Linking Academic English Mastery to the Demands of Integrated English Language Development

Presented by Ivannia Soto, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Education

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Institute for Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Teaching
In the center of the graphic are the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy and the CA ELD Standards, which define year-end expectations for student knowledge and abilities and guide instructional planning and observation of student progress. The CA ELD Standards also identify proficiency level expectations (Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging) and ensure that EL students have full access to the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy and other content standards.

Circling the standards are the key themes of the standards: meaning making, language development, effective expression, content knowledge, and foundational skills. These themes highlight the interconnections among the strands of CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language) and the parts of the CA ELD Standards (interacting in meaningful ways, learning about how English works, and using foundational skills). The themes are organizing components for the grade level discussions (chapters 3-7).

The white field represents the context in which instruction occurs. This framework asserts that the context for learning should be integrated, motivating, engaging, respectful, and intellectually challenging.

The outer ring identifies the overarching goals of ELA/literacy and ELD instruction. By the time California’s students complete high school, they have developed the readiness for college, career, and civic life; attained the capacities of literate individuals; become broadly literate; and acquired the skills for living and learning in the 21st century.
Meaning Making

Meaning making is at the heart of ELA/Literacy and ELD instruction. Meaning making must be the central purpose for interacting with text, producing text, participating in discussion, giving presentations, and engaging in research. Meaning making includes literal comprehension but is not confined to it at any grade or with any student. Inference making and critical reading are given substantial and explicit attention in every discipline.

Language Development

Language development, especially in the areas of vocabulary, academic language, syntax, and text structure is crucial for learning. It is the medium of literacy and learning; it is with and through language that students learn, think, and express. The strands of the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy—reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language—all have language at the core, as do the parts of the CA ELD Standards, interacting in meaningful ways, learning about how English works, and using foundational literacy skills. Growth in meaning making, effective expression, content knowledge, and foundational skills depends on students increasing proficiency and sophistication in language.

Effective Expression

Reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language are tools for effective communication across the disciplines. The CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy make this clear by including standards for both literature and informational text in kindergarten through grade five and grades six through twelve and by including standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects in grades six through twelve. Students express their understandings and thinking in a variety of ways—through writing, speaking, digital media, visual displays, movement, and more. These expressions are both the products of students’ learning and the ways in which they learn. The reciprocal nature of reading, writing, speaking, and listening is such that each is constantly informed by the others.

Content Knowledge

Content knowledge is built as students become proficient readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. Providing a place for content instruction within the school schedule is critical. In the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy students learn that texts are structured differently in different disciplines, which words have different meanings depending on the topics, and that sentences may be patterned in ways unique to particular fields. Content knowledge is also built by reading a wide range of texts both in school and independently as well as providing students opportunities to engage in inquiry-and project-based learning to read and hear content texts within real world contexts.

Foundational Skills

Acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy—print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency—is crucial for literacy achievement. For students to independently learn with and enjoy text and express themselves through written language they must develop facility with the alphabetic code. Students acquire foundational skills through excellent systematic instruction and ample opportunities to practice.
Transitional kindergarteners listen to, enjoy, and discuss the book, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, several times over the course of a week. Their teacher, Mrs. Haddad, guides children’s identification of key story details using its narrative structure, recording the characters, settings, and events of the plot on a large chart. With support, children use 12” x 18” construction paper to construct individual books. Drawing or using cut paper, each child designs a cover page, a page with a home in the forest, one with three bowls, one with three chairs, and one with three beds. Paper cut-outs of Goldilocks and the bears are given to the children to be used as props. The children will move them through the pages of their books, which serve as scaffolds, to retell the story to one another.

Mrs. Haddad thoughtfully selected the book for the retelling activity because there are objects, such as bowls, chairs, and beds, that can serve as memory triggers for story events and for particular language usage, dialogue, and other phrases used repeatedly throughout the story: “This porridge is too hot! This porridge is too cold! This porridge is just right.” Before they use their books to retell the story, and as the other children are engaged in collaborative tasks at literacy stations, Mrs. Haddad spends extra time with her EL children who are at the Emerging level of English language proficiency. Using a book she’s constructed, which is similar to the one the children will use, she retells the story with the children and has them join her in saying the dialogue and phrases. She also prompts the children to use transition terms, such as *then* and *next* as well as past tense verbs (Baby Bear *said*). She intentionally models enthusiasm and intonation, and she invites the children to do the same. This way, the EL children will have the language and confidence they need to participate in the retelling of the story with other children.

The children have multiple opportunities to retell the story using their books with different partners. Mrs. Haddad offers to video record those who wish to be recorded so that the story may be viewed on a class computer during independent choice time. Eventually, the books are taken home so that children may tell the story to their families.

**CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy:** RL.K.1; RL.K.2; RL.K.3; W.K.3; SL.K.1; SL.K.2; L.K.6

**CA ELD Standards:** ELD.PI.K.12a, ELD.PII.K.1, 2, 3b

**California Preschool Learning Foundations (60 months):**

Listening and Speaking 1.4: Use language to construct extended narratives that are real or fictional.

