
2 Using a Four-Pronged Framework

Why is it important to understand the difference between students who carry academic language and those who are learning it?

In Chapter 1, we were introduced to Jana Fielding's kindergarten classroom and one of her students, Lily, who does not possess the language skills that she needs to perform successfully in school. We begin this chapter by continuing our discussion of students who are learning academic language and students who carry it to and from school. Let's revisit Lily and then meet Thomas, a student who carries academic language into kindergarten.

We learned in Chapter 1 that Lily was not doing well in school and that Mrs. Fielding had placed her in the language arts group that she believed would provide Lily with the supports that she needed for improvement. We also learned that Mrs. Fielding would like to be a more effective teacher for students like Lily and work more closely with their parents; however, she is not sure what steps to take.

Thomas is also a student in Mrs. Fielding's class. During morning meeting, when Mrs. Fielding routinely introduces her students to the day's schedule, Thomas listens attentively and is often the first to raise his hand in response to her inquiries about the letters, sounds, and words that she references on the chart paper that sits on an easel adjacent to her seat. Thomas loves sounding out the words and, more often than not, making connections between what he already knows and what is written. He is well on his way to being a reader. During the parent conference, Mrs. Fielding lets his parents know how proud she is of his efforts and how well he is doing in class.

The following two reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

REFLECTION PROMPT FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following question, and write a response.

- From what you have read so far about Thomas, list three to four reasons why you believe that he is doing well in school.



REFLECTION PROMPT FOR TEAM STUDY AND OUR-O-LOGUE

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following questions, write a response, and prepare to discuss it with your team.

- Would you continue to place Thomas and Lily in different language arts groups? Explain your reasons for or against placing them in the same group.



**REFLECTION PROMPT FOR TEAM
STUDY AND OUR-O-LOGUE****Time for Reflection:**

Reflect on the following question, write a response, and prepare to discuss it with your team.

- What qualities of school readiness do you think are important, and how would or do you attend to these with students who do and do not have them? Provide a list of three to four things that you do or would do with students from each group.

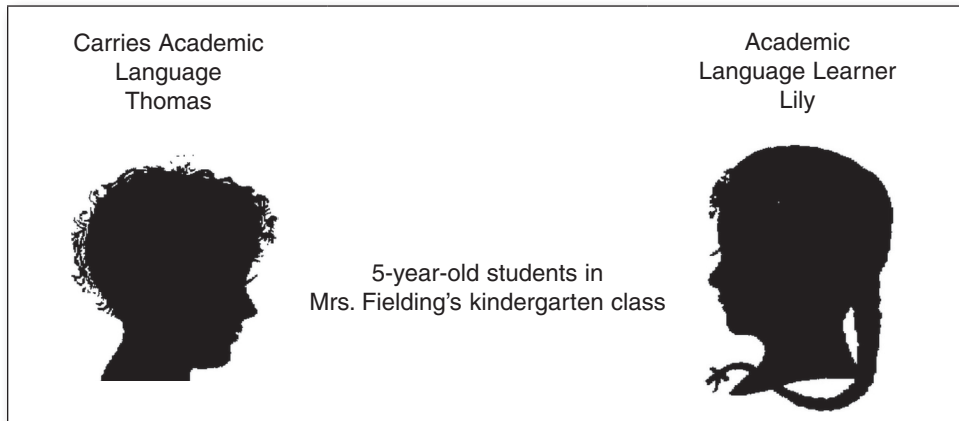
Let's take a closer look at Lily and Thomas. In Chapter 1, we learned that Lily's parents did not graduate from high school and did not see value in school. In addition, we learned that Lily's parents tell her stories about their family histories and childhoods. In school, Lily is performing poorly. Mrs. Fielding is concerned that her language skills are well below where they should be, and she is thinking of referring Lily for a special education evaluation. Thomas's parents went to college, his father works as an accountant, and his mother works as a salesperson. Reading is commonplace in his home, and Thomas participates throughout the year in many sports activities as part of the city's recreational programming. Mrs. Fielding is pleased with Thomas's performance in school and is observing him starting to read.

**STUDENTS WHO ARE CARRYING VERSUS STUDENTS
WHO ARE LEARNING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE**

Let's look more closely at which language practices enacted at home more closely parallel the language and literacy practices at school. To

do this, let's assign Thomas the category of *carries academic language* and Lily, *academic language learner*. I developed the term *carries academic language* to refer to students who come to school with school-matched language skills.

