

**LANGUAGE DIVERSITY & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:
LEADING ADVANCED LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO FOSTER ELLS' ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

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Meeting #5 Agenda

9.00 a.m. The Institute: Looking Back and Moving Forward

STRENGTHENING DAILY INSTRUCTION FOR ELLS

9.15 a.m. Part 1. Content and Language Objectives

10.30 a.m. Part 2. Unpacking Academic Language Focused Instruction Using NYC Curricula and Approaches

11.45 a.m. Lunch

12.30 p.m. Part 2. Unpacking Academic Language Focused Instruction Using NYC Curricula and Approaches

1.00 p.m. Part 3. Supporting Teachers through Observations and Feedback

2.15 p.m. Wrap-Up

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Best Practices in Content-Embedded, Academic Language-Focused Instruction for ELLs

(see Module 4 for articles that feature best practices in academic vocabulary instruction)

Elements of Content-Embedded, AL-Focused Instruction

Element 1: Select a topic to design a unit of study & generate a 'big' guiding questions

Select a multifaceted, academic topic around which to develop student knowledge and generate a question that may guide the inquiry

Element 2: Select engaging texts, generate text-based questions, and target academic language (AL)

- a. Select multiple, engaging texts that can be used to build topic knowledge and knowledge of academic language
- b. Generate questions that might be used to guide the reading of each text
- c. Select a few high-utility AL vocabulary and structures that are necessary for understanding the multiple texts that comprise the unit and can be used by students to convey their learning in speech and writing.

Element 3: During each lesson, engineer multiple writing, speaking, and listening opportunities--that follow predictable routines--for students to produce the target AL and to practice learning AL independently

Speaking/Listening

Writing

Strategies for continued AL learning

Element 1: Select a multi-faceted academic topic around which to develop student knowledge and generate a 'big' question to guide the inquiry.

What does this mean?

Struggling producers of academic language (AL) are not struggling thinkers!

However, it is often the case that students who have struggled to access text have also had fewer opportunities to develop the linguistic knowledge, the content knowledge, or the habits of mind needed to analyze historical topics, make a reasoned argument in science, or produce a literary analysis in English Language Arts. While linguistic knowledge may be acquired through oral interactions, much of the language used to express complex ideas in writing is rarely used in spoken, English—even in academic settings. For many students, increasing opportunities to access complex topics and the language used to express these ideas in text, is vital.

Even among those adolescents who don't struggle as readers, many need opportunities to develop an understanding of the ways in which scientists, historians, or literary scholars approach academic inquiry. While members of a discipline often begin with a 'big' question and use multiple texts as sources of information when seeking to answer these questions, adolescents are often simply provided with information via a single source, often a textbook. To address this problem, we advocate for the use of **'units of study,'** sometimes referred to as 'thematic units' or 'question-driven units' to guide effective, knowledge-building

Units of Study & Guiding Questions: An Example from 6th Grade

Cross-Disciplinary Topic: Weather

Cross-Disciplinary 'Big' question: How does weather impact life on earth?



In science:

Topic: species adaptation

'Big' question: How do humans and animals adapt to physical environment?

In social studies:

Topic: formation of community

'Big' question: How do humans organize their societies differently as a result of the physical environment?

In English language arts:

Topic: folk explanations vs. science

'Big' question: What do folk tales tell us about how humans have sought to explain forces in the physical environment?

instruction. *Units of study offer an approach that can build linguistic and content knowledge simultaneously—they are comprised of a series of lessons that are purposefully designed to incrementally build knowledge of a single topic or theme by exposing students to multiple text-based sources.* Often taking an inquiry-based approach, units of study are designed to support students in using texts to systematically reflect on a 'big question' related to the topic. Units of study may be situated within a single discipline or, if the question is broad enough, be inter-disciplinary.

Pitfalls

- **Topics are not engaging or have not been made relevant to students.** For example, we can study nuclear energy by having students learn solely about how this type of energy is generated; or, we can teach this information within a unit that is guided by the big question: 'Should we generate nuclear energy at Indian Point?'
- **'Big' questions are easily answered or have one logical answer**
- **A heavy focus is placed on learning 'facts' rather than the ideas or concepts that are central to a unit.**

Hallmarks: What to Look for...

In Curriculum:

- 🌿 Topics are conceptually rich, so that knowledge will need to be developed over time, using more than one text
- 🌿 Questions that guide the unit have no easy answer
- 🌿 Information in the unit is not 'told' to students—rather, they are supported in 'discovering' the key ideas by engaging with the big question

What Makes a Good Big Question?

