Review

Beyond language: Academic communication and student success

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A R T I C L E I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This paper argue that an explicit focus on teaching the nature of academic language and how it works to create meaning in complex texts is a crucial component of effective instruction for students who are at risk of underachievement. However, it is just one among several crucial components. Equally important are the promotion of literacy engagement and identity affirmation. Despite extensive empirical evidence supporting the impact of these variables, they have been largely ignored in educational policies and instructional practices.

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1. Introduction

This paper builds on the discussion of academic language in other contributions to this issue by highlighting the empirical evidence regarding effective instruction for three groups of students who are at risk of underachievement: English learners, students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and students from socially marginalized communities. These three dimensions of potential educational disadvantage overlap with each other but are also conceptually distinct. The overlap derives from the fact that many students fall simultaneously into all three categories but this is not always the case. For example, a student in the United States from a Romanian background with professional parents would fall into the "immigrant background" category but not the other two categories. In common with the authors of other papers in

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this issue, I argue for the importance of teaching academic language explicitly across the curriculum but caution that other evidence-based dimensions of effective pedagogy need to be simultaneously in place if academic language teaching is to be successful. Equally important dimensions of effective instruction are (a) ensuring that students experience ample access to print and are enabled to engage actively with literacy, (b) effective scaffolding of students' language comprehension and production, (c) connecting instruction and curriculum to students' lives and mobilizing their background knowledge, and (d) creating instructional contexts of identity affirmation and empowerment.

There is considerable consensus among researchers and educators about the role of extending students' knowledge of academic language, scaffolding meaning, and activating their background knowledge. However, the roles of literacy engagement and identity affirmation have been largely ignored in recent debates on closing the achievement gap between social groups defined on the basis of language, income, and racialized status. In the United States context, if the mandate of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to focus instruction intensively on the development of academic language proficiency is implemented in isolation from other components of effective instruction, the goal of improving academic outcomes is unlikely to be realized. I first highlight some of the points regarding the teaching of academic language made by the authors of the other articles in this issue. In particular, I draw attention to aspects of the pedagogy they document that are vulnerable to being ignored in the context of the current insistence on high-stakes testing in the United States. Among the instructional features documented in these articles are the role of English learners' home language (L1) in the development of academic language proficiency (Gebhard, Chen, & Britton, 2014) and also the importance of integrating the teaching of academic language into a broader academic communication framework that emphasizes both critical literacy and the multiple modalities through which meaning is constructed and communicated (Haneda, 2014). I then discuss what we know about causes of underachievement among different social groups (low-SES, immigrant-background English learners, and students from marginalized communities that have experienced sustained discrimination in the wider society). Obviously, instruction is more likely to be effective if it responds specifically to these causal factors than if it ignores them. Finally, I articulate an evidence-based framework that attempts to respond to the causes of underachievement and I specify how the explicit teaching of academic language is integrated into this framework. The core argument is that students will gain expertise in understanding and using academic language when instruction engages them in the co-construction of knowledge and provides opportunities for them to use academic language for intellectually powerful purposes.

2. The context of academic language instruction in the United States

The advent of the CCSS in the United States has focused the attention of policy-makers and educators on the centrality of academic language for students' overall educational growth. The CCSS emphasize that teaching academic language should be a central focus of *all* teachers across the curriculum and the language demands of different subject areas should be explicitly addressed by content teachers in addition to language arts and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers. They recommend a balance between fiction and non-fiction texts across the curriculum – about equal amounts in elementary school, rising to a 30/70 split by high school. Students will also be required to read and understand complex texts across a range of disciplines and to draw on the evidence in these texts to construct coherent and persuasive arguments both orally and in writing.

This intensified focus on academic language has resulted in a dramatic increase in scholarly articles and books concerned with how to teach academic language effectively, particularly for English language learners and other groups of students who are perceived to be at risk of underachievement (e.g., students from low-income backgrounds) (e.g., Bunch, 2013; Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Zacarian, 2013). The articles in this issue illustrate this trend and are particularly timely because the CCSS identify what students should know and be able to do at different grade levels but say very little about teaching strategies to enable students to attain these standards. The CCSS (2010) explicitly note that it is "beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners" (p. 6) but go on to claim that "all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives" (p. 6). They suggest that it is possible for English language learners "to meet the standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening without displaying native-like control of conventions and vocabulary" (p. 6). The question, obviously, is "How?" This paper and others in this issue provide perspectives on how classroom instruction can meet the challenge of the CCSS.

