Teacher Created Materials

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Research–Based Curriculum

Language Power

Language Development

Language is the means by which we communicate with one another in different contexts and for many purposes. As students interact with their environment (family, friends, and community), they are exposed to rich and complex systems of language. They develop the ability to comprehend (listen), speak, read, and write in a language. These initial experiences with language set the foundation for learning the complexities of academic language in school. This includes learning a wide range of new words, learning new ways of sharing their thinking, learning through oral and written forms, and understanding how language is crafted and used for a given academic purpose.

School provides both formal and ongoing informal opportunities to develop language. Through language arts instruction, students are given explicit instruction in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They learn about phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse. These elements of a language work together as students become fluent users of the language. In addition, students have the opportunity to apply what they have learned across the curriculum and continue to acquire content-specific language and general academic language.

Developing a Second Language

Language development for English learners includes both conversational fluency and academic language. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is the language students need to engage in social conversations. For English learners, this is often the level of proficiency reached at a speech-emergent level of second-language acquisition. Students sound fluent in social conversations, they can understand directions, verbally express their thinking at basic levels of comprehension, and write for a variety of purposes.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), on the other hand, is the level of language development at which students are able to understand concrete and abstract language and express their thinking across the curriculum. It is the language level students need to comprehend and use in order to achieve academic success (Cummins 1980).

While English dominant students may come to school with strong conversational fluency, they too will need to continue to build their academic English. All students are language learners. And though English may not be the primary language of English learners, they too come to school rich with language experiences. They have learned to communicate with their families, friends, and community and many have high levels of conversational fluency in their primary language.

English learners' prior experiences with language can prepare them for the difficult task of learning a second language. They can call upon the knowledge they have acquired in their primary language to understand and develop a second language. Research consistently shows that there is a strong transfer between a student's primary language and the development of second language literacy (Goldenberg 2010). The challenge for English learners is often the speed at which they are expected to learn a second language coupled with learning content and academic English (Mora-Flores 2011). While continuing to develop conversational fluency, they need support in understanding how English is crafted across the curriculum.

Academic Language

Academic language impacts student achievement across the curriculum (Olsen 2010). Students need to understand the language of the discipline to access information and, in turn, share their learning in oral and written forms. Academic language has been defined as follows:

- the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skill. (Chamot and O'Malley 1994)
- the logical, connected discourse that is much more precise in reference than ordinary spoken language (SCOE 2004)
- a degree of expertise, or an ability to use and understand the classroom-specific language required for academics (Cummins 2006)
- word knowledge that makes it possible for students to engage with, produce, and talk about texts that are valued in school (Flynt and Brozo 2008)
- the entire range of language used in academic settings (Echeverria, Short, and Vogt 2010)

Referencing the work of Dutro and Moran (2003), teachers can begin to think about the building blocks of academic language as the functions, forms, and vocabulary for accessing, thinking, writing, and talking about content. These building blocks can help teachers scaffold language to support content area instruction and learning.

> What is critical to acknowledge is that language is key in all academic learning processes. Students must understand how educators think, talk, and present content. Instruction should support the relationship between content instruction and language development.

Academic Language (cont.)

Language Functions and Forms

Language functions can be defined as the purpose for using language. The forms of language are the structures of language used to fulfill a function. How do they work together? A social studies teacher may ask students to defend their opinions on the need for three branches of government. As students share their thinking, they will use the language function of agreeing and disagreeing. This same language function may be seen across a variety of content areas and in various forms.

Functions and forms of language help students express their thinking and increase comprehension. The chart below shows how the language function of agreeing and disagreeing can be used in various forms across content areas.

General Academic vs. Specialized Content Vocabulary

In addition to functions and forms, academic language also includes vocabulary. Baumann and Graves (2010) explain the need for students to become familiar with both general academic and specialized content vocabulary. General academic vocabulary includes words that are valuable for academic purposes and have high utility across the curriculum. For example, when engaged in a mock debate, students need to use academic vocabulary, including the words opposition, agreement, and argument. These words are not specific to any one discipline and can be used across the curriculum to express academic thinking. General academic vocabulary includes words we want students to retain and have access to when speaking and writing in school and for career and college readiness.

