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ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

STRATEGIES TO BUILD THE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE
OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS

by Jill Wilsey

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

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Abstract

The demographics of classrooms all around the United States are steadily changing. Thus, educational practices must shift to meet the increasingly diverse needs of students entering the classroom. English Learners (ELs) require additional language support in mainstream classrooms to meet the rigorous Common Core standards, but many teachers feel ill equipped to meet these needs. A review of the current literature concludes that strategies such as total physical response, accountable talk, think, pair and share, revoicing, sentence frames, reciprocal teaching, and thinking maps will increase ELs ability to use academic language effectively. This capstone provides lesson plans using the Making Meaning curriculum to answer the research question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?*

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“Language is a way of seeing, understanding, and communicating about the world.”

-Margo Gottlieb & Gisela Ernst-Slavit

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Recently I participated in an English Language (EL) workshop at the Minnesota Department of Education that was geared toward academic language and discourse in the classroom. My principal, EL supervisor, and a classroom teacher were all present. After we received the information, we were encouraged to shadow our EL students to observe how much talking they were doing in their classrooms. We were each assigned a different EL student in grades third through fifth and observed them for one hour. In five-minute increments, we filled out a Google form to note at that moment who was doing the talking. The results were not surprising; the classroom teachers were doing a majority of the talking.

This workshop caused me to reflect on not only the teaching that was happening at my school but on my own teaching. I took a hard look at my teaching and asked myself: how am I intentionally teaching academic language in the classroom? I want to be purposeful in my teaching and make sure I am giving my students the support they need to engage in meaningful discourse using academic language.

This has led me to ask: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?* In this chapter, I define academic language, state my rationale, and share the experience too many EL students face in their classrooms.

Definitions

To begin, I would like to establish the definition of academic language. Academic language is the language used in school to communicate a deeper understanding of content and grade level skills (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). Students must have academic language modeled and explicitly taught to them in context to successfully use it on their own. There is academic language in all content areas that must be taken into consideration when teaching ELs. The language of mathematics is very different from the language of social studies. This means that throughout one day, ELs are being exposed to many high-level academic words in various content areas.

Rationale and Context

I first became interested in language and other cultures when I was thirteen. I went on my first international trip to Mexico with my church youth group to build homes and was drastically changed by the experience. Experiencing a new culture and language opened my eyes to see that the world is much bigger than the small, rural area I grew up in, in central Illinois.

Since that trip, traveling and experiencing new cultures has become a passion of mine. I love seeing the world through new eyes and being challenged in my worldview. By the time I went to college, I had already been to nine different countries, which led me to pursue my degree in elementary education with a concentration in EL. I realized then that I did not have to travel all around the world to interact with different cultures on a daily basis.

I started my career as a third grade teacher in Oklahoma in a highly diverse school. My class was sixty percent EL, which caused me to teach every lesson with

language in mind. I covered my walls with anchor charts filled with academic language, sentence starters, and pictures to help support the language needs of my students.

Three years ago, I moved to Minnesota and am now in my fourth year as an EL teacher at an elementary school in the suburbs of Minneapolis. Over the past several years there has been a rise in EL students that attend my school. Currently, of the 576 students enrolled, there are 81 EL students and 15 different languages represented. This increase in population has caused my school to reflect on its practices to determine how to best meet the language needs of our EL students.

In an effort to implement best practices at my school this year we moved to a co-taught EL teaching model. In previous years, EL students were pulled from their classrooms to receive small group language instruction. While this model gave students the advantage of being in a small group setting to receive more personalized instruction, many times they were missing the core instruction that was taking place in their classrooms due to scheduling conflicts.

As a staff, we had to reflect on our practices and ask ourselves, 'Are we making the problem worse by pulling students?' We determined that our students needed more support to access grade-level content in the classroom, which led us to move to a co-taught model.

Moving to a co-taught model of teaching was a big adjustment for me because I had previously been working with small groups of four to six students. Working in the mainstream classroom gave me a new perspective of what a day looked like for many of my EL students. My co-teachers are all amazing, caring teachers but I have noticed many of the EL students are not engaging in academic language in meaningful ways.

Instead, they are silent in their classrooms. That silence is the driving force of my research. My purpose in researching academic language is to create resources and strategies teachers can implement into their classrooms to build student's academic language and discourse.

Abdiqadir's Journey

Shadowing an EL student earlier this year has been my prime motivation in selecting this research question. One of the best parts of my position as an EL teacher is, for the most part, I work with the same students every year. The only new students I receive are Kindergartners and students who move in. As a result, I really get to know my students and I get to see them grow and mature from year to year.

The student I chose to shadow was Abdiqadir (pseudonym). He is an enthusiastic, third grade Somali student who has many friends. At home, he mostly speaks Somali and at school, he uses strong social language to interact with peers. Last year, I worked with him in a pullout setting and saw his language skills grow leaps and bounds. In a small group setting, he was actively engaged, asked questions, and used academic language when given supports, like sentence frames and pictures.

When I shadowed him during his reading block his class was working on finding the main idea and key details of an informational text. He sat quietly on the carpet during the entire lesson, which was about 25 minutes, without saying a word. His teacher modeled for the students how to find the main idea and key details from her example text. She asked students if they had any questions, and while several students asked questions, Abdiqadir did not show any signs of not understanding his task. The students were then sent to work with a partner on a new text. They were

expected to read the text, determine the main idea and key details, and then write it down.