Each of the articles in this issue provides concrete instructional examples of teaching academic language. The articles by Gebhard, Chen, and Britton (2014) and Moore and Schleppegrell (2014) document how academic language can be developed using the analytic tools provided by systematic functional linguistics (SFL). In contrast to more traditional approaches to language teaching that focus on vocabulary, grammar, and discourse features largely in isolation from the social contexts where meaning is constructed, SFL brings form and function together by focusing on the linguistic choices made by speakers or writers on the basis of their perception of the particular context, audience, and purpose of the communication. Moore and Schleppegrell also review evidence that "contextualized application of traditional grammar (a 'rhetorical grammar') embedded within other reading and writing tasks could support students' awareness of how language form relates to meaning" (p. xx). Thus, SFL provides one powerful route towards helping students demystify how academic language works but other approaches that raise students' awareness of how specific language forms encode meaning in complex texts can also achieve positive results. This is illustrated by the "juicy sentences" instructional strategy documented by Wong Fillmore and Fillmore (2012) in which the teacher works with students for 15–20 min each day to draw their attention

to how language is used in just one sentence of the text the class is working on. As a consequence of these instructional conversations, students internalize a disposition to notice how language is used in text and, as a result, they become more successful in constructing meaning from what they read.

Haneda (2014) broadens the discussion of academic language to include it as one "important component of the broad repertoire of academic communication needed for achieving personal, intellectual, and social goals" (p. xx). She suggests that when students are engaged in activities that concern them personally, they will appropriate the necessary mediational tools to enable them to achieve their communicative goals. This conception of academic language as one set of semiotic tools among others that are drawn on for effective academic communication (e.g., graphs, diagrams, images, etc.) has the major advantage of integrating the construct of academic language with the notion of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013), which emphasizes the range of modalities through which students (and humans generally) construct meaning. It also explicitly links with the reality that non-linguistic forms of communication are utilized extensively in the classroom as scaffolding to enable English learners to comprehend meaning.

Haneda (2014) highlights the importance of connecting the teaching of academic language to the current realities of students' lives and enabling them to use academic language to take social action for purposes to which they are committed (e.g., to restore recess that had been cancelled by the school principal). She explicitly embeds the notion of academic communication in a broader context of critical literacy in which students deconstruct texts in order to construct their own texts or understandings that enable them take social action. This process results in student empowerment in the sense that "students have an opportunity to re-narrate their identities as literate, competent individuals rather than as at-risk-students" (p. xx).

Gebhard et al. (2014) also emphasize the importance of drawing on students' cultural and linguistic resources (funds of knowledge) in order to give them "a semiotic foothold" in the genres of language that dominate the school curriculum. In the instructional example they discuss, the teacher invited "students to use their home language in discussing concepts in class and in completing homework assignments that involved interviewing family members in Spanish" (p. 11).

I have highlighted the fact that both Haneda (2014) and Gebhard et al. (2014) clearly suggest that effective academic language instruction must go beyond a transmission orientation where the teacher focuses on one-way transmission of information and skills to the student. Their emphasis on teachers and students co-constructing knowledge and developing critical literacies reflect social constructivist and transformative pedagogical orientations (see Cummins, 2009; Cummins, Brown, and Sayers, 2007 for discussion of pedagogical orientations). In particular, constructs such as critical literacy and empowerment, which are central to a transformative pedagogical orientation, explicitly introduce societal power relations and teacher-student identity negotiation into conceptions of effective pedagogy in general and effective teaching of academic language in particular.

