Eight Essential Shifts for Teaching New Standards to Academic English Learners

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The transition to the various sets of new standards offers a window of opportunity to fortify what and how we teach. It also provides a chance to reflect on how our most marginalized students most effectively learn the most difficult knowledge and skills. The new standards challenge us to teach students much more than loosely connected pieces of knowledge and test-taking skills. They offer an opportunity to equip diverse students with deeper understandings of content, more expert-like thinking skills, and stronger communication skills. The new standards offer a rare opportunity, if we seize it, to make some major shifts in moving from surface-level transmission and memorization models to approaches that richly cultivate the cognitive and communicative potentials of every student.

We are not saying that math, science, and history teachers must add all the rules of English grammar to what they teach. We are arguing the importance of answering two questions along the way: How can I use content teaching to build students' language of my discipline? What is the most I can realistically do to improve how I develop students' language and literacy? Many teachers are already developing language in powerful ways simply through well-designed content activities. Indeed, the most engaging and effective content teaching strategies can also be effective language teaching activities, especially when supported by some of the practices in this book.

Consider your own abilities to use complex academic language; most of them developed from engaging in motivating activities that involved reading challenging texts, communicating ideas, and interacting with others to accomplish challenging tasks.

Complex Academic Language

You can't get very far in school and life without using complex language—though many people try. Content area concepts, thinking skills, and literacy all depend on students' abilities to use complex language. What we call complex language in this book is a subset of features and skills within the much broader category of academic language. The broad term *academic language* tends to include any language used to describe abstract ideas and cognitive processes in school (Schleppegrell, 2004; Swartz, 2001; Zwiers, 2008). Vocabulary, in particular, is often equated with academic language. Yet the bulk of what we call complex language involves

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putting clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and other elements together to construct, negotiate, and communicate clear and whole academic messages. While many activities in this book do include vocabulary-related elements, one of our main goals is teaching students how to understand and create complex messages in a discipline. We believe that too much school time has been spent on noncomplex language, on the pieces; it is time to intensify our focus on equipping students to read, think, talk, and write in ways that will prepare them for thinking and communication in the future.

Figure 1.1 shows the three main dimensions of academic language and associated skills. In the Sentence and Message dimensions, students are doing something with the words: they are communicating complex messages. The activities and lessons in this book emphasize developing the Message dimension. Even though the Word/Phrase dimension is important, we believe that: (a) it tends to be the easiest to assess and teach; (b) many other resources are available on teaching words (i.e., books on academic vocabulary); (c) many teachers have asked for ways to help students communicate longer and more complex messages; and (d) we have observed the need for more emphasis on teaching academic English learners how to learn and communicate beyond word and sentence levels.

Dimensions	*Features*	*Skills*
 ***Message***	• Clarity & coherence • Register for participants & purposes • Density of ideas and their relationships • Message organization & structure (visuals, paragraphs) • Organization of sentences	• Create a logical flow of and connections between ideas, knowing how ideas develop and need to develop • Match language with the purpose of the message (Clear, complete, focused, logical, appropriate to the discipline) • Create, clarify, fortify, & negotiate ideas
 ***Sentence***	• Sentence structure (compound/complex) & length • Transitions & connectives • Complex verb tenses and passive voice • Pronouns and references	• Craft sentences to be clear • Use of a variety of sentence types to clarify a message and condense information • Combine ideas, phrases, and clauses.
 ***Word/ Phrase***	• Cross-disciplinary terms • Figurative expressions & multiple meanings • Content vocabulary • Affixes, roots, and transformations	• Choose and use the best words and phrases communicate • Figure out the meaning of new words and terms • Use and clarify new words to build ideas or create products

Figure 1.1 – Dimensions, features, and skills of complex academic language use (Adapted from WIDA, 2012)

In looking at the three dimensions in Figure 1.1, it can help to imagine a word as color, which communicates some meaning. Put words together into a sentence and you get more meaning, but it is still limited, like the figures and elements a painting. Put the figures together at and you compose a message, like the painting in the Message dimension in *Figure 1.1*. We need

to move beyond the teaching of just the vocabulary (colors) in the first dimension and the grammar rules (forming of figures) in the second dimension to teaching students how to construct a wide variety of complex, original, and whole messages (paintings) (Carr, Sexton, & Lagunoff, 2006; Zwiers, 2008). Most of these messages require critical thinking skills and abilities to use language within particular functions and settings (Carrier, 2005; Echevarria et al., 2006; Schleppegrell, 2005).