I listened in as Abdiqadir and his partner worked together and I quickly realized that they did not know what they were doing. While their teacher modeled her own thinking, the students were not invited into the conversation to think for themselves. As a result, students like Abdiqadir and his partner were left frustrated and confused. The two students did not have a solidified understanding of what the phrases ‘main idea’ and ‘key details’ meant to then identify it in a text.

Watching this lesson and seeing Abdiqadir’s frustration reminded me of the importance of explicitly teaching academic language and giving students time to practice using it in conversations with peers. I know many of the teachers at my school feel stuck on how to best support the growing number of ELs in their classrooms. This is why I feel so strongly about creating resources and strategies teachers can use to build the academic language of EL students to engage students in meaningful peer-to-peer discourse.

Summary

This chapter has established the rationale and context for the research question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?* I have defined academic language, shared my own personal journey that has led me to this research topic, and have given a real-life example of the challenges many EL students face when academic language is not explicitly taught in the classroom.

In chapter two, I review the literature on academic language. This includes the need for teaching academic language, the benefits of teaching academic language has on EL students, and practical strategies teachers can use to build student academic language. The evidence provided in chapter two shows that building academic language is valuable to all students but crucial for the success of EL students. In chapter three, I explain the framework, setting, audience, and describe the project in depth. In chapter four, I reflect on my capstone project and share what I have learned in this process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The demographics of the United States are rapidly changing. As a result, classroom practices need to change to meet the language and cultural needs of students and their families. “The percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELLs was higher in the school year 2014–15 (9.4 percent, or an estimated 4.6 million students) than in 2004–05 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.3 million students) and 2013–14 (9.3 percent, or an estimated 4.5 million students)” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, p. 1).

Many teachers feel stuck on how to best meet the language needs of their ELs. ELs need teachers to break down academic language so they can access information and begin to use that language in academic conversations and in their writing.

According to Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit (2014), academic language is the language needed to access grade level curriculum and communicate in content areas. Knowing that many teachers lack the resources and knowledge to adequately meet this growing population this question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?*

Chapter Two Preview

There are several themes that are apparent when looking at current research; the need to teach academic language, the benefits of teaching academic language, and strategies to teach academic language. To begin, this chapter examines the need to teach academic language in the classroom. It explains the need for teachers to

understand their ELs language level and provide explicit language instruction.

Additionally, it includes the need for teacher education on how to best support their ELs as well as the need to teach academic language to meet the rigorous Common Core Standards.

Next, this chapter analyzes the benefits of teaching academic language. Explicitly teaching academic language strengthens students' academic conversations, leading to deeper levels of learning. In addition, providing ample opportunities for students to practice using academic language in structured ways builds the confidence of ELs in the classroom.

Finally, this chapter provides practical strategies teachers can use in their classrooms to build their ELs academic language. These strategies include: total physical response, accountable talk, think, pair and share, revoicing, sentence frames, reciprocal teaching, and thinking maps.

The Need to Teach Academic Language

According to Haynes (2007), it takes ELs approximately one to three years to master social language. Social language is the language students use to interact with their peers, family, or teachers in everyday tasks (Lucas, 2008). Social language is much easier for students to learn because it tends to be context embedded. When using social English, ELs gain meaning from not only the words they hear but also by interpreting facial expressions, gestures, and the setting (Lucas, 2008). These cues enable ELs to create meaning even when an unknown language is used.

While it only takes several years for students to master social language, it takes much longer for ELs to master grade level academic language. Students need to have a

deep understanding of academic language to understand it and use it to communicate information (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). It takes many ELs approximately five to seven years to gain control of grade level academic language if they have age appropriate mastery of their home language (Haynes, 2007). Students who have not received formal education in their home language take between seven to ten years to develop grade level academic language (Haynes, 2007).

Many teachers hear their students speaking social English with their peers and assume they are academically proficient in English. This assumption leaves ELs struggling in the mainstream classroom because they do not have adequate language support to access the content material (Zwiers, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to understand the differences between social and academic English to meet student needs.

The linguistic function, language structure, and vocabulary usage are quite different between social and academic English. Fisher, Frey, and Rothenberg (2008, p. 37) break down the differences between social and academic language as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Social vs Academic Language

Element	Social Language	Academic Language
Linguistic function	Common functions include describing, seeking information, and managing conversation.	Common functions require complex language structures (e.g., persuading, analyzing, interpreting, hypothesizing).
Language structure	Simple present, past, and future verb tenses appear frequently in short, simple sentences.	Complex and passive verb tenses, participial phrases and auxiliaries, compound sentences, and the like are frequently used.
Vocabulary usage	Fewer and less complex words are most common.	A large number of words and word forms, often with specialized meanings, is required.

English language levels. Many ELs entering the classroom have insufficient language in both English and their home language to complete rigorous grade level tasks (Donnelly & Roe, 2010). As a result, mainstream teachers must accurately assess their student’s language proficiency to determine the level of support the student will need to access the content information.

