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Foreword

Academic language is a tangled web of roots that anchor and nourish most of the learning that students do in school. Yet these roots are deep and difficult to see, especially if we have ingrained habits of focusing on more visible “branches and leaves” of learning, such as discrete facts, grammar rules, right answers in math, and vocabulary definitions. Students need teachers who understand how to fortify learning of content and its language roots at the same time.

I spend a lot of time in classrooms and listen to large amounts of classroom language. In doing this research, several helpful principles for the development of academic language have emerged. First, teachers must be aware of the most important language needed in the lesson and be strategic in developing it both directly and indirectly. Second, students’ oral academic language must be developed across content areas. This includes developing their abilities to produce clear and complex output and to engage in authentic interactions in which they build up and fortify ideas in back-and-forth dialogue. Third, academic language grows through authentic and engaged use. When students’ brains are involved in a wide range of situations and challenges, they gather more and more language over time and get better at shaping it to understand, communicate, and build ideas (Zwiers, 2008).

Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms: Definitions and Contexts brings these principles into a practical light. It offers educators a concise and insightful guide for understanding the exciting complexities of teaching academic language across disciplines. In Chapter 2, the authors state one of their central themes: “Learning academic language, like learning any other language, requires systematic, deliberate, prolonged, and robust approaches that are rich, contextualized, and meaningful for each and every student.” Yet in many settings, approaches for developing academic language, if they exist at all, are not systematic, deliberate, robust, or meaningful—and as a result, student learning suffers—especially learning for students in diverse classrooms.

Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms: Definitions and Contexts shows readers a variety of poignant examples of how teachers across the country are using effective academic language development approaches in different grade levels and content area classrooms. The vignettes allow educators to see the complexity and engagement of the lessons as well as the ways in which the ideas might translate to other classroom contexts.

A wide range of new standards has entered the scene, all of which place high academic language demands on students. The increased emphasis on using more complex texts, for example, means developing our teaching practices to help students learn the language and purposes of challenging texts, so they can construct meaning. Academic language develops when students engage in learning activities that approximate how experts in a discipline think and communicate, encourage the transforming and applying of ideas in new ways, and link concrete and abstract knowledge. Such activities should give students opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue with one another and become critical consumers of information, as well as foster their abilities to think and talk about how to best think and talk (i.e., to engage in metadiscourse). And this book provides clear examples for designing such activities.

But what should all this look like in a full unit of instruction? Chapter 5 outlines how to weave the necessary elements and practices together to create lessons that are well rooted and well nourished by contextualized academic language instruction. The units also model how to adeptly weave formative assessment across and within lessons, showing how teachers can observe student work and activities to learn where students are and where they need to go with respect to language.

When we dig into the complex questions of teaching academic language across a wide range of grade levels, content areas, and students, we are presented with few simple answers. But over time we can and need to construct our “answers” for our settings, based on insightful research, exemplars from the field, and expert resources. Fortunately, *Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms: Definitions and Contexts* is an expert resource for clarifying the questions and sculpting the answers that you need in your setting.

Jeff Zwiers

Preface

The whispers in the stairwells of laughing children leave much to the imagination. The din of student clatter in the lunchroom is almost deafening. The shouts from team members in the gym almost drown out the coach's directives. Classrooms are abuzz with frenetic activity. Language permeates school!

It is not only the shift to new standards, but also thinking of innovative ways to implement these changes, that is causing teachers, coaches, and school leaders alike to rethink district curriculum around using language for academic purposes. One idea that seems to have gained traction is that professional learning teams, whether pairing content and language teachers or teachers within a department or grade level, have become a more powerful force in designing instructional assessment than individual teachers. Teachers working together can create a synergy for learning, reach mutual decisions with widespread results, and push each other professionally.

We begin our story here with a discussion of the key features of the language of school and how these qualities frame instructional assessment practices. Integral to this conversation is the role of academic language use in today's diverse classrooms as well as in the field of language education. After defining the dimensions of academic language, we illustrate how to purposely integrate language into instructional planning and exemplify how language surrounds and influences every student and teacher.

This foundational book on the value of academic language use for academic success sets the stage for the accompanying six-part series. Accompanying this introduction, individual books of vibrant classrooms reflect three grade-level clusters (K–2, 3–5, and 6–8) and two disciplines (mathematics and English language arts). In today's schools filled with wondrous students, many of whom represent linguistic and cultural diversity, we highlight how teachers infuse the academic language demands of grade-level standards and materials into fascinating units of learning.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This foundational book for the series is organized into six chapters:

Chapter 1: What Is Academic Language?

This first chapter defines the focus of the book: the nature of academic language, including an overview of different perspectives for understanding this concept. It explores distinctions and connections between oral and written language and emphasizes the importance of oral language as a vehicle for promoting academic language development. We also include discussions of academic language as a developmental process, the importance of building awareness of academic language use, and students' expression of academic language through multiliteracies. Finally, we describe learning the language of the content areas, with its conciseness, use of high-density information words, and precision of expression in relation to access, equity, and social justice.