Lesson time is very limited. The more time we spend on one thing (e.g., vocabulary), the less time we have to spend on others (e.g., communicating whole ideas). Mohan (2006), for example, strongly argues for more complex language in science: "Simplified understandings of explicit language instruction, in leading to simplified science talk, result in simplified science (p. 52)." These are further elaborated upon in the shifts described in the next section.

Shifts

Long before the advent of recent standards, various educators proposed a variety of "shifts" in how we should think about learning and teaching. Here are a few shift-based quotations from the seminal works of several widely respected experts in the field. Notice the themes of thinking and communication in them.

- "Were all instructors to realize that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth, something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked." --J.D.
- "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other." --P.F.
- "Through others we become ourselves." --L.V.
- "Knowing and communicating are in their nature highly interdependent, indeed virtually inseparable." --J.B.
- "It is easy to imagine talk in which ideas are explored rather than answers to teachers' test questions provided and evaluated; in which teachers talk less than the usual two-thirds of the time and students talk correspondingly more; in which students themselves decide when to speak rather than waiting to be called on by the teacher; and in which students address each other directly. Easy to imagine, but not easy to do." --C.C.

Sadly, these powerful ideas proposed by John Dewey, Paolo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and Courtney Cazden, along with the ideas of similar thinkers, have not had enough overall influence on today's teaching practices—particularly the teaching of diverse students. Why? There is not enough space to dig deeply into the many reasons, but here are several forces that tend to keep such shifts from affecting the average lesson:

- Factory models: basing classroom processes on assembly line approaches that consider students to be empty vessels that must be filled up with content knowledge
- Assessment ignorance and misuse: focusing on comparing students and saving money by using machine-scored multiple choice tests
- Lack of faith in teachers: attempting to provide "teacher-proof" one-size-fits all, scripted curricula and assessments

- Low expectations for diverse learners: placing them in inescapable tracks, asking them low-level questions, and providing them with fewer resources

Unfortunately, in many schools these forces still shape the teaching and assessment of diverse students. In such settings educators must take the time to ask how they can focus more on the cultivation of each student's potentials across all domains of development.

Fortunately, the new standards has fostered interest in major shifts in instruction and assessment, most of which we believe should have been implemented all along. Educators cannot afford to let this window of opportunity pass. While most mainstream students can survive and succeed despite outdated and test-focused teaching, many academic English learners cannot and do not. The new standards is more rigorous, which is what academic English learners need to succeed in college and career, but the increased rigor can also mean increased failure if we don't make major changes in instruction and assessment. In a sense, we must use the new standards to serve our diverse students—not the other way around.

This article synthesizes and clarifies instructional and philosophical shifts through a lens that focuses on the needs of academic English learners. Academic English learners are often immigrants, children and grandchildren of immigrants, long-term English learners, and speakers of English dialects and vernaculars. Many struggle in school because they have not been immersed in rich literacy or communication experiences that depend on the academic language valued in school's tasks, texts, and tests.

Common Shifts

The new standards have led to a wide range of interpretations for how teaching should change. These changes are usually called "shifts." Much of the focus has been on outlining the implications of the standards for teaching all students. There has been less emphasis on identifying additional shifts that would benefit academic English learners and students who don't do well in school. Yet the urgency of meeting their learning needs has grown as teachers and schools are seeing firsthand the more rigorous literacy and communication demands that undergird many of the new standards.

Before addressing the AEL Shifts, the term used in this article, it is helpful to analyze the commonly cited shifts currently being suggested within the education community and consider their implications for teaching academic English learners. Several of the more well-known shifts for teaching all students are found in the first column of Figure 1. In the second column are several important implications and nuances of these shifts for teaching academic English learners.