In 2003, the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) organization was founded with the mission to “advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high-quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators” (WIDA, 2014, p. 3). The WIDA (2013) framework breaks the language proficiency standards into four domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The listening domain is based on the students’ ability to process, interpret, and understand the spoken language in different situations (WIDA, 2013). The speaking domain is based on the students’ ability to use oral language in different

situations for various purposes (WIDA, 2013). The reading domain is based on the students' ability to process, interpret and understand various written texts (WIDA, 2013). The writing domain is based on the students' ability to write as a way to communicate in different situations for various purposes (WIDA, 2013).

These four domains encompass the literacy skills ELs need to build upon for language acquisition. Additional to the four domains, WIDA (2014) divides ELs language levels into six levels: entering, beginning, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching. WIDA (2014, p.15) provides Model Performance Indicators (MPIs) to support teachers on what they should expect ELs to produce with appropriate support.

To begin, MPI's allow teachers to accurately gauge ELs language proficiency and scaffold students to the next level. Thus, ELs can have the right amount of support to be successful while working towards language proficiency. In addition, MPI's characteristically are developed around one topic or theme to build content vocabulary (WIDA, 2014). Finally, MPI's focus on one academic standard and the academic vocabulary needed to reach that standard (WIDA, 2014). This direct focus allows teachers to narrow in on the specific language students need to be successful and provide students with explicit instruction.

Explicit instruction. According to Samson and Collins (2012), ELs need direct vocabulary instruction and time to practice listening and using academic language in context to build proficiency. Academic language is abstract and technical by nature, thus students need it broken down for them to internalize (Samson & Collins, 2012). Consequently, building strong academic language skills is difficult for many native English speakers.

Scheppegrell (2012) stated that it is imperative that all students develop strong control using academic language and actively participate in engaging activities using academic language. While all students need academic language instruction to access content material, it is crucial for ELs to have continual exposure and time to practice using academic language in meaningful ways.

To succeed in school, ELs need language input that is only one level beyond their language level so they can access the information (Lucas, 2008). When the language input is too complex, ELs are unable to comprehend what is spoken to them but when they hear language that is just one level up students are able to push themselves to new learning (Lucas, 2008). As a result, teachers need to not only know the language level of their students but they must have knowledge of the language they expect students to use so they can appropriately support students (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Teacher Education. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) claimed that many ELs have limited opportunities in the classroom to hear and practice using academic language. Teachers have a tendency to rely heavily on everyday language, which leaves students lacking the skills necessary to understand and use academic language appropriately (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014).

As the number of EL students' increases throughout the US, teachers need to start changing their practices to meet the diverse needs in their classrooms. Many teachers want and know they need to change their instruction but feel stuck on how to reach EL students. It is important for mainstream teachers to have a basic understanding of their ELs language levels so they know how to best support them in

their content area (Samson & Collins, 2012). This knowledge allows teachers to anticipate student's needs and give appropriate support.

Teachers in all content areas must remember that they are also language teachers (Schleppegrel, 2012). For students to successfully access the content material in the classroom, they must have the language explicitly taught to them. "Teachers must have a working knowledge and understanding of language as a system and of the role of the components of language and speech, specifically sounds, grammar, meaning, coherence, communicative strategies, and social conventions" (Samson & Collins, 2012, p.9).

Administrators and school leaders play a big role in enhancing teachers' knowledge on how to best support ELs in the classroom. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) provided practical ways school leaders can encourage teachers to grow professionally, such as unpacking the academic language in grade level standards, creating language targets, developing instructional strategies to teach academic language, discussing best instructional practices, and promoting the use of an academic word wall.

Common Core. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of K-12 standards in English language arts (ELA), literacy in history/social studies, science, and math (CCSSI, 2010). The academic language needed for students to meet the CCSS is rigorous. This requires teachers to mindfully think through their intended learning outcomes and determine what language they intend their students to produce.

Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014, p. 38), broke down academic language into language function, purpose, and keywords as seen in Table 2. This provides teachers a

direct connection between the CCSS and the academic language needed to meet grade level skills.

Table 2

Academic Language Function

CCSS	Academic Language Function	Purpose	Key Words and Phrases Within a Sentence
5.2.3.3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.	Cause and Effect	To show the reason behind an outcome or to show the consequence of an event	as a result consequently due to therefore since so
3.1.9.9. Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters.	Compare and Contrast	To show similarities and differences between two things, people, places, ideas, concepts, actions	although similarly on the other hand however even though

Additionally, the CCSS emphasizes the need to explicitly teach listening and speaking skills to students. Third grade students are expected to, “Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly” (CCSSI, 2010, p.24). Building student’s academic language prepares students to engage in academic conversations around complex topics.

Benefits of Teaching Academic Language

A students’ language ability often directly determines their academic and social success in the classroom (Facella, Rampino, & Shea, 2010). Therefore, intentionally teaching academic language benefits all learners in the classroom. Gottlieb and Ernst-

Slavit (2014) stated that intentional language instruction “increases reading comprehension, develops knowledge of new concepts, improves range and specificity in writing, helps students communicate more effectively, and develops deeper understanding of words and concepts” (p. 45).