In the context of the current implementation of the CCSS in United States schools, this broadening of pedagogical orientation is of crucial importance. There is clear evidence (see Cummins, 2007a, for documentation) that the increased emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing brought in by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) legislation, and continued within the Obama administration's Race to the Top initiative, has exacerbated the pedagogical divide whereby schools serving students from low-SES backgrounds are much more likely to focus on test preparation (transmission-oriented "skill and drill" instruction) than is the case in schools serving more affluent students. If this approach to accountability persists, it is probable that the new standards related to the teaching of academic language will be enforced by high-stakes standardized tests with the continuation of consequences such as student grade retention, teacher loss of job or income, and the closing of "failing" schools. This, in turn, is likely to result in a predominant instructional focus on teaching academic language through direct instruction with minimal connection to students' lives or the funds of knowledge in their communities.

Thus, when I (and other authors in this issue) argue for explicit teaching of academic language across the curriculum, we are *not* talking about transmission-oriented direct instruction of language forms that characterized much of the scripted instruction implemented in schools serving low-SES students subsequent to the passage of the NCLB legislation. Rather we are talking about the integration of language and content whereby teachers incorporate explicit language objectives into their instruction in subject matter across the curriculum in order to draw students' attention to the ways in which meaning is constructed through language. This point is elaborated in a later section in the context of the *Literacy Engagement* framework.

In the next section, I outline what we know about causes of underachievement among different social groups in order to establish a foundation for framing an evidence-based instructional response to these causal factors.

3. Causes of underachievement and appropriate educational responses

Raising the achievement levels of underachieving students through more effective teaching of academic language is a major goal of the CCSS. However, in order for schools to attain this goal, instruction must address the full range of causal factors that contribute to underachievement. These causal factors go far beyond simply ineffective teaching of academic language.

In the international literature on patterns of academic achievement (e.g., DeVillar, Jiang, & Cummins, 2013; OECD, 2010a) three groups are commonly seen as "disadvantaged" —students from low-SES backgrounds, immigrant-background students whose home language (L1) is different from the language of school instruction, and students from communities that have been marginalized or excluded from educational and social opportunities as a result of discrimination in the wider society. However, "disadvantage" is not a fixed or static construct; significant components of the background experiences of the

Table 1
Deconstructing educational disadvantage.

Potentially conducive to construction of disadvantage	Socioeconomic status	Immigrant status	Marginalized group status
Societal/community contexts			
Conduits of disadvantage	-Prenatal care	-Home-school language difference	-Societal discrimination
	-Nutritional adequacy -Lead exposure -Housing segregation -School quality -Range of language interaction -Access to print -Cultural and material resources, etc.		-Identity devaluation -Stereotype threat -Low teacher expectations
Evidence-based instructional response	-Maximize literacy engagement	-Ensure effective scaffolding of language and literacy across the curriculum	-Connect instruction to students' lives
	-Demystify and reinforce academic language across the curriculum		-Create contexts of student identity affirmation and empowerment through culturally responsive instruction

three groups specified above are transformed into actual educational disadvantages only when the school fails to respond appropriately to these background experiences. For example, a home-school language switch becomes an educational disadvantage only when the school fails to support students effectively in learning the school language (Cummins, 2001; Gándara, 2013). Similarly, the effects of racism in the wider society can be significantly ameliorated when the school implements culturally relevant and responsive instruction that challenges the devaluation of students and communities in the wider society (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2013). Thus, the creation of actual educational disadvantage is not socially determined by the realities outside of school. Rather, it is a dynamic process which is socially constituted within the structures of schooling and the interactions between teachers and students.

Table 1 specifies some of the ways in which the negative impact of background variables associated with "disadvantage" can be reduced by educational policies and programmes.

3.1. Socioeconomic status

The ways in which SES exerts its negative effects on achievement have been well documented (e.g., Berliner, 2009; Orfield, 2013; Rothstein, 2013) and the factors listed in Table 1 are illustrative rather than definitive. Some of these factors are beyond the capacity of individual schools to address (e.g., housing segregation) but the potential negative effects of others can be ameliorated by school policies and instructional practices. For example, the provision of free and reduced lunches in U.S. schools directly attempts to counteract the effects of inadequate nutrition in many low-income families.