Common Shifts	**Implications for teaching academic English learners (AELs)**
Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction	This shift tends to focus on elementary school and ELD/ESL settings that have over-emphasized fiction texts. Most AELs need to gain larger amounts of academic knowledge across disciplines for current and future learning experiences, much of which only comes from reading nonfiction in school. Thus, extra doses of nonfiction, combined with extra teaching of their language and structures, benefit AELs.
Reading and writing grounded in evidence	AELs need extra instruction on what constitutes strong and weak evidence for supporting an idea, claim, opinion, etc. Finding and using

	evidence involves value systems that can differ across cultures. AELs need focused instruction and modeling on how to value certain pieces o evidence over others, and how to explain how the evidence supports a claim.
Regular practice with complex texts and academic language	For AELs, the "regular practice" should involve extra attention to how authors use language in texts to convey micro- and macro-ideas. This means close and "wide-angle" reading strategies. Using complex texts with AELs requires more support than for non-AELs. That is, just analyzing a key sentence will not be enough for students to understand the text and acquire its language.
Rigorous pursuit of conceptual understanding procedural skill, and application	While this is a math shift, it applies across disciplines. A heightened emphasis on conceptual understanding and application presents challenges for AELs, especially related to assessment. We must figure out how to assess complex conceptual understanding despite students' lack of advanced academic English. We need to do both: build students complex language as we augment how we assess higher-order thinking and conceptual understandings.

Figure 1 – Common instructional "shifts" and their implications for AELs

Eight Shifts Focused on Academic English Learners

The new standards present an extra web of challenges for academic English learners. In our work with teachers and students, we have uncovered additional "shifts" (AEL Shifts) in instruction and assessment that are needed to help diverse students succeed. The rest of this article highlights this set of major pedagogical and curricular shifts that we consider to be vital for enduring learning in diverse settings. Many of these shifts are not new; they are just reminders of (a) practices that teachers have been using for years to make teaching and learning effective; and (b) what we know we should have been doing all along in our schools. Then again, several shifts do require us to step out and take a fresh, more bird's eye view of the pedagogical habits that have evolved and devolved over recent decades.

This article invites educators, especially teachers of academic English learners, to engage in even deeper shifting than the shifting called for in Figure 1. We invite you to connect back to the ideas of Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky, Bruner, Cazden, and others to reflect on how you can realize more complete, equitable, and powerful visions in your schools and classrooms.

AEL Shift 1 - From Access to Ownership

Plenty of professional development resources and programs focus on providing English learners with better "access" to the content. Access, while not well defined, tends to mean comprehension. Much of what is called sheltered instruction is focused on providing academic English learners with increased comprehension of a lesson's content. Sheltered instruction usually includes extra uses of visual aids, modified teacher talk, gestures, and background building activities for texts. Yet too often, sheltered instruction can involve significant "watering down" of

complex language in order to provide easier access to texts and content, and in doing so, the sheltering fails to build students' grade level language and literacy.

Sheltered instruction often does achieve access, but access is not enough. We need to foster students' *ownership* of the language and thinking needed to communicate complex concepts. Ownership means being able to use language and concepts in novel and authentic ways—not just to answer questions on a test. This shift therefore focuses on supporting students in using language in ways that are valued in the discipline and at grade level.

This shift also consists of making sure academic English learners benefit from working with peers at higher and lower levels of language proficiency. This means untracking their classes and placing them in mainstream classrooms. Of course, this also means adjusting instruction so that all students are supported and have multiple interactions with peers.

In a nutshell, we need to stop sheltering students from interactions with mainstream peers, disciplinary communication experiences, and knowledge-working skills that they will need for future classes, college, and career success.