Reading 4.1: Demonstrate knowledge of details in a familiar story, including characters, events, and ordering of events through answering questions (particularly summarizing, predicting, and inferences), retelling, reenacting, or creating artwork.
In science, Mr. Chen is teaching his students about interdependent relationships in ecosystems. The class has planted different kinds of plants in the school garden and are now determining which kinds of insects are beneficial or detrimental to the plants and why, including the role of pollinating insects. The children engage in collaborative discussions about the informational texts they read on the topic, the multimedia they view, and what they observe in the garden and record in their science journals.

During designated ELD, Mr. Chen works with his EL students at the Bridging level of English language proficiency. He facilitates a discussion about the language used in the science informational texts the class is reading and the language needed to engage in science tasks, such as observing insects in the garden and then discussing the observations or recording them in writing. This language includes domain-specific vocabulary (e.g., beneficial insects, pollinators, pests), general academic vocabulary (e.g., devour, gather), and adverbials, such as prepositional phrases (e.g. with its proboscis, underneath the leaf, on the stem). He highlights some of the language patterns in the informational texts students are reading (e.g., most aphids, some aphids, many aphids), as well as some complex sentences with long noun phrases that may be unfamiliar to students (e.g., As they feed in dense groups on the stems of plants, aphids transmit diseases. Whereas the caterpillars of most butterflies are harmless, moth caterpillars cause an enormous amount of damage.). He guides the students to “unpack” the meanings in these phrases and sentences through lively discussions.

Mr. Chen strategically selects the language from the texts that he will focus on in instruction, and he also points out to students that this language is a model for students to draw upon when they write about or discuss the science content. He structures opportunities for the students to practice using the new language in collaborative conversations and in writing. For example, he asks them to provide rich oral descriptions of the characteristics and behavior of the caterpillars and butterflies they have been observing, using their science journals and books they have at their tables. To support their descriptions, he asks them to draw a detailed picture of one insect and then shows them a chart where he has written the words structure in one column and functions in another. The class briefly generates some ways to describe the physical structures of insects (e.g., head, thorax, abdomen) and functions (to sense and eat….to move and fly….to hold organs to survive or reproduce) of these structures. He writes these brainstormed phrases and words on a chart for students to use as they label and discuss their drawings.

He asks the students to engage in a partner discussion to first describe the characteristic structures and function for behavior of the insects and then to discuss how the insects are beneficial or detrimental to the plants and why, using evidence from their science journals. He prompts them to use a chart with reminders for effectively contributing to conversations (e.g., take turns, ask good questions, give good feedback, add important information, build on what your partner says). Following their collaborative conversations, Mr. Chen asks the students to work together to write a concise explanation that captures their discussion and to use precise language (by expanding their ideas with adjectives or prepositional phrases and structuring their sentences by combining ideas, for example). He asks them to
first discuss with their partners what they will write, and he tells them that they must both write and write
the same thing. This requires the students to negotiate and justify their ideas, which, Mr. Chen observes,
supports them to clarify their thinking.

When he reviews the students’ writing, he uses a guide based on the CA ELD Standards and
tailored to the writing goals of this unit of study, in order to gain a better understanding of which language
resources students are “taking up” and feeling confident about using and which language resources he
needs to focus on more intensively.

| Primary CA ELD Standards addressed in Designated ELD: | ELD.2.1, 4, 6, 10, 12; ELD.PII.2.3-7 |
| CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: | SL.2.1, L.2.6; W.2.2, 4 |
| Related Next Generation Science Standards: | 2-LS2-2A (Interdependent relationships in ecosystems) |
Mr. Duarte's fourth-grade students have engaged in a variety of experiences to learn about the California Gold Rush. They read from their social studies text and other print materials, conducted research on the Internet and presented their findings, wrote scripts and dramatically enacted historic events for families and other students, participated in a simulation in which they assumed the roles of the diverse individuals who populated the region in the mid-1800's, and engaged in numerous whole-group and small-group discussions about the times and the significance of the Gold Rush in California's history. The focus of their study is for students to consider the following: How did the discovery of Gold change California? In particular, students are encouraged to consider the Gold Rush’s impact on the state’s size and diversity of population, economic growth, and regional environments.

