

**Using strategies and techniques that make academic content more accessible, classroom teachers can help ELL students keep pace academically.**

This is the second in a four-part series written exclusively for the *Kappa Delta Pi Record.* Each article

summarizes what research says about effective practices for Ells. The authors draw on several recent reviews of th e research (August and Shanaha n 2006; Genesee et al. 2006; Goldenberg 2008; Sau n ders and Goldenberg, in press). The first article in the series (which appeared

in th e Fall 2009 *Record)* covered research on English oral

languag e instru ction . This, the second article, deals with academic language and literacy In English . Arti cle three *(Record* Spring 2010) takes this research into practice

by describin g an observatio n tool (the CQell) that is usef ul for plann ing and coach ing teachers who want to implemen t effecllve strategies in their classrooms. The final article *(Record* Summer 2010) is about school an d

district reform and offers practical recommendations for administrators and teacher leaders so that the research can more readi ly translate into practice.

Academic language is a vital part of content-area instruc­ tion and is one of the most pressing needs faced by Eng­ lish language Learners (Ells).The fundamental challenge Ells in all-English instruction face is learning academic content while simultaneously becoming proficient in English .Because of this challenge, we, as educators, do not know to what extent Ells can keep pace academically with English speakers;nonetheless, our goal should be to make academic content as accessible as possible for these students and promote English language development as students learn academic content.

Academic language differs from everyday language and knowing the differences is important for effective academic instruction .*Academic language* refers to the sort of language competence required for students to gain access to content taught in English and, more generally, for success In school and any career where mastering

large and complex bodies of information and concepts is

needed (Fillmore and Snow 2000). Academic language, the language of texts and formal writing, is different from everyday speech and conversation, what Cummins (1984) has referred to as Basic Interpersonal Commu­ nication Skills (BICS). SICS, in general, is language used for communication skills in everyday social interactions.

In contrast, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is the oral and written language related to literacy and academic achievement (Cummins 1984).

The terms BICS and CALP have somewhat fallen out

of favor, in part because they imply a hard dichotomy that might be misleading .There is likely to be a great deal of grey area,where language has both conversational and academic elements. Nonetheless, SICS and CALP identify

a useful distinction between (a) language that is relatively informal, contextualized, cognitively less demanding, used in most social interactions, and generally learned more easily;and (b) language that is more formal, ab­ stract, used In academic and explicit teaching/learning situations, more demanding cognitively, and more chal­ lenging to learn.

Fluency in academic language is especially critical for academic achievement. Knowledge of academic disci­ plines-science, social studies, history, mathematics-is, of course, the primary objective of content-area instruc­ tion .Just as important is the language needed to learn

about and discuss academic content. Most Ells eventually

acquire adequate conversational language skills, but they often lack the academic language skills that are essential for high levels of achievement in the content areas.

Educators must focus on the academic language needed for academic achievement. Yet, we *are* lacking a solid research base that identifies effective techniques and approaches.There are, however, promising directions-

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Portions of this article are based on the authors' forthcom­ ing book *Promoting Academi c Achievement among English Learners,* to be published by Corwin Press in 2010, and are used with permission .

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### e.g., Dutro and Moran (2003), Schleppegrell (2001);

Lyster (2007), and Zwiers (2008). Educators are strongly

tolearn about them, implement them in their classrooms and try to detennine which best meet the needs of English learners.

..

## students need to be taught expressive as well as receptive language.

### Using sheltered instruction strategies makes grade-level

academic content comprehensible; that is, students devel­ op *receptive* language in order to comprehend or, at least. get the gist of a lesson. From this type of instruction, students do not necessarily develop *expressive* language so that they can speak and write in the language. Students need to be taught expressive language-Hcomprehensible output" (Swain 1985)-so that they can answer ques­ tions, participate in discussions, and be successful at

showing what they know on assessments.

### Because content instruction may be an excellent op­ portunit;y to teach language skills In a meaningful context, teachers may Integrate both types of instruction through­

out the day. There is no reason to believe these types of Instruction are mutually exclusive. This support for Ells In the general classroom may be offered in addition to a separate English Language Development (ELD) block.

are different ...and similar!