Academic conversations. According to Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit, (2014) oral language is crucial for student literacy development. Consequently, teachers who structure time for students to engage in meaningful conversations using academic language develop stronger literacy skills (Zwiers & Crawford, 2014).

The development of strong conversation skills has many benefits for ELs. Purposeful conversations develop students, “... vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, and thinking skills that authors of texts expect readers to have” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011, p.13). These skills directly impact students reading and writing skills.

Zwiers and Crawford (2014) state that engaging in academic conversations develops students’ critical literacy skills. Participating in an academic conversation requires students to “...closely examine, scrutinize, criticize, validate, and shape the ideas being discussed” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2014, p. 15). These skills push students to be both active listeners and participants in the conversation.

Building confidence. Many ELs struggle in mainstream classrooms for a variety of different reasons. Not only do ELs face language barriers but there are also cultural barriers that make ELs feel isolated and insecure around their peers. Consequently, ELs have a tendency to keep quiet and do their best to blend in and adapt to their new surroundings (Monobe, Bintz, & Mcteer, 2017). While it is normal for ELs to go through a silent period where they just listen and absorb the new language, it is extremely

important for students to have safe spaces to practice using academic language to build confidence (Monobe, Bintz, & Mcteer, 2017). The more time ELs have in a safe, learning environment to practice academic language, the more likely they are to actively participate in meaningful classroom discourse.

Strategies to Teach Academic Language

Teaching academic language looks different in every classroom due to the grade level and content area. In early elementary classrooms, teachers help build a foundation of academic language through oral interaction and meaningful class discourse.

Friedberg, Mitchell, and Brooke (2017) provide several strategies to engage early elementary students in learning academic language, such as provide ample opportunities for students to use new vocabulary and participate in academic conversations, display content and academic vocabulary throughout the classroom as visual cues and refer back to them often, explicitly teach reading strategies for students to use context clues to determine the meaning of new words, and model to students how readers monitor themselves for comprehension when reading.

Students in upper elementary or secondary grade levels are expected to understand and use complex academic language in the classroom. Consequently, many ELs need additional support to engage and use grade level academic language. Friedberg, Mitchell, and Brooke (2017) provide several strategies to teach upper elementary and secondary students in learning academic language, such as explicitly teach students to use word parts (prefixes, suffixes, and root words) to determine the meaning of new words, pre-teach vocabulary before reading a new text as a class to

build background, and provide ample opportunities for students to engage in guided practice in small groups and with partners.

Total physical response. Total physical response (TPR) is an interactive way to engage ELs in learning new vocabulary and academic language. Students are taught to respond to their teacher by using non-verbal cues such as: pointing, nodding, waving, gesturing, or another physical movement (Harrasi, 2014). This strategy promotes academic listening in an authentic, stress-free way. While ELs need time to practice speaking using academic language, it can be a daunting task for many newcomer ELs. The routine of using TPR is a support that builds academic language and confidence for ELs.

In addition, the physical moment of TPR provides a link between academic language and word meaning (Facella, Rampino, & Shea, 2010). Teachers can create actions for their targeted language and use the action every time the word is spoken to reinforce meaning. For example, when teaching the word 'identify' teachers can pretend to look through a magnifying glass to support students that identify means to determine or find.

Accountable talk. Accountable talk refers to the academic conversation that takes place between a listener and a speaker (Ferris, 2014). Accountable talk requires students to be actively involved in academic conversation with guided support. They are asked to listen, ask questions, expand their thoughts, and provide evidence to support their thinking. Accountable talk supports students' use of academic language because it provides students with a framework that guides their thinking. The supports given allow

students more opportunities to engage in meaningful discourse, which helps to build their academic language (Ferris, 2014).

McGlynn and Kelly (2018, p. 30) provided examples of sentence frames that can be provided to students to deepen the level of academic conversation taking place in the classroom as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Accountable Talk Sentence Frames

Agreement	Disagreement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I agree with _____ because _____. • I like what _____ said because _____. • I agree with _____; but on the other hand, _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I disagree with _____ because _____. • I am not sure I agree with what _____ said because _____. • I can see that _____; however, I disagree with _____.
Extension	Clarification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me more about _____? • This makes me think _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not understand _____. • I am confused about _____.

Think, pair, and share. Think, pair, and share (TPS) is an interactive strategy that engages all students in the learning process. First, the teacher poses a high-level question. Then, the teacher gives students an adequate amount of think time to process the question and formulate a response. After that, students turn to a neighbor and share their response. Finally, students have time to share out their thinking or add-on to another student (Goldsmith, 2013).

TPS is a beneficial strategy for ELs because of the additional time to think and the added practice of sharing with a partner. Time to think is crucial for ELs because they not only have to process the question in English but they also have to formulate a

coherent response. This requires time, which does not take place when a teacher calls on the first student to raise their hand. Additionally, many ELs lack the confidence to share in a whole-group setting. When students share with a partner, students feel more comfortable to actively engage in the conversation and deepen their thinking.

