
Building Academic Language in the Secondary ELA Classroom

Tami Hicks
Director of Professional Learning, WVEC
WVEC Consortium Coordinator - TITLE III



LEARNING INTENTIONS

Today, we will learn about.....

- Supporting Student Learning by building Academic Language
 - The Language of Your Classroom/Content Area
 - Three tiers of Vocabulary students learn
 - The value of visuals, hands-on/authentic learning and talk!!
 - Specialized vocabulary and general academic vocabulary
 - Instructional strategies for teaching Academic Language
 - We will investigate our professional book for teaching ideas!
 - Investigate & Instructional Supports we are using & possible new ones
-

SUCCESS CRITERIA

By the end of today, you will:

- Be able to provide background knowledge on the importance of Academic Language, as well as a definition and examples of different types of Academic Language.
 - Be able to identify Tier I, II, and III words (and connect to your classroom)
 - Be able to analyze student work and text for Academic Language.
 - Have added several Instructional Strategies to your toolbox
-

Building Background Knowledge - What is Academic Language?



What is Academic Language?

TABLE TALK

How would you define Academic Language?
Think about what Academic Language means to you....write down your ideas, phrases, words and or phrases that would help you define Academic Language.

CHART YOUR IDEAS...Be prepared to share!

Definition ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

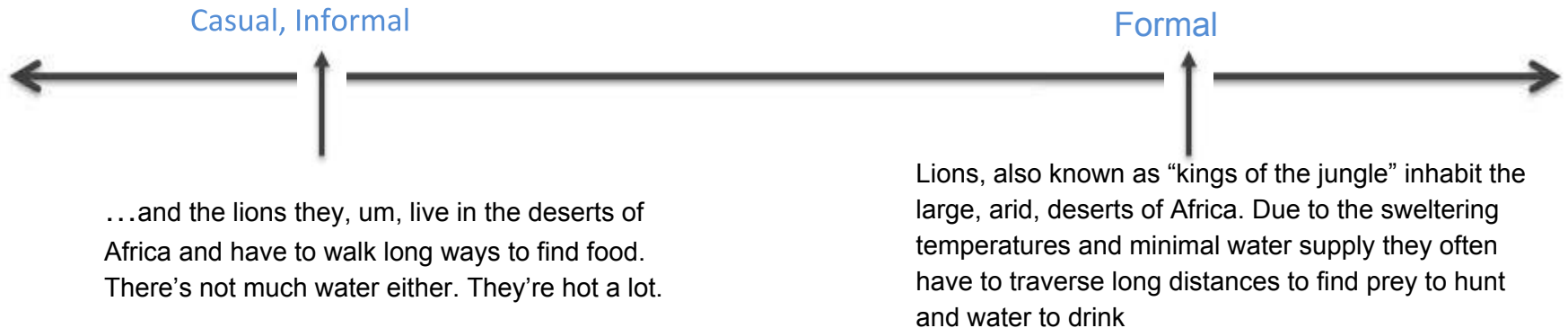
- Language used in academic settings and for academic purposes to help students acquire and use knowledge (Anstrom, et al., 2010)
 - Words and syntactic structures that students are likely to encounter in textbooks and tests, but not in everyday, spoken English (Strategic Education Research Partnership, 2010)
 - “The language used in the learning of academic subject matter in a formal schooling context; aspects of language strongly associated with literacy and academic achievement, including specific academic terms or technical language and speech registers related to each field of study.” (TESOL, 2003)
-

Academic Language DEFINITION...cont'd

Academic Language is the FORMALIZED LANGUAGE OF SCHOOL!!

- The language of the CLASSROOM
 - The language of the SUBJECT you are teaching
 - The language of the TOPIC you are teaching
 - The language of TEXTS students are reading
 - The language of PROBLEMS students are solving
 - The language students are using to WRITE in formal academic settings
-

- Academic language:
 - Cannot be defined dichotomously (i.e., a student has mastered it or has not) but exists on a continuum, with informal, casual conversation at one extreme and the formal, technical presentation of ideas at the other extreme





LITERACY GAP

Literacy is the gateway skill that students must have mastered if they are to be successful in any course; low literacy levels translate into poor grades, grade repetition, and eventual disengagement from school; all of which tend to precede a student's decision to drop out.

Page 3, Academic Language! Academic Literacy!

Research - Importance of Academic Language & Vocabulary on Student Achievement

[John Hattie: Vocabulary Instruction](#) Effect Size of .67

Students who experienced vocabulary instruction experienced major improvements in reading comprehension and overall reading skills. Most effective vocabulary instruction included providing both definitional and contextual information, involved students in deeper processing, and gave students more than 1 or 2 exposures to the word to be learned.

[WIDA RESEARCH](#)

Indiana Academic Standards- Vocabulary

RV.1: LEARNING OUTCOME FOR READING VOCABULARY:

Build and apply vocabulary using various strategies and sources

RV.2: VOCABULARY BUILDING: *Use strategies to determine and clarify words and understand their relationships*

RV.3: VOCABULARY IN LITERATURE AND NONFICTION TEXTS: *Build appreciation and understanding of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying the meanings of words and their uses*

It is all about perspective.....