Figure 2.1 Carrying Versus Learning Academic Language



Carries Academic Language

How we describe different groups of students is often our means for framing their education. For example, Thomas routinely observes his father's daily practice of reading the newspaper and his mother's practice of reading recipes, magazines, books, and other printed materials. These behaviors lead to literacy development, and they cement reading as an essential behavior. In a great sense, Thomas's personal, world, cultural, and literacy knowledge is being bolstered by these literacy practices (Pransky, 2008; Rogoff, 1990; Zacarian, 2011; Zacarian & Haynes, 2012). In addition, Thomas's parents are college educated. If we combine the two characteristics, parents' education and exposure to literacy practices at a young age, we might surmise that his parents' behaviors are geared for Thomas to develop literacy skills and that education is important for his growth and development. In addition, it is clear that before Thomas set foot into an educational system, he had been exposed to the ever-present culture of reading and literacy development as a way of being and acting.

Thomas's parents also speak in ways that match what Delpit (1995) refers to as *middle-class speech*. For example, their expectation is that Thomas will know to wash his hands when preparing for the evening meal. Their question, "What do we do before we eat?" though a veiled

directive, requires Thomas to engage in three separate sequentially ordered events. First, he will stop doing what he is doing; second, he will wash his hands; and third, he will come to dinner. These, too, are literacy-oriented behaviors in that they call for Thomas to sequence an event in a particular order, an activity that we as educators associate with an important thinking skill. Delpit notes these behaviors in a very different but important way. Lily’s and Thomas’s parents use language in ways that reflect their cultures. However, only Thomas’s parents use it in the way that it is used in school. The middle-class speech that he is hearing and using at home parallels that of school. When Mrs. Fielding asks questions, for example, “Are we ready to line up?” he understands it properly as three messages: stop doing what he is doing, line up with his peers, and get ready for a transition. Thus, Thomas carries the language that he is learning at home into school and vice versa. In this sense, the two are matched and build from each other. Figure 2.2 reflects the behaviors that are commonplace among students who carry academic language.

The following reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

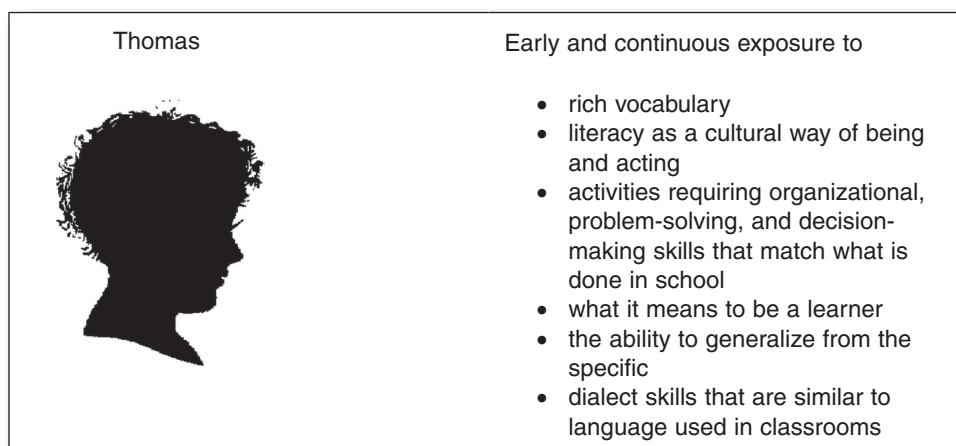
REFLECTION PROMPT FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following question, and write a response.

- As you read the bulleted list in Figure 2.2, think of how these do or do not associate with the practices that are needed for being successful in school, and note your ideas.



Figure 2.2 Carries Academic Language

Learning Academic Language

Lily's parents often share their childhood and life experiences with her. She knows a good deal about her family's history and background as well as their cultural traditions as a result of being routinely exposed to these narrative storytelling activities. When she is with other family members, including her grandparents and others, they also engage in these types of behaviors. These are valuable behaviors that can be geared for literacy but do not necessarily match what occurs in school. That is, while much of Lily's personal, cultural, world, and language knowledge is rooted in these traditions, they do not reflect the practices that commonly occur in school. In addition, neither of Lily's parents completed high school, and they do not believe that school was for them.

This is not to say that Lily's parents do not care about her education. It is to say that her upbringing is quite different from Thomas's and that of other children reared in homes where parents provide their children with early literacy behaviors and routines that are like little suitcases ready to carry into school. First, Lily's parents are not as formally educated as Thomas's are. Second, their parenting, though loving and caring, is not geared for the development of literacy skills in the same way as many schools approach literacy. While we might mistakenly assume that they are not "good" parents because they are not gearing Lily for literacy, an alternate asset-based view is essential here. Lily's parents believe strongly in oral storytelling traditions. It is a critical interactional

behavior, according to developmental psychologist Mary Gauvain (2001), and one that they use as part of Lily's development, understanding of the world around her, and, importantly, membership in their social community. If we think of this in terms of what Lily needs to be a member of her community, her parents are rearing her in the ways that will lead Lily to be successful in this regard (Gauvain, 2001). They are playing a key role in this developmental process. While parents are not the only ones involved in interacting with children, the types of interactions that parents and other adults have with children are part of their socialization process and are shaped around what is available and, of course, valued.


