Summer 8-31-2020

Giving Them The Map: Making Language Visible for English Language Learners

Elizabeth Seymour

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons
GIVING THEM THE MAP:
MAKING LANGUAGE VISIBLE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

Betsy K. Seymour

A capstone thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University
St. Paul, Minnesota
May 2020

Primary Advisor: Julianne Scullen, Ed.S.
Content Reviewer: Cynthia Lundgren
Peer Reviewer: Tracy Valbuena, Peter Christopherson
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

- ELs In Schools: Policy and Accountability ......................................................... 3
- What We Know About Instruction For Multi-Language Learning ......................... 4
- My Background And Teaching Goals .................................................................... 5
- Hopes For ELL Education ..................................................................................... 6

## CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

- Introduction ........................................................................................................... 8
- Academic Language ............................................................................................... 10
- Metalanguage ......................................................................................................... 16
- Common Strategies For Language Instruction ....................................................... 21
- Systemic Functional Linguistics Theory ................................................................. 24
- Teaching And Learning Cycle ............................................................................... 26
- Chapter Summary ................................................................................................. 31

## CHAPTER THREE: Project Outline

- Introduction ........................................................................................................... 32
- Project Description ............................................................................................... 34
- Rationale ............................................................................................................... 35
CHAPTER ONE

ELs in the schools: Policy and accountability

By now, those working in US schools have heard the statistics. The number of English language learners (ELL) in the US school system was approximately 4.9 million in 2016. This is an increase from 3.8 million in 2000 (National Center of Education statistics). ELL students maintain a significant portion of our schools’ demographic, and our federal and state policies are putting more focus on these learners.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, was put into place to provide equal access to high-quality education for all students in the United States. ESSA outlines federal policy in assessment and accountability, educational standards, teacher quality, program innovation, and other areas (MPI Migration Policy Institute). With ESSA replacing No Child Left Behind, schools are now accountable for academic indicators measuring their performance. One of these indicators includes English language proficiency.

In the Midwestern state where WIDA ACCESS 2.0™ is used to measure English language learners’ (ELL) language proficiency growth in the Midwestern state where this research project is being done. The many measures and accountability mandates have placed focus on the critical needs of ELLs and the importance of creating precise language lessons to ensure their equitable education. It’s important that explicit curriculums and methods are being implemented broadly in our schools. Therefore the question that resonates for me is How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs? In this chapter, I will reflect on my time working as an ELL educator and
the challenges and growth opportunities in the field that brought me to this question. I will outline my hopes for ELL lesson writing and teaching frameworks and the research that these methods are grounded in. I will include both my personal and policy points that have influenced my interest in the topic of explicit language lesson writing systems.

**Common research-based practices about multi-language learning**

My work as an EL teacher necessitates synthesizing the worlds of content curriculum, language curriculum, and education policy. This is a large task in that my district doesn't have a specific curriculum used for our language learners. This circumstance is all too common in many US schools. The state where I teach English is part of the WIDA ™ consortium where ACCESS assessments, designed by WIDA ™, test for language growth in the context of curriculum. In an effort to advocate for learning equity by teaching language in content, ESL teachers must identify key language components in content standards, and create language lessons tied to content units for frequently large caseloads.

Much has been researched about multilingual development today. Based on language education research for English language learners, academic language is best learned through context (Schleppegrell, Derewianka, Rose, Martin). Academic language is complex in its many distinct features. Some of them are authoritative tone, density, technicality and abstraction. Looking more closely at these features one can identify more concrete elements seen in the unique patterns of academic language (Fang, 2008, Zweirs, 2008). Research also suggests that language should be taught explicitly in order for our English language learning students to make gains in all content areas, including language growth (Schleppegrell 2012, Derewianka 2016, Rose, Martin 2006).
In addition, many of our English learners are challenged in the area of academic language of schools (Schleppegrell, 2012).

It is partly with this knowledge in mind that I became interested in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Genre Pedagogy. SFL theory suggests that language is best taught through exploring and emphasizing how language structures make meaning (Christie, 2004; Derewianka, & Jones, 2016; Rose, 2006). Genre Pedagogy specifically is the application of SFL in the classroom. Wida outlines Key language Uses as genre pedagogy. Within the framework of Key Language Uses, teachers can guide students to recognize and use language patterns that are unique to explaining, arguing, narrating, and informing. Gaining this awareness encourages students to interact and analyze texts (Lundgren & D’Costa, 2019). Through genre theory and its application of SFL in the schools, we can give English learners the map for understanding academic language complexities rather than simply assuming they will be acquired through immersion and exposure English.

**My background and teaching goals**

I work as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in a culturally and linguistically diverse district. I attempt to create language lessons that are connected to unit content and state standards, yet explicit in language focus. This has been my priority in order to communicate clearly about what English language lessons entail and how they differ from content lessons. I began looking into how language can be taught explicitly so students could strengthen metalanguage skills and in turn, develop more academic language control. My goal has been to make language “visible” not only for students but also for communicating with
mainstream teachers, parents, and administrators. I’ve found that ESL is an area of education that is often misunderstood in the broader field of education. Frequently, well-meaning and overstretched staff members resort to attempting to use ESL colleagues as paraprofessionals rather than language specialists who can and should provide sound language lessons in order to make language learning accessible for English language learners (ELLs).

In addition, many reading and writing curriculums and intervention programs fall short in teaching diverse learners specific comprehension skills needed for academic language necessary in schools. I have found this is particularly evident in late elementary and intermediate grades. While the National Reading Council has outlined the foundational components necessary for reading (NICHD, 2000), more is needed to help educators develop the complex structures used in academic language. English learners transitioning from the primary to the intermediate grades are suddenly exposed to unique language demands of academic language typical in expository texts (Zhihui, 2008). I believe this is where English Language instruction for mid proficiency level language learners comes in. We need to provide skills and tools that show ELLs how to deconstruct and reconstruct academic language. With a focus such as this, our lessons are more inclusive and ELLs have greater opportunities to express their understanding.

**Hopes for ELL education**

My intention in researching systemic functional linguistics, complex language features, and metalanguage in school contexts is to use them as an anchor for building strong language lesson methods. My hope is that a lesson writing process grounded in these theories will support and strengthen ELLs’ academic language growth so they’re empowered to demonstrate their
knowledge and thinking. I’m seeking proven methods to teach language explicitly in order to build reading comprehension and language output for diverse learners. This goal led me to The Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) and specifically the Pathways model of TLC (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Lundgren & D’Costa, 2019; Rose & Martin, 2012). The cycle provides a system for developing robust and explicit language lessons that are grounded in the theory of genre pedagogy. In turn, I hope my students will have concrete skills to apply when reading, writing, and speaking in academic contexts, so they can be more engaged in the joy of learning in English. I also hope my colleagues can utilize and execute a fresh method of language lesson planning and facilitation that encourages these outcomes.