One way to not over-shelter is to use grade level complex texts. A classroom snapshot of this is Mr. Ellis's sixth grade language arts class in which they are reading a challenging article on genetic engineering. They are using a visual scaffold called "wide-angle reading" (Zwiers, O'Hara, & Pritchard, 2014) to get the big picture of the text and its purposes. Students, in pairs, first survey the article and discuss the possible purposes of the author, the teacher, and the reader. They use pencil, knowing that these might change as they read. They then identify the type of text, text structure, thinking skills needed, organization strategies, questions, and key terms, all of which provide a framework for supporting complex ideas that emerge in the text. At times Mr. Ellis zooms in to ask a few close reading questions about key parts of the article.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Use grade level texts and intellectually challenging tasks with the appropriate linguistic supports for all learners, and have students engage in both close and "wide-angle" reading practices (See Zwiers, O'Hara, & Pritchard, 2014).
- Engage in a range of text-based writing and conversation activities in which students are supported in using language and ideas from the texts.
- Have students work in heterogeneous groups and classrooms on text-based tasks.
- Provide opportunities for students to use technology to communicate original ideas and messages.
- Inspire, allow, and support students to come up with their own questions, own answers, own ideas, own evidence, own syntheses, own comparisons, own opinions, own problems, and own texts.

AEL Shift 2 - From Pieces to Wholes

One of the most damaging effects of multiple-choice-test-pointed instruction is the focus on many disjointed "pieces" of content knowledge and language. Students attend classes that are not integrated, read textbooks that jump from topic to topic, and take tests full of unrelated short texts and questions. Academic English learners, in particular, have been asked to spend loads of time memorizing word meanings, grammar rules, math shortcuts, and a range of facts culled from long lists of standards. Parts and pieces are easier and cheaper to test, to teach, and to learn. This focus on quantity, rather than quality, considers learning to be the accumulation of discreet facts, word meanings, grammar rules, etc. "The more accumulation, the better," some say. This shift, however, emphasizes helping students to put pieces together for a purpose and to use increasingly advanced

levels of academic discourse skills to create and communicate original and useful whole ideas in a discipline. We must be like basketball coaches who, rather than having players spend all of their workout time on free throws and dribbling drills, have their players also engage in scrimmages, practice games, and real games.

A close cousin of this shift is moving from a focus on short, right answers to a focus on longer more complex understandings. Students have spent too much time thinking of language as choosing the right answer rather. This shift encourages students to go beyond picking or knowing right answers to actually using the answers in the construction and communication of a complex idea in the discipline. Many students are yearning for chances to do less choosing, listing, and regurgitating of the pieces of other people's ideas. They desire to do more creating, sculpting, arguing, and shaping of whole ideas. Fortunately, the new standards emphasize putting ideas together, using critical thinking skills, collaborating, communicating, and doing tasks that better prepare students for the complex tasks of the future.

A classroom snapshot of this shift is Ms. Bernard's fourth grade math class. She models with another student how to approach a real problem she has that involves fractions, how to estimate the answer and how to represent what is happening in different ways. She then has her students practice explaining to one another why they used certain strategies and how they got their answers. She finally has them pair up to create their own real-world problems and write out how to solve them. She puts many of their problems on quizzes and tests.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Provide more authentic and engaging purposes for learning with project-based learning and performance-based assessments. These give students reasons to come to school, to learn toward something, and to work to put the pieces together in order to construct and communicate complex ideas.
- When teaching reading, don't dive straight in to a text to focus on vocabulary or individual sentences without helping students look at the text's purposes, main ideas, structures, and other big picture, "wide-angle" dimensions.
- In language arts classes, use whole novels; and across all content areas use whole articles and a variety of complete complex texts.

AEL Shift 3: From an sole focus on content to placing equal emphases on language, literacy, and content

This shift is based on a somewhat extreme point of view: complex language and literacy skills that can be learned in each content area are as important as the content itself. We do not dispute that students need to know a discipline's facts, concepts, and skills. Students need to learn these things in order to know and learn more things. Indeed, academic English learners often need more school-valued content knowledge than their more-proficient-in-academic-English peers. Yet this doesn't mean that we should reduce language and literacy demands in order to focus on content. Rather, and this is somewhat counterintuitive, we must realize the large roles that language and literacy play in content learning. We must develop our PLK (Bunch, 2013; Zwiers, 2008), or "pedagogical language knowledge," which is similar to Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge, or PCK. Teachers need to know the language that is running the learning show in each lesson. The more we develop students' language and literacy skills needed for learning, the better all students will learn the content in enduring ways. And vice versa.