Specialized content vocabulary is domain specific, is often low frequency, and supports students' access to the curriculum (Baumann and Graves 2010). Specialized content vocabulary is key for comprehension. Students need to understand the words they will be asked to hear and read as part of content instruction. The importance of focusing on content vocabulary is for students to understand content. Teachers frontload key vocabulary at the beginning of a lesson to support student comprehension of the text. These key words are critical to the overall theme or unit of study and will support students in acquiring content knowledge.

Content Area	Language Forms for Function of Agreeing/Disagreeing
Reading	I understand the character's motives, but I feel that most people in that position would react differently.
Math	On the other hand, I can see why someone might prefer to measure in centimeters rather than inches.
Social Studies	True, but what about the viewpoint of the other group involved?
Science	I agree with the part about the high cost of alternative energy, but I believe the monetary cost is necessary to preserve Earth's nonrenewable resources.

Language Proficiency Levels

The rate and progression of language development for English language learners varies greatly. However, researchers have been able to identify a common sequence of development as students progress from simple language production to more complex and diversified ways of communicating. This progression is often referred to as English language development or proficiency levels.

Researchers and school districts have defined these levels using diverse scales. Some identify five or more levels of development while others focus on three distinct stages.

The Language Power program is organized in three language proficiency levels: Level A, Level B, and Level C. Each proficiency level includes common listening, speaking, reading, and writing behaviors used to create language-appropriate lessons to support ongoing language development. Though the use of three levels may seem overly simplified, each level differentiates for a range of abilities, as all language learners are unique.

The chart on the following page details the common language expectations for English language learners for Level A, Level B, and Level C proficiency levels.
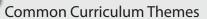
Language Proficiency Levels (cont.)

Proficiency Level	Common Language Expectations

Level A	Listen attentively and focus on comprehending oral and written language
	Have an emerging receptive vocabulary (words they understand)
	Repeat what is heard (parroting)
	Use simple sentences and stock expressions to express needs, wants, and thoughts
	Participate using key words or phrases
	Answer who, what, when, and where questions
	Respond by:
	  • using one-word responses (naming, labeling)
	  • drawing
	  • writing in a primary language (when applicable)
	  • creating
	  • copying
	  • pointing
	  • circling
	  • matching
	  • underlining

Level B	Continue to develop a receptive vocabulary and use an active, expressive vocabulary
	Focus on comprehension of oral and written language (across genres)
	Use present-tense verbs
	Achieve conversational proficiency
	Express opinions
	Share thinking orally and in writing
	Ask clarifying questions
	Demonstrate learning by:
	  • writing or journaling
	  • drawing
	  • grouping and labeling
	  • selecting
	  • predicting
	  • narrating
	  • describing
	  • explaining
	  • summarizing
	  • synthesizing

Level C	Achieve strong command of English syntax in oral and written language with few errors Expand vocabulary to include general academic and specialized content vocabulary Demonstrate critical and creative thinking in listening, speaking, reading, and writing Express abstract thinking orally and in writing Read a wide variety of text across the content areas Write in a variety of forms and genres Debate or defend thinking Role play

Effective Practices for Language Development

Teaching Thematically

English learners benefit from a thematic approach to learning (Haas 2000). When students can connect learning to a larger context, it makes the information more meaningful (Haas 2000). Students are able to make connections and see how learning across the curriculum is interrelated. In language, a thematic approach allows English learners to be exposed to the content and academic language connected to the theme.

More exposure to language and varied opportunities to use it supports language development. Through a thematic approach to learning language and content, students have more opportunities to develop academic language. English learners need opportunities to use academic language in a variety of contexts to support their language fluency.

With a thematic approach, English learners have an opportunity to use academic language across the curriculum, and experience the varied contexts in which to use language appropriately. They are asked to use language for similar academic functions, such as description, explanation, compare and contrast, cause and effect, and analysis as they learn content from different disciplines. This gives English learners the chance to use the forms of language necessary to carry out the given task (function). This further provides opportunities for students to use general academic vocabulary to share their learning while developing new content-specific vocabulary, as well. Thematic instruction is an authentic approach to learning as it relates to the real world.