While much of my research is in pursuit of strengthening learning of complex language in context for ELLs, I also believe new writing on this subject could add to a growing body of research. Because this is a broad topic, my focus will be on designing a website with embedded professional development sessions that can be used in-person or virtually. This model provides English language educators with a language lesson writing process that promotes teaching language tied to context. In turn, I also hope to promote equitable education by teaching language explicitly in order to clarify the curricular content in which the language complexities are embedded.

All stakeholders need to know how an English language lesson is different from an English language arts lesson or a reading intervention. People in the field of education need to know what is taught beyond the word level (vocabulary) and grammar level (set rules) language. The only path I’ve seen so far that allows me to carve out clear lines that distinguish language lessons from content while drawing on content standards is that of functional linguistics. In
addition, the only lesson development method I’ve seen that is grounded in this theory and incorporates sound practices along with time for teachers’ preliminary language analysis is Language Pathways TLC.

My interest in the theory of functional linguistics started with Beverly Derewianka’s book, *Exploring How Texts Work* (1993). For me, she was one of the first language educators and researchers whose work demonstrated a means for explicitly teaching English Learners how language works. Similarly, a categorization of language is also outlined by WIDA TM at the word, sentence, and discourse levels. Additionally, a cycle of teaching and learning that Derevianka and other researchers and curriculum developers such as David Rose and Cynthia Lundgren use in their methods, provides a structured approach to academic language instruction that is grounded in genre pedagogy. When I have worked toward applying this systematic approach, I have been able to give my English language learners more than simply a repeated version of the content lesson or even worse, a remedial reading lesson. I have been able to give them the map to the language of power that is academic language. ELL students are empowered when we help them see language and express themselves using the complex language of schooling that is expected for academic success. The more clear students are in the meanings language makes, the stronger each student’s individual voice.
Summary

The broad subject of language learning policy and my personal experiences working as an ELL educator has led me to build on my question: *How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?* To fully engage in this question it is important to reflect on some of the practices commonly used by educators and backed by research. Language acquisition researchers have influenced my experience as an educator and challenge my growth as one. Because of policy, research, and personal teaching experiences, I’m drawn to the need for strengthening and clarifying the language lessons ELLs receive. I believe the more explicit the instruction is, the more inclusive the learning environment. By engaging students in the meaning of language structures in a clear manner, we’re giving them the metaphorical map that allows them to move through school effectively.

Chapter 2 will provide research that has influenced the theory of explicit language instruction providing meaning for ELLs. It will outline research that influenced the development of The Teaching and Learning Cycle Pathways. Chapter 3 will describe the professional development framework that is grounded in the previously mentioned research theories.
CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

The challenge of meeting the needs of English language learners is evident to their educators. This is particularly true in the areas of reading comprehension and language output domains. Those ELL students in the mid language proficiency levels, in particular, often struggle to move toward higher levels. Additionally, students in the upper elementary grades are shifting from newly acquired foundational reading skills to applying these skills for reading to learn. During the early elementary period, a focus is on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary is evident in curricular models (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Once these preliminary skills are taught, students are ready to move onto reading in order to learn content in social studies, science, math, and ELA. These texts are predominantly written in what is widely called academic language (Zhihui, F. 2008). Despite the growing awareness of the term, many educators aren’t armed with concrete examples of academic language features or methods of explicitly clarifying these unique features for English language learners. Without explicit lessons guiding ELs through some of these unique language patterns, students are left with what is often an incomprehensible task of interacting with complex language patterns and content-specific technical vocabulary. In addition, they are responsible for producing unfamiliar registers of school language that include unique patterns dependent on the content that it’s embedded in. This necessitates a type of detailed reading where students can track large amounts of information packed into text. Without explicit language lessons that show students how to derive meaning from language patterns,
many English language learners struggle with school language and the patterns, structures, and vocabulary that accompanies it. This brings me to the question: How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?

In this chapter, I will highlight a body of research as it relates to the language instruction needs of mid-level EL students in the upper primary grades. I will also outline the areas of language research that lay the foundation for explicit methods for teaching academic language and reasons to support those methods. I will include curriculum and tools based on the Teaching and Learning Cycle. I will first identify features of academic language that make it a uniquely challenging area of language learning. Next, I will review the topic of metalanguage and the benefits of developing this aspect of language instruction for ELLs. An overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics follows. This is the theory that anchors the instructional methods included here. Finally, I will examine current examples of implementing The Teaching and learning cycle that are relevant to the goal of explicit language instruction for EL educators. I hope to find answers to support the question above regarding explicit academic language instruction for upper elementary ELLs.

**Academic language**

The combination of state standards, along with the National Reading Panel’s (NRP) compilation of key foundational literacy skills, orient most primary grade educators in preliminary literacy instruction. Skills such as phonics, phonemics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary are clearly broken down developmental steps that guide educators (National Institute
of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). In addition, pedagogical methods tied to these skills provide teachers and students with an educational framework. However, once students enter a reading level typically seen in late third grade and higher, the task of reading comprehension weighs more heavily on the student. Added to this is the reality that text structures change significantly at this time.

Beginning in about fourth grade, readers must cope with ever more complex demands upon language, cognition, and reading skills. Whereas the major hurdles prior to fourth grade are learning to recognize in print the thousands of words whose meanings are already known and reading these fluently in connected texts with comprehension, the hurdle in grade four and beyond is coping with increasingly complex language and thought (Jacobs, Baldwin & Chall, p.45).

There are very few instructional methods embedded in common reading curriculums that address how to focus on and teach these new and unique text complexities. Because much of English language instruction falls into the category of reading comprehension and output skills, it’s reasonable that ELL educators have much invested in this portion of an ELL learner’s education. Furthermore, students who have mid-level English language proficiency and who are in higher elementary grades and entering middle school have the added challenge of bridging, not only their emerging bilingual skills but their developing reading and writing skills into greater complexity.

It’s clear to most language educators that there are distinct qualities evident in the language of school, yet educators need to be mindful of the rich variety of home languages that students bring to the schools and recognise the additive value they bring to our classrooms. It is
also necessary however to address components of academic school language that make it such a hurdle for students in reading comprehension and writing (Ranney, 2012). While there isn’t a precise consensus on what academic language is, there is agreement on some common elements tied to it. Despite the varied views on components of academic language, academic language itself is commonly thought to be a unique register that has sub-registers each possessing their own distinct functions. For example, a narrative text will have different patterns and structures than a science text explaining a phenomenon. This is where the theory of genre is evident (Derewianka, 2011; Rose & Martin, 2012).

