

Academic Language Varies by Purpose and by Type

Don Bouchard: First, this slide, which is, um, a, um, adapted from Jeff Zwiers' book *Building Academic Language*, and that one just very, I think, uh, clearly demonstrates the fact that our students come from, um, individual, um, backgrounds, one different from the other. Even if and even when they come from the same cultural background, there are individual factors that make them different one from another. And they all come in to the school context. If they don't have, uh, parity in their English language proficiency with their native speaker peers, then they need to, um, uh, engage in some kind of support so that they can achieve that grade-level parity. Well, that said, they need to have general academic language for knowing, thinking reading, writing, and visualizing the information that they're going to encounter. But more specifically, they need to be able to use the language in those very special areas that are the business of schooling, which are the separate content areas: math, science, social studies. And hence the whole rationale for the standards framework, so that's the nature of the dynamic. Now this particular slide is, um, is in Jeff Zwiers' text, so you could, um, cite that if you want, um, use that as your illustration. So that said, there's some questions we want to pose, that we want to understand about our students. How are they going to interact with the content? We have a content that we want them to learn among all of our other students, but how do we know that they're going to be ready to understand and learn from that content? It's one thing for them, or for us to understand that they don't have a particular proficiency in English, but what does that proficiency look like for each individual? In other words, a three is not a three is not a three. A student who's a three can be very different in terms of proficiency characteristics from another student who's the same level. So we need to understand, um, some of the intricacies around that.

What are the language expectations around the delivery of content? In the form of the language domains: listening, reading, speaking and writing, any combination of those. In the form of vocabulary that needs to be, um, understood or foregrounded in order for learning to take place. Complexity at the sentence level, and kinds of texts or genres that are being used for students to understand and engage in. So all of these factors are part of language expectations.

A third question is how are ELLs going to communicate with each other and collaborate? Ok, there's a, there's a presupposition here. How are they going to communicate with each other and collaborate, which means that we're talking right from the get go with a co-constructive approach to learning. It's not learning in isolation. It's learning with others, learning from each other, and it implies an authentic approach to the delivery of instruction. So that's important.

And then, fourth question here is how do ELLs understand their roles in the learning process? In other words, why am I learning this? What is the value in this? We need to explore that a little bit. What's the use of the content that I am engaging in? Is it just for its own sake or is there a reason for doing so, and this is important as well.