, six, some, we.) Then when a student points to the word the rest say it."	
Lesson Component	Fluency	Refers to any activity occurring as part of a fluency routine or activity	Includes choral reading, Reader's Theater or activities related to developing fluent reading	Does not include other parts of the literacy block such as	"Reader's theater- practicing fluency. Students are in small groups of 4-5 students."	1, 2
General Teacher Move	Discussion moves	Refers to teacher moves that acknowledge or respond to student talk and further the conversation	Includes questions or comments from teachers and strategies such as uptake, revoicing, or questioning which results in more than one student responding in a single response	Does not include teacher questions or comments which do not result in additional talk.	In owl hunt S: freedom T: Use the word in an asking sentence. S: waiting T: gives more wait time. You can also use can and do. S: Do we have freedom? T: Do we have freedom? Where? S: Do we have freedom outside? T: Yes, do we have freedom outside at recess?	1, 2
General Teacher Move	Wait time	Refers to times when teachers utilized extended wait time to give students time to think or generate a response	Includes time in any sized group when teachers used wait time to delay sharing of responses, allowing more time for students to think before calling on or hearing student responses. Includes teachers' references to using wait time.	Does not include unintentional times teachers waited. For example, if the teacher was delayed by a question or someone entering the room	"It was kind of a wait time thing, letting kids get a chance. Every kid is at a different level so during that whole group time kids get a chance to use their strategies to decode that word."	1, 2
Utility	Included	Refers to an instructional activity or scaffold from the curriculum resources	Includes any instructional activity or scaffold from any component of the instructional block which the teacher implements as described in the resource.	Does not include activities the teacher significantly modifies or does not include.	"The lesson included suggested EL support of using turn and talks or showing the visual	1, 2

		which the teacher implements as described in the resource.			of the vocabulary word on the card which the teacher did.”	
Utility	Not Included	Refers to an instructional activity from the curriculum resources which the teacher does not implement in the classroom	Includes any instructional activity from any component of the instructional block which the teacher does not implement	Does not include activities which the teacher implements or those which the teacher modifies or adapts	“Brainstorming took place as a whole group. The teacher and IA had individual conferences. Students did not turn and talk or think pair share to brainstorm or share ideas.	1, 2
Utility	Added OLA	Refers to a teacher adding an oral language activity to the lesson as outlined in the curriculum resource	Includes any oral language activity that is not included in the core lesson plan but is one the teacher adds into the lesson.	Does not include oral language activities that are already included in the core lesson plan in the curriculum resources	“Has students work in their groups to discuss the answers before sharing out, adding in discussion in small groups.”	1, 2
Utility	Added Scaffold	Refers to a scaffolded support the teacher adds to the lesson which is not included in the lesson	Includes scaffolds the teacher may add to the lesson to adjust it. This includes adjusting the group size.	Does not include components of the lesson which are already mentioned in the lesson.	“ 3 EL students worked in a small group with the instructional assistant and did talk through their story. She asked them questions, they brainstormed together, and students told her orally about their memories.”	1, 2
Utility	Replaced OLA with another OLA	Refers to occasions when the teacher replaced or adapted an oral language activity included in the curriculum resource with another oral language activity	Includes activities where teachers adapted or exchanged the oral language activity from the curriculum resource for another one.	Does not include instances where oral language activities were completely omitted or implemented as described in the curriculum.	“Engage and Respond: Turn and Talk My Book p. 153…This Turn and Talk routine following the reading was replaced with a whole group discussion about the predictions.”	1, 2
Teacher Perception	Challenge	Refers to a challenge noted by the teacher	Includes any challenges the teacher notes related to teaching or supporting ELs	Does not include perceived challenges for	“I have very, very limited Spanish skills	2

		related to teaching ELs		the teacher, rather only self-reported challenges. Does not include barriers to implementing oral language activities	and ability so I think just that, finding the right words to help myself communicate the needs."	
Teacher Perception	EXMP- inclusion or exclusion	Refers to a teacher's explanation of a move or practice related to including or not including an activity	Refers to teachers' explanation of their practice related to the choice to include or not include a specific practice or activity	Does not describe the activity, but teachers' reasoning.	"Because we were deeply running into writing time. I made the decision to revisit it as a class because I really wanted to at least get started on the writing,"	1, 2
Teacher Perception	EXMP-OLA	Refers to a teacher's explanation of a move or practice related to an oral language activity	Includes teacher's explanation or discussion related to specific oral language activities	Does not include a description of observed oral language activities, but rather those the teacher discusses	"I try to do lots of turn and talks." "It is already pretty much in the basal that we use."	1, 2
Teacher Perception	EXMP- Scaffold	Refers to a teacher's explanation of a move or practice related to a scaffold	Includes teacher's explanation or discussion related to using specific scaffolds	Does not include a description of observed examples of scaffolds, but those the teacher discusses	"I just spend a lot of time talking and gesturing." "I use a translate app occasionally."	1, 2
Teacher Perception	Oral language importance	Refers to teachers' perceptions around the importance of oral language	Includes teacher's comments or statements around the importance of oral language or its role in reading and literacy	Does not include a description of oral language activities, but rather teachers' understandings related to oral language	"It helps with their comprehension." "A lot of ELs pick up decoding…but if they don't have the language, they still have no idea what they've read even though it sounds beautiful."	2
Teacher Perception	Barriers to Implementation	Refers to teachers' perceptions around	Includes teachers' perceptions of barriers or challenges that impede them from	Does not include general challenges related to	"Because we were deeply running into	1, 2

		barriers to implementing oral language activities	implementing oral language activities	teaching ELs or challenges perceived by the observer, but rather those teachers mention	writing time."	

Appendix E

Data Analysis and Emergent Theme Chart

Emerging Theme	**Notes**	**Data**	**Examples**	**Connection to Other Data Points**

Appendix F

Extended Curriculum Review Chart

	Kindergarten	1^{st}	3^{rd}	4th
Vocabulary				
Shared Reading				
Writing				
Collaborative Discussions				