Genre pedagogy is teaching about how subject-specific registers are organized to give meaning. Common genres, such as story-telling, persuading, explaining how or why something works, or sharing information have patterns that are transferable across grade levels and subject areas (Brisk, 2012; Derewianka, 2011; Rose & Martin, 2012).

WIDA™, developers of the ACCESS Language Proficiency Assessment, use a genre-based approach for the new English Language Proficiency Standards. Based on the most salient genres as identified through the Common Core, WIDA’s Key Language Uses include Explaining, Arguing, Narrating and Informing (Lundgren & D’Costa, 2019). For ELL students it's important to understand why and how Genre or Key Language Uses are incorporated in academic language. This awareness can heighten the understanding of the target language more fully as well as the cultural demands of school contexts (Brisk, 2012).

Academic language is more than precise vocabulary; it also necessitates specific language control using features such as cohesive devices, nominalization, embedded clauses and more. Significant research in text analysis has shown that there are commonly recurring patterns
in texts. These patterns are seen across a variety of curricular fields. (Uccelli, Phillips & Galloway, 2017). According to Uccelli & Galloway, there are six specific core academic language skills: Organizing analytic text, connecting ideas logically, tracking participants and themes, Interpreting writer’s viewpoints, understanding metalinguistic vocabulary, and unpacking dense information. Many theorists point to specific grammatical elements that give cause to the complexity of these very skills named above. Knowing the elements is key to the application of the skills outlined by Uccelli et.al.

Zhihui Fang outlines unique features of academic language and suggests some of the reasons for the challenges they pose to upper elementary ELLs. My focus is specifically on meeting the needs of these students. Fang highlights four areas that can pose comprehension and language output challenges for students: technicality, abstraction, authoritative tone, and density. Technical language is necessary for curricular texts such as social studies, science, and math. These texts use specialized language that is unfamiliar to most learners. In the world of ELL and other areas of education, this specialized language is called Tier 3 vocabulary. This type of vocabulary is field-specific. Students will also encounter what is referred to as Tier 2 vocabulary. These words are part of a more broadly vocabulary used across a variety of contexts from math to language arts, science and social studies (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013).

Language patterns relying on abstraction, Fang's (2008) second feature, entail elements such as nominalization. Nominalization is the use of verbs or adjectives as nouns. For example, the adjective cautious becomes caution. The use of these patterns allows for authors to synthesize a large amount of information. It also allows for a hierarchical structure in which new information is introduced as it is built on previously given information. (Rose & Martin, 2012).
The quality of the hierarchical structure in itself poses potential problems for ELs. Connecting ideas from one clause or one sentence to another creates an additional cognitive task.

Text Density, the third academic text feature that Fang (2008) provides, is characterized by the number of words used in a given sentence. With this pattern, lengthy noun groups are used to pack a large amount of information into these noun structures. Authors of academic texts also make use of features such as nominalization and clause complexes. Fang suggests this grammatical pattern can significantly slow down what he refers to as a students’ print processing. The use of this type of language pattern isn’t typically seen in children until late elementary years and into adolescence making explicit and repetitive use of it important for teachers.

The fourth feature, Authoritative texts, has a tone that is characteristically impersonal (Fang, 2008). Grammatical devices such as technical vocabulary, declarative sentences, passive voice, and generalized participants contribute to Authoritativeness. In addition, Fang points out that academic texts often make use of the passive voice in order to uphold an authoritative tone, rather than a personal one (2008).

Another pattern used in school-based texts is the way in which information is structured. One example is seen in the clause. A typical clause pattern is one where familiar or known information is at the beginning of the clause and what comes at the end of the clause is new information. This is considered the Theme/Rheme structure (Rose & Martin, 2012). Highlighting this pattern is one-way students can conceptualize complex information in a systematic way. This is also a significant element in that it lends itself to the hierarchical structure that many expository texts rely on (Schleppegrell, 2001). That is to say, an author of an academic text has
the task of incrementally developing information throughout the text. “In school-based texts… a single author is challenged to progressively build an argument, summarizing and recapitulating prior discourse as each clause expands and furthers the exposition” (Schleppegrell, 2001). Schleppegrell’s statement highlights the previously mentioned statement that academic texts call authors Organizing analytic text, connecting ideas logically, tracking participants and themes (Uccelli, Phillips & Galloway, 2017). Schleppegrell also distinguishes academic texts as typically using declarative mood, and clause linkage strategies that build on information hierarchically. Beverly Derewianka provides an additional demonstration of academic text features as they’re applied to genre. Because she aligns with the theory that all language is social and all language purposes are social, genre theory suggests that texts are broken into general types each holding common patterns unique to its social function. She suggests the importance of not only text features in a given example but also organizational patterns. The genre types used predominantly education standards are as follows: Recounts, Instructions, Narratives, Information Reports, Explanations, and arguments (Derewianka, 2011, Rose, & Martin, 2012).

Where Derewianka and Rose highlight language patterns of genre pedagogy, Jeff Zweirs breaks language into that of each content area. Zweirs outlines more broadly that there are three connected academic language functions characterizing academic language which are used: describe complexity, higher-order thinking, and abstraction. In addition to these functions, he indicates the features of academic language including the use of figurative expressions such as metaphors, analogies, idioms, and other terms that use common ideas to describe abstract concepts (Zwiers, 2008).
Zwiers also emphasizes the importance of encouraging the investigation of figurative language in all of the content areas. A second noted characteristic is that of being Explicit. This means that explanations are precise and clear, orienting the reader who is unfamiliar with the given topic. For example, students need to learn not to use referents such as *this* or *that* unless they are using it as a cohesive device in which they have already referred to an idea or person in a previous sentence. Additionally, academic features such as remaining detached from the message by not using feelings, opinions or personal stories is a device used in academic language (Zwiers, 2008). Students also need to support points with evidence as well as use modals such as could, would, should, can, will, shall, might, may, must, and ought to for nuance. Also included in the academic features is the component of qualifiers such as most, perhaps, likely, often, suggests that, relatively, presumably, and more. Lastly, the use of prosody to emphasize or de-emphasize parts of a sentence or paragraph is a characteristic feature inherent in academic language (Zwiers, 2008). Each of the noted elements of academic language not only is important for teachers in order to develop focused, explicit language lessons but also for students who need to gain access to these patterns with the goal of improving their own language output and reading comprehension skills.