It is important to note that there *Is* a connection between

conversational and academic language; they are not com­ pletely distinct from each other.Using students' everyday experiences can help students team academic language. That Is, If students are familiar with a task In a social

### context, they may be able to adopt appropriate language

from that task and transfer it to school-based tasks.

For example, a student might know how to retell

what happened on a favorite television show or present an argument for why he should be able to go out and play basketball at the park. Accordingly, that student may be able to transfer the language he or she uses to express

cause and effect regarding behavior and consequences to

a science experiment, an if-then hypothesis structure, or

a historical sequence of causally linked events.If a student can compare and contrast dogs and cats, this same struc­ ture applies to comparing and contrasting two systems

of government To help students make these language connections, teachers should bring this skill to a conscious

level. Though students may be able to make comparisons in their everyday life,they may need to leam how these structures are transferable to school-based situations.

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There is not a clear line separating conversational from academic language. Table 1 describes the differences between conversational and academic language and also shows the grey area where the two overlap. Categories used in the table are based on Goldenberg and Coleman

(in press).

Academic language instruction should include not only the vocabulary of the content subjects, but also the syntax and text structures. Schleppegrell (2001)

distinguished between academic language and everyday

speech and explained how academic language is about so much more than learning content-specific, or techni­ cal,vocabulary. Students may know the meanings of individual content-specific words, yet still not be able to understand the larger meaning when reading them in *a* sentence or be able to combine them to write a sentence.

Academic language and curriculum content are

closely intertwined. It is not sufficient for a student to comprehend only text and teacher-talk well-that Is, to have receptive understanding. The student also must be able to express his or her complete thoughts orally and in writing using academic language. For example, students need to understand how to construct a sen­

tence *or* paragraph (orally and in writing) that expresses compare/contrast *or* cause and effect (Dutro and Moran 2003).

### Languag vc.I *1*

should be incorporated into

content instruction.

Sheltered instruction strategies, or SDAIE (Specially De­ signed Academic Instruction in English), provide com­ prehensible input for any content area. The term com­ *prehensible input* refers to strategies that enable Ells to understand the essence of a lesson by means of context or visua l cues, clarification, and building background knowledge that draws on students ' experiences (Krashen and Terrell 1983).

What is often overlooked is that sheltered instruction calls for all lessons to have clearly stated language objec­ tives in addilion to providing comprehensible input. Short (1994) discussed the importance of explicit language instruction along with content-area instruction. She advocated developing language objectives in addition to content-area objectives for Ells to provide them access to the core curriculum. The SlOP.<1 model for making content comprehensible to English Learners also emphasizes the need for a language objective along with a content objec­ tive (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short 2008) and suggests the language goals be adjusted *for* the students' proficiency­ levels (Genesee et al. 2006, 191).