A classroom snapshot of this shift is Mr. Wilson's ninth grade science class. He not only wants students to be able to balance chemical equations, he wants them to be able to clearly

explain, using scientific language, how and why the changes occur. He models his thinking and highlights the language that he used, such as "According to the law of conservation of mass, if…, then..." He listens for use of this language and other expressions that show attempts to clarify what is happening in the chemical reactions. While observing students work in pairs, he jots down student uses of language to highlight afterward. For example, one student said, "*Because we need* to have the same amount of atoms in the product, *we need to* put a coefficient of 2 here in front of N_2." Mr. Wilson then used this as a model of starting sentences with *Because*.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Work with a literacy and/or English language development specialist to identify the challenging background knowledge and language demands in the texts that you teach, and discuss strategies for addressing these demands.
- Create language objectives and disciplinary literacy objectives that help to remind you the types of language and literacy skills needed by students to learn and show learning.
- Plan with language, literacy, and content learning in mind. When you plan lessons and units have a clear vision of where you want students to move with respect to language and literacy development.
- Formatively assess students' language of the discipline by analyzing their writing and listening to their conversations in response to cognitively demanding prompts.
- Balance the focus on oral and written uses of language in support of content learning.

AEL Shift 4: From Individual to Collaborative

Particularly in schools with large numbers of language learners, lessons have focused on building up the skills and vocabulary of each individual student. Students have been asked to focus much of their learning time on isolated practice in preparation for the tests. The new standards, on the other hand, value the skills of communication and collaboration, which also serve to develop learning of other content and English language development standards. The better students get at clarifying, negotiating, and explaining content ideas, the better (more deeply, more enduringly) they learn the ideas. And better students become at communicating in school, the better prepared they are for communicating in higher education and life.

We must therefore shift from preparing individuals for individual tests to having students collaboratively learn ideas and communicate them. This means reducing the time spent on having students fill in blanks and, instead, having students negotiate and clarify with one another the meanings of the words that would go in the blanks—and then *using* the words to construct clear and authentic messages. We must apprentice students into being able to do many of the things historians, mathematicians, authors, and scientists do as they collaborate in real world settings.

A snapshot of this shift is Ms. Yu's second grade classroom in which students work together to argue, with evidence, whether they would recommend to others living in urban or rural settings. Partner A is told to argue for city life and Partner B against it. Then they switch the topic to rural life. They practice using new language along the way. For example, Ms. Yu models how to state reasons starting with "One reason for living in…, Another reason for living in…" Students collaborate to come up with a final recommendation letter for anyone making that decision.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Read and watch resources that promote classroom talk, especially paired interactions.
- Focus a grade level group, or content area team, or professional learning community on the practice of developing productive interactions during lessons.

- Write out a model conversation that you would like your students to use. Notice the various moves and skills used to keep the conversation going.
- Develop formative assessments for use with groups of students and do not rely solely on individual assessments. You might, for example, develop and use a rubric with the skills needed for paired conversations in history. Sharing this rubric with students helps shift their mindset about the importance of collaboration skills and the role they play in learning.

AEL Shift 5 - From Playing School to Learning

As large numbers of students become disinterested in school, they begin to build their skills at "playing school." This is particularly true of academic English learners, who are more likely to lose interest in school because they (a) can't keep up with the language and literacy demands of texts and tasks each day; and (b) lessons do not connect to students' languages and cultures. How do you play the game? Keep quiet, turn in work (even if copied), minimally answer questions, talk as little as possible in class and group discussions, and stay out of trouble. Too many students play this game for too many years. They can learn very little, even though they pass classes and even do moderately well on tests.

We must strive to reduce this school game playing and build a culture/mindset in the classroom that focuses on learning. Yes, it is possible. Other shifts in this article, in fact, can help build up such a culture. For example, as students begin to own language and use it to communicate authentic and whole messages, as teachers allow and value collaboration, and as schools treat students as thinkers with ideas worth sharing, a learning culture will form.