**Metalanguage**

Metalanguage is the process of conceptualizing how language is used. It is learning about language *through* language. As such, it is a tool for talking about texts. It gives students an opportunity to analyze how an author is using language at word, sentence, and discourse levels. Because metalanguage is intended to be used in any curricular lesson, school-based discussions
and investigations are an authentic opportunity to practice it. Metalanguage also can serve dual learning opportunities as it is tied to content. Students are learning content material and learning about language tied to the material. Advocating for the important use of metalanguage in L2 lessons, Guangwei Hu holds the position that Metalanguage is a means for students to reflect on significant language features within school settings (Hu, 2011). He argues first, that language analysis is already an embedded component of ELA curriculum. Secondly, when interactive discourse focuses on language structures, it can not occur without a shared language vocabulary (metalanguage). In addition, Hu notes that since metalanguage naturally relies on exactness in looking at language, it lends itself to anticipating the necessary grammar rules and even potential errors used by the emerging bilingual student. Lastly, teachers benefit from focusing on a metalanguage by heightening their awareness of language patterns and structures (Hu, 2010). Thus, Previously learned structures can be part of an accumulated bank of language tools to be used as a source for building up language knowledge.

In their book, *Learning to Write Reading to Learn*, Rose and Martin share categories of language that can be used in pedagogy. They outline the value of educators and students alike to own a shared vocabulary in order to talk about language. Beginning by noting the implicit grammar that very young children hold when first entering schools, Martin and Rose suggest that very meaningful discussions can happen in the classroom between students and teachers simply by asking *wh*-questions (who, what, where, when) about a given text or event.

It’s from this notion that they provide the first in a series of linguistic categories for metalanguage pedagogy by naming what they call “meanings” to these very *wh*-words: who = people, what = thing, what doing/happening = process, where = place, how/how long = time,
how/what like=quality (Martin & Rose, 2012). By providing these terms or “meanings” (Martin & Rose, 2012) to each of the wh- question, teachers, and students have a foundational place to begin exploring, discussing, and understanding how grammar provides meaning. As a result, academic discussions can occur, while supporting an intentional focus on language. The second point of departure for teaching and learning about metalanguage is in discussing and identifying the clause (Martin & Rose, 2012).

Clauses can be identified by teachers and students by noting the process and person or thing or other “meaning words” involved. Within the clauses themselves, there are word groups that are represented. These too can be used in teacher/student text analysis and discussion. Verb groups are the process words mentioned earlier. People and things (nouns) expressed in a group are nominal groups. Groups of words that reveal information about time or place are prepositional groups. Because not all prepositions mean place or time, function theory grammar refers to these phrases as Circumstances. Thus, a clause contains elements that fall under the categories process, participants, circumstances, and qualities (Martin & Rose, 2012).

Table 1

Applying Meaning to Grammatical Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wh- words for identifying word groups</th>
<th>Types of meaning at the word level</th>
<th>Grammatical Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>who /what</td>
<td>people/thing</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When/how long</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Prepositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they are doing/did</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Verb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clause grammar features</th>
<th>Elements of meaning at the clause level</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal group</td>
<td>Participant (people /thing)</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb group</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositional group</td>
<td>Circumstance (quality ,time, location)</td>
<td>Prepositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond the word group and clause levels of metalanguage use, teachers and students need to emphasize texts at the discourse level. Two textual functions that provide meaning at this level are cohesion and identification (Martin & Rose, 2012). Periodicity refers to how information progresses in a passage. According to Martin and Rose, features such as topic sentences, introductions, and conclusions are aspects of Periodicity. Derevianka and Jones use the term, stages, and phases when referring to this aspect of meaning (Derevianka & Jones, 2012). Additionally, identifiers such as articles (a the), demonstratives (this, these, those), comparatives (each, other, more, less) and pronouns (he, she, it, they, you, me) all function by tracking people, places, things and ideas from one sentence to another. These cohesive devices can be complicated for ELLs when they refer to lengthy noun groups. Both cohesion and identification work to convey messages in an organized manner (Rose & Martin, 2012). The two interpersonal functions of metalanguage at the discourse level are negotiation and appraisal. Negotiation refers to the different ways in which speakers communicate with one another which Rose and Martin suggest can be questions, statements, commands, and responses. An appraisal is an evaluative language that can be positive or negative. Finally, ideational functions that are concerned with people, things, processes, are conjunctions and ideations. Ideation conveys meaning and relations in the text through elements such as repetitions, similarities, and contrasts (Rose & Martin, 2012). Teacher awareness of the organizational patterns of discourse is another means of focusing on aspects of language in order to bring clarity to students reading comprehension and control over their language output. While the use of the linguistic terminology wouldn’t be supportive to students, providing them with more accessible
terminology and an awareness of these patterns allows for discussion about the text at the developmental and language level of the student.

These descriptors of language outlined above, fall into the area of metalanguage which considers terminology. However, the broader notion of classroom discussions around language is an equally important aspect of metalanguage. Incorporating these discussions is part of developing students' appreciation and engagement of the text. Teachers need to intentionally and explicitly support students in this effort. This can be developed in a systematic manner. Tasks such as selecting effective texts, identifying key features, shared reading, students’ observation and discussions of shared features, processing and conceptualizing features, building a shared metalanguage, word walls categorized by process, circumstance, and participant all contribute to this metalanguage discourse (Derewianka & Jones, 2012). Mary J. Schleppegrell is influential in guiding educators to incorporate metalanguage into school dialogue and lessons. She addresses the nature of changing registers within the context of schools as being a natural and important resource for promoting language awareness among ELLs (Schleppegrell, 2013). Schleppegrell illustrates areas in language learning that are gaining pedagogical ground. First, that language is best taught in context. In the context of school registers, students are learning both curricular and language goals. The context of the classroom also lends itself to authentic social interactions. These interactions are critical according to sociocultural perspectives as asserted by Schleppegrell. Current research supports the value of teaching language tied to content learning. However, one of the challenges language learners have is that of using language in expanded forms to demonstrate what they know and have learned in content (Schleppegrell, 2013).
In a study done by Schleppegrell, elementary students engaged in metalanguage activities tied to ELA context learning. The study showed evidence of many positive outcomes. Through two different ELA lessons using metalanguage discourse, students were not only observed to be developing an understanding of language but also practicing the broader academic goals of abstract reasoning and categorization used in all content areas. Students learned language tools such as identifying mood and speech function in a shared text. Another group of students evaluated sentences by segmenting clauses to determine a variety of processes (verb groups) used in a given text. Students deconstructed sentences to find meaning in clause chunks (Schleppegrell, 2013). Studies such as this support the use of metalanguage. Processing language through explicit discussions arms language teachers with tools to develop lessons and provides authentic opportunities for language learners to focus on aspects of language that are inherent in academic texts. In turn, students develop language control in both reading comprehension and language output.

