

GLOSSARY

Academic language proficiency, interpersonal communication skills, discourse, academic (language) functions

Academic language proficiency refers not only to an individual's knowledge of the technical vocabulary, jargon and concepts of a particular discipline, e.g., mathematics, but also to skills in comprehending, speaking, reading and writing such language. Comprehending a written math problem and explaining its solution is an example of academic language proficiency. Explaining and demonstrating to someone the various ways of propagating plants (growing from seed, root cuttings, root separation and air-layering) is another example.

Academic language proficiency contrasts with **interpersonal communication skills** that refer to nontechnical language acts, such as greeting friends, talking about the weather, light conversation around the dinner table or at parties, reading signs and writing short notes to friends and colleagues. **Discourse** refers to any language sequence greater than the single word, such as multiple spoken sentences or extended speech, and written sentences, paragraphs and pages of text. **Academic language proficiency**, therefore, includes not only the knowledge of individual vocabulary words, but also the ability to engage in spoken and written discourse on a given technical topic. Discourse often is characterized by particular language features, such as *if...then* types of sentences in science and mathematics.

Academic language proficiency includes the ability to use the language of academic functions such as informing, comparing, ordering and classifying. These often have their own characteristic forms of expression. For example, when comparing objects we use endings on adjectives such as *taller* and *tallest* or function words such as *more* insulated and *most* insulated or *less* insulated and *least* insulated. When ordering items, we often employ ordinal numbers such as *first*, *second*, *third*, *fourth*, *fifth* and *sixth*.

Achievement gap

The **achievement gap** refers to significant differences in performance levels, usually on standardized performance measures, among various student groups. Typically, the performance data of students on standardized measures such as the Connecticut Mastery Test or the National Assessment of Educational Progress are compiled and then disaggregated according to student group, such as white students, Hispanic students and African-American students. Average scores on the same measure for these student language or ethnic groups then are analyzed on a school district, state or national level to determine whether discrepancies in achievement are present. If, for example, white students score 20 points higher, on average, than Hispanic students in reading or mathematics on such a test over a period of years, then there is an achievement gap among white and Hispanic students.

Cognitive coaching

Cognitive coaching is a nonevaluative type of teacher training based on a relationship of trust and respect between teachers and the coaches who observe them. It consists of using various thought-provoking questioning strategies designed to help teachers understand their own teaching with greater insight, to think about their teaching, and to control and change it through their own decision making.

Contextual clues to meaning

The concept of **contextual clues to meaning** comes from language-acquisition theory. We acquire language by understanding what people say to us or write to us by understanding the “input.” We make what we are saying or writing understandable to others by using “extra-linguistic” clues such as pictures or other visual aids, body language and physical demonstrations. Providing contextual clues to the meaning of what we are saying or writing is especially important when teaching English or content areas in English to English language learners.

People also will understand what we are saying or writing to the degree to which they understand the topic or the concepts we are expressing. Before we discuss a certain topic, therefore, we need to determine how familiar our listeners or readers are with the topic, i.e., we must determine their prior knowledge. If they know little or nothing about the topic of discussion or of the reading, i.e., if they lack prior knowledge, then we need to stop and engage them in activities and experiences that will help them understand the topic. For example, if we wish to discuss growing plants and the students know little about the topic, then we need to bring them out to a garden and get them familiar with soil, plants, roots, planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, watering, etc.

Therefore providing **contextual clues to the meaning** of spoken and written language has two aspects: 1) using extra-linguistic clues to signal the meaning of what we are saying or writing, and 2) creating familiarity with unknown topics or concepts. With English language learners it is important to use contextual clues to meaning in teaching both English and subjects through English, to determine their familiarity with topics covered in spoken and written English, and to introduce them to unfamiliar topics and concepts.

Co-teaching, team teaching and collaboration

While these three practices overlap, there are several important distinctions that need to be made among them. **Co-teaching** is an instructional practice in which two or more educators or other certified staff persons:

- share instructional responsibility
- for a single group of students

- mostly in a single classroom or workspace
- for specific content/objectives
- with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability, although
- each individual's level of participation may vary.

Team teaching refers to a situation in which two general education teachers combine classes and share instruction. It differs from co-teaching in two ways: 1) in co-teaching, the teacher-student ratio is greatly improved; 2) in co-teaching, two significantly different orientations toward teaching are blended. On the middle school level, team teaching often refers to a process for planning interdisciplinary instruction, but not sharing instructional delivery.

Collaboration refers to how individuals interact, not the activity they are performing. Consequently, activities such as co-teaching, problem solving and consultation may or may not be collaborative.²⁷

English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs

ESL instruction refers to classes in which English language learners (ELLs) learn to listen, speak, read and write in English. Typically, both interpersonal communication skills and academic language proficiency are developed. An **ESL program** refers to a total educational program for ELLs, that is ESL instruction as well as instruction in the content areas such as math, science, social studies and literature. These subjects are taught in English, but with modifications that make them understandable and accessible to students who are still in the process of acquiring the language.

