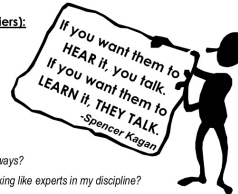

Competence At Work Spencer Ebook

Guiding Questions from Building Academic Language (Zwiers):

- ✓ What is academic language, how can I **build** it as I teach content?
- ✓ How can I **adapt** my curriculum and assessment to build on the **cultural and linguistic strengths** of my students?
- ✓ How can I get students to think together to **co-construct** meaning; rather than just study to memorize?
- ✓ How can I **build language skills** for complex reading and writing?
- ✓ How can I **assess** thinking skills and language proficiency in useful ways?
- ✓ How can I most efficiently **apprentice students** into thinking and talking like experts in my discipline?



→ Excerpts from "English Language Development: Implementation at Grades Six Through Twelve" (Dutro and Kinsella)

Secondary education is a complex endeavor. Fast-paced schedules, specialized courses, rigorous content, high-staked assessment, and variety of instructional methods place a high demand on students. For students, who must navigate these complexities while acquiring [academic] English, the demands intensify significantly (Dutro and Levy 2008).

Academic Language Development in Core Content

Although there are many definitions of academic English, there are agreed-upon commonalities. According to various sources cited by Saunders and Goldenberg, "Academic language refers to the specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse/ textual, and functional skills associated with academic instruction and mastery of academic materials and tasks". Academic language is significantly different from the informal speech student use outside the classroom. The language of schooling includes everyday words (e.g. *reason, understand*), general academic vocabulary that cuts across subject areas (e.g. *respond, category*), and specialized terms (e.g. *polygon, onomatopoeia*) (Feldman and Kinsella 2008). Written and spoken classroom discourse is also characterized by academic text structures and grammatical complexity (Bailey 2007; Scarcella 2003; Schlepprell 2004; Wong Fillmore and Snow 2000).

Academic English requires sufficient background knowledge to apply general knowledge of words differently across subject areas. For example, *division* and *product* have strikingly different meanings in mathematics than they so in social studies or everyday use. Similarly, a student might encounter the term *factor* in a mathematics class (process) and later that same day in a discussion of economics (issue). Academic English also entails specialized knowledge of concepts in particular subject areas.

Building Functional Language

Mastery of language and syntactic features allows students' full participation in academics by enabling them to put ideas together in a wide range of ways. Mastery includes learning the breadth of language patterns to communicate relationships between ideas: to explain, describe, compare, and contrast, summarize, generalize, express, cause-and-effect relationships, sequences, and so on. **The intentional teaching of language structures- the "mortar"- enables Students to internalize the patterns needed to express concepts, ideas, and thinking.**

Teaching English from the perspective of language functions helps to identify the language demands of a specific academic task (describing, sequencing events, comparing attributes) and content concepts (methods of communication, narrative events). The benefits of learning to use the language functions such as *comparing*, for example, extend beyond a given task because once Students know how to compare, they can apply that skill to a range of contexts across content areas. Students practice and extend their language skills for comparing by applying it in different ways. **Increasing competence in any language function obligates the speaker or writer to use increasingly complex sentence structures.**

Using this approach, learning interesting content- and how to talk and write about that interesting content- is not delayed until more advanced levels of proficiency are reached. Academic language is developed from the beginning stages of second language learning. Competence in a range of functions equips students to participate in content instruction and supports academic language proficiency. **Language becomes a vehicle, rather than a barrier, to learning.**

Switzerland District-Wide Academic Support Teams, October 2010 *(from K. Kinsella)

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