Brainstorm words and phrases that each person below would use to describe this picture:

Scientist

Economist

Artist

Social Studies teacher

Poet

Two Categories of Academic Language

Specific Content Based Academic Language

Social Studies: democracy, civilization, communism, geography, legislature

Science: photosynthesis, friction, compound, plate tectonics, force

Math: fraction, equation, division, angle, addition, factor

Language Arts: alliteration, plot, genre, author's voice, theme, irony

SPECIFIC CONTENT ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Specific academic language for each subject area is unique to that subject

Content Academic language increases in difficulty as students progress through grades and subject matter

Provides the building blocks from which conceptual knowledge can be built

“The more a student understands the specific content language of a particular subject matter, then the faster and more efficient they can learn additional knowledge.” - Willingham, 2006

General Academic Language

Provides the foundation for educational success

Includes words that connect concepts, outline transitions,
and demonstrate relationships

Brick and Mortar words - critical for EL's



Brick and Mortar Words



Brick and Mortar Words - Example

Vocabulary Bricks

“Bricks” are the vocabulary specific to the content and the concepts being taught. They include such words as: government, mitosis, metaphor, revolt, arid, revolution, and habitat. Traditionally, this is the vocabulary teachers pre-teach at the beginning of a content area lesson or unit. In the earlier grades, many of these words are nouns, such as giraffe, hoof, stem, leaf and can be illustrated or labeled. In later grades these words tend to be conceptual.

Brick and Mortar Words

Vocabulary Mortar

"Mortar" words and phrases are required for constructing sentences. They are words that determine relationships between and among words. They are words that hold our language together and are essential to comprehension. Many mortar words and phrases are basic vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to students who are learning English. This vocabulary is best taught explicitly in the context of language use, as these words do not generally stand alone, but within the context of a sentence or phrase. Without deliberate instruction in the use of these words, English Learners may not discern the time/place relationships among the rest of the words in a sentence or passage. **Connecting words:** *because, then, sometimes, before, therefore, however, whereas* **Prepositions and prepositional phrases:** *on, under, behind, next to, in front of* **Basic regular and irregular verbs:** *leave, live, eat, use, saw, and went* **Pronouns:** *she, he, his, their, it, themselves.* **Academic vocabulary:** *notice, think, analyze, plan, compare, proof, discuss*

EXAMPLE: <http://engagingstudents.blackgold.ca/index.php/division-iv/sci-d4/reading-strategies/>

ACTIVITY - Analyze Content Text

Choose one sample text to analyze.

Look for specialized words, general academic words, brick and mortar words (list on back), and every day words.

Under language, think about features and language function

Now, try this same process with your sample text!

FIND.....

1 GENERAL ACADEMIC LANGUAGE WORD

1 SPECIFIC CONTENT/TOPIC WORD

1 MORTAR WORD

1 IMPORTANT THING TO TEACH ABOUT LANGUAGE

A few more things to remember in regards to Language/Vocabulary & English Learners

Things to focus on:

Common phrases that always go together: Peanut butter and jelly, salt and pepper, socks and shoes, spaghetti and meatballs

Multiple Meaning words: Round of golf, round ball, round up to closest hundredth// Plot your graph, terrorist plot, the plot of the story, a plot of land

Conversions to other forms: “produce” to “production

Idiomatic Expressions: I can't face this, Hit the books, Hit the sack, Twist my arm, Sit tight, Face the music, Keep your chin up.....

Acemic Language!
Academic Literacy!

Cognitive Reading Strategies

(page 40)

- Activate Prior Knowledge
 - Make predictions'
 - Build background knowledge/information needed
 - Visualize
 - Generate questions
 - Monitor Reading comprehension
-

FOUR levels of Word Knowledge

- 1) I never saw it before
 - 2) I've heard of it, but I don't know what it means
 - 3) I recognize it in context.....it has something to do with.....
 - 4) I know it! I understand it well!! I can understand its use when listening, reading, speaking and writing!
-

Academic Language Awareness

(Page 76)

Students categorize academic words into three categories:

- **Actions**
 - Action words and verbs can help provide meaning for EL's
 - **Concepts**
 - Key concepts words - important words for learning
 - **Transitions**
 - Words that help them understand text structure
-

BOOK CHAT...

**A few more things to investigate in
Academic Language! Academic Literacy!**

VIDEO

Good video from a group of teachers who all collaborated around teaching the Academic Vocabulary - POINT OF VIEW - and how this is connected and presented in each subject area. Illustrates how they assigned tasks and assessed learning at each level, 1-5.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/130650405>

NEW iLearn Assessments



- ❑ Rely heavily on DOK levels 2 & 3
 - ❑ Teachers and administrators need to become familiar with [iLearn Blueprints](#) and [Item Specifications](#).
 - ❑ [Sample problems](#) provided - for DOK practice
 - ❑ [Smarter Balanced Sample Items](#)
- ❑ Students are often getting only 1 out of 2 points due to not being able to do DOK 3 thinking
- ❑ Heavy on deep understanding of Tier II & III Academic Vocabulary
- ❑ Heavy reading/writing demands in all areas (including Math) - explain reasoning, justify, cite evidence

Resources

BOOKS:

Academic Language! Academic Literacy! A Guide for K-12 Educators

By Eli R. Johnson

Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms By Margo gottlieb and Gisela Ernst-Slavit

Building Academic Language through Content-Area Text By Erica Bowers and Laura Keisler

Mastering Academic Language: A Framework for Supporting Student Achievement By Debbie Zacarian

Building Academic Language By Jeff Zwiers

Academic Moves for College and Career Readiness By Jim Burke

ASCD ARTICLE: *A Lesson in Taking Flight*; Kristine Robertson, February, 2016 Issue:

CONTACT INFO

Tami Hicks

thicks@esc5.k12.in.us

765-588-1146

WEBSITE: www.esc5.k12.in.us

Follow us on FB: Wabash Valley Education Center

Twitter: @tamiwvec