Today, Mr. Duarte engages the students in an activity in which they explain and summarize their learning through the use of a strategy called "Content Links." He provides each student with an 8.5 x 11" piece of paper on which a term they had studied, encountered in their reading, and used in their writing over the past several weeks is printed. The words include both general academic and domain-specific terms, such as hardship, technique, hazard, profitable, settlement, forty-niner, prospector, squatter, pay dirt, claim jumping, bedrock, and boom town, among others. He distributes the word cards to the students and asks them to think about the word they are holding. What does it mean? How does it relate to the impact of the Gold Rush on California’s economy, population, and/or environment? If necessary

To support his EL students, most of whom are at the late Emerging and early Expanding level of English language proficiency, and other students, Mr. Duarte encourages the class to take a quick look at their notes and other textual resources for their terms in the context of unit of study. Then, Mr. Duarte asks the students to stand up, wander around the classroom, and explain their word and its relevance to the study of the Gold Rush to several classmates, one at a time. This requires the students to articulate their understandings repeatedly, which they likely refine with successive partners, and they hear explanations of several other related terms from the unit of study. In addition, Mr. Duarte anticipates that hearing the related terms will also help the students to expand their understanding about their own terms and that they will add the new terms to their explanations as they move from one partner to another.

The students are then directed to find a classmate whose word connects or links to theirs in some way. For example, the words might be synonyms or antonyms, one might be an example of the other, or both might be examples of some higher-order concept. The goal is for the students to identify some way to connect their word with a classmate's word. When all of the students find a link, they stand with their partner around the perimeter of the classroom. He then provides the students with a few moments to decide how they will articulate to the rest of the class how their terms relate. To support his EL students at the Emerging level of English language proficiency and any other student who may need this type of support, he provides an open sentence frame (Our terms are...
related because ___.). He intentionally uses the words “connect,” “link,” and “related” to provide a model of multiple ways of expressing the same idea.

Mr. Duarte invites the students to share their words, the word meanings, and the reason for the link with the whole group. David and Susanna, who hold the terms pay dirt and profitable, volunteer to start. They explain the meanings of their words in the context of the subject matter and state that they formed a link because both terms convey a positive outcome for the miners and that when a miner hits pay dirt it means he will probably have a good profit. Finally, the students discuss how these terms relate to their larger study on the impact of the Gold Rush on California.

As pairs of students share with the whole group their word meanings and the reason for their connections, Mr. Duarte listens carefully, asks a few clarifying questions, and encourages elaborated explanations. He invites others to listen carefully and build on the comments of each pair. After all pairs have shared their explanations with the group, Mr. Duarte inquires whether any student saw another word among all the words that might be a good link for their word. Two students enthusiastically comment that they could have easily paired with two or three others in the room and they tell why. Mr. Duarte then invites the students to "break their current links" and find a new partner. Students again move around the classroom, talking about their words, and articulating connections to the concepts represented by the other words. Mr. Duarte happily observes that through this activity students not only review terms from the unit but also deepen their understandings of the overall significance of such a dramatic and far-reaching event.

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: SL.4.1; L.4.6; RI.4.4

CA ELD Standards: ELD.PI.4.1, 11a, 12a; ELD.PII.4.5.

Related CA History-Social Science Content Standards:

4.3 3: Analyze the effects of the Gold Rush on settlements, daily life, politics, and the physical environment (e.g., using biographies of John Sutter, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Louise Clapp).

4.4.2: Explain how the Gold Rush transformed the economy of California, including the types of products produced and consumed, changes in towns (e.g., Sacramento, San Francisco), and economic conflicts between diverse groups of people.

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills: Historical Interpretation 1. Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events.
In English language arts, students in grade six summarize and analyze stories in a variety of ways (e.g., during a teacher-led lesson, during writers’ workshop, with a peer). During the analysis, students focus on the overall structure of stories, how elements such as setting and plot interact, the development and point of view of the characters, and the theme or central idea.

During designated ELD time, teachers continue to promote summary and analysis of stories by expanding the pool of language resources their English learners can choose to draw upon during their oral discussions or written analyses. Teachers show their students how in the different stages of stories (e.g., exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution), authors use different linking words or transitional phrases to lead the reader through the story. They explain to their students how these language resources are also useful for retelling stories, writing original stories, and for writing analyses of stories (literary criticism). For example, in the exposition, words and phrases to orient the reader to the characters and setting are useful (e.g., in a faraway land, one day in late summer, on the vast plains). In the climax and rising action stages, words and phrases for introducing conflicts or plot twists are useful (e.g., unexpectedly, out of the blue, all of a sudden). In the falling action and resolution stages, words and phrases for resolving the conflicts and tying everything up neatly are useful (e.g., consequently, ultimately). Teachers support their students to understand how these words and phrases create cohesive texts by providing opportunities for them to find examples in texts and by encouraging them to use the language resources in their own writing.

Teachers also help their students build up language resources to summarize and analyze the story’s elements. For example, teachers can build students’ vocabulary for expressing their ideas and opinions by creating banks of synonyms for think (e.g., believe, interpret, propose, come to the conclusion) or says (suggests that, indicates, demonstrates), as well as by teaching some of the general academic words explicitly. Similarly, word banks with adjectives to describe characters (e.g., jealous, courageous, empathetic) or adverbials to indicate time, manner, or place (e.g., throughout the winter, fearlessly, along the coast) are co-constructed with students so that they can refer to the words and phrases as they discuss and write texts.