Cognitive development, according to Gauvain (2001), is dependent on the network and boundaries that are made available. As children are guided to participate in the world around them, such as playing sports and engaging in family discussions, or passively observing it, such as observing a church ritual, the more exposure they have, the broader their understanding becomes. Thus, the interactions (both passive through observation and active through participation) that children are routinely exposed to become the cement that holds their view of the world together. Let's look at this through the lenses of Lily and Thomas.

Lily spends most of her time at home with her immediate and extended family. She also attends church with her family. She is part of this close family network. Thomas participates on a weekly basis in the city's recreational sports programs. While both children are exposed to different people, the nature and scope of their social interactions are part of the network and boundaries of their development (Gauvain, 2001). All of these experiences provide opportunities that influence the children's developmental growth. In Lily's case, parenting is not focused on the types of literacy behaviors that are commonly nested in school. Further, the type of development that she is experiencing is also much more direct. As an example, she is told explicitly when to stop doing what she is doing, wash her hands, and come to dinner. If we are to view cognitive development as being influenced through what Rogoff (1990) defines as apprenticeships, Lily's development is being guided in a direct and explicit manner. For example, she is expected to be dependent on her mother's explicit directions.

It is important to connect the relationship between child development, school, and beyond—including the eventual workplace. If we are to connect how each relates to the other, we can begin to see how they are all related or not related to each other. To push this idea, let's first look at

Figure 2.3. It reflects the behaviors that are commonplace among people like Lily who are academic language learners.

Figure 2.3 Academic Language Learner

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Early and continuous exposure to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral storytelling • rich narrative of personhood and membership • activities requiring following directions • explicit direct parenting • dialect that is distinct from school language • vernacular speech | <p>Lily</p>  |
|--|--|

The following reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

REFLECTION PROMPT FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following question, and write a response.

- As you read the bulleted list in Figure 2.3, note how these do or do not associate with the practices that are needed for being successful in school.



Like Thomas, they have engaged in what Zwiers (2007b) calls *foundational* activities. In cultures where these foundational activities occur, for example, reading is a highly valued and practiced activity. This could not be more true for public and public charter school educators. Our profession is deeply rooted in literacy practices as a way of being and acting—they practically ooze out of our pores! However, the same cannot be said for all of our students, and herein lies the major distinction between educators and some students.

Let's look at the distinctions that have been made between students who carry academic language and students who are learning academic language. A primary difference is that parents of children who carry academic language are more educated. They typically have a college education and value literacy as a cultural way of being. They also have been exposed, and expose their children routinely, to rich vocabulary and activities that are matched with what will occur in school. In addition, they are generally speakers of or fluent in the dialect of school, the dialect that is needed to listen, speak, read, and write academically (Zwiers, 2007a). In this sense, regardless of the parents' home language (e.g., English, Spanish, Vietnamese), if they use academic language, they are likely to be raising their children to do the same.

Figure 2.4 lists the distinctions between users of academic language and academic language learners.

Figure 2.4

| Academic Language User | Academic Language Learner |
|--|---|
| <p>Early and continuous exposure to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rich vocabulary • literacy as a cultural way of being and acting • activities requiring organizational, problem-solving, and decision-making skills • what it means to be a learner • the ability to generalize from the specific • a dialect that matches school dialect | <p>Early and continuous exposure to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral storytelling • rich narrative of personhood and membership • activities requiring following directions • explicit direct parenting • a dialect that does not match school dialect • vernacular speech |

The following reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

- Observe a classroom setting in which a subject is being taught. Describe the lesson in detail in terms of what is evidenced from the Academic Language User column in Figure 2.4.

- Describe the lesson in detail in terms of what is evidenced from the Academic Language Learner column in Figure 2.4.

- What differences do you note between your response to the previous two tasks in terms of their applicability for students from each group?

THE CALL FOR A FOUR-PRONGED FRAMEWORK

At a foundational level, young children are exposed to early life experiences that are targeted for what is needed to be a member of the cultural group in which the children are being reared (Gauvain, 2001; Rogoff, 1990, 2003). Thus, children develop the language and communication

skills that they need to actively participate in their home culture. For some, much of what has occurred and is occurring in their home culture is targeted for literacy development in a range of subject-specific areas such as language arts, math, science, and social studies. This early exposure is what Zwiers (2007a, 2007b) refers to as the foundational building blocks of academic language. As children develop, their foundational level is expanded in both general and specific ways. In the field of education, we often refer to this as building from our students' background.