**Systemic Functional Linguistics Theory**

SFL is the process of examining grammar and the way that it functions in order to deepen understanding of language and how it communicates meaning. Students can learn how language works in social and academic contexts (Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010). Under the theory of SFL, the three areas that guide the choices of language are genre, context, and register. The register itself is further divided into mode, tenor, and field. (Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010). In SFL theory Field refers to the social activity or the topic of the discourse, Tenor refers to the relationship of the participants and Mode refers to the manner of the communication. (Christie, 2004) As cited by Christie (2010), Halliday also introduced the argument that all languages have three
Metafunctions. There is an experiential metafunction which represents the nature of experiences in language. There is interpersonal metafunction which relates to relationships and interactions in language and there is textual metafunction which relates to how texts are organized (Christie, 2004). Each metafunction is an important aspect of an explicit English language lesson.

When SFL theory is used in ESL pedagogy, teachers are responsible for analyzing important language features and developing lessons that promote awareness of these features as they’re used in different registers. SFL theory promotes metalanguage. From a pedagogical perspective, Genre is an important component that has grown out of SFL. While promoting awareness of these frequent patterns and structures is pertinent in applying SFL, the goal is not to apply rigid grammatical rules to language but to show students that language patterns change with different contexts. In addition, patterns of language create meaning.

Schleppegrell (2013) points to SFL as a theory being implemented by language teachers in the schools. She suggests that the area of sociolinguistics and language within the context are aspects of SFL theory introduced by MAK Halliday. She says SFL shares the view that language develops within social contexts. A genuine social exchange and focused language guidance increases ELLs’ awareness of the meaning found in varieties of language patterns (Schleppegrell, 2013). SFL theory has also brought understanding about the developmental stages of academic language. As outlined by Christie (2002), this developed out of Halliday’s distinctions between written and spoken texts. He argued that the grammar of the written language has a very different organizational structure than that of the written text. This is illustrated in Halliday’s term, “grammatical metaphor.” A commonly used example of this is seen with the use of nominalization. For example, the sentence: “Hurricane Katrina destroyed the
town and the surrounding communities joined to rebuild what they could, could be expressed in this way: The destruction of Hurricane Katrina led to surrounding communities joining to rebuild what they could”. The latter example exemplifies nominalization and expanded noun phrases that are typical of academic texts. The Pedagogical significance of this type of language shift (grammatical metaphor) is that it isn’t until late childhood to adolescence that children are able to produce this level of textual density (Christie, 2002). Raising awareness of these structures provides opportunities for students to evaluate, analyze, and in turn produce these academic structures. Accessing this level of language control can allow students a pathway into the complexities of language heavily used in school and beyond.

There is also an argument for incorporating SFL theory into ESL pedagogy in that it provides tools to analyze academic text features including text stages, theme and rheme positions, lexical choice, types of verbs and noun groups such as (nominalization, and extended noun groups), cohesive devices including types of conjunctions, types of reference, substitution, and ellipses (Rose, 2012). These elements are important for teachers in order to anticipate student comprehension challenges and to provide a focus for designing explicit language lessons. Students will ultimately benefit from having a clearer perspective on challenging linguistic devices and will be able to use them as a model for their own written communication.

**The Teaching and Learning Cycle**

There are numerous methods that provide language focus and scaffolds for language instruction. However, The Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) is a comprehensive format for ELL teachers. TLC is a process for organizing instruction that builds language awareness,
supporting reading comprehension, and building skills for independent writing. In addition, the framework facilitates the use of explicit language focus. While there is some small variation in the names of the sections in each cycle, the TLC models are influenced by Halliday’s SFL theory and in turn Genre pedagogy. In this way, TLC works with academic language and metalanguage. According to David Rose, the creator of the curriculum, Reading To Learn, which utilizes TLC, there are six steps to the cycle. The steps are 1. Preparing before reading, 2. Detailed reading, 3. Prepare for Writing, 4. Joint Rewriting, 5. Individual Rewriting, 6. Independent Writing. In their book, Learning to Write Reading to Learn: Genre, Knowledge and Pedagogy in the Sydney School, Rose & Martin state, ‘To read with fluency and comprehension, … (levels of language patterns) must be recognized and interpreted simultaneously. Likewise, to write successfully, we must have all these language patterns at our disposal (P. 12). These levels as laid out by Rose and Martin are Letter pattern, syllable, word, word group, sentence, paragraph, text. There are patterns within each level: patterns within the word (spelling), patterns within the sentence (grammar) patterns within the text (discourse) (Rose & Martin, 2012).

Another proponent of the Teaching and Learning Cycle is Cynthia Lundgren, who developed a framework called Language Pathways. Language Pathways guides teachers through the teaching and learning cycle with resources designed to support language instruction at each phase of the cycle (Lundgren & D’Costa, 2019). It is specifically designed with English language learners in mind. Lundgren segments the stages of an explicit lesson into four stages: 1. Planning for Instruction and Assessment, 2. Building Awareness of Language Patterns, 3. Joint Construction of Text, 4. Independent Work and Evaluation. Lundgren’s model of TLC highlights the critical role of the educator to be keenly aware of the specific functions, structures,
and patterns concerned with a given text. In addition, The Pathways framework highlights the critical role of the teacher to model, moderate, and anticipate student needs in the given area of language.

**Figure 1**

*Teaching and Learning Cycle for Pathways*

Beverly Derewianka uses a five-step teaching and learning cycle. The stages she emphasizes are 1. Building knowledge of the field, 2. Supported reading, 3. Modeling/deconstruction, 4. Joint construction, 5. Independent use of the genre. Similar to Lundgren and Rose, Derewianka uses SFL influences such as “building the Field” to emphasize the importance of background information as well as orienting students in the unique structures of a given genre (Derewianka, 2016).

The principles of all TLC formats lend themselves to all content areas and all language proficiency levels, although my focus for this project will be on mid-level language learners in
late elementary and middle school. Each of the three frameworks outlined above is based on SFL theory anchoring students in academic language of school content. TLC processes incorporate a stage of preparing learners with background knowledge. This supports language learning through context. All of these examples of TLC also are connected to metalanguage whether textual, ideational, or interpersonal functions. For example, Derewianka cautions that teachers don’t use the text simply as a vehicle to teach grammar but rather to savor the meaning of a given text, discuss selected features, and call students to think about the effect of the features (Derewianka, 2016).