Teachers provide structured opportunities for students to practice using these new language resources during designated ELD so that during ELA, students will use the language more confidently when summarizing and analyzing literature orally and in writing.

**CA ELD Standards:** ELD.PI.6.6b, 8, 10,12; ELD.PI.II.6.2b, 3-5

**CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy:** RL.6.2-4; W.6.3; SL.6.4; L.6.6
Los Rios High School’s program for recently arrived immigrant adolescents provides a robust academic curriculum for ELs at the Emerging level of English language proficiency who are within their first years in the U.S. The school understands that adolescent ELs who are newly-arrived immigrants and who need to learn English are among the most vulnerable subgroups of ELs, especially when they have gaps in their educational backgrounds. In developing the program, the teachers and administration researched successful newcomer programs in the U.S. and agreed that they would commit guiding students to:

- Engage meaningfully with intellectually rich academic content
- Think critically about complex problems and texts
- Work collaboratively with peers
- Communicate effectively in different ways
- Develop an academic mindset
- Acculturate to the school system in the United States
- Develop or strengthen students’ native language literacy skills

The school sees as assets to a global society the fact that the newcomer EL students can navigate through multiple cultural worlds, speak more than one language, and collaborate with diverse groups of people. The program Los Rios has designed, and continuously refines, includes a two semester-long intensive program in students’ first year in the U.S., but students can exit after one semester if they’re ready and stay a little longer, too. This flexibility has been beneficial for meeting the diverse needs of students, particularly students who need a little more time adjusting to their new environment, such as adolescents with severely disrupted educational backgrounds and/or traumatic experiences, such as living in a war zone before immigrating to the U.S.

Students are assessed in their primary language and in English when they arrive in order to determine how teachers will differentiate instruction, and class sizes are kept small, with a cap at 25 students. The intensive first year program is taught by a team of five teachers (math, science, social studies, language arts, arts). These teachers also teach mainstream courses at Los Rios, and the newcomer EL students will transition to courses taught by these teachers, which supports their transition and on-going progress. The teaching team has the same learning goals for the newcomer EL students as they do for students who are native English speakers. The newcomer ELs engage in the same content and type of small group work that students in mainstream classes would be doing, but their teachers bring the added lens of the needs of high school students who are very new to the U.S. and at the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

What is different about the intensive program is the types and levels of scaffolding the teachers provide. All of the teachers incorporate project-based learning into their coursework with a heavy emphasis on collaboration and meaningful communication. The students engage in rigorous hands on projects, using English to work together and to write about and orally present out to the entire class on their projects. There are many different primary languages in the classroom, but English is the common language used to communicate. However, the teachers encourage the students who speak the same language to speak with one another in their language and also to conduct research about the content they are learning and develop understandings in their primary language. They want their students to realize that they can transfer their knowledge from their primary language to English, and that they’ll need to learn how to use English to convey this knowledge. The teachers do not insist that students use perfect English. Rather, they encourage their students to take risks and use English meaningfully by providing a supportive and safe learning environment for them to do so.

The school has seen the students flourish through the projects they engage with, which provide many opportunities for students to use English meaningfully, develop sophisticated content knowledge, and be supported by peers. In her ninth-tenth grade integrated algebra class, Ms. Romero uses project based learning to engage the students in understanding the essential question of how to measure length indirectly. The project is making a scale model of the school building, so Ms. Romero first has the students work in groups to generate at least one question that can become a mathematical problem related to the essential question. Through much dialogue in small groups and with the whole class, she follows up with asking students which mathematical concept(s) their questions address. The students then go outside and measure the height of the school building and the things surrounding it, such as trees, using an inclinometer to measure indirectly, which will help them to measure the angle of elevation. Ultimately, they will provide oral presentations on their project and write about the concepts. As the students engage in this hands-on project, they develop the ability to communicate effectively in English using sophisticated math language, learn critical content knowledge, and collaborate with their peers in...
ways that prepare them for college and careers.

In tenth grade biology, the students learn about DNA. The science teacher, Mr. Lee, teaches the same biology content to his newcomer ELs as he does to his mainstream classes, but he constantly focuses on supporting his newcomer ELs’ English language development by providing planned and just-in-time scaffolding. For example, Mr. Lee frequently amplifies the technical science vocabulary students need to understand and be able to use in order to fully engage with the content, as illustrated in the following example:

Mr. Lee: We need a good verb that means (using gestures) going into a cell and taking out the DNA
Suri: Extract!
Mr. Lee: Extract! So, we extracted your DNA last week. This week we need to replicate, or copy, your DNA. Mr. Lee’s students work in pairs, using their smartphone dictionaries and thesauruses, to delve into the new science vocabulary they are learning, using a template Mr. Lee has provided for recording information about the words:

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<tr>
<th>Word in English</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Word in My Language</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Template</td>
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When students are ready to transition to the mainstream English classes, which all include integrated ELD, they have a transition profile, and the school follows a systematic monitoring plan to ensure they continue to progress. The students’ transition into mainstream coursework is well-thought out, and clusters of the students are placed in heterogeneous classes with native English speaking peers as well as other EL students. The newcomer EL program teachers co-sponsor an extracurricular International club that includes a peer network of native English speaking students and ELs. The native English speaking students in the club also serve as peer teaching assistants in the newcomer program, and many of them are in the classes the students transition into once they exit the intensive program. The teachers have found that intentionally finding ways for different groups of students to interact meaningfully creates bonds between the students that may not arise in traditional mainstream courses.