English immersion programs

As used in this document, English immersion programs refer to the English mainstream education program. ELLs that are placed in the mainstream program are said to be immersed in English if supports such as ESL and sheltered content instruction are not provided.

English language learners (ELLs)

This term refers to students from non-English speaking homes that are in the process of acquiring proficiency in English. Another frequently used term is "limited-English-proficient"(LEP) students.

²⁷ Friend, M. "Co-Teaching: Principles, Practices and Pragmatics," Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis, School of Education. Workshop for Special Education Resource Center, Middletown, CT, May 20, 1998.

English mastery standard

In 1999, the State Department of Education developed an **English mastery standard** for the language proficiency and academic achievement tests that comprise the annual assessment. The standard for each test is a score that students are expected to attain during, or at the end of, 30 months in the bilingual education program. For the English language proficiency test, the standard is the fully proficient score in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For the Connecticut Mastery Test, students must achieve above the intervention level or better on the mathematics, reading and writing tests.

Language acquisition, language learning

Language acquisition is the process of “picking up” a language by interacting with fluent speakers of that language. It is the process whereby children learn their native language at home. As a result, an individual can acquire additional languages; hence the term second-language acquisition. **Language learning**, on the other hand, implies being taught a language in a classroom or tutorial situation. Classroom activities such as explicit teaching of vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing all are indicative of language learning.

Language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, writing), achievement

Language proficiency refers to the language skills that an individual has, regardless of how that individual acquired them, and with no reference to a specific course of study. Language proficiency is complex and encompasses the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Examples of listening/speaking skills include: comprehending a spoken question and responding appropriately; expressing feelings; and explaining a process (e.g., operating a computer program). An example of reading proficiency is comprehending the meaning of written texts over a varied range of topics as demonstrated through a verbal or written explanation. Writing proficiency can be shown by such tasks as conveying a set of directions in writing that can be understood or by writing an analysis of research. Proficiency should not be confused with **achievement**, which is the content one has learned through a specific course of study such as a history or literature course. The knowledge and skills learned in such a course are measured by an achievement test that is based on the course objectives and content. **Language proficiency tests** measure sets of skills identified as important by the test maker, with no reference to a particular course of study. Individuals may, of course, possess proficiency in more than one language.

Language transition support services (LTSS), annual assessment

LTSS are instructional services required for students who have exited a program of bilingual education after 30 months without having met the English mastery standard on the annual assessment. The purpose of LTSS are to enable these students to achieve the mastery standard and to function successfully in the mainstream classroom. Services consist primarily of continued English language and literacy development, as well as content-area instruction, with modifications and support that facilitate learning for English language learners (ELLs). Section 10-17f of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that students in bilingual education programs and in LTSS be tested annually in English language proficiency and in academic subjects, hence the term **annual assessment**.

Mainstream program, bilingual education program

The **mainstream program** refers to the regular school program in which instruction is conducted in English for native English-speaking and English-proficient students. The term **bilingual education program** refers to an educational program for English language learners (ELLs) conducted in English and the students' native languages. ELLs are taught the same curriculum as students in the mainstream program, but in their native languages as well as in English, and receive instruction in English listening, speaking, reading and writing, commonly called English as a second language (ESL) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Eventually, the students reach a level of English academic language proficiency and literacy that allows them to perform all of their studies in English.

Process writing

Process writing is a way of teaching students to write that involves the following phases: 1) prewriting; 2) conferencing between teachers and students or between students; 3) drafting and revising; and 4) editing surface-level errors such as spelling, grammar and word order.

Sheltered content instruction

Sheltered content instruction refers to the modifications that teachers employ in making content-area instruction in English understandable and accessible to ELLs and that enable the students to express what they have learned. Teachers modify instruction by:

- using a **level of English** that students can comprehend (simpler words, shorter sentences, slower pace, more pauses);
- using many **contextual clues**, such as pictures, manipulatives, hands-on activities, graphic organizers, body language, films, slides, computer programs with graphics, etc.;

- accessing students' **prior knowledge**;
- **preteaching** major concepts and introducing students to unfamiliar topics;
- **teaching the academic language** as part of content teaching – this includes introducing new and important words and modeling discourse features that students are likely to encounter in content-area readings and verbal discourse; and
- introducing students to **learning strategies** that will help them understand and acquire the new content, such as selective note-taking and skimming chapter titles and subheadings.

Transfer of reading skills from one language to another

When children learn to read, they acquire a complex set of skills that can be transferred to additional languages that they may acquire. For languages that employ alphabets, such as English, some of the reading skills and concepts that are most likely to transfer include: sound-letter correspondence; directionality, i.e., reading from right to left or from left to right; skimming and scanning text; and using context to ascertain the meaning of unknown words.