- No easy answer
- No single 'correct' answer
- Not easily answered without engagement with external sources (texts)

In Instruction:

- 🌿 Instructor allows space for students to share alternative interpretations of the text and to answer the unit guiding question differently

Element 2: Select engaging texts, generate text-based questions, and choose target AL words to teach

What does this mean?

Select Engaging Texts

A common misconception associated with the Common Core State Standards is that teachers ought to simply teach more complex texts. In reality, the teaching of more complex texts is the natural *consequence* of an instructional agenda that focuses on knowledge building. Fundamentally, we are going to *have* to teach more complex texts to students if we want them to have access to the complex knowledge and ideas these texts contain. Because complex language and sentence structures are often necessary to convey complex information and relationships, we should anticipate that our students will require additional skills as readers as we move away from the traditional text selection criteria (often a text level) to those that favor the selection of texts on the basis of their merit for **building knowledge**.

However, we should also anticipate that by situating texts as a tool for answering the questions that guide our units of study, we are also positioning our students in new ways that are more developmentally suited to their needs as adolescent readers. In this context, students are transformed from passive readers to **engaged** thinkers. It is, also, in this sense that we use pre-modifier, 'engaging,' to describe texts. We often think of selecting texts that are engaging simply because they are on high-interest topics to adolescent readers. Instead, we must also acknowledge that much of what makes a text engaging is whether the reader sees the value and purpose in the task. Ideally, the texts we select are engaging in both senses to adolescent readers—they are interesting to students and students have a very clear sense of their purpose for accessing the text.

Generate Text-Based Questions

An important but often overlooked step in the design of units of study, is the generation of sub-questions to the overarching 'big' question or topic that guides the unit of study. These sub-questions are important to guide students through particular texts. Not every piece of information in a text is of equal importance to answering the 'big' question; but determining the relative importance of discrete pieces of

The Paradox of the Text-Based Question

To support readers in closely reading and acquiring knowledge from texts, educators make use of text-dependent questions. However, a pre-condition for answering these questions accurately is that students have comprehended the language of the text.

information hinges on knowing the purpose for which the text is being read. The role of the text-based question is to focus students' attention on particular pieces of information within the text, in order to purposefully build knowledge of the topic of study.

A cascade of text-dependent questions: Scaffolding deep comprehension (Uccelli & Phillips-Galloway, 2012)

Text-based questions should increase in complexity as the class moves through a text. For example, these questions might start out guided by the purpose of supporting a shared level of basic comprehension, but might culminate in having students making inter-textual connections—connections across texts. Below we list a series of text-based question stems, which increase in difficulty. This gradual progression scaffolds students to deeper-levels of text comprehension.

Clarification:

- What does X [word/expression] mean as it is used in this text?
- Can you explain what X means on page Y of this text?
- Who/what is X [e.g., 'she', 'this system', 'this person', 'this'] in this sentence?

Paraphrase:

- How would you restate this sentence from the text in your own words? In other words, can you tell us what this sentence means in your own words?
- How could the author/text have said this more clearly? *
- In the text, who did what? Who said what? Who believed what? Who felt what?

Interpretation and reasoning:

- Can you identify some causes of X [event or phenomenon] in this text?
- Can you identify the temporal sequence of events in the text?
- What is happening in this paragraph?
- What is the author/text trying to tell you in this paragraph? What do you see in the text that makes you say that? Why is the author/text telling you that? *
- What is the author's perspective about X? In other words, what does the author think about X? What do you see in the text that makes you say that?

Synthesis:

- How would you summarize the most significant idea of this paragraph/fragment of the text using your own words? What might another person identify as most significant?
- Can you tell us in a few words how the text/author describes/explains a person/process/ concept/phenomenon/perspective on an issue (refer to guiding question)?
- Using just a few of your own words, can you tell us what is the author's conclusion? Use evidence from the text to support your statement.

- How did the author's choice of particular words, phrases or ways of organizing this text impact the way that we, as readers, interpret the events, view the characters, or understand the arguments/events? Cite evidence from the text to support your conclusion.

Inter-textual connections (with multiple texts)

- What type of texts are these (e.g. narrative, informational)? Are they similar types of texts?
- Who are the authors? Do we know anything about them? Can you trust these sources? Why?
- Are the authors of these texts trying to say the same thing or different things? What do you see in these texts that makes you say that?
- Look at sentence/paragraph X: Can you identify similar topics/persons/places/problems in these texts? Can you identify similar ideas in these texts? Why are they similar?
- Can you identify points of conflict or contradiction in these texts? How do you know that they are they in conflict?

