

**Learning Academic Language:
We're All Language Teachers, or Should Be**
JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall, University of Maryland Baltimore County, UMBC
crandall@umbc.edu

1. Increasing Student Diversity

- Latinos, Asian-Americans, World Englishes, Varieties of American English
- Different educational and literacy experiences and expectations
- Increasing diversity among learners but less so among teachers

2. Challenge for Schools

- Bridging the gap between home and school
- Helping children to learn academic language/discourse
- The role of the mainstream or content teacher

3. Some Guiding Principles

- Students learn academic language and concepts most effectively when:
 - they learn it through meaningful content
 - they use the language in interacting with their peers
 - they have access to more knowledgeable others
 - they have a number of opportunities to try out what they are learning

4. Social and Academic Language (Cummins)

- Social Language: informal, concrete, conversational, cues from context
- Academic Language: formal, abstract, school-based, meaning through language
 - Cf. reading email from a friend vs reading a science textbook
 - talking on the playground vs explaining a procedure

5. Factors that Influence Difficulty of Academic Discourse and Texts

- Degree of complexity of the information
- Degree of context or support provided

6. Guidance for Developing Instructional Strategies for All Students

- Make content and language more comprehensible (Cummins, Krashen)
- Increase interaction and support using the language (Long, Swain, Vygotsky, Bruner, Olson)

7. Make Content and Language More Comprehensible

- Engage learners in experience
 - Science as an ideal subject for acquiring and developing academic language and literacy
 - Can participate at different levels (Lave & Wenger)
 - Situated meaning (sources of meaning in the context outside text)
 - Scaffolding and joint construction of academic discourse

- **Draw upon children’s home languages and cultures**
 Bring in community “funds of knowledge” (Moll)
 Choose multicultural literature and texts
 Engage in “instructional conversations” with learners –from everyday language to more academic (discipline-specific) language (Goldberg)
- **Organize instruction into themes**
 Use different types of texts and activities for different language and literacy levels
 Provide context and natural repetition of key concepts and language
- **Provide alternatives for accessing meaning or demonstrating understanding**
 Visuals, graphics, demonstrations
 Use alternative assessment (more time, different modalities, etc.)
- **Consciously teach reading**
 Select range of texts – literary, informational, Internet texts
 Engage learners in collaboratively interacting with those texts
 - Reader’s Theater
 - Science Literature Circles (informational & literary texts)
 - Jigsaw Reading
 Use graphic organizers and other pre-, during-, and post-reading activities
- **Consciously teach language**
 Incorporate language objectives and scaffolding (“sentence frames”)
 Direct attention to vocabulary development through content
 - Word Walls
 - Word Families (Academic Word List; science word lists)
 - Word Analysis - Roots and Affixes (Graeco-Latin academic words)

8. Increase Interaction and Support

- **Engage language learners with others in cooperative/collaborative activities**
 Cooperative Tasks and Projects (Dewey, Papert)
 Buddy Reading
 Peer and Cross-age or Cross-Proficiency Tutoring
- **Reduce teacher talk; Increase student-student and student-teacher talk**
 4 Levels of Questioning
 Point To; One-word/Yes/No; Short Phrase; Sentences
 Frequent Comprehension Checks
 Cooperative Tasks with Assigned Roles
- **Engage learners in writing, especially interactive writing**
 Dialogue Journals/Science Journals
 Language Experience Stories
 Email/Key Pals, Discussion Boards, etc.
 Group Reports