Common Curriculum Themes

Language Power provides students with a 30-piece, high-interest, level-appropriate text set, all organized around common curriculum themes. Each book and text card was carefully selected to provide a natural progression in language and learning opportunities.

Frontloading and Building Background

To better prepare students for academic learning, it is helpful to frontload key vocabulary or concepts by generating and building prior knowledge (Girard and Spycher 2010). In some cases, the concepts or content may seem so new to students that the teacher may want to build student background knowledge. This can include sharing some related content with students to help them make relevant and meaningful connections to better comprehend the new information.

Building Background Knowledge and Vocabulary

Language Power lessons include a specific section for building background knowledge and vocabulary. This section is strategically placed before reading to help students make language and learning relevant and meaningful throughout the lesson.

Effective Practices for Language Development (cont.)

Four Language Domains

Language development is a complex process—one that requires students to develop language in four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. And for students to become proficient in a language, these skills cannot be discreetly learned; the skills must be tightly integrated in a complex web of receptive (listening and reading) and expressive language (speaking and writing).

Listening

Through the act of listening, students work to understand and interpret what is heard, whether in a social conversation or an academic setting. In these settings, students observe body language and other clues that add context to the language. For example, when a teacher explains the life cycle of a plant, he or she may gesture to a graphic representation, which provides context for students to understand the language. Students need many opportunities, rich with verbal and nonverbal language, to learn and practice these active listening skills.

Speaking

As language continues to develop, students begin to speak in social and academic settings. In the academic context, students must learn to accurately and successfully use the vocabulary and language structures appropriate for all content areas. To achieve this goal, students need consistent opportunities to experiment with new language in a nurturing environment and in a wide variety of formats.

Reading

In order for students to become fluent readers, they must move beyond decoding to understand and interpret a range of texts. With this goal in mind, students need access to texts and purposeful instruction on an assortment of topics and genres across all contents areas. Instructional texts should offer opportunities for students to interact with a wide variety of language structures. And instructional sequences should provide guided practice of reading strategies and skills.

Writing

Writing skills must be developed for diverse purposes (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to entertain), for a variety of audiences (e.g., friends, a classroom of peers, a college application), and a range of forms (e.g., business letter, personal email, essay). The skills and language required of students depend on the identified purpose, audience, and form. Students need thoughtful support in order to intertwine these elements to become proficient writers.

Supporting the Four Language Domains

Language Power addresses all four language domains.
- listening and speaking opportunities in every lesson (labeled Talk Time), including structured support for speaking through sentence frames
- interaction with texts on a range of topics representing a variety of genres and content areas
- regular opportunities to write about learning

Effective Practices for Language Development (cont.)

Language Input and Output

Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell (1983) introduced the concept of comprehensible input as a component of language acquisition. They argue that for language to be learned, the message must be understood. Therefore, English learners need access to language and content through strategies that are:

- highly contextualized—Contextual cues, such as facial expressions and body language, add meaning to language and support comprehension.
- scaffolded—Teachers scaffold language by using vocabulary and language structures that students can access. A teacher can use shorter sentences with simpler syntax, progressing to more complicated language structures as students' language proficiency develops.
- multimodal—Students can better comprehend input through multiple modalities, such as peer discussion, visuals, and hands-on activities.

Language input is an active process for English learners. Though teachers may not always see or hear what students have acquired, there is a great deal of thinking, negotiating, and organizing that takes place when students acquire language.

The comprehensible output (CO) hypothesis states that language is developed when we attempt to communicate but fail and have to try again. Through trial, error, and feedback, students arrive at the correct form of language, their conversational partners understand them, and language output is achieved (Swain 1985). As students engage in language input, they prepare for comprehensible output. Comprehensible output is the process by which English learners share their thinking and learning. But how can students achieve comprehensible output?

Traditional vocabulary instruction provides students with receptive language acquisition opportunities, such as listening and reading (Mora-Flores 2011). Unfortunately, many students do not have enough expressive language acquisition opportunities, such as writing and speaking. As a result, these students have a higher receptive vocabulary than expressive vocabulary, and their language skills are weaker.