I

**Part** II: **Acadernic Language Proficiency**

**Table 1. The Continuum of Conversational to Academic Language**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ..• be embedded in meaningfulcontexts, drawing upon shared background knowledge, or existent in the moment of the conversation.When people converse,they often talk about a specific topic about which they both have at least some direct knowledge,experience ,and relevant information | While discussing unfamiliar content, adeQuate background knowledge is purposefully provided by a speaker.Both presentation and text may make ample use of visuals,such as charts,posters, and photos, to make lhe academic content more highly contextualized tor the reader/ listener. | ...be relatively decontextuallzed ,relying largely on information contained In the lan­ guage of the oralor written text. The reader or listener has to provide his or her own relevant background knowledge or context necessary for understanding. |
|  | ...be fundamentally interpersonal. Face­ to-face exchanges allow for contextual and Interpersonal cues such as gestures, facial expressions,and Intonation. | Speakers often use interpersonal cues such as gestures. speaking rate.pauses. and Intonation to make the message more comprehensible. | ...be fundamentally impersonal Emphasis, mood, and tone must be communicated pri­ marily through words and content. Face-to-race exchange is very limited or nonexistent. |
|  | ...use more familiar everyday words.Precise meanings generally are not as Important as maintaining conversational flow and adeQuate mutual understanding. | Speakers and texts use unfamiliar words and expressions that make relatively simple concepts more difficult to understand . | ...use specific and less familiar vocabulary that can be technical,abstract ,and carry pre­ cise meanings the listener/reader Is expected to understand. |
|  | ...freQuently use grammatlcal shortcuts,such as "and" or pronouns,whose meanings are apparent to the participants in the context of the conversatlon .Talk can Include nonstandard, collOQulal speech. | Speakers and writers can make their content-rich message more accessible by using a conversationa l tone. which can include figures of speech,famlllar expres­ sions, and less density of ideas. | .. frequently use specific grammatical, organizational,and presentation elements. Writing and speech Is more formalized and structured.To establish authority, tone is set by an Impersonal,declarative style.Language Is denser with more ideas presented. |
|  | ...place fewer explicit cognitive demands on the reader or listener.Events and personsare known, familiar,and concrete.Inferences, analyses, and presenting reasoned arguments are typically less prominent. | Everyday conversational events can be cognitively complex and challenging,such as a child logically retelling a television episode and showing a causal sequence, or presenting an argument for why he should be able to stay out late without parents' direct supervision. | ...be used for more complex cognitive funcuons ,such as summarizing,analyzing, and explaining;relating what is read to other Ideas;evaluating and crlttQulng arguments;composing reasoned,well-developed texts;and Interpreting and solving word problems. |
|  | Husband and wife exchange Information about whal they did at work that day; each Is gener· ally familiar with what the other one does and with his or her work colleagues .In an animated conversation, friends discuss a date the night before .Two experienced divers, planning a scuba­ diving trip,decide locations and gear they will need.Softball players argue over whether a player was out when she ran to ftrst base.Family members order from a menu at a restaurant.Friends watch a movie and make occasional comments ,observations ,and jokes to one another.Children take turns during show and tell,shar­ ing with the class a favorite toy from home. | An Individual trying to follow a conversa tlon about unfamiliar persons and com· pllcated events Is provided background Information or shown pictures.A student converses with someone who speaks wilh little expression .uses little eye contact,and does not respond to oth­ ers' behaviors or responses.A speaker uses expressions such as "If you juxtapose lhe two• Instead or "If you put them side by side." or asks."What arethe parameters here?" Instead of "What do we need to consider?"A person describes a television programto her friend and explains why she found 11so moving and Insightful. | A student reads a book or listens to a lecture on recent advances 1n genetics.A teacher shares an encyclopedia article on the Sectoral College.A professor of contemporary literature presents a postmodern,post-structuralist analysis of *The Sound and the Fury.*A sociologist Is Interviewed on a news program and asked to explain the impact of the economic downturn on community -based organizations .A student must explain his reasoning,In writing ,when solving a mathematical word problemCo-workers at a public relations firm must present and argue For their proposed campaign to rehabilitate the tarnished Image ot a client. |

For example, students studying how the saguaro cactus survives Inthe desert In science (content objective) have a language objective of writing cause-af1d..effect sen­ tences USlng signal words Nf>ecause" and "as a result of." For example, "'Because Its accordlan skin holds water, the saguaro cactus can survive In the desert."and "As a result of ItsShallow roots,which capture surface water, the saguaro cactus can survive in the desert.•A social stud­

ies teacher having students Interview a grandparen t or other elder to learn about the past can instruct students on how to correctly phrase interview questions (language objedive).An English teacher having students write about setting (content objective) can use this as an opportunity to teach a lesson on adjectives (language objective). How­ ever, the language objectives, like the content objectives, should not be chosen randomly .They should be selected based on the proficiency level and grade level standards

appropriate to the students.

Educators must take care that ELD does not displace Instruction in academic content. Content-based ELD, which is driven by the ELD standards, does not replace content Instruction driven by the content standards. In other words, just because an ELD lesson is about a science topic does not mean it meets the requirements for standards-based science instruction in that grade level. A sheltered lesson makes standards. based content instruction accessible. A content-based ELD lesson has language as a focus, but uses a content area as the medium. This type of lesson Is not the same as standards-based content Instruction.

Closing 

Most Ells take years to develop the level of academic

English proficiency required for full participation In all­ Engllsh classrooms (Genesee et al.2006).It does not take much imagination to conclude that if (a) students are functioning at less than high levels of English proficiency; and (b) Instruction Is offered only In mainstream academic English, These students will not have access to the core academic curriculum .They wllU have virtually no chance

Of performing at a level similar to that of their English­ speaking peers. Whether students are in primary language (that is, "bilingual") or English-only programs, educators must focus intensively on providing them with the aca­ demic language skills In English they will need to succeed In school and beyond.