The two conduits of disadvantage that are most relevant to the present paper are the limited access to print that many low-SES students experience in their homes (and schools) (Duke, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001) and the more limited range of language interaction that has been documented in many low-SES families as compared to more affluent families (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995). In order to address these realities, schools serving low-SES students should (a) immerse them in a print-rich environment in order to promote literacy engagement across the curriculum and (b) focus in a sustained way on how academic language works and enable students to use academic language for powerful purposes. The promotion of literacy engagement involves encouraging students to interpret and discuss texts, in both speech and writing, in light of their experiences and perspectives. This co-construction of meaning integrates the evidence within the text with students' background knowledge and disrupts the assumption that texts have only one "fixed" meaning that can be transmitted by the teacher.

Unfortunately, neither of these instructional priorities was pursued under the NCLB Act (2001) educational mandate. Instead, the $6 billion *Reading First* programme systematically denied funding to school systems that attempted to extend students' access to books (e.g., classroom libraries) and promote literacy engagement (e.g., writing). The rationale was that these programmes did not promote systematic phonics instruction in a sufficiently intensive way (see Cummins, 2007a; Herszenhorn, 2004 for documentation). Not surprisingly, *Reading First* demonstrated no benefits with respect to either reading comprehension or reading engagement (Gamse et al., 2008).

3.2. Immigrant status

With respect to immigrant-background students who are learning the language of instruction, there is consensus among researchers and most policy-makers that schools need to support students in gaining access to instruction and catching up

academically. Obviously, both within countries and across countries, there is variation in the extent to which schools do provide adequate scaffolding of instruction. For example, in Canada and Australia, speaking a home language other than the school language is unrelated to achievement (i.e. not a disadvantage) but in many European countries it *is* related to achievement (i.e. it is a disadvantage) (OECD, 2010a). One reason that a home-school language switch emerges as a disadvantage in these countries is that schools have traditionally done very little to help students learn the school language. Furthermore, access to the language outside of school is limited because of patterns of housing segregation (reflecting broader patterns of societal exclusion/racism).

Another reason for the underachievement of immigrant-background students in certain contexts is that students' L1 has rarely been invoked as a cognitive or academic resource in the teaching of L2 despite the fact that students' background knowledge is encoded in L1 when they start learning L2. As documented in more detail in the next section, this devaluation of the linguistic and cultural knowledge that immigrant-background students bring to school also reinforces the broader pattern of societal power relations which has historically excluded certain minority groups from social participation and advancement.

3.3. Marginalized group status

As noted in a previous section, in many cases underachieving students will fall into all three categories of potential disadvantage and thus societal power relations will also negatively affect the achievement of many low-SES and immigrant-background students. However, the negative effects of societal power relations on student achievement are most evident in the case of students from socially marginalized communities and these effects have been documented in many research studies (see, for example, Bishop & Berryman, 2006; McCarty, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Groups that experience long-term educational underachievement typically have experienced material and symbolic violence at the hands of the dominant societal group over generations (e.g., African-American and Mexican-American students in the United States, First Nations students in Canada, Roma students in many European countries). The operation of these power relations in the classroom can be illustrated by a study carried out in the American southwest many years ago by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1973). This study reported that Euro-American students were praised or encouraged 36% more often than Mexican-American students and their classroom contributions were used or built upon 40% more frequently than those of Mexican-American students. Under these conditions, students are likely to internalize the message that they are not seen as academically capable nor expected to succeed.

The relationship of identity negotiation to societal power and status relations is also clearly implicated in the phenomenon of "stereotype threat" for which there is extensive experimental evidence (Steele, 1997). Stereotype threat refers to the deterioration of individuals' task performance in contexts where negative stereotypes about their social group are communicated to them. For example, negative attitudes on the part of teachers towards the variety of English spoken by many low-SES African-American students have frequently been communicated to students with predictable results (e.g., Baugh, 1999). It is not difficult to see how negative stereotypes communicated overtly or inadvertently to students within the school might undermine their academic engagement. A direct implication is that in order to reverse this pattern of underachievement, educators, both individually and collectively, must challenge the devaluation of students' language, culture, and identity in the wider society by implementing instructional strategies that enable students to develop "identities of competence" (Manyak, 2004) in the school context. Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) clearly expressed the relationship between coercive relations of power in the wider society and appropriate educational responses in the following two quotes: "The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society" (1995, p. 485); "When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence" (1994, p. 123).