Providing ample opportunities for thoughtful dialogue and discussions with peers is a critical part of English language development (Mora-Flores 2011). Partners or groups may ask for clarification or offer comprehensible language input to support new attempts at output. The feedback process powerfully demonstrates the real purpose of language: communication. Students must communicate their learning across the curriculum orally and in writing, and therefore, need explicit instruction on how to do so fluently and successfully.

Making Input and Output Comprehensible

Language Power facilitates comprehensible input by giving students multiple opportunities to see, hear, and interact with vocabulary and language, and through the use of graphic organizers in the Student Guided Practice Book.

Language Power facilitates comprehensible output by giving students opportunities to use language through speaking and writing activities, supported by sentence frames and opportunities for immediate feedback.

Effective Practices for Language Development (cont.)

Gradual Release of Responsibility

English learners rely on varied levels and types of support, or scaffolding, for language and academic development. This process is referred to as the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Gallagher and Pearson 1983). Teacher support begins as highly structured and moves toward a gradual release of responsibility, helping students become independent learners.

At the initial stages of language development, English learners rely on the modeling of others, such as teachers, peers, parents, siblings, texts, and multimedia. Teachers can provide explicit language instruction while giving students opportunities to apply language in purposeful ways. Scaffolding strategies, such as demonstrations and think-alouds, provide students access to content and language. Hands-on experiences and teaching through multiple modalities further support learning.

As students develop higher levels of academic language and learn more content, they need less support to access the curriculum. This does not mean that the scaffolds are taken away completely. As students encounter more complex, content-specific language, and demanding content instruction, they still require support. Teachers can continue to employ strategies for making content comprehensible by carefully designing scaffolds for instruction to help students achieve proficiency of more rigorous language demands.

Scaffolding Literacy

Margaret Mooney (1996) developed a framework for supporting diverse learners that gives students opportunities to be read to, with, and by themselves. When reading to students, teachers provide support through modeling and explicit instruction. Teachers demonstrate how language and literacy work—what it looks and sounds like to read and make meaning from text. "I Do" experiences show students how to use and develop listening skills and find new ways of speaking, reading, and writing as they watch, listen, and learn.

Heavy scaffolding during the early stages of learning prepares students to work alongside the teacher in what Mooney calls "with" experiences. Teachers provide high levels of support and invite students to participate through all four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. "We Do" experiences provide students with ongoing teacher support while helping them take risks and try out the new learning at hand. Teachers carefully guide students while gradually giving students more responsibility during the lesson.

These two stages, "I Do" and "We Do," provide the necessary learning opportunities for students to then use their literacy and language skills by themselves in the next stage of the lesson. "You Do" experiences allow students to independently demonstrate their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Teachers informally assess and support students based on individual needs.

Gradual Release of Responsibility as a Model of Instruction

Language Power provides students with appropriate support to ensure the successful transfer of language skills from guided practice to independent application. Each lesson follows the I Do, We Do, You Do model with the overall goal of promoting language proficiency.

Effective Practices for Language Development (cont.)

Differentiation

Differentiating curriculum can be challenging. The first key to understanding differentiation is listening to one's instinct and knowing one's students. Teachers then look for the kinds of support students need to learn specific concepts. They seek new ways to present information, new manipulatives that make sense, and new ways of providing adequate support. As student abilities grow, teachers reduce the amount or type of support they give so that students continue to grow, instead of using the support as a crutch. Differentiation is not about making the work easy for students. Instead, it is about challenging all students appropriately.

How Do Teachers Differentiate?

Teachers can provide an enriched learning environment for all students through carefully structured, differentiated units of study. What follows are some ways that teachers can support students through differentiating the content, process, and product:

- Content: Teachers can differentiate content (what students learn) by varying instructional techniques and materials. This includes varying the complexity of assignments, asking leveled questions, offering leveled texts, assigning tiered graphic organizers, and using different resources and materials that cover the same concepts but vary in levels of difficulty and abstraction.