To move this discussion from research to practice, fet's take a look at a scenario that incorporates some of these recommendations .This is an actual lesson taught by a *5th-grade* teacher.

# Elementary

Academic Instruction

Mrs. C is teaching a 5th grade social studies

lesson on immigration. ELD levels range from early intermediate to fluent English. The language objec­ tive is for students to write cause-and-effect sentences about the immigrant experience-e.g., "Because

we wanted a better life, my family immigrated to the United States'' or "My family immigrated to the United States because we wanted a better life." This lesson is designed to motivate interest in and build

background for a chapter on immigration in the his­

tory textbook that students will read later.

Before students read the state-adopted history textbook, Mrs. C looks for key passages. She analyzes them for *any* words, phrases, or concepts that may need clarification and any concepts for which she may need to build background knowledge. She also looks for supportive visuals in the textbook, such as charts, graphs, maps, and photos.

Mrs. C begins the lesson by sharing pictures of her f amily members who were immigrants. Next she pulled on a *babushka* (Russian for scarf) and a long skirt and becomes her own immigrant grand­ mother. Speaking in the first person, she tells the story of when, how, and why she came to America.

She points to Russia on a map. As she tells her story, "grandmother" holds up vocabulary cards with the words *immigrant, motivation, perspective, ancestor,* and *descendant,* and she uses each word in context. For example, "I am an immigrant from Russia. I used to live in Russia, but I came to live in America. My

motivation or reason for coming to America was ...."

Students are then invited to interview her-that is, ask her question s-in preparation for their assign­ ment to interview an immigrant. The person can be a family member or, if that is not practical, a neighbor or teacher. The students and Mrs. C. discuss pos-

sible interview questions, using the target vocabulary words, and decide: "From what country did you immig rate to the United States? When did you arrive? What are some things you remember about that experience? What was your motivation for coming/ leaving? What was your perspective, or how did you feel about immigrating?" When the students return with their interview responses, Mrs. C records them on a graphic organizer with these headings: Person, Country, Motivation for Immigrating, and Perspective.

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Part II: **Acaden1ic Language Proficiency**

Mrs. C models how to turn the answers into cause­ and-effect statements, using sentence frames:

 *because -'*

*Because \_,------*

Students respond with sentences orally and in writing­ such as,

*My great-grandmother immigrated to the United*

*States from Russia in 1903 because she wanted reli­ gious freedom. My grandmother likes it here because*

*she can attend a synagogue.*

*Because of the potato famine, my ancestors* immi­ *grated to the United States from Ireland. They were sad because they had to leave some family members behind.*

Following are examples of sentence frames associated with higher-level thinking and text structures found in textbooks. Refer to Dutro and Moran (2003) for modifica­ tions by proficiency level.

*Bolh and arelhave \_*

Both Mars and Venus are planets. Both Saturn and Jupiter have rings.

 *are* ,*but/ however are. \_*

Eukaryotes are found In plants and one-celled organisms. however prokaryotes are found in animals.

*While \_*

While eukaryotes carry out all processes of Ille,prokaryotes rely on many cells working logether to function.

 *because \_*

Many people came to California around 1849 because gold was discovered there.

*Because of \_*

Because of the potato famine around 1850, many Irish Immigrated to America.

*As a result of \_*

As a result or drought,poor farming methods, the Great Depression,and dust storms, many people lost their farms in lhe 1930s.

*Arst,* .*Next,* .*Then,* . *Anally, \_\_\_*

How Some Volcanoes Are Formed

First, the earth plates move, creating friction and heat. Next, the plates melt and become molten magma.Then, the molten magma rises Into a gap in the earth's crust. Finally, the volcano erupts and spews lava.

*A fslhas \_*

*For example, \_ In addition, \_*

A saugaro cactus has numerous ways to survive in the desert.For example, it has an accordion skin that expands to hold the

limited precipitation. In addition, it has many shallow roots to capture what little rain falls on the surface of the desert.

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