Goldsmith (2013) examines how TPS is beneficial to ELs by stating it widens the achievement gap when students are only called on when they are the first ones to have their hands up, and it inadvertently places a high value on students who are able to process the question and produce an answer quickly instead of placing value on a well developed and throughout responses. Additionally, EL students need many opportunities throughout the day to practice speaking in English with their peers. Therefore, TPS allows ELs to practice speaking in a low stakes environment so they can build confidence (Goldsmith, 2013). This also enables teachers to informally assess students while they listen in on partner conversations and address any misconceptions that were overheard (Goldsmith, 2013). In addition, TPS develops a safe learning environment because all students are able to play an active role in sharing their voice (Goldsmith, 2013).

Revoicing. Revoicing occurs when teachers repeat back all or part of what the student said (Ferris, 2014). This strategy allows teachers to model language control, connect students thinking to academic language, and clarify. Teachers say to their student, “I heard you say _____. Is that correct?” (Ferris, 2014).

Revoicing benefits students because students may need support to structure their thoughts into coherent sentences. It also gives students a chance to add-on or correct their response once they have time to process what they have said and have

heard it repeated back to them. Additionally, revoicing reinforces the use of academic language because teachers can model the use of academic language and support students in higher order thinking (Ferris, 2014).

Sentence frames. Sentence frames are supports given to students to scaffold their output (Sanchez & Harper, 2012). The purpose of sentence frames is to provide students with the language needed to successfully complete a skill. This allows students to practice a new skill successfully with support (Sanchez & Harper, 2012). Sentence frames provide a clear way to model language expectations to students and gradually release responsibility to the student (Sanchez & Harper, 2012).

The gradual release of responsibility model is a framework that provides students with different levels of support (Maynes, Julien-Schultz, & Dunn, 2010). The first level involves the teacher modeling the task to the students by thinking aloud. This supports students by initially showing them the new skill. Next, the teacher invites students to join in and together the teacher and students collaborate to complete the skill. Then, students work collaboratively in groups. This provides students time to actively engage in academic conversation around grade level skills while using academic language (Maynes, Julien-Schultz, & Dunn, 2010). Finally, the students complete the skill independently.

Sentence frames provide rich language and support to all students. Eventually, the goal is to gradually take away the sentence frames and for students to produce the intended language independently. However, this is dependent on the language level of the EL.

Sanchez and Harper (2012, p.70) provide examples of sentence frames that promote high-level thinking skills as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Example Sentence Frames

<p>Compare and Contrast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ___ and ___ are similar because they both ___. • ___ and ___ are different because ___ (is/has) ___, whereas ___ (is/has) ___. 	<p>Infer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on ___, I (infer/think/conclude) that ___. • I think this represents ___ because ___.
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Reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching is a comprehension strategy teachers use before, during, and after reading that requires students to focus on four elements: “predict, question, clarify, summarize, and respond to what they are reading” (Oczkus, 2011, p. 1). Reciprocal teaching benefits students because it requires them to play an active role when reading a text instead of passively reading. Additionally, reciprocal teaching empowers students to engage in structured academic conversations about texts to help build their academic language and reading comprehension.

First, teachers model the role of the four jobs: predictor, questioner, clarifier, and summarizer. Next, students work in groups of four and are assigned a specific role for the before, during, and after the reading discussion. After that, the predictor engages the group in a pre-reading conversation about the text so the students can practice making inferences on what they think it will be about. Finally, students will read the text and stop every few pages (depending on text complexity and grade-level) to engage in academic discourse.

To make reciprocal teaching effective, teachers must clearly define roles, establish expectations, and provide prompts or graphic organizers to guide students.

Oczkus (2011, p. 2) provides clearly defined roles and prompts to guide students as seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Reciprocal Teaching Roles and Prompts

Role	Prompts:
Predictor- helps the group connect sections of the text by reviewing predictions from the previous section and helps the group predict what they will read about next by using clues and inferences in the text	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think will happen next? 2. How might this process be used in other situations?
Questioner- helps the group to ask and answer questions about the text and reminds the group to use all types of questions (higher and lower order)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think the author was deciding? 2. What were you thinking about as you were reading?
Clarifier- helps the group find parts of the reading that are not clear and finds ways to clear up these difficulties	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What other words could we use in place of...? 2. How do these two sentences compare?
Summarizer: restates the main ideas in the text and helps the group state the main idea or ideas in their own words	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the most important information in this chapter? 2. The author wanted me to remember...

Thinking maps. Thinking maps are innovative graphic organizers that help students structure their thoughts and ideas on paper. There are eight different types of thinking maps: defining, classifying, describing, comparing, sequencing, cause and effect, whole to part, and analogies (Bataineh & Alqatnani, 2017).

Thinking maps are beneficial for ELs because they provide students with a structure to help anchor their thoughts and link their thoughts to the academic language being used. They also, provide all students with a visual pattern that fosters deeper levels of thinking. In addition, thinking maps promote “student-centered and cooperative learning, concept and language development, reflective thinking, clarity of

communication, and continuous cognitive development” (Bataineh & Alqatnani, 2017, p. 6).

For example, the multi-flow map directly correlates to teaching the words *cause* and *effect*. The map allows students to anchor their thoughts on paper and deepen their understanding of the words and meaning of *cause* and *effect*. Once students have their thoughts down on paper, teachers can take students a step further by providing sentence frames so students can form complete thoughts and sentences from their thinking map.