This analysis enables us to theorize the notion of *empowerment* and bring it into the "mainstream" educational improvement discourse as a central dimension of effective instruction (Cummins, 2001). The starting point is the claim that within a societal context of unequal power relations, classroom interactions are never neutral—they are always located on a continuum ranging between the reinforcement of coercive relations of power and the promotion of collaborative relations of power. Coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country. For example, when schools communicate directly or indirectly to bilingual/English learner students that the school is an English-only zone and they should leave their L1 at the schoolhouse door, this represents an example of the operation of coercive relations of power.

Collaborative relations of power, by contrast, reflect the sense of the term *power* that refers to "being enabled," or "empowered" to achieve more. Within collaborative relations of power, power is not a fixed quantity but is generated through interaction with others. The more empowered one individual or group becomes, the more is generated for others to share. The process is additive rather than subtractive. Within this context, *empowerment* can be defined as *the collaborative creation of power*. Instruction that fosters empowerment will typically connect with students' lives and validate their language, culture and intellectual resources. It will enable students to use language for powerful purposes that affirm their identities as capable, creative, and intellectually competent. As noted previously, the instructional examples discussed by Haneda (2014) and Gebhard et al. (2014) illustrate this process of "re-narrating identities."
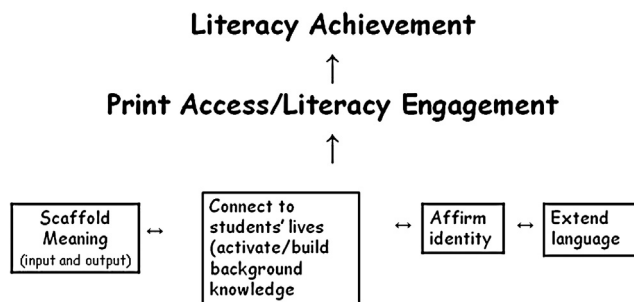
Literacy Achievement

↑

Print Access/Literacy Engagement

↑

| Scaffold Meaning (input and output) | ↔ | Connect to students' lives (activate/build background knowledge) | ↔ | Affirm identity | ↔ | Extend language |

Fig. 1. The Literacy Engagement framework.

4. Putting academic language instruction in its place

Where does academic language teaching fit within a broader context of addressing the causes of student under-achievement? In Table 1, several instructional responses were specified that address factors that potentially contribute to underachievement among low-SES, immigrant-background, and marginalized group students. These include maximizing literacy engagement, teaching academic language explicitly across the curriculum, scaffolding students' comprehension and production of language across the curriculum, connecting instruction to students' lives, and affirming students' identities in the context of academic work. These instructional responses have been compiled in the *Literacy Engagement* framework (Cummins, 2011, 2013).

It is important to understand the purpose of this framework and the validity claims that are embedded within it. The framework is intended as a heuristic or a "portal" to enable educators to engage with the empirical evidence regarding literacy development among students who are at risk of underachievement. I have suggested that theoretical claims and the frameworks that integrate these claims should be judged by criteria of adequacy and usefulness (Cummins, 2009, 2013). "Adequacy" refers to the extent to which the claims or categories embedded in the framework are consistent with the empirical data and provide a coherent and comprehensive account of the data. "Usefulness" refers to the extent to which the framework can be used effectively by its intended audience to implement the educational policies and practices it implies or prescribes.

Adequacy and usefulness are never absolutes. More detailed frameworks than the syntheses of evidence outlined in Table 1 and Fig. 1 may be more "adequate" both in explaining phenomena related to underachievement and identifying instructional practices that respond effectively to underachievement. However, gains in specificity and/or complexity may be made at the expense of usefulness. Too much detail may lead educators and policy-makers to lose sight of the "big picture" while excessive theoretical complexity or language that is alien to educators and policy-makers will reduce the likelihood of implementation.

Thus, the Literacy Engagement framework claims *adequacy* in the sense that all of its instructional components are fully consistent with and supported by the empirical evidence. For example, as documented in the next section, despite the fact that the role of literacy engagement has been largely ignored by policy-makers, there is extensive research evidence highlighting its impact on literacy achievement. Furthermore, the framework claims *greater* adequacy than alternative frameworks that have largely ignored the evidence regarding literacy engagement and identity negotiation in determining achievement. For example, despite proponents' claims that the theoretical assumptions regarding the teaching of reading underlying the *Reading First* programme were "scientifically proven," these assumptions were clearly inadequate insofar as they failed to address the available research evidence regarding determinants of reading comprehension (Cummins, 2007a).