The newcomer EL students receive credits toward graduation for the courses they take, and many graduate after four years of study, but some students stay for a fifth or sixth year in order to complete their graduation credits. Guidance counselors receive specialized training and serve as mentors for supporting newcomer EL students’ adjustment to school life, class scheduling, and college and career planning. The school’s family liaison provides support to the newcomer students and their families by acting as translators/interpreters or bringing trained interpreters into conversations with parents when needed, and by referring parents to the appropriate services in the community, such as refugee assistance centers or cultural community organizations. In addition, Los Rios provides intensive and on-going professional learning for all teachers and counselors, including time to learn new approaches, try them out and reflect on them, collaborate on unit and lesson planning, and observe one another teaching.

Sources:
The Teaching Channel Deeper Learning Video Series: Deeper Learning for English Language Learners (https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/deeper-learning-for-ell-ips)

Additional Resources:
To see models of newcomer programs, visit the following Web sites:

- Center for Applied Linguistics Secondary Newcomer Programs in the U.S.
- Oakland International High School (http://www.oaklandinternational.org/)
- International Network for Public Schools (http://internationalsnps.org/international-high-schools)
ELD/ELA Framework

Snapshot Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are students doing?</th>
<th>What is the teacher doing?</th>
<th>How does this compare to current practice? (Be specific. Use textual support.)</th>
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Integrated & Designated ELD: Working in Tandem

**Integrated ELD:**
All teachers with ELs in their classrooms use the CA ELD Standards *in tandem with* the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy and other content standards.

**Designated ELD:**
A protected time during the school day when teachers use the CA ELD Standards as the focal standards in ways that build *into and from content instruction.*
Chapter 2
Research Base for Discourse

Conversational Discourse

The word ‘discourse’ is commonly used in academic texts and presentations, but what is it, really? Like academic language, it has multiple overlapping meanings. Here I don’t attempt to define it, but instead present several terms that most often emerge in discourse’s wide range of definitions in the literature: extended, communication, discussion, argument, orderly, formal, reasoning, conversation, social practice, beyond the sentence level, how language is used in a discipline, and language in use. These terms cover a lot of ground, so I have chosen to focus on one area under discourse’s broad umbrella: conversation.

Thus, this book focuses on what I call conversational discourse, which is the use of language for extended, back-and-forth, and purposeful communication between people. While this type of discourse can and does happen through the use of visual and written messages, I highlight oral conversations in this book. And I zoom in even further to focus on paired conversations because of the high concentration of listening and talking per minute that they offer to each student.

A key feature of conversational discourse is that it is used to create and clarify knowledge, not just transmit it. Too many people view language as just as a tool for transmission and reception of static ideas and knowledge. Language is not one solid tool, but a dynamic and evolving mix of resources and flexible tools used to communicate, build, and choose ideas at any given moment. Conversation, as Theodore Zeldin writes, “is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards; it creates new ones (1998).”

The Clash of Learning Paradigms

In recent decades, policies and testing practices have had a large influence on what learning looks like and how it is fostered. Especially in schools with diverse populations, huge emphasis was placed on choosing right answers on tests and raising test scores. Curricula, lessons, and classroom assessments were tailored to help students do well on these high stakes tests. Learning, in the eyes of many students, teachers, and curriculum guides, meant memorizing word meanings, grammar rules, and the easiest-to-assess standards. Too many students have come to think that learning equals amassing points, which comes from getting answers right on homework, quizzes, and tests. This is much like Paulo Freire’s “banking model” of education in which teachers are supposed to deposit learning into student’s passive minds (Freire, 1970).

Many educators are now working hard to move beyond this “memorize for points,” quantity-focused paradigm of learning that still shapes instruction. This paradigm is deep-rooted because of the large amount of time it has been in place. Many teachers currently in the workforce were students in schools—and then teachers in training—under this paradigm. Moreover, the recent pushes for “data-driven” practices and spreadsheet-based results also tend to favor the quantity-focused paradigm. The messier collaboration-focused “quality” paradigm
struggles to win in such a battle. I hope that this book will help to strengthen this messier, yet deeper, paradigm and also describe how to effectively assess growth along the way.

**Conversational Purposes, Maxims, and Dispositions**

In an effective conversation, the participants, for the most part, have an agreed upon purpose for talking with one another. Yet, many students don’t know what the purpose of conversing is. Indeed, purposes beyond “to get points” are often lacking in school activities, including conversations. Students might view conversation as free time, a time to share or get answers, show off, and so on, but too many students don’t see conversation as a chance to clarify and fortify ideas with another person or to engage in collaborative argumentation to make an important decision about an issue.