Summary

The focus of this research is: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?* The literature review provided three themes to consider when teaching academic language to ELs: the need to teach academic language, the benefits of teaching academic language, and strategies to teach academic language. The population of the U.S. is changing. As a result, teaching practices need to change also. An emphasis on teaching academic language will not only benefit ELs but all students as they learn to think beyond the text.

Next, chapter three explains the project that was created to support the research question. This chapter describes the lesson plans created for third grade teachers to effectively teach the academic language needed to master grade level standards. The lesson plans include: MPIs, differentiated language supports, and strategies to build academic language.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

As stated, the number of ELs entering the classroom is rapidly increasing. As a result, mainstream classroom teachers need more support and strategies to scaffold their ELs. This project was created to provide mainstream third grade teachers with lesson plans to teach grade level academic language to ELs. These resources are used to support my research question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?*

To begin this chapter, I present the rationale and purpose of my project. Next, I provide the framework that was used in this project. The framework included the Making Meaning curriculum and WIDA model performance indicators (MPIs). After that, I describe the intended setting and audience for this project. Following this, I provide a thorough overview of the project description. To conclude, this chapter I provide a timeline of when the project was completed and when I plan to share it with the third grade teachers at my school.

Rationale

Three years ago, I made the switch from being a mainstream classroom teacher to an EL teacher. While I have always had ELs in my class, when I made the change I began to look at teaching language through a different lens. I realized that there were times I did not explicitly teach my students the language I expected them to produce. Many of the ELs in my class struggled to access academic language and I felt stuck on

how to best support them. After talking to many of my colleagues, I see that many of them feel the same way I did as a mainstream teacher.

This has now led me to compile resources and strategies to explicitly teach third grade ELA academic language. These resources are aligned with the CCSS and use the Making Meaning curriculum as the foundation. Currently, the third grade teachers at my school use the Making Meaning curriculum to teach reading skills so I created lesson plans around the curriculum with added resources and strategies to scaffold ELs. My purpose was to create practical, user-friendly resources that can be easily implemented in the classroom to build academic language.

Next, I provide the framework used to create this project. I used both the Making Meaning curriculum and WIDA MPI's to create lesson plans around academic language.

Framework

I used the Making Meaning curriculum and WIDA MPI's as the framework for my project (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018). Making Meaning is the literacy curriculum my school uses so I modified those lessons to explicitly teach the academic language third grade students need to meet grade level standards. I also modified WIDA MPI's that align with grade level standards so teachers know the targeted language and support to give students.

Making Meaning. Making Meaning is a research-based, reading and vocabulary curriculum used in whole-class instruction (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018). The curriculum focuses on student comprehension and self-monitoring skills using high quality read alouds.

The curriculum uses both fiction and nonfiction text to engage students to think, question, discuss, and respond to the text (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018). The mentor texts are read aloud to students so all students, no matter their reading level, can access the text and engage in the learning process. This curriculum supports students by gradually releasing responsibility to them. The lessons are designed for teachers to model their thinking and scaffold students to deeper levels of thinking. At the end of the lesson, students are then asked to either work independently or with a partner to practice the skill using their own books at their reading level.

WIDA MPIs. Model performance indicators (MPIs) describe the English language proficiency (ELP) level for a language domain (WIDA, 2013). As stated earlier, the language domains are reading, writing, speaking, and listening. MPIs provide teachers with support to scaffold their students as they grow from one language level to the next.

MPIs consist of three elements: the language function, content stem, and support. The language function describes how students will use language to demonstrate their proficiency (WIDA, 2013). The content stem specifies the content language used to meet the learning target. The support includes instructional strategies teachers can use to scaffold their students to be successful.

I included a speaking MPI for each standard to support teachers in scaffolding their students. The inclusion of an MPI allows teachers to identify the language level of their ELs and give them practical ways to support their students to advance to the next language level. In addition, the MPIs provide the specific academic language needed to perform mastery of the skill.

Next, I describe my intended setting and audience for this project. The resources I made are specifically for the third grade teachers at my school.

Setting and Audience

The setting for this project was a K-5 elementary school in the suburbs of Minneapolis. There are 576 students that attend the school where I teach. Of those students, 81 students are EL. The main three languages represented in the school are Spanish, Somali, and Vietnamese but there are many other languages represented.

The EL population at my school is steadily increasing. For the past several years there were 1.6 EL teachers servicing students. Last year, the full-time equivalent was increased to 2.0 to meet student needs. The increasing population has caused the staff at my school to rethink their teaching and reflect on best practices.

The primary audience for this project was mainstream third grade teachers. Last year, my school began the process of switching from a pullout EL model to a co-taught model. For the past two years, I have co-taught in third grade during their writing block. Next year, I will co-teach with third grade during their reading block so these resources will be used to support teachers when we co-teach together.

Next, I provide a detailed description of my project. This includes the format, standards, and strategies used to create my lesson plans.

Project Description

For my capstone project, I created a shareable Google Document, Appendix A, that redesigned the third grade Making Meaning curriculum to explicitly teach grade level academic language. I believe a Google Document, Appendix A, was the most

effective means for my project because I easily shared it with my colleagues, embedded links to additional resources, and organized it in a user-friendly manner.