Thus intentional interaction is key in using the cycle. In addition, they each support the concept of SFL in that language development is considered to be content-dependent and knowledge of structures enhances comprehension. The very notion of these systems of teaching language support that text varies significantly from one discourse community to another. In this case, an explanatory text will have identifiable structures that are distinguishable from a descriptive text for example. In this way, the Teaching and Learning cycle also is tied to genre-based pedagogy. Genre-based pedagogy, as it relates to TLC, has the goal of taking students through the various cyclical stages in order to build awareness and control of a given text type (genre) to the point of independent comprehension and output of that text type or genre (Christie, 2004). In Cynthia Lundgren’s Pathways framework of TLC, Key Uses (WIDA ™) is the term used to signify these text types.

In their book, Teaching Language in Context, Beverly Derewianka and Pauline Jones embed a variety of academic tasks within each phase of the TLC as they use it. During the first
phase, building knowledge, activities suggested are brainstorming, floor storming, jigsaw task, and bundling or categorizing information.

During the supported reading phase, they suggest building the field of the curriculum and text type through skim-reading and scanning skills and promoting a gradual release of responsibility within the reading task. The third phase of modeling or deconstruction is concerned with focusing students’ awareness of the genre or social purpose of the text. To do this, students examine teacher-selected texts focusing on patterns of language at the levels of text, clause, group or phrase, and word. Students are asked questions such as, “What is the text about (field)? Who is the intended audience (tenor)? How is the text organized (mode)?” Teachers lead students through identifying and using specific patterns before they apply them. The use of metalanguage is important during this phase as teachers incorporate learning activities such as Jumbled text in which students reassemble cut up stages and phases of a text. Students can also label them. Teachers can also provide a type of cloze that has a missing language feature for students to provide. This is a good opportunity for students to work with language at the sentence, paragraph, and whole-text levels. They can also highlight language features in the chosen genre, label images with arrows and captions. With metalanguage, modeling, and practice Derewianka and Jones suggest, rich language learning experiences can unfold (Derewianka & Jones, 2016).

During the joint construction phase of the cycle, teachers lead students in constructing a text using the focused stages, phases, and features practiced in the earlier portions of the TLC. Using a larger shareable text format the teacher scribes what students share during an interactive dialogue. Hunt 1994 (as cited in Derewianka & Jones 2016) describes the following steps in joint
construction: a) review, b) orientation, c) negotiation, d) reading of the completed text. This is highly structured in that the teacher is leading by recasting, asking questions about word usage and phrasing along the way. This stage in the framework lends itself well to small group differentiated writing or collaborative writing where students can respond to one another’s writing.

Finally, the Independent construction phase includes drafting, editing, and publishing. Critical to the success of this stage is explicit criteria and teacher feedback. Derewianka and Jones caution that this level of focused writing is not intended for every written task in the classroom. Time for quick writes and journaling for pleasure is important as well however this focused time provides the focus on language that is necessary for students.

The significance of the teaching and learning cycle is that it is influenced not only by sound pedagogical practices but also substantial linguistic theories as they relate to language learning. In addition, the cycles focus on an aspect of language (academic language) that is overlooked in curriculum development resulting in EL students being underserved. With a systematic lesson writing method that incorporates a robust synthesis of language development methods based on research, teachers are in a much better place to provide truly explicit academic language lessons for English language students.

**Summary**

This literary review drew from a broad scope of theories related to linguistics. Much of the researchers included were influenced by MAK Halliday who introduced the notion of functional linguistics in the sixties. Decades later linguists such as Martin, building off of functional linguistics and socio-linguistic theories of his predecessors, introduced the ideas
around genre pedagogy. With these underpinnings, a good deal of information is available for educators to use in the pursuit of carving out solid, explicit language lessons. The use of Teaching and learning cycles outlined at the end of the chapter is the very vehicle for teachers to design these necessary language lessons. My goal is to utilize the Pathways framework of TLC in order to facilitate a professional development course for English language teachers. Pathways connect well with WIDA™ which created the standards and assessment required by federal law for states to demonstrate ELLs are making adequate yearly progress. WIDA™ is the language consortium used by many states. Pathways also is a model of lesson writing that will be somewhat familiar to what many educators are accustomed to. Based on my own experience as a language teacher, the fact that teacher language analysis is a component of the cycle is imperative. While Pathways provides a cycle that calls for language to be taught explicitly, it is not scripted nor is it a tool to teach the rules of grammar. Within Pathways, there is ample room for teachers to exercise flexibility and use their unique understanding of their individual students as they develop language lessons. Pathways is a means of keeping language educators focused on clear elements of language and the meaning it conveys. In turn, EL teachers provide English language learners with the map that they deserve as they navigate the challenges of academic language.

The next chapter provides information about the methods applied to answer the question, *How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?* The chapter will include a description of the Professional Development workshop in which teachers will work collaboratively to determine academic features of typical school texts, create common language vocabulary and discussion prompts, as
CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In this project I’m interested in developing a way for English language teachers to create and teach explicit language lessons that promote equitable learning for ELL students. All language is unique to its culture. This includes cultures in the language of schools. School language is built around uniquely complex patterns of academic language. Without clear guidance about meanings that these language patterns produce, ELL students can be hindered by the very language that is designed to teach content. Therefore, with this project, I have created a professional development workshop embedded in a website. This website and the professional development sessions in it could be used flexibly depending on teachers’ and facilitators’ needs. The professional development sessions are built on adult learning theories and the website uses principles of good web design. The project is guided by the question, How can EL educators
determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter I review a body of literature tied to the topic of explicit language lessons and equitable learning. The literature review acclimated the reader to the complexities of school language, the metalanguage necessary for focusing on those complexities and a process for organizing language instruction and learning. In this chapter I outline a professional development model that is made available by use of a website designed specifically for the PD sessions.

Project Description

After years of working as an elementary ELL educator, I’ve encountered a recurring topic of conversation among language teachers around explicit language instruction and academic language. Among ELL educators, there is a common struggle to keep lessons focused on language development while working within the context of the curriculum that the language is embedded in. My experience has shown me that my strongest language lessons are focused on specific language patterns and the meanings obtained from them. These lessons involve students in exploring texts for given features and discussing elements of the text that clarify the meaning. They are tied to a given curricular context shared in the broader classroom yet the language lesson doesn’t stray too far into the weeds of content objectives. When this happens a language lesson risks losing its necessary explicit language focus.