Choose target AL to Teach

Whether to understand multiple complex texts on the same topic, to form answers to text-based questions with a single text, and/or to adequately express these understandings, students require knowledge of a number of words. Therefore, effective literacy instruction includes explicit attention to teaching the concepts that underlie these words. For instance, a science teacher preparing to teach a unit on human adaptation may select 7-10 words/concepts that appear frequently across the texts she intends to read with her students (and in academic texts, generally) and plan to teach these explicitly (for example, 'result,' 'consequence,' 'environment,' 'adaptation,' 'mutation,' and 'extinct'). In addition, she may choose additional linguistic features that are prevalent in the texts that students are reading to explicitly teach. For instance, the suffix, *-tion*, frequently added to the verb, 'adapt,' to form a noun may be a

Words Worth Teaching: How to Select Words to Teach

- **FREQUENCY:** Is this word found frequently in the texts that comprise the unit?
- **IMPORTANCE:** Does this word refer to an essential piece of knowledge or concept within the unit ('environment,' 'mutation')?
OR
Is this word likely to appear frequently in academic texts ('result,' 'consequence')?
- **UTILITY:** Will students need to know this word to understand the texts we will read in this unit?

Will students need to know this word to speak and write about the topic of study?

Will this word be useful for academic speaking and writing generally?

morphological manipulation worth teaching as part of this science unit.

Pitfalls

- **Using a single text**
- **Selecting text that is not engaging or not setting out a clear knowledge-building purpose for accessing the text**
- **Viewing each text as an isolated reading, rather than as a part of a larger unit**
- **Failing to generate text-based questions that help students to identify key information within a text in the service of answering the 'big' question**
- **Not supporting basic text comprehension before asking students to engage in higher-level comprehension processes**
- **Selecting rare words to teach—words that might appear in a single text, but do not appear throughout the unit and are not necessary for understanding the unit topic or for writing and speaking about the topic**

Hallmarks: What to Look for

In Curriculum:

- 📖 Texts are engaging (high-interest to adolescent readers *and/or* students are motivated to read the text because it is in the service of building essential knowledge necessary to answer the 'big' question guiding the unit)
- 📖 Multiple texts are used throughout the unit (many genres, multiple levels, and from many perspectives)
- 📖 The language used is generally like that used in the discipline and like that which we hope students to produce
- 📖 Questions that guide the reading of each text (text-focused questions) help students to identify ideas and information central to answering the 'big' question guiding the unit
- 📖 The AL language and features selected for teaching are useful for discussing/writing about the unit topic and for reading the multiple texts that comprise the unit

In Instruction:

- 📖 Instructor communicates the purpose for reading the text in light of the unit goals
- 📖 Instructor connects the texts within the unit so that students understand the role that each text is to play in building their understanding of the unit topic
- 📖 Instructor allows space for students to share alternative interpretations of the text and requires students to use text-based evidence to support claims
- 📖 Students are supported in answering text dependent questions through appropriately paced instruction that builds basic comprehension first and, then, moves to supporting readers in making inferences
- 📖 The focus AL is clearly highlighted in the instruction

Element 3: During each lesson, engineer multiple writing, speaking, and listening opportunities--that follow predictable routines--for students to produce the target AL and to practice applying strategies for learning AL independently

What does this mean?

Multiple, Meaningful Exposures

Because language learning and learning concepts are inextricably linked, high-impact language learning occurs during regular content instruction when students are asked to repeatedly return to the target AL language for the purpose of communicating their learning. By engaging students in writing and speaking activities that require the use of the target language features, we create an authentic context for language use and development (Stahl, 1999). AL learning is far from passive, the work of thinking about word meanings and connecting newly learned language to words already known requires that students have many opportunities to puzzle, problem-solve and attempt to use the AL word or feature being taught (McKeown & Beck, 2004). There is much evidence that a single exposure—even a single lesson—to an AL word or feature is not enough; instead, these exposures must be multiple, and over time (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

Speaking & Listening

Increasingly, we recognize the importance of discussion, debate and paired oral-language work for supporting text comprehension and academic language development. These interactions allow for students to practice producing language; but, perhaps of equal importance, to hear their peers produce fluent academic language. It is also through talk that students are offered a small window into the text comprehension processes of others. Under optimal instructional circumstances, students tend to build on the thinking of others by adopting and extending the language that peers provide—this phenomenon is known as ‘snowballing’ (Anderson et al., 2007). These interchanges do not need to be long, but should punctuate every lesson.