The lesson plans include: the mentor text, grade level standard, academic language, MPI, language supports, and partner work. In addition, I included scripts for teachers to use to model how to effectively use academic language so they can gradually release responsibility to their students.

My project focused on five main literature ELA standards that third graders are expected to master by the end of the year. The standards (CCSSI, 2010) are:

- 3.1.1.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- 3.1.2.2 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
- 3.1.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
- 3.1.4.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.
- 3.1.6.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

In addition, I included detailed strategies in the lesson plans that support building academic language. The strategies I used are: total physical response, accountable talk, think, pair and share, revoicing, sentence frames, reciprocal teaching, and thinking maps.

Next, I explain the timeline for the completion of my project and the assessments used to determine the project's effectiveness.

Timeline and Assessment

These resources were created in the fall semester of 2018 and will be given to the third grade teachers during the spring semester of 2019. The standards and books chosen for this project are specifically taught during the spring semester so teachers will be able to implement the resources this school year. I will bring the lesson plans and resources to our weekly planning meetings to begin implementation.

After using the resources to teach the standards, I will informally assess students daily by listening in on their conversation. Specifically, I will listen in to see if students are using the targeted academic language that was taught that day. I will take anecdotal notes while listening in so I know who needs even further support.

Formally, I will assess the effectiveness of these resources by grading students' final unit assessment. I will determine students' level of language proficiency based on the academic language they used on their assessment. This data will inform the effectiveness of my resources and help me to assess my own work. At this point, I will make any revisions to the resources to make them as user-friendly as I can.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the project I will create to answer my research question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?* To begin, I explained my rationale for creating this project. After that, I provided the framework I used to create my project. Next, I described the intended setting and audience for my resources. Then, I provided

a project description to explain how it will be formatted. Finally, I have explained my intended timeline for when I would like to implement these resources.

In chapter four, I reflect upon my capstone project as a whole. Additionally, I share what I have learned through this process as a researcher, writer, and learner.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Introduction

Through the process of asking and researching the question: *What strategies can teachers use to build the academic language of EL students in academic conversations?* I have found a plethora of practical resources and strategies to share with my co-workers. This process has allowed me to take a hard look at my own teaching and examine how to best support my students in their mainstream classrooms.

This final chapter begins with a reflection of my learning. This project has been a stretching and fulfilling process for me that required me to grow professionally. Next, I revisit the literature and share the key findings from the research. After that, I provide an overview of the curriculum used to develop my adapted lesson plans. Then, I explain the implications of my project. After that, I examine the possible limitations of my project. Finally, I explain my personal plan for using the lessons and goals to create more lesson plans to support ELs.

Reflection on Learning

As I now stand back and reflect on the learning that took place while creating my capstone project, I see how much I have grown professionally. While I have my teaching license in EL and have been working as an EL teacher for the past three years, I have learned so much about language levels and how to help support my students to grow in proficiency. This process has not only enhanced my own teaching but has allowed me to create practical resources that I can share with my colleagues.

It was extremely beneficial for me to take the time to create individual MPI's for each third grade standard. While I have used MPI's in the past, this was the first time I created my own. I found this process to be both challenging and stretching because I had to foresee student's needs, provide necessary support, and have a clear outcome pre-established. This process caused me to look at each standard through a new lens because I had to know exactly what academic language I wanted my students to produce.

Revisiting the Literature

When researching practical strategies to develop academic language in mainstream classrooms, I found a vast amount of resources and strategies to support teachers and students. Many EL strategies are considered best practices for all students but I have noticed that only a few of these strategies are actively being used in my school.

To begin this research, it was beneficial to build background on the need to teach academic language. All students no matter their home language need strong academic language skills in English to be successful in school but for ELs, it is imperative for the instruction to be explicit and direct. It is an unrealistic expectation for ELs to just hear academic language in the classroom and use it correctly the first time. ELs need ample opportunities to practice academic conversations with appropriate levels of support depending on their language level. This research helped me to understand that many mainstream classroom teachers do not have a solidified understanding of their ELs language level. As a result, I found it beneficial to embed MPI's in my lesson plans so teachers would have a clear understanding of their students' language level and have

strategies to help students grow towards the next level with appropriate levels of support.

Curricular Development

The Making Meaning curriculum and WIDA's MPIs were used as the foundation of this project. I used both to adapt lesson plans based off of five third grade literature standards. These fit together nicely to make user-friendly lesson plans to support ELs in mainstream classrooms. The lessons plans were created as a Google Document, Appendix A, so they can easily be shared with the third grade team. In addition, once we start using the lesson plans in the spring, they can be easily modified for everyone to see if we notice something needs to be added or changed when teaching.

Implications

The adapted Making Meaning lesson plans that have been created for this project will be shared with the third grade team in the spring semester of the 2018-19 school year. Currently, I co-teach in two of the four third grade classrooms but the lesson plans will be shared with all members on the team so the language needs of all students in the grade level can be met. I plan weekly with all four members of the third grade team so I can explain the rationale and provide support on how to best utilize the lesson plans within the classroom.

After implementing the lesson plans in the classroom, I believe students will have a deeper understanding of the academic language needed to meet the third grade literature standards. The strategies provided will scaffold students at all language levels and allow teachers to differentiate instruction based on students' needs. As students'

proficiency levels grow, teachers will have a better understanding of what support is appropriate for student success.