Creating a lesson that upholds this criteria is a significant and challenging task. To aim toward this outcome, educators need to spend a great deal of time focusing on language
functions, structures, and vocabulary used in a given content. ELL teachers also design and use a variety of scaffolds and other supports. In many districts, including my own, none of these elements are synthesized for the ELL teachers in the form of a curriculum or a consistent lesson writing process. With expectations that language lessons are taught within a given content area (a best practice in language instruction), it is not ideal to have a separate curriculum as this could potentially isolate language instruction. This would be a contrary practice to that of teaching language within a curricular context which promotes equity in learning for ELLs. Grade level teams’ Collaborative teaching goals could also be hindered by using a separate curriculum. In addition, many language teachers take pride and enjoy their ability to create sound language lessons tied to the content and to the students that only the teacher knows best. It is with this frequently discussed topic that I began to consider the question: How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs? A broadly accessible professional development framework that would provide opportunities for professional language educators to build on their knowledge about language pedagogy would be a good place to start.

Rationale

The rationale for focusing on explicit academic language instruction for upper elementary through middle school students is twofold. First, there is a shift in literacy expectations for all learners at this time. The National Reading Panel (NRP) Report outlines five principal elements of reading instruction: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (NICHD, 2000). Throughout elementary grade levels, each of these reading elements is part of instruction however the learning focus in kindergarten through third grade is word recognition.
and decoding whereas in the upper elementary grades and beyond, students are increasingly expected to read in order to learn new concepts. This entails the processing of complex technical and abstract language. Thus upper elementary grade students are at a critical place in their reading development (Chall, Jacobs, Baldwin, 1990).

The second reason for this area of professional research lies in the importance of academic language to an older elementary student. The language is a critical component in school. It is unique in its features. The complexity of academic language poses additional challenges to students as they navigate the meaning of increasingly challenging texts. ELLs demonstrate language growth when academic language elements are a focused part of language lessons (Schleppegrell, 2012).

The categories woven into this research are broad yet there are formats that have been developed to synthesize the complexities outlined. The explanation of Teaching and Learning cycles provides a framework to apply many of the best practices of language teaching that language educators are already using. Language Pathways (Lundgren, 2019) is ideal in that it works well with WIDA™ Key Language Uses and because it incorporates a portion of the lesson creation cycle to the language planning and analysis necessary for teachers.

Pathways TLC is central to my professional development plan. The objective of the project is to provide an accessible learning environment for teachers to build on the knowledge they have while enabling them to acquire new lesson writing methods. Therefore, the paradigm of cognitive constructivism is ideal in this context. A workshop model within a website will provide opportunities for ELL teachers to practice the stages of Pathways TLC and link to a variety of tools made readily available by the website. This online model was made accessible by
the creation of a website called showingthemthemap.com. With the use of the website, the facilitator has the opportunity to present in-person workshops or facilitate virtually. In-person workshops can be presented as a projection or on a digital display. For virtual facilitations, the website can be shared through a video conferencing platform such as Zoom, MS Teams, or Google Meets.

During the Professional learning workshop, teachers will analyze various texts to find common academic language features, determine patterns and structures for potential student learning activities, and plan for different manipulative and detailed reading exercises as well as co-construction writing exercises. They will also develop common language vocabulary and language discussion question banks to engage their students in content language discussions. All these concepts are applied to the Pathways TLC model.

Because this is a full process with many components, the professional learning environment allows for three sessions in which participants can continue to apply new learning to their current and authentic language topics. To do this, teachers have ample time to analyze authentic school texts that demonstrate a variety of complex language features. In working through Pathways TLC, teachers don’t only synthesize the theory of deriving meanings from language patterns but they also apply learned components to an actual lesson.

**Audience**

The Professional development project is intended for a group of fourth through eighth grade ELL teachers. The educators work in a first ring, suburban district with a large number of ELL students who are predominantly Spanish/English speaking. There is also a smaller portion of Somali, and Asian students. In addition, because the PD can be implemented virtually via a
website, there is the opportunity to bring in a broader audience of English language educators and facilitators.

Focus on this grade level range is connected to a critical shift in academic language demands and exposure that occurs at this time. Common within this grade level range is the need for students to navigate many complex texts. A bulk of student learning is processed through the mode of reading. Expectations for students to communicate what they have learned through complex oral and written output also increases at this time.

**Outline and Timeline**

The professional development plan consists of an educational website design accessing participants to three online blended learning sessions. Each session contains short video segments guiding teachers through support slides that were created on Prezi ™. Website tabs and blocks connect participants to supplemental lesson planning and teaching materials, as well as discussions and breakout sessions. Facilitators have the option of in-person or virtual presentation with this PD website. Breakout sessions are part of the blended learning of this workshop model. This allows participants to practice and apply new learning to their individual language lessons while working collaboratively with a small group or partner. Because the plan entails three sessions, a segment will include time for retrieval practice as well. This will allow participants to have further processing time. This is also critical for building knowledge that is part of the paradigm and important as a self formative assessment tool throughout the sessions. The videos are necessary for orienting the participants in discussion and questioning strategies, various texts, academic features, and interactive activities that can be applied to the Pathways model.
Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined the rationale for this research project. The goal of the project being to answer the question, *How can ELL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?* Also included in this chapter is the description of the various project components and the facilitation of them. I described the lesson writing framework that is used throughout the professional development sessions in the website as well as the background language theories that the method is built upon. In chapter 4 I will write the conclusions of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Initially the purpose of this project was to develop a language lesson workshop for English language educators of upper elementary students. While this did come to fruition, added to the project was the creation of a website in order to share the professional development in an accessible way. The professional development website I created is called givingthemthemap.com. It is designed for flexibility and accessibility of use and to build off of educators’ current knowledge. It includes new information about school text analysis in planning and teaching as well as student engagement in complex elements of school texts. In addition, explicit instructional strategies are applied to a consistent language lesson cycle called Pathways
teaching and learning cycle. Guiding this process is the question, *How can EL educators determine specific elements of school language and provide explicit language instruction for ELLs?*

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter is a reflection on experiences learned throughout the process of creating this Capstone research project. Included are the aspects of my research that proved to be significant and particularly relevant to the creation of my professional development workshop. Following this I outline new insights on how the different aspects of my research relate and the ways in which my understanding of the topic has evolved. I share what I see as possible implications of my research project and in addition share some of the limitations that were discovered as I created the project. Later I lay out possible ways this project could influence further professional development, English language writing pedagogy and the accessibility of them through educational websites. In addition suggestions for future work on the Professional Development project are discussed. Also included is the manner in which results of the project will be shared. Finally, the project is discussed in terms of how stakeholders in the field of English language will benefit from the professional development workshop and website I created.