Chapter 2: What Are the Dimensions of Academic Language?

This chapter underscores the importance of understanding academic language beyond vocabulary to include discourse- and sentence-level structures. We describe what each of these three levels entails and provide pertinent examples. In addition, we remind readers that academic language learning, like learning a new language, necessitates systematic, deliberate, prolonged, and robust approaches that are rich, contextualized, and meaningful for students. We emphasize the use of strategies that build on students' prior knowledge, including their historical, linguistic, and cultural knowledge, and that engage students in rich and varied language and content experiences to render better academic outcomes.

Chapter 3: How Do Standards Define and Shape Academic Language Use?

This chapter, a crucial reading for educators, school leaders, and administrators, explores the relationship between content and language learning through the lens of standards. It examines academic language within standards and highlights the influence of college and career readiness standards, including the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards, alongside English language proficiency/development standards as the catalyst for designing and aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The chapter concludes with hearty lists

of suggestions for redefining teaching and learning around academic language use tailored for multiple stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, and district administrators.

Chapter 4: How Is Academic Language Used in Content Areas Schoolwide?

This chapter presents brief vignettes that peek into diverse classrooms, where content area teachers and their students are busily using academic language for thinking, knowing, acting, and interacting during subject matter instruction. As readers “visit” music, physical education, arts, mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies classrooms, they see that academic language is not taught as a list of 10 important words needed for the topic or unit of instruction. Instead, they witness how the full extent of academic language—at the discourse, sentence, and word/phrase levels—is learned as students engage in sophisticated and meaningful disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices.

Chapter 5: How Can Academic Language Be Integrated Into Instruction and Assessment?

This chapter focuses on becoming aware of academic language use in instruction and assessment in classrooms filled with linguistically and culturally diverse students. Following a brief historical overview of language education, we share important aspects of planning instruction and assessment units that revolve around academic language use. Topics related to the design of a curricular unit include selecting a theme and accompanying standards, capitalizing on linguistic and cultural resources to connect home with school, identifying unit targets and differentiated objectives, designing an end-of-unit assessment along with engaging instructional activities and tasks, and understanding the reciprocal relationship between differentiated instruction and classroom assessment.

Chapter 6: How Is Academic Language Situated in Curricular Design and Infused Into Professional Learning?

This last chapter illustrates how a curricular framework can facilitate learning of content and academic language that, in turn, fosters academic success for all students. A brief literature review that traces curriculum from the early 20th century to the present provides the rationale for a Curricular Framework that serves as the basis for the series. Taking an integrated content and language perspective, we describe the usefulness

and contribution of each component of the Framework as it relates to academic language use within the mainstay of educational practice. We close by highlighting the importance of professional learning opportunities so that teachers and teacher leaders will have the tools to integrate academic language within curriculum and promote its use.

We realize that in today’s busy classrooms, teachers are under tremendous pressure to ensure that their students make ample academic progress. It is our conviction that systematic use of academic language, grounded in both content and language standards, will assist teachers and school leaders alike in reaching their annual goals for student achievement and language development. We hope that incorporating academic language use into school life will yield results that will propel our 21st century students to unforeseen heights.

The K–8 Mathematics Series

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Contributors</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Content Topic</i>
1	Catherine Carrison Erika Muir	K	Whole Numbers and Number Sense
	Sylvia Celedón-Pattichis Sandra I. Musanti	1	Base-10 Thinking
	Michael Silverstone Debbie Zacarian	2	Basic Operations— Odd and Even Numbers
2	Judith B. O’Laughlin	3	Time
	Gisela Ernst-Slavit Margo Gottlieb David Slavit	4	Fractions
	Jennifer M. Bay-Williams Rose M. Glasser Tricia A. Bronger	5	Algebraic Thinking— Analyzing Patterns Across Representations
3	Amanda Villagómez Kerri J. Wenger	6	Geometric Solids
	Zandra de Araujo	7	Ratios and Proportions
	Gladis Kersaint	8	Geometry—Similarity and Congruence

The K–8 English Language Arts Series

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Contributors</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Content Topic</i>
1	Gabriela Cardenas Barbara Jones Olivia Lozano	K	Reading and Oral Language Development: My Family and Community
	Eugenia Mora-Flores	1	Using Informational Texts and Writing Across the Curriculum
	Sandra Mercuri Alma D. Rodríguez	2	Developing Academic Language Through Ecosystems
2	Terrell A. Young Nancy L. Hadaway	3	Informational and Narrative Texts: Our Changing Environment
	Penny Silvers Mary Shorey Patricia Eliopoulos Heather Akiyoshi	4	Biographies, Civil Rights, and the Southeast Region
	Mary Lou McCloskey Linda New Levine	5	Literature and Ocean Ecology
3	Emily Y. Lam Marylin Low Ruta' Tauiiili-Mahuka	6	Argumentation: Legends and Life
	Darina Walsh Diane Staehr Fenner	7	Research to Build and Present Knowledge
	Liliana Minaya-Rowe	8	A Gothic Story: "The Cask of Amontillado"