A foundational principle for any effective conversation is cooperation (Grice, 1975). This principle, called the Cooperative Principle, depends on several maxims (often called Grice’s maxims), summarized here:

- Make your contribution not more or less informative than is required at the current stage of the conversation
- Don’t say ideas that you think are false or ideas that lack evidence
- Be clear
- Be relevant to the current stage of the conversation

These maxims seem obvious at first, but upon closer inspection of them and of typical conversations in classrooms, we see how important they are. Many students still need to learn how much they need to share, how to use evidence to shore up their ideas, what it means to be clear to different conversation partners, and how conversations work.

It also helps students to have certain interactional mindsets, or dispositions, as they enter into conversations. These dispositions help to extend and enrich conversations. I have turned these into several “I will try” statements for students (many adults should try these, too). Look at each one and consider what happens in a conversation if one or both partners don’t have the disposition.

- I will try to help my partner think more deeply about this topic
- I will try to allow my partner to help me think more deeply about this topic
- I will try to understand this topic better during our conversation
- I will try to work with my partner, not against, even if we disagree at times
- I will try to be open to learning new ideas and having my ideas change

Of course, in the messy world of real discourse—especially student discourse—we will see a wide range of quality when looking at the purposes, maxims, and dispositions in conversations. This is due, in part, to the overall expectations that students have about learning and about the role of discourse. If students have been conditioned over many years to think of learning as memorizing answers, then suddenly having them “think together” (Mercer, 2000) with others to build or negotiate ideas can clash with their theories of how they learn. This is a major shift in instruction and assessment that, in the minds and practices of both students and teachers, will take lots of work, time, and patience. Another shift is from a focus on self to more focus on others. Students should have in mind that they are not just in school for themselves, but
also to help others grow academically and socially. Most big assessments don’t promote this view, but our daily lessons must do so if our students are to succeed in being collaborative members of society.

Students need teachers with a working knowledge of the many things that make classroom conversations effective such as their purposes, prompts, maxims, dispositions, and skills. And students need hefty amounts of conversational experiences to maximize these things. But how do students learn, for example, how much information is typically required in a conversation, or how much evidence is needed to warrant sharing an idea, or what it means to be clear to peers who aren’t my friends, or what it means to share relevant information at the right times in a conversation? They need teachers who draw attention to these things, model them, and provide loads of practice and support throughout the year.

**Building Ideas with the “Given” and the “New”**

Now let’s zoom in a bit to look at the more intricate gears of conversations. Most partner turns include two parts, the “given and the new” (Halliday, 2013). The given is a mention of things already talked about. It might be a paraphrase, a recap, or a zooming in on information just shared in the conversation. It might be a reference to common knowledge or something experienced by both partners before this conversation. For English learners, given information is familiar and therefore students can more easily process the language used to describe it.

The “new” within a turn is information that is new to the conversation. Why talk if nothing new results? The new is usually connected to the purpose of a conversation and is vital for the building of ideas. Participants benefit from understanding and articulating new ideas, variations, perspectives, etc. For English learners, the generating and understanding of new ideas pushes them to use new language. Notice the given and the new in the following conversation.

1 Bijila: *All that gold? I think I would* buy a big house give some money to friends.

1 Manny: *Yeah. Me too. Maybe* buy a nice car or jet plane. Maybe I could buy the school and make them give me good grades.

2 Bijila: *I don’t think they would do that. You could give them money to buy new stuff,* like desks and science stuff.

3 Manny: No, I don’t know. *Maybe. But I’ll leave school cuz I never gotta work, and/*

4 Bijila: /But then you don’t learn things for life. School is not just for jobs. So you get the gold and buy and house and what, watch TV all day?  

5 Manny: Yeah.

6 Bijila: What about doing good, like the teacher said, with it? *I want to give it to friends and maybe to buy like food for hungry people in other countries. I might/*

7 Manny: /Maybe to some to friends and to my uncle, but not my cousins. They’re lame.

Think about how this conversation and others like it can shape students’ language and thinking. Both students are engaged in trying to go beyond just the givens and build new ideas. New ideas might include new ways to: harness energy, solve a geometry problem, view a historical person, learn from a character in a story, and so on. Student minds have a need to go beyond the givens in order to connect, create, choose, and to improve their lives and world around them. As they push themselves to clarify given ideas and describe the new ones, students push themselves to understand and use increasingly academic language.
Choosing the Best Thing to Say Next

With few exceptions, each turn in a conversation is spontaneous. It depends on the previous turns and the current development of the ideas in the conversation. Thus, several conversations could start with the same initial idea, but, given the amount of choices and "avenues" that keep branching off each with each turn, the conversations will likely diverge significantly.