The framework's claims to *usefulness* are obviously an ongoing process. However, by highlighting the inadequacies of current policy responses to underachievement, it has served as a portal to enable educators to enter into collegial discussions regarding school-based language policies and effectiveness of the instructional choices that they are making both individually and collectively. The framework is briefly described below.

4.1. The Literacy Engagement framework

The framework posits print access/literacy engagement as a direct determinant of literacy attainment. Print access and literacy engagement are two sides of the same coin—without abundant access to books and printed materials in home or school, children are unlikely to engage actively with literacy. There is extensive empirical research supporting the relationship between literacy engagement and attainment (e.g., Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Guthrie, 2004; Krashen, 2004; Lindsay, 2010; OECD, 2004a, 2010b). Guthrie summarized the implications of data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) research and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States by noting that students:

> whose family background was characterized by low income and low education, but who were highly engaged readers, substantially outscored students who came from backgrounds with higher education and higher income, but who themselves were less engaged readers. Based on a massive sample, this finding suggests the stunning conclusion that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income. (p. 5)

The reading measure developed by the OECD focused on the extent to which 15-year olds could construct, extend and reflect on the meaning of what they have read across a wide range of textual genres (OECD, 2004b). In other words, it focused on comprehension rather than decoding, fluency or spelling.

The more recent PISA findings (OECD, 2010b) confirm the relationships between reading engagement and achievement. Engagement in reading was assessed through measures of time spent reading various materials, enjoyment of reading, and use of various learning strategies. Across OECD countries, approximately one-third of the association between reading performance and students' socio-economic background was mediated by reading engagement. This implies that instruction that strongly promotes literacy engagement could potentially push back about one-third of the negative effects on achievement associated with SES.

It is important to note that literacy engagement includes writing as well as reading. There is considerable research documenting the role of extensive writing not only in developing writing expertise but also in improving reading comprehension (Graham & Herbert, 2010).

The framework specifies four broad instructional dimensions that are critical to enabling students to engage actively with literacy from an early stage of their schooling. Literacy engagement will be enhanced when:

- students' ability to understand and use academic language is scaffolded by the use of visual and graphic organizers, reinforcement of effective learning strategies, and encouraging students to use their L1 to clarify content (e.g., through discussion or use of L1 electronic or text resources);
- instruction connects to students' lives by activating their background knowledge which is often encoded in their L1;
- instruction affirms students' academic, linguistic and cultural identities by enabling them to showcase their literacy accomplishments in both L1 and L2;
- students' knowledge of and control over language is extended across the curriculum through instructional strategies such as those described in the other papers in this issue.

One promising strategy to increase students' awareness of language across the curriculum involves drawing their attention systematically to morphological features of language. The meta-analysis of research carried out by Bowers, Kirby and Deacon (2010) reported that such instruction made a positive contribution to literacy outcomes particularly for less able readers and when integrated with other components of literacy instruction rather than being implemented in an isolated way. In a recent study in French–English bilingual/immersion programmes in Quebec, Lyster, Quiroga and Ballinger (2013) demonstrated how an instructional focus on morphological awareness, integrated with a broader focus on literacy engagement, resulted in positive outcomes with respect to students' knowledge of morphological features. Language and content objectives were explicitly integrated in this study: "While the language focus was on derivational morphology, the content focus emerged from the themes of illustrated storybooks, which proved to be a rich source of both language and content for young learners of different proficiency levels and programme types" (p. 177).

The distinctions captured in the Literacy Engagement framework are frequently fused in classroom practice. For example, connecting instruction to students' lives acknowledges the relevance and legitimacy of the funds of knowledge in their communities. Bilingual students' identities are also affirmed when they are encouraged to use their L1 writing abilities as a stepping stone or scaffold to writing in their L2. Although not highlighted as a separate category, the implementation of bilingual instructional strategies that acknowledge and legitimate students' L1 is an integral component within each of the instructional dimensions (Cummins, 2007b; Gebhard et al., 2014).