A Few Teacher Moves for Leading Discussion from Accountable Talk

Resnick, O'Connor, & Michaels (2007) suggest six talk moves that educators can use to lead classroom discussions of text:

- (1) Revoicing: "Let me be sure I've understood. You're saying XXX?" (with time for the students to add to or reject the teacher's formulation)
- (2) Restating: Asking students to restate a peer's reasoning: "Can you tell us in your own words what he said?"
- (3) Reasoning: Asking students to apply their own reasoning to a peer's comment: "Do you agree or disagree with X and why?"
- (4) Prompting: "Would someone like to add to that?"; "Say more about that..."
- (5) Explaining: Asking students to explain their reasoning: "Why do you think that?" or "How did you get that answer?"
- (6) Challenging: "Is this always true?" or "Can you think of any examples where that would not work?"

Resnick, L., O'Connor, C., and Michaels, S. (2007). Classroom Discourse, Mathematical Rigor, and Student Reasoning: An Accountable Talk Literature Review.

Writing

Writing is both a method through which students learn and through which they demonstrate their learning. When writing in response to text as a writing-to-learn activity—by summarizing the text, taking notes as they read, and responding to short prompts after reading—students have a chance to consolidate or codify their thinking on a topic as well as to engage in habits that support text comprehension (e.g., re-reading).

When writing in response to a text, students often draw AL features from the text and incorporate these their own responses. While educators are rightfully concerned about plagiarism in adolescents' writing, they must also recognize that language learning occurs first by mimicking (think about how babies and toddlers learn language!). In this way, writing may be used both to support students in clarifying their understandings of how ideas encountered in the text relate to each other as well as to support AL learning. Writing to learn opportunities, like speaking opportunities, should occur daily. While students do not need to produce long texts each day, the short texts they do produce should challenge them to use evidence from the text, make reasoned arguments and state a thesis, as preparation for the task of producing larger texts.

Writing to demonstrate learning should also be a component of each curricular cycle. Effective units of study culminate in the writing of an essay in which students respond to the 'big' question used to guide the unit of study.

Predictable Routines

We have all had the experience of feeling uncomfortable with new routines (e.g., driving in a new area, taking a new class at the gym, etc.)—and recognize that we are less effective and fluid than we would like. By analogy, routines for learning when new to students bring similar discomfort, which can undermine their effectiveness. Repeating core activities from one unit of study to the next so that students can master the routine and expectations facilitates AL learning. When students are engaging in new routines for learning, they must allocate energy towards this task, which leaves less energy to direct towards the learning at hand. For example, we have found in our work with an academic vocabulary intervention that repeating task types (e.g., similar approach to debate across units), students gain a sense of confidence and self-efficacy and less instructional time is expended on setting up these structures for learning. As the year progresses, educators can continue to advance ELLs' development by using the same routines but gradually increasing the cognitive and linguistic demands of core activities.

Tools for AL Independent Learning

Instruction should support students in applying AL learning routines independently—this is the only way that such instruction can have a lasting impact on student learning. Learning to break words into meaningful parts (prefixes and suffixes) is one way that we can equip students with the skills to independently decipher the meaning of less familiar words (Nagy, 1999). In addition, strategies for managing complex syntax support readers in navigating texts independently and efficiently.

Pitfalls

- **Activities do not repeat across units**
- **Words are taught within each text, but never across texts or across the unit**
- **A heavy focus is placed on oral language production, to the neglect of written language production**

Examples of Core Activities...

Speaking/Listening

Mock Interviews and role play

Debates

Think-Pair-Share

Class Discussions

Writing

Weekly persuasive essay

Student definition of AL words

Word Webs

Summaries of texts

Hallmarks: What to Look for

In Curriculum:

- ✎ Students are exposed to target AL words and features intentionally throughout the instructional cycle through multiple activities and text exposures that are built into the curriculum
- ✎ Students are asked to use the target AL words and features when speaking and writing as part of each lesson in the unit
- ✎ Routines (such as weekly debate, mock interview, activities for defining words) occur regularly throughout each unit so that students have time to develop mastery of these processes for learning
- ✎ Students are engaged in speaking, listening and reading activities as part of each lesson
- ✎ Skills that support independent AL learning are built into the curriculum and taught explicitly—morphology, text structure analysis, skills for parsing complex sentences.