Possible Limitations

One limitation to consider when implementing these lesson plans with ELs is whether or not a newcomer student is in a silent phase. According to Haynes (2007), it is common for newcomer ELs to experience a silent period where they are either unable or unwilling to speak in the new language. This period could last for more than a year or for several days depending on the student and their prior exposure to the language. During this period, ELs are learning by observing, listening, and taking in their new environment. Newcomers should not be forced to speak instead; they should speak when they are ready (Haynes, 2007).

While these adapted lesson plans were created with ELs in mind, it is imperative for mainstream teachers to understand that it is common and appropriate for newcomers to experience a silent period. The language supports provided in these lesson plans will serve as a good model for newcomers to listen to the academic language being taught but newcomers should not be expected to produce academic language, even with support.

Another limitation is the amount of instructional time needed to explicitly teach academic language and the time needed to ensure all students can practice using the language successfully. When I weekly plan with the third grade team it seems that time, or lack thereof, is always a constraint. Additionally, when I co-teach in the third grade classrooms I am only in there for 30 minutes, which is challenging. We do our best to deliver 10-minute mini-lessons and then use the rest of the time to differentiate

instruction through small group instruction but it is difficult to keep the lessons short while still reinforcing the production of academic language.

Personal Plan

I am looking forward to sharing and implementing these adapted resources in my co-taught third grade classrooms during the spring 2018-19 semester. My third grade co-teachers and I have a planning day set at the end of this semester where I plan to share my lessons. This meeting will be beneficial because I will have time to share my rationale behind the lessons and receive feedback from my co-teachers. Together, we will map out our spring semester and determine how to best meet the needs of all our students.

My long-term plan is to create adapted lesson plans like the ones made in this project for third grade informational standards. Due to time constraints and a desire to do a thorough job, I chose to create this project solely around literature standards as a starting point. The academic language needed to access literature and informational texts is quite different so as the spring semester progresses I would like to evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson plans and begin creating more lessons to support ELs.

Summary

The process of researching and creating this project has sharpened and grown me as an educator. As I reflect on my learning, I can see how my view of academic language around grade level standards has changed. The language students' are expected to produce to meet grade level standards is challenging, even for native English speakers. ELs need more support within the classroom to access grade level content so I am very excited to start implementing my new lesson plans in the spring.

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Appendix A

Capstone Project Lesson Plans

The capstone project Google Document entitled “3rd Grade Adapted Making Meaning Lessons can be accessed using the following link: <https://goo.gl/ZjMrRy>

Appendix B

Academic Language Vocabulary Cards

The academic language vocabulary cards are sorted by the CCSS. Click on each link to access the cards.

3.1.1.1: <https://goo.gl/ZsCcPM>

3.1.2.2: <https://goo.gl/uLU1Gk>

3.1.3.3: <https://goo.gl/dNoGpT>

3.1.4.4: <https://goo.gl/pweSfB>

3.1.6.6 <https://goo.gl/ucp2rU>

Appendix C

MPI's

The MPI's are sorted by CCSS. Click on each link to access the MPI.

3.1.1.1 MPI Ask Questions: <https://goo.gl/n9S4Re>

3.1.1.1 MPI Answer Questions: <https://goo.gl/SYzdgu>

3.1.2.2 MPI Recount Stories: <https://goo.gl/S6yk8g>

3.1.3.3 MPI Describe Characters: <https://goo.gl/fscTtm>

3.1.4.4 MPI Determine the Meaning of Words: <https://goo.gl/s2CbQv>

3.1.6.6 Point of View: <https://goo.gl/DZTyoD>

Appendix D

Making Meaning Language Supports

The Making Meaning language supports are sorted by the 3rd grade text used to teach the standard. Click on each link to access the language supports.

Miss Nelson is Missing: <https://goo.gl/mjWkoC>

Officer Buckle and Gloria: <https://goo.gl/WAA3BS>

Brave Irene: <https://goo.gl/cXmivC>

The Paper Bag Princess: <https://goo.gl/D9eJCN>

Alexander, Who's Trying His Best to Be the Best Boy Ever: <https://goo.gl/KNo6Kn>

Fireflies: <https://goo.gl/nSK6C4>

Julius, the Baby of the World: <https://goo.gl/7iVpMX>

Appendix E

Vocabulary Cards

The vocabulary cards are sorted by the 3rd grade text used to teach the standard. Click on each link to access the vocabulary cards.

Miss Nelson is Missing: <https://goo.gl/jVzfDc>

Officer Buckle and Gloria: <https://goo.gl/91PbdP>

Brave Irene: <https://goo.gl/dM1udj>

The Paper Bag Princess: <https://goo.gl/FhRW3W>

Alexander, Who's Trying His Best to Be the Best Boy Ever: <https://goo.gl/H5VwkL>

Fireflies: <https://goo.gl/gRxmGi>

Julius, the Baby of the World: <https://goo.gl/AGiW22>

Appendix F

Partner Work

The partner work is sorted by the 3rd grade text. Click on each link to access the partner work.

The Paper Bag Princess: <https://goo.gl/FhRW3W>

Fireflies: <https://goo.gl/Fus6un>