- Process: Teachers can differentiate the process (how students learn) by varying the grouping techniques and, at times, offering self-paced assignments. Depending on their needs, students can work individually, with partners, in groups, or with the teacher to gain the knowledge they need.

- Product: Teachers can differentiate product (what students produce to show what they have learned) by offering choices or tiering assigned products. This includes giving students a choice of writing topics or formats, such as drawing and labeling for beginner students or writing complex essays for advanced students.

 Differentiation Options

Language Power is differentiated by design (via grade spans and language proficiency levels). Opportunities for differentiation are in each lesson.

- a range of reading levels within each text set

- activities in the Student Guided Practice Book, which can be completed with teacher support, in pairs, or independently

- full-color books with photos and illustrations to support visual learners

- graphic organizers to provide comprehensible input

- sentence frames to scaffold the use of appropriately complex language structures

- instructional activities that address multiple learning modalities

- audio support via the Audio CD

- flexible writing activities

- activities to support fluency

- Family Literacy Activities to enhance language development in the home

Supporting Literacy at Home

Literacy development begins in the home and continues at home through ongoing opportunities for students to use, comprehend, read, and write language. All students have language experiences at home. What differs is the alignment of those experiences with the traditional literacy skills taught and developed in school. To help families of English learners, educators need to share those practices that can be used at home to support students' traditional literacy development in school.

To start, all families should be encouraged to talk with their children. The role of oral language in literacy development is strong. Through conversation, students learn vocabulary, syntax, phonology, oral discourse, and build oral language fluency. As students begin to develop their literacy skills in school, they need regular opportunities to apply them at home. More specifically, English learners need opportunities to practice English language and literacy skills beyond school to develop a higher level of fluency. English learners need access to materials, and parents need ideas for how to use materials effectively with their children. These extended learning opportunities enhance language development and promote higher levels of literacy.

Home Language Support

The Language Power program empowers families to support their child's language development through Family Literacy Activities for each lesson and Parent Tip Cards that offer useful tips and engaging activities to build parents' capacity to support literacy and language learning in the home. To facilitate ongoing reading practice, the Digital Resource CD includes digital versions of each lesson's books or text cards, which can be printed and replicated for students to take home, as well as Spanish and English versions of the Family Literacy Activities.

Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of instruction and should be conducted regularly. "Evaluating student progress is important because it enables the teacher to discover each student's strengths and weaknesses, to plan instruction accordingly, to communicate student progress to parents, and to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies" (Burns, Roe, and Ross 1999).

Formative Assessments

Teachers use formative assessments to help them drive their instruction to meet students' needs (Honig, Diamon, Gutlohn, and Mahler 2000). Formative assessment is usually an ongoing process.

Progress-Monitoring Assessments

Progress-monitoring assessments can be administered both formally and informally. Formal assessment methods, such as chapter and unit tests, provide teachers with information needed to make administrative decisions about grouping, promoting, and placing students, in addition to identifying any accommodations needed (Airasian 2005). Informal assessment methods, such as informal observations, classroom participation, activity sheets, and student responses (Airasian 2005), allow teachers to pinpoint each student's specific strengths, weaknesses, and misconceptions and to create a more complete and balanced picture of each student's needs. These methods can also help teachers form a detailed picture of the instructional needs of the class as a whole to maximize instructional time.

Summative Assessments

The purpose of summative assessment is "to judge the success of a process at its completion" (Airasian 2005). It provides students the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of new learning, which in turn helps guide instructional planning. This type of assessment shows growth over time and helps set instructional goals to address students' needs. It guides the strategies or steps students need to continue along their academic or instructional path.

Assessment Options

Formative Assessment:

- a Pretest that can help provide guidance for placement within the program

Progress-Monitoring:

- a Progress Check in each lesson (with log sheets for individual students and individual lessons)
- a performance-based Theme Assessment and rubric at the conclusion of each theme
- Student Guided Practice Book activity pages
- Talk Time opportunities within each lesson
- a Fluency Rubric that can be used with each text

Summative Assessment:

- a Posttest that can serve as a measure of student progress at the completion of a kit level

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