Let’s say you are in the middle of a conversation with one other person. Out of many possible things to say in your next turn, what is the best thing to say to realize the purpose(s) of the conversation? While there are many choices, some are more likely than others to help the conversation along. There is never one “right” thing to say, of course, but as you learn more about conversations, you will see that some moves have more potential than others to realize their academic purposes, foster disciplinary thinking, and cultivate language.

As you are listening to your partner’s current turn, you are doing several things in your mind. You are thinking about what new things he or she is adding and how well you understand what your partner is saying. You are thinking about what has been said so far in this conversation, what you already know about the topic, and what questions you might ask. You are thinking about what you might say next to build on your partner’s current turn, and how to make what you say as clear as possible. Other types of responses might also be emerging in your mind, such as encouraging your partner to clarify or support ideas, paraphrasing what your partner said to see if you understood, adding details or examples, evaluating evidence, negotiating, and respectfully challenging what your partner said. There are many others, but these moves, which are described in more detail in Chapter 3, are most of the most-likely-to-be-effective options in classroom conversations.

Chapter 3

Conversation Skills

One of the ways in which we can help students make effective choices in their interactions with others is to develop several key conversation skills (Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014). Unfortunately, many educators, students, and people walking down the street don’t have a clear enough idea of what is involved in an effective conversational discourse. Many students, for example, think that all conversations are arguments to win, or that they involve just one person sharing an answer with another, as what happens in most think-pair-shares. The notion that you can respond back and forth with a partner to build up and negotiate ideas is rare in students.

An effective conversation in school has and does several things that we can see and hear. First, it changes something. This means that in the mind of participants the information, ideas, or feelings about a topic are built up, strengthened, clarified, or changed in some way. For example, I might talk with a friend about the election coming up and learn his views on a certain candidate. I share my views, some of which clash with his, and I see the characteristics that I value in a candidate more clearly than I did before our conversation. Second, a conversation has evidence of conversation skills. These skills, described in detail in this section, include clarifying ideas, supporting ideas with evidence and reasoning, evaluating evidence and reasoning, comparing the strength of ideas to choose the strongest one, and negotiating ideas.

In every conversation, there should be the building or changing of at least one idea. This usually requires a combination of both clarifying and supporting the idea with evidence and reasons. Then, if another competing idea pops up, it becomes an argument, and students then
build up the second idea, too, also by clarifying and supporting it. After building up both (or all, if more than two) ideas, students evaluate the amount and quality of support on both sides in order to choose the “strongest” or “heaviest” one. Picture a balance scale with weights on both sides (see the conversation between Mayra and Ben below). If there is not a clear winner, then students can negotiate and qualify their ideas. This process of jointly and respectfully building up two or more ideas and choosing one is what I call collaborative argumentation. Students don’t choose sides right away and “fight with words” to win; rather, they work together. Examples of both modes of conversation (building one idea and collaborative argumentation) are provided below.

The Skill of Clarifying Ideas

To get an effective conversation going, one student starts the conversation by responding to a prompt, posing a relevant idea to start talking about. This idea, in most cases, will not be clear to the listener the first time it’s described. The listening partner will then prompt for clarification of this idea, asking something like “What do you mean by…?” as you see Ilsa do in line 3 of the following conversation.

1  Ilsa:  So, the teacher asked us why people are biased in history.
2  Ana:  I think they want to look good.
3  Ilsa:  What do you mean by that?
4  Ana:  They lie like maybe leave out stuff so that they’re like heroes or something.
5  Ilsa:  Yeah, like when the teacher said even us, we like don’t say the whole truth when we tell our parents stuff.
6  Ana:  So, you’re saying that we are like those people who lie in history?
7  Ilsa:  Yeah, kind of. Remember that guy, John Smith. He made up stuff, like on Pocahontas, to sell books.
8  Ana:  Can you say more about that? I read it but don’t remember.

To clarify, a partner can do several things: ask for definitions (line 3), ask for elaboration (line 8), and paraphrase (line 6). As you saw in the excerpt, clarifying can help to prompt a partner to produce more language, which (a) provides input for the listener and (b) challenges the speaker to put ideas into more and/or better words. This extra language used, as you see Ana produce in line 4 and Ilsa produce in line 7, helps both partners to think about the content being discussed. Complex ideas are more likely to “stick” because students are taking ownership of them—along with the language that describes them—in order to co-construct meaning together.

One challenge that we face is that students’ communication experiences tend to be with people who know them well. They have not had to do much clarifying because family and peers tend to already know a lot about what they are saying. They have not needed to explain more complex, multi-sentence ideas very often to others for authentic purposes, so they don’t develop habits of being extra explicit for a wider range of people.

Thus, one of the biggest needs for students developing academic language is a chance to practice their abilities to describe complex ideas to others and receive immediate feedback related to how clear it is. Conversations contain many turns, and many of these turns are attempts and opportunities to clarify. A partner listens and then offers nonverbal or verbal confirmation of clarity or lack thereof, giving feedback to the speaker to do something more or something different with language in order to get the idea across.

