In the STARlight

Issue 10

Leveraging English Language Learner Shadowing Into Academic Oral Language Opportunities for ELLs

+ Key Points
+ Implications
+ Resources

Written by:

Ivannia Soto, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Whittier College

Prepared by:

Yee Wan, Ed.D.
Santa Clara County Office of Education

March 2013

Students of Today Achieving Results

The new speaking and listening demands of the Common Core Standards will require *all* students, including English Language Learners (ELLs), to participate in "academic discussions in one-on-one, small group, and whole-class settings." Additionally, students will need to "collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems" (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2012). This means that teachers must do intentional planning in order to elicit more opportunities for academic oral language development in the classroom setting. Oftentimes, however, educators may not realize the importance of incorporating academic talk into their classrooms, or they may not been taught how to apprentice students into academic discourse.

The ELL shadowing process can be utilized to create urgency around the need for ELLs to practice academic oral language development and active listening in the classroom setting. Sadly, on average, ELLs spend less than 2% of their school day in academic oral language development (August, 2003). Based mostly on chapters 2 and 6 of *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* by Pauline Gibbons (2002), which discuss the importance of speaking and listening for ELLs, the student shadowing process asks educators to spend a day in the linguistic life of an ELL. Specifically, educators monitor the academic speaking and listening behaviors of ELLs in the classroom setting, at five-minute intervals. The figure below shows the protocol that is used for ELL shadowing.

Figure 1: ELL Shadowing Protocol

English Language Learner Shadow Study Observation Form

Student: _Josue_ **School:** _Si Se Puede High School_

ELD Level: _Level 3 (Intermediate)_ **Gender:** _Male_ **Grade Level:** _9th_

Years in US Schools: _10 years_ **Years in district:** _10 years_

Time	Specific Student Activity/ Location of student 5 minute intervals	Academic Speaking (Check one)	Academic Listening 1-way or 2-way (Check one)		Student is Not listening (Check one)	Comments
8:00	Student is presenting to the class.	❑ Student to Student- *1* ❑ Student To Teacher-*2* ❑ Student to Small Group-*3* ❑ **Student to Whole Class-4** ❑ Teacher to Student-*5* ❑ Teacher to Small Group- *6* ❑ Teacher to Whole Class- *7*	1 way or two way ❑ Student listening mostly to Student-*1* ❑ Student listening mostly to Teacher-*2* ❑ Student listening mostly to Small Group-*3* ❑ Student listening to mostly Whole Class-*4*		❑ Reading or writing silently-1 ❑ Student is off task-2	Student uses the academic language stem to begin his PowerPoint presentation on molecules.

Once teachers have shadowed an ELL, they often state that they would no longer teach without requiring academic talk. An elementary school teacher, in one of the very first ELL shadowing trainings in District 6 of Los Angeles Unified School District in 2003 said, "The person talking the most is the person learning the most, and I'm doing the most talking." In addition to teachers, both principals and second language experts agree about the power of ELL shadowing. Rudy Gonzalez, a principal at a high-poverty elementary school in Norwalk, CA has experienced the power of shadowing at his school. He explained that once teachers at Morrison Elementary School began focusing on language development, benchmark test scores went up right away. Increases on state tests followed. California sets a target score for schools of 800 on its Academic Performance Index, the statewide accountability system. For the 2008-2009 school year, Morrison's overall API was 818, while the score for the ELL population alone was 791. For 2010-2011, the overall score was 856, and the ELL score was 850. "That's phenomenal growth in two years," says Gonzalez. In addition, he emphasized the discrepancy between ELLs and the general population is down to six points. "We've closed the gap."

Similarly, Guadalupe Valdés, Bonnie Katz Tenenbaum Professor of Education at Stanford University School of Education suggests, "This approach will change a classroom observer's mindset forever. Student shadowing is a technique we all should learn to do, to do well, and to do frequently. The success of our students depends on it."

Implications for Teachers

Still, ELL shadowing is the first step. After shadowing, educators must take a look at their instructional materials in order to find and elicit academic oral language development once again. One way to apprentice students to move from one-on-one, small group, and whole group discussion demands of the Common Core is to use academic oral language development strategies as scaffolds. According to many linguists, academic language is not natural language

and must be explicitly taught. The Understanding Language Initiative (2012) suggests that "the overlap between language and content has dramatically increased . . . this overlap brings with it an urgent need to attend to the particulars of instructional discourse in the disciplines." Specific strategies that will assist ELLs with academic oral language development, across the disciplines, include:

1. **One-on-one oral exchanges: Think-Pair-Share strategy.** Unlike partner talk, which is a briefer opportunity for academic talk, Think-Pair-Share calls for teachers to devise open-ended questions, which requires longer responses and higher-order thinking. It asks students to think carefully and support their responses, and it requires ELLs to both share their response with a partner, as well as listen carefully to their partner's response before writing down a response. This strategy will allow ELLs to be more confident when they share out with a smaller group or during a whole class discussion.

2. **Small group exchanges: Reciprocal Teaching strategy.** This strategy structures productive group work so that each student has an accountable role for academic talk, and it reinforces good reader habits with ELLs. Specifically, after reading a text, each student engages with the selection by summarizing what they read, creating questions for discussion about the text, predicting what might happen next using evidence, or connecting the text to another text, life, or society. ELLs can then use academic language stems associated with their specific role to discuss their findings from the text. In this manner, students are apprenticed into building on each other's ideas when having an academic conversation.

3. **Whole group exchanges: Socratic Seminar strategy**. Once students become proficient and comfortable with Reciprocal Teaching discussions, whole class discussions using Socratic Seminar can be utilized. These less structured discussions typically begin with an open-ended question that is posed by the teacher or a student. Students examine text independently to obtain and substantiate their answers which requires a second reading exposure. Once students have identified their ample evidence, an academic discussion can occur. The fishbowl method promotes careful listening in a Socratic Seminar discussion when half of the class participates in discussing one segment while others actively listen. In a second discussion, groups switch discussing and listening roles.

More details about ELL shadowing, Think-Pair-Share, and Reciprocal Teaching are provided in the book *ELL Shadowing as a Catalyst for Change* (Soto, 2012), published by Corwin Press.

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Online Resources

Common Core State Standards Initiative. http://www.corestandards.org/

Understanding Language Initiative. http://ell.stanford.edu/

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Questions for Reflection

(1) How can you increase opportunities for your ELLs to use academic oral language?

(2) What percentage of time do you think your students spend in academic talk? Perhaps try the 15-minute rule, where you will require talking of some sort after no more than 15 minutes of teacher talk.

(3) Which of the three strategies outlined— Think-Pair-Share, Reciprocal Teaching, or Socratic Seminar—would you first try with your students?

(4) What additional academic oral language development strategies will you use to increase academic oral language production with your students?

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