In Instruction:

- ✎ Instructor communicates the importance of using target AL words when speaking and writing
- ✎ Instructor acknowledges the challenges associated with learning new language and conveys an attitude that values experimenting with language by praising students attempts at using target language (e.g., an expectation that students will not use words correctly at first)
- ✎ Instructor builds in learning routines if these are not already an integral part of the curriculum
- ✎ Instructor builds in intentional exposures to target AL words and features if these are not already an integral part of the curriculum
- ✎ Students are aware of the learning routines—and demonstrate a level of comfort with routines
 - -Discussion (short peer-to-peer, debate format, mock interview) punctuates every lesson
- ✎ Writing is used as a method for consolidating thinking before and after reading and discussion and occurs each day as part of each lesson
 - -Students are encouraged to use peers as language resources when reading and writing
 - Students are asked to make use of previously taught words, language structures and strategies for AL learning when reading and writing

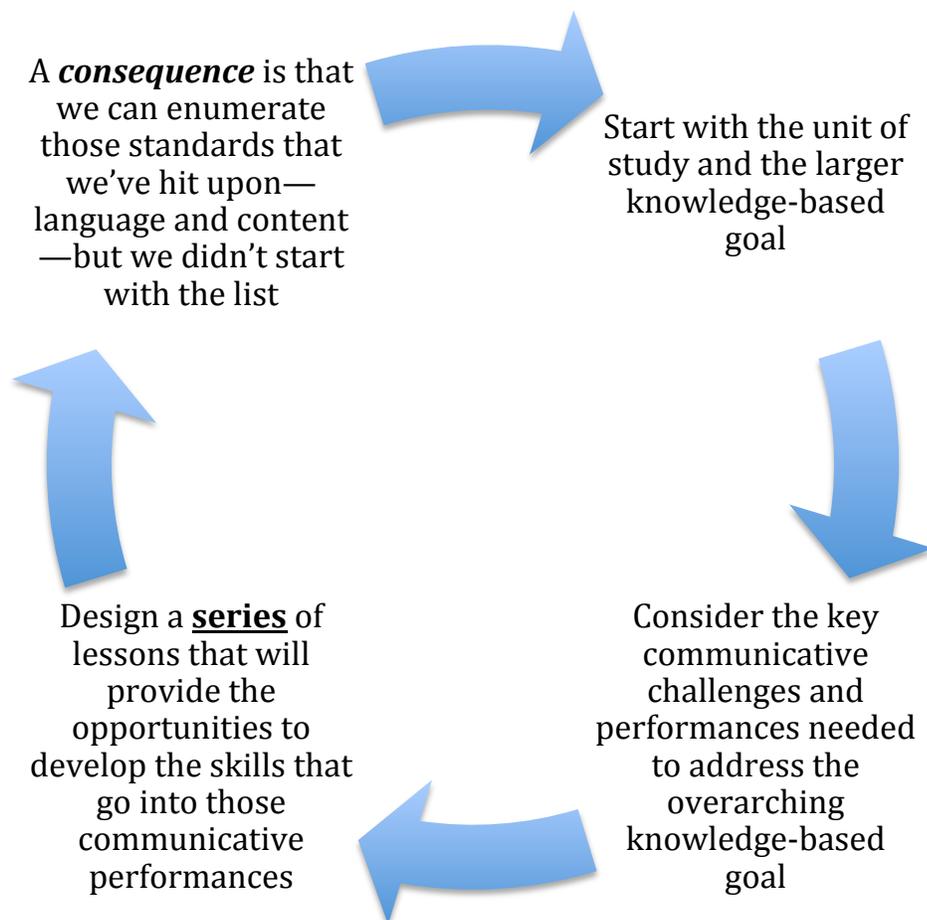
Crafting Language and Content Objectives

Language and Content: An Inextricable Link

Often, we begin crafting instruction by thinking about what we want our students 'to know'—this is a content objective. What we only rarely consider is that *all* content learning is acquired and demonstrated through language.

Given this, we need to also begin our instruction by considering the language skills that students will need by the end of the unit to convey their learning in a culminating task—often a speaking, reading or writing assignment. These assignments (or communicative performances) draw on a host of language skills that students may not have had the opportunity to acquire. For this reason, we need to explicitly teach and scaffold these language skills throughout a series and sequence of lessons.

A Cycle for Crafting Language and Content Objectives



What is a communicative performance? Some Examples:

1. To participate in a debate about whether humans are causing climate change
2. To write a persuasive essay to a local politician about an initiative to reduce greenhouse gases
3. To follow a scientific process of reading and reporting on evidence
4. To find evidence in the text that supports or refutes the notion that humans are causing climate change