How clarifying within conversations fosters academic language and literacy
Imagine getting feedback on how clear you are from 29 or more different people on a weekly basis, in multiple conversations with hundreds of turns in which you speak and listen. The effect on your literacy, language, knowledge and thinking can be profound. Even if a highly proficient speaker converses with a less proficient speaker, both benefit from the process of seeking clarity. The highly proficient speaker is challenged to make her ideas extra clear and the other student benefits from extra language input—and from trying to make his ideas clear to her.

Students who are clarifying ideas about what they are reading can help one another with the content and language of complex texts. As students are encouraged to go back into texts to clarify what they are trying to get across, they refer to language in the text and use it in their turns.

**Academic English Mastery Series:**
**Teaching Connections among the ALD Dimensions**

“The purpose of this four-book series is to assist educators in developing expertise in, and practical strategies for, addressing the key dimensions of academic language when working with ELLs and SELs. In order to systemically address the needs of ELLs and SELs, we educators must share a common understanding of academic language development and the interconnectedness of its four dimensions” (Soto, 2016).

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<tr>
<th>ALD Dimension</th>
<th>Author’s Definition</th>
<th>Interconnections</th>
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| Conversational Discourse | Zwiers (2016) defines **Conversational discourse** as the use of language for extended, back-and-forth, and purposeful communication among people. A key feature of conversational discourse is that it is used to create and clarify knowledge, not just transmit it. The essential skills of conversational discourse are:  
  - Conversing with a purpose  
  - Clarifying ideas  
  - Supporting ideas and finding evidence  
  - Evaluating Evidence and reasoning  
  - Negotiating ideas  
Successful conversational discourse for ELLs and SELs requires a safe classroom culture and appropriate scaffolds for conversation. | ✓ Conversational discourse necessarily connects to the development of **academic vocabulary** and to its written counterpart, academic writing across genres.  
✓ It connects to **grammar and syntax in context** through the need to make and express meaning at the text, paragraph, and sentence levels.  
✓ It connects to culturally and linguistically responsive practices by engaging students in cooperative practices and respectful listening to other points of view/backgrounds. |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Academic Vocabulary (Interpretive and Productive Modes)</th>
<th>Calderon (2016) defines <strong>academic vocabulary</strong> as a combination of words, phrases, sentences, and strategies to participate in class discussions, to show evidence of understanding and express complex concepts in texts, and to express oneself in academic writing. To enhance academic vocabulary for ELLs and SELs, teachers select words to specifically teach before, during, and after instruction. They select words and phrases that they believe ELLs and SELs need:  - to know in order to comprehend the text,  - to discuss those concepts, and  - to use in their writing later on.</th>
<th>✓ Academic vocabulary, according to Calderon, is the centerpiece of <strong>conversational discourse</strong>. ✓ It connects to <strong>grammar and syntax in context</strong> naturally in that vocabulary is also taught within context. The two dimensions mutually provide meaning for one another. ✓ It connects to <strong>culturally and linguistically responsive practices</strong> in making understandable the distinctions between some common misuses of words (&quot;berry&quot; instead of &quot;very&quot;) and the standard English word association.</th>
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<td>Grammar/Syntax in Context (Expanding and Enriching Ideas)</td>
<td>According to the Freemans (2016), <strong>grammar and syntax in context</strong> are a set of internalized rules about language use that people acquire over time, both for first and second language. Academic texts pose a particular challenge to ELLs and SELs because of the writing’s:  - technical vocabulary and lexical density  - levels of abstraction, and  - differences in text by content area There are specific skills to use with grammar and syntax in context at the sentence, paragraph, and text levels.</td>
<td>✓ Grammar and syntax in context connects closely to the development of <strong>academic vocabulary</strong> as a means of expressing deeper thinking. ✓ It connects to <strong>conversational discourse</strong> through its role as a functional resource (making choices in using language). ✓ It connects to <strong>culturally and linguistically responsive practices</strong> by examining the similarities and differences in the rules internalized by first language acquisition among diverse student groups.</td>
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<td>Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices</td>
<td>LeMoine cites Gay (2000) in defining <strong>culturally and linguistically responsive practices</strong> as “ways of knowing, understanding, and representing various ethnic groups in teaching academic subjects, processes, and skills.” Its primary features benefitting ELLs and SELs include:  - promoting cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning  - incorporating high-status, accurate cultural knowledge about different groups of students, and  - cultivating the cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success of diverse student groups. Simply stated, it is meaningful learning embedded in language and culture.</td>
<td>✓ Culturally and linguistically responsive practices connect to the development of <strong>academic vocabulary</strong> by providing recognition for prior knowledge and acknowledging culture as part of linguistic development. ✓ It connects to <strong>conversational discourse</strong> by prioritizing cooperative conversation procedures and minimizing confrontational discourse. ✓ It connects to <strong>grammar and syntax in context</strong> by building on second language acquisition strategies and methods (such as SDAIE and contrastive analysis).</td>
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