

## Research Overview

### ***Word Generation: An Approach to Promoting Academic Language***

Catherine E. Snow, Harvard Graduate School of Education

#### **Research questions and goals**

Is it possible to use a vocabulary intervention to promote literacy by influencing student learning, teacher knowledge, and school organization?

Specifically, the goals of the intervention are:

- Student level
  - Improved academic vocabulary breadth
  - Improved academic vocabulary depth
  - Improved academically productive discussion skills
  - Improved persuasive academic writing
- Teacher level
  - Increased awareness of vocabulary demands
  - Increased awareness of academic vs. technical vocabulary
  - A wider array of usable techniques for teaching vocabulary
  - A wider array of usable techniques for promoting academically productive discussion
  - An enhanced sense of efficacy and responsibility for content area literacy
- School level
  - Higher test scores
  - Better cross-content-area collaboration and accountability
  - Increased cross-grade collaboration and accountability

#### **Research design**

All teachers and students at two middle schools implemented a pilot version of the intervention in 2006-2007. This academic year, all teachers and students at four middle schools and in the middle grades at one elementary school will participate in an enhanced version of the intervention. Pre- and post-testing will be carried out at comparison schools matched on demographics and test scores. If this year's study confirms the pilot year's findings of efficacy, a larger random-assignment study will be planned.

#### **Intervention**

Word Generation is a mechanism for introducing academic vocabulary in a motivating way, and providing students with structured opportunities to use them a) in relation to different content areas, b) in classroom discussion, and c) in writing. Instructional activities are provided for teachers in English Language Arts, in Social Studies, in Science, and in Math, and each school needs to develop a plan to ensure 15 minutes per day are devoted to the intervention, in a different content area each day.

#### **Data collection**

Pre- and post-testing of all participating students, in both intervention and comparison schools, focuses on knowledge of the words taught, on depth of word knowledge, and on use of word knowledge in reading comprehension. In addition, students produce weekly essays, a sample of which are analyzed for purposes of tracking improvements in quality of writing, vocabulary, and in use of academic language.

#### ***Adapting Texts to English Language Learners' Needs***

CREATE funds an additional component of the Word Generation project. *Adapting Texts to English Language Learners' Needs* is developing alternative, simpler forms of the Word Generation paragraphs to make them more accessible to ELLs. The ELL-accessible paragraphs will provide a basis for a modified, ELL-focused version of Word Generation.