**Research and Project Creation**

In my years as an English language teacher a common challenge has reoccurred among my ELL colleagues and the teachers that we collaborate with. Where do we draw the lines of distinction between content lessons and the language lessons that are tied to them? In addition, how do we create cohesive lessons as a team and ensure that we’re providing our ELL students with educational support to promote language development? This challenge has been particularly
true in lesson planning discussions regarding ELLs who have some proficiency and are now delving into the world of school texts. These texts, more commonly referred to as academic texts, are complex. An often misunderstanding has been that a language lesson was simply a vocabulary lesson or a grammar lesson. In the face of this challenge, I work toward carving out clear principals that are necessary for a language lesson. With this in mind, I began to learn about language theories such as Systemic functional linguistics. It is with this theory in mind that I began my research.

Much of the research that influenced my project, confirmed my belief that it was necessary to illustrate a clear picture of what a language lesson could and should entail. For me, Beverly Derewianka revealed what would be guidelines for pedagogical ideas related to language growth. Her writing made clear to me what text analysis was necessary for developing a sound language lesson. Later, I learned that it was Halliday who introduced the theory of language called Systemic Functional Linguistics. This is the theory that influenced much of my other research. The essence of it being that Language is a system of meaning. SFL does not propose teaching strict grammar rules and the memorization of them but that specific patterns in language can provide meaning.

It was in reading David Rose that I discovered the critical role of metalanguage or thinking about and talking about language. The notion of a shared vocabulary for students to derive meaning from specific language patterns found in a text was one of the pieces that tied the language theory to the instruction. Additionally, both Rose and Derewianka introduced me to genre pedagogy. The idea that there are unique structures that are common in different school text types. It was through Cynthia Lundgren’s writing that I saw how genre pedagogy related to
SFL theory adheres to the concept that all language is derived from culture and the genres commonly used in school each has its own typical patterns, structures and words. It was also Lundgren’s Pathways Teaching and Learning Cycle that gave me a framework to apply my learning about functional language in order to execute the theories in my lessons.

All of these theories and methods provided me with information to develop language lessons that were clearly tied to language while drawing from content units. The more concrete my view of language grew, the more clearly I could teach it to my ELLs and discuss it with colleagues on my teaching teams. Because of this experience, I initially anticipated creating a curriculum for ELLs that would warrant a project.

As my research evolved, so too did my idea for a project. It became clear to me that my topic was much broader than I had previously determined. I also realized that the topics of genre pedagogy and the method of Pathways teaching and learning cycle were highly adaptable. This notion sparked my curiosity about how colleagues may want to apply their own knowledge and lessons to the theories. It was with this thinking that I eventually chose to create a professional development framework for ELL teachers. Paired with this change in thinking was a new omnipresence of remote teaching and learning due to the COVID 19 pandemic. In this context, I determined an online training would be beneficial. My plan evolved in a second way when I determined that there were many tools and components I had put into the PD. With this in mind, I chose to create a website that would make my professional development workshop widely accessible.

Providing an Professional learning opportunity connected to a website allows fellow language educators to engage in new ideas about how language lessons can be developed and
taught. Participants can navigate the website to access breakout session prompts, lesson planning and teaching tools. By clicking on each video recorded lesson embedded in the website, teachers can work at their own pace, and on their own time to gain new learning about language pedagogy. If a facilitator chooses to, they can also use the Professional development website in-person as well.

Because this is still an adult professional learning environment, it is designed to build off of the experiences of the participants. Much of the work outlined in this PD should feel somewhat familiar to educators in that it mirrors a gradual release of responsibility common in lesson writing today.

The training embedded in this website provides a large amount of concrete ideas for teachers to apply in their lessons, yet there is ample room to adapt, and create new materials when working through the teaching and learning cycle that’s illustrated in the training. The other consideration was the need to engage participants in breakout room discussions and recall reviews. In this way adult learners can share insights and questions with one another.

My hope is that English language teachers would utilize my website to access this professional development session. The goal is a tool that is flexible, relevant to the audience and a resource for facilitating adult learning about language pedagogy. Components of the PD that can be obtained on the website could provide participants with a new perspective on talking about and engaging students in language. With this model they can also link to many teaching and learning tools for language analysis necessary for planning and teaching. In addition, I hope that educators would have some concrete examples for applying engaging language learning activities to the Pathways TLC.
The intention for this research and project has evolved in the time that I’ve worked on it. First, the topic of systemic functional linguistics and explicit language lessons became a much broader subject than I had originally thought. Therefore deciding which aspects would best apply to my final goal was difficult. This was true in writing both the research portion and the project. When it came time to synthesizing all of my research in the PD a great deal of research needed to be intentionally left out. In addition to discovering limitations in creating the project, I realize some EL educators may be committed to their own specific language lessons which might not allow for the flexibility of working with genre pedagogy and pathways.

Ironically, the very limitations that were encountered in writing this may give cause to developing more Professional development sessions. These sessions could be connected to the broader topic by way of Modules. Educators could work through various models in workshop fashion through the course of a school year or summer workshop. In this version, teachers could potentially work on a language scope and sequence tied to all of the content units that their lessons are built on. Text selection and analysis, creation of manipulatives and anchor charts tied to the lessons developed through the Pathways model would all be part of the workshops. There is ample space to continue building off of the content and framework that I put into place.

As the website and PD stands today, the learning opportunity is obtainable for English language educators in my district who are teaching in the upper elementary grades. It could be shared during our district’s various PD opportunities in the 20-21 school year. Because many of the ELL educators are from different buildings, they are all working within different models however the PD lends itself to this level of variety. Cohesiveness in language lesson writing is one of the ways our district team of ELL educators could grow from a PD and website such as
this. In addition, the more explicit our language lessons are, as the PD suggests they could be, the more heightened our ELLs’ awareness of language and content. In working to incorporate these methods over the past three years I have seen significant growth. For example the 2019 ELL proficiency growth for 4th and 5th grades was 5-10% higher than the average growth of like peers in the state of Minnesota. According to the 2020 WIDA ACCESS preliminary scores at the time of this writing, 20+ students in fourth and fifth grades excited the ELL program due to our state’s exit criteria.

This is a significantly higher number compared to the previous year where anywhere from 8 to 10 students typically exit from ELL services in our Dual language school. I’m hopeful that by bringing concrete methods for writing explicit language lessons in authentic contexts, we can continue to empower our ELLs to move through school successfully. I believe that clarifying and bringing meaning to school language is one way we can provide educational equity to our diverse language learners.

References


Derewianka, University of Wollongong A Curriculum cycle for learning genres