This concept is essential for us to consider as we develop ways for advancing student achievement. It also calls for a framework for understanding how to build on students' backgrounds, especially those who are learning academic language, so that they, too, can have meaningful access to learning and opportunities to be successful in school. To consider what it means to carry academic language means thinking more broadly about what is needed. Academic language is more than the ability to use words to listen, speak, read, and write.

To understand the concept of academic language, read the following excerpt and complete the reflection activity that follows it:

New Compact Microspectrometer Design Achieves High Resolution and Wide Bandwidth

Spectrometers have conventionally been expensive and bulky bench-top instruments used to detect and identify the molecules inside a sample by shining light on it and measuring different wavelengths of the emitted or absorbed light. Previous efforts toward miniaturizing spectrometers have reduced their size and cost, but these reductions have typically resulted in lower-resolution instruments. . . .

The 81-channel on-chip spectrometer designed by Georgia Tech engineers achieved 0.6-nanometer resolution over a spectral range of more than 50 nanometers with a footprint less than one square millimeter. The simple instrument—with its ultra-small footprint—can be integrated with other devices, including sensors, optoelectronics, microelectronics and microfluidic channels for use in biological, chemical, medical and pharmaceutical applications. (Adapted from Physorg.com, 2011)

The following reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

(Continued)

- With a partner, select a paragraph of text from a math, science, social studies, or language arts text. Summarize the excerpt in one or two sentences.

- Collaborate on a list of terms, words, idioms, and phrases (TWIPs) that you believe are key to know.

- Describe one concept that is being discussed in this paragraph, and discuss how it is dependent on the TWIPs that you identified in the previous question.

While there are only four sentences in this excerpt, each is packed with a special type of meaning that is indigenous to a certain group of people: electrical and computer science engineers. To understand this short passage well, we have to possess (1) depth of knowledge about the culture of electrical and computer science engineers; (2) the ability to listen, speak,

read, and write in electrical and computer science language; (3) academic knowledge in this field of study to comprehend the text meaningfully and interact with it; and (4) the ability to use critical thinking skills about electrical and computer science in order to be able to contribute to it.

Being one who carries academic language requires the same type of proficiencies. Students must have sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive skill knowledge to perform academic tasks at any grade level. This does not occur naturally, however, for anyone. For some students, as we have discussed, their home language environment matches their school environment. Thus, what happens in school builds on the foundational academic language knowledge that has been and is occurring at home and vice versa. Thomas's parents are gearing their home culture to match what they believe will occur in Thomas's school; they are helping Thomas develop the skills that he needs to be a successful kindergarten student. Lily is being reared in a fine home culture as well; however, it is not focused on school culture in the same ways as Thomas's is. The absence of these connections is contributing to her doing poorly in school.

To address these differences more fully calls for a four-pronged framework (Collier, 1995; Zacarian, 2011) for planning and delivering high-quality learning experiences to students who carry academic language and, more important, those who are learning academic language so that we may better advance achievement for all students.

Four-Pronged Framework for a High-Quality Learning Environment

1. Learning is a sociocultural process. It involves building connections with students' "personal, social, cultural, and world experiences" (Zacarian, 2011, p. 77). While we often refer to this as building on students' backgrounds, it must be grounded in students' and their families' identities and personhood.
2. Learning is a developmental process. It calls for understanding the literacy proficiency level of each student and targeting instruction a little bit beyond it so that it is obtainable and reachable.
3. Learning is an academic process. It is "built on the prior learning experiences of students and when the academic language and learning goals are made explicit" (Zacarian, 2011, p. 78).
4. Learning is a cognitive process in which higher-order thinking skills are intentionally taught.

Each of these is interdependently connected and applies in all learning environments, especially in classrooms composed of diverse learners.

The following reflection prompts have been separated for individual study and team study. Complete the prompt that applies to your particular context.

REFLECTION PROMPT FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following question, and write a response.

- Write about the ways in which you infuse or would infuse each of the four prongs into your work. Write two to three specific ideas for each of the prongs.



REFLECTION PROMPT FOR TEAM STUDY AND OUR-O-LOGUE

Time for Reflection:

Reflect on the following task, write a response to it, and prepare to discuss it with your team.

- Observe a lesson being taught. Discuss in detail the ways in which each of the four prongs is or is not incorporated into the lesson.



SUMMARY

In this chapter, we described the distinctions between students who carry academic language and students who are learning academic language. We drew from Rogoff (1990, 2003) and Gauvain (2001) to describe the influence of cultural development on children's language practices. We also highlighted early exposure to academic language in our discussion of Zwiers's (2007a, 2007b) foundational language concepts. We introduced the four-pronged framework for understanding how to create high-quality classroom environments that support carriers of academic language and, most important, the learning of academic language—learning as a socio-cultural, developmental, academic, and cognitive process.

In Chapter 3, we will look more closely at the first of the four prongs: learning as a sociocultural process and how it must be tied to students' personal, cultural, and world knowledge.

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