A classroom snapshot of this shift is Mr. Salazar's seventh grade history class. Rather than just memorize ideas from the textbook, students are using primary sources to decide whether the Black Plague was more negative or positive for medieval Europe and later time periods. As they discuss in groups and pairs, Mr. Salazar has them use the new words and facts they learned from the texts to argue the issue. They then compare it other plagues and disasters in history. He teaches students talk as historians would talk about the issue.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Think of facts and concepts to be learned as elements to be learned for a purpose, similar to the real world. Students are more likely to learn in order to learn, if there is an engaging reason or direction. Put yourself in a student's shoes and think about how interested you would be in the activity or lesson.
- Do some action research on intrinsically motivated learning in your students; survey them and see what kinds of topics, activities, or products make them want to learn regardless of points or grades.
- Hold a discussion about intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning in school. Have students reflect on how well they learn despite good or bad grades on certain products of learning.

AEL Shift 6 - From "Direct" to "Less Direct" Teaching

This shift might raise a few eyebrows since "direct" and "explicit" approaches have been around a long time and some have even gained momentum in recent years. In many cases, direct approaches tend to involve large amounts of teacher talk telling students what they need to learn.

Teachers model, describe, and explain as students listen and then do what was modeled. There is often some "checking for understanding" along the way, in which students answer questions out loud, on paper, or on a mini-whiteboard to show the teacher that they learned.

Of course, some "direct teaching" is needed at times in most lessons. Teachers do need to just plain tell or explain students certain things to students—but not the whole lesson. A big challenge is that this type of teaching creates the illusion of learning. Students are quiet, even taking notes, and they even do well on quizzes and questions about the content. They might even think they are learning. But assess them a week later. Many don't remember much; these students, many of whom are academic English learners, do not learn well in direct and linear ways. Some of their minds even seem to "spill" as much as you can "fill". Many of your students' minds need to process the ideas, work with (knead) the information, and sculpt it with others. They need to try ideas out in safe settings, and do new and engaging things with the ideas.

The development of academic language is a messy, dynamic, social process that is far from linear and instead "spirals" up and out over time in different ways for different students at different rates. For example, in October we cannot check off Carlos's learning of a standard such as "Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.8). We have to monitor growth in a standard like this one during the entire year (and over the years) with a wide range of texts. In most cases, we will never know exactly when or how a student learned a particular academic language expression or skill. It developed "indirectly," over time, as a result of purposeful reading and writing of academic texts and working with others in engaging tasks that required Carlos to push himself to articulate and negotiate newly forming ideas.

A classroom snapshot of this shift is Ms. Lee's fifth grade math class. With a focus on scale, area, and volume, he is having students design a city and estimate the rough costs of the materials for constructing it. He introduces various requirements such as building shapes and heights, and thickness measures for concrete and pavement. Students also bring in boxes of different sizes to create a large-scale model of the city. He asks students to be city planners and figure out the cost of materials for one building (he holds a box in his hand), telling them the scale is 1:100. He has them discuss in pairs what they will do first and what information they need. He provides the information (e.g., cost of materials per square meter) as they ask for it, and he guides them as they work together to solve problems related to the project.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Prompt for, use, and validate students' ideas throughout each lesson. Build on these ideas to model the types of thinking that you want to develop in the lesson.
- Encourage students to become experts in certain topics to be learned. Allow them to go beyond what you might directly teach to learn more in-depth concepts within a discipline.
- At times, don't spoil the "plot" of a lesson: don't start the lesson by describing its objectives. Instead, have students engage in an activity or simulation and have them discuss what they did learn, are learning, or still need to learn in the lesson. Have them come up with the objectives after and as they learn them.

AEL Shift 7: From Testing to Assessment and Beyond

This shift is somewhat controversial (as shifts tend to be), but we include it anyway to spark some reflection. Under NCLB, many classroom practices for academic English learners focused on improving test scores. This meant loads of activities and time spent on learning how to—individually and silently- read many short unrelated texts, choose or guess the right answer, read the test questions beforehand and look for answers, memorize grammar rules, write with writing "formulas," and navigate the various parts of tests in a short amount of time. The focus, as mentioned in AEL Shift 2, was quantitative: getting as many facts and rules learned as possible, and then using them to score high on tests. The new standards, however, tend to emphasize the quality of conceptual understandings and communication.

