Buzzing Classrooms: Accessing the Language of Curriculum
Research Highlights

“National data confirm that there are large and persistent gaps between the reading performance of language-minority and English-only … children.”

— August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005, p. 50

“Academic language [is] critical for reading and understanding content.”

— Rivera, Moughamian, & Francis, 2009, slide 41
College and Career Readiness Standards

- Students must use language correctly to be college ready and to communicate effectively in the skilled work force.

- Due to the complex role of language in education, all content area teachers must be prepared to support student growth in this area.
Objectives

• Identify the key elements in developing of academic language and academic vocabulary

• Distinguish between social and academic language and understand English language learners’ (ELLs) acquisition of these two types of language

• Discuss how to provide leadership to support strategies and routines that strengthen instruction for ELLs
Developing Academic Language

• Understanding the complex structures of the English language
• Incorporating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
• Including background knowledge in content-specific learning
• Building collaborative learning environments
• Increasing vocabulary knowledge
Developing Academic Vocabulary

• Linking terms to students’ experiences and background knowledge

• Limiting the number of words introduced at one time

• Selecting words appropriately

• Speaking and writing to build meaning in context

Birsh, 2005
Activity

What happens when you encounter academic language and academic vocabulary from a field of study other than your field?
Promoting Academic Language and Vocabulary Development

- Strengthen teaching skills and the knowledge base in academic language and vocabulary development.
- Expand the instructional focus in all content areas to incorporate key practices and strategies for promoting academic language and vocabulary development.
- Facilitate and support the teaching of academic language and vocabulary through strong instructional leadership.
- Evaluate curricula to ensure strategies and routines are incorporated to teach academic language and vocabulary on a daily basis.

Vogt & Echevarria, 2008
Research Highlights

ELLs have a greater chance to become proficient in the language when they have frequent and varied opportunities to use it.

Vogt & Echevarria, 2008

Educating ELLs is a systemic issue relevant to all teachers, not just specialists.

WestEd, 2008
Foundations of Academic Language and Vocabulary Development

- Reading skills in the student’s native language
- Strong strategies, routines, instructional practices, and curricula
- Instruction modified to meet the needs of ELLs

Goldenberg, 2008
Classrooms That Focus on Academic Language

• Prepare students to address the complexities of the English language

• Provide ELLs opportunities to practice using English in an academic setting with strategic support systems

• Provide ELLs with access to content knowledge through focused and explicit instruction
Classrooms That Focus on Academic Vocabulary

- Prepare students to read informational and content area text with high levels of proficiency
- Facilitate students’ comprehension of text
- Increase students’ use of words in a variety of contexts—both in and outside of academic settings
Classrooms That Promote Academic Language and Vocabulary

**What is seen:**

- Content and language objectives
- Writing samples (student and teacher)
- Concept maps and word analysis charts
- Word walls that support instruction
- A variety of texts (e.g., informational, reference books, newspapers)
- Vocabulary instruction that makes connections to words’ Greek and Latin roots
- Sentence stems posted to support conversation
- Materials adapted to meet the language, content, and developmental needs of ELLs
Classrooms That Promote Academic Language and Vocabulary (cont.)

What is heard:

• The teacher and students facilitating and guiding conversations
• The teacher and students using academic language and academic vocabulary
• The teacher and students incorporating background knowledge and experiences that support learning
• The teacher scaffolding instruction
• Teacher-to-student, student-to-student, student-to-teacher discussions
• The teacher and students producing examples to support new learning
• Students asking and answering higher-order questions
• Students using a variety of words in different contexts
“It is vital to accelerate ELLs’ social and academic English language development so they can master the grade-level content knowledge that will enable them to meet high standards.”

— Short, 2000
Social vs. Academic Language

It takes less time to acquire social language than to develop academic language.

Social language:
• Usually more informal
• Conversational

Academic language:
• More abstract
• More complex
• Content focused, content specific

Cummins, 1979; Rivera et al., 2009
Teacher Needs

To ensure that students can access the language of curriculum, teachers require the following:

• Open communication
• Time to plan
• Models of successful implementation
• Time for growth
• Acknowledgment of incremental gains

Blase & Blase, 2004
Reflect on Leadership

I am strong in the area(s) of _____________ because…
I need to work to improve in the area(s) of ____________ because…
Questions
Objectives: Review

- Identify the key elements in developing academic language and vocabulary
- Distinguish between social and academic language and understand ELLs’ acquisition of these two types of language
- Discuss how to provide leadership to support strategies and routines that strengthen instruction for ELLs