Some of the most important language and skills, such as creating new ideas and conversing with others to solve a problem, are too difficult, expensive, and subjective to assess every year in standardized ways. And yet, such skills are vital—especially for academic English learners. We can use standards and assessments to give us a baseline of what to teach, but we will often need to teach well beyond them. We will need to teach things that aren't counted on the color-coded spreadsheets.

And when the standardized tests for the new standards do arrive, we must resist the ingrained habits, black-hole-like forces, and temptations to look at the sample test questions, break them down, and focus yet again on parts and pieces that are the most testable. When use our time on these things, it is at the expense of teaching students how to create and communicate whole ideas. There are many vital standards that will never be tested well enough with computer programs. We will need to (here is the controversial part) design and improve our own assessments, formative and summative.

A snapshot of this shift is several fourth grade teachers who assess paired conversations in the last month of each semester. Students don't know the exact day they will need to have an intelligent conversation (much like in real life), so they prepare and practice throughout the semester. They prepare in each subject area. Teachers observe conversations and support the use of language and skills as needed. Teachers realize that this assessment doesn't directly (or explicitly) prepare students for yearly state tests, but they believe that this focus counts more than many of the things that are more easily counted.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Focus professional development and learning communities on improving formative assessment of standards that are linguistically challenging and don't get assessed in the tests (e.g., conversation skills).
- Share ideas for creating and adapting real-world-like performance assessments that develop and show the learning of multiple standards.
- Develop protocols for the design of assessments of student practices and teacher practices so there is a common language for—and culture of—engaging in data-informed instructional change.

AEL Shift 8 - From Silos to Sustainable Systems

All of the previous shifts, of course, require yet another meta-shift: changing the system from isolated pockets of practice to an integrated model that sustains growth. This model includes coaching, collaboration, observations, data analysis, conversations, leadership practices, relationships, cultural practices, and policies that support complex language and literacy

development for academic English learners. This shift requires educators at all levels in a system to know what to communicate and how to communicate it.

A key feature of this shift is communication. We can and should share loads of information about our students, how they learn, how they don't learn, what they are learning and need to learn. And the system needs to be set up to maximize this communication. It builds networks that productively share ideas. Another feature of a sustainable system is its focus on high-quality data. The system should always strive to get and analyze increasingly useful data on student learning and teaching practices.

A classroom snapshot of this shift is Mr. Cook's instructional coach, Ms. Rizzi, who helps him to focus on certain elements of lesson planning that are vital for teaching English learners. Currently they are focusing on improving students' abilities to evaluate evidence from fiction and nonfiction texts. After a lesson observation, Ms. Rizzi shared an scaffolding idea that she had seen another teacher use and they discussed how to adapt it for the academic English learners in Mr. Cook's class. Moreover, to develop her coaching practices, Ms. Rizzi attends professional development workshops and meets with district leaders, school administrators, and other coaches at the school.

Here are several suggestions for implementing this shift:

- Cultivate communities in your school where educators collaboratively engage in disciplined inquiry around instructional problems of practice.
- Hold department level or school level data sessions where teachers analyze and share student work and discuss ideas for instructional improvement. Beforehand, make sure the data is valid and valuable.
- Allow time for teachers to share their learning from professional development they have attended with others at their school or within their district.
- Develop a school or district level design team consisting of teachers, coaches and administrators. The role of the design team would be to identify cross-cutting instructional challenges and to identify the resources (professional development; collaboration time; tools and materials) needed to address these problems and improve instruction.

Conclusion

Each of these shifts is a continuum. How far along a teacher or school is in each shift on any given day will vary. In fact, many teachers have already been shifting in these eight ways well before the new standards were introduced. This is what effective teachers do. They learn from successes, mistakes, resources, students, conversations, professional development, and so on. They know what their students need, and they shift and adapt. But we need to keep growing: every teacher and school can improve in one or more of the shifts described above.

The complexity of teaching is profound, and students change every year. Academic English learners, in particular, need teachers at the top of their game in knowing what and how to teach in the limited windows of time given. True, it's messy and challenging to shift away from the familiar, but our students' futures are in the balance.

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