There is virtually universal consensus among researchers and educators about the relevance of scaffolding instruction, activating background knowledge, and extending students' awareness of and ability to use academic language. However, there has been only sporadic acknowledgement of the importance of literacy engagement and identity affirmation within educational policies. The role of students' L1 as a cognitive and academic resource has also not been widely acknowledged.

The specific relevance of the Literacy Engagement framework to the teaching of academic language in general and more specifically for the implementation of the CCSS is that academic language cannot be taught effectively in isolation from broader conceptions of academic communication where different genres of language are mobilized to achieve personal, intellectual, and social goals (see Haneda, 2014). Thus, academic language teaching needs to be seamlessly integrated into a broader pedagogical orientation that prioritizes enabling students to use language and literacy for powerful and empowering purposes. These forms of literacy engagement enhance students' identities in association with their developing expertise in using academic language.

In the next section, I illustrate what I mean by "using academic language for powerful and empowering purposes" by summarizing a project carried out by students and teachers in a California elementary school. A more detailed account is provided in Cummins et al. (2007).

5. Project FRESA

This cross-age project was initiated in 1999 by third-grade teacher Amanda Irma Pérez and fifth-grade teacher Michelle Singer in Mar Vista Elementary School in Oxnard, California. The school is surrounded by strawberry fields and a large majority of students (45 out of 50) had family members who worked picking strawberries. The two classes met on a weekly basis to pursue the project. Students initially brainstormed about what they knew and would like to know about strawberries. The students generated questions such as "I wonder why the seeds are on the outside" and "I wonder why the people who pick the strawberries wear scarves across their noses and mouths" (Cummins et al., 2007, p. 131). They reviewed the questions they had generated and decided what questions would be most appropriate to ask their parents. Students then analyzed the questionnaire responses they received and looked for patterns that emerged across the responses. Cummins et al. summarized some of the students' findings as follows:

> They saw how long people had worked in the fields and how it had affected their health. "My dad used to work in the fields but he can't work now because of his back," one child said. "Really?" said another. "That same thing happened to my grandfather." Many of the most disturbing answers mentioned *fertilizantes*, the Spanish word the parents used for *pesticides*. "Why do you have so many headaches?" the children had asked their parents. "Por los fertilizantes" (because of the "fertilizers," one father said). Another child responded, "No wonder my mom always has a headache. I didn't know that was why." (p. 133)

As the project continued over the course of the school year, students engaged in inquiry that ranged right across the curriculum (science, social studies, math, language arts). They tracked the life-span of strawberries from seeds to export markets. In addition to interviewing parents and other family members, students used the Internet for additional research and invited community experts (from the Environmental Defense League and the California Rural Assistance League) to speak to their class. The teachers created a web site that contained students' poetry, artwork, graphs, and the results from their community investigations. Students also engaged in dialogue on local economics and profit analysis as part of their math curriculum. They then carried their investigation beyond their community by connecting through email with students in a coffee-growing area of Puerto Rico, and in a strawberry-growing area of India. As the project grew they also communicated by email with students in Paraguay who had worked picking strawberries and with strawberry growers in Chile who wanted to learn about working conditions in the United States.

The students also examined the websites of the major strawberry companies that operated in the Oxnard area. On the basis of their research, they wrote letters to several of these companies, asking questions such as "How often do the workers receive breaks?" and "Are there clean bathrooms on site?" They also decided to write letters to California's Governor, Gray Davis, to express their concerns about the use of pesticides and the working conditions their family members were experiencing in the fields. Throughout the project, each student wrote in their "FRESA Journal" and the response received from the governor's office that encouraged them to continue "to take an active role in public policy development" was photocopied for inclusion in each student's journal (although many students were skeptical about the sincerity of the governor's promise to investigate their concerns).

This project illustrates the power of pedagogy to develop students' critical literacy and to enable them to use language in multiple genres (e.g., letters, poetry, research reports, multimodal web page creation, etc.) for powerful and empowering purposes. In discussing the project, the two teachers communicate a message that resonates strongly today in the era of CCSS reinforced by high-stakes standardized tests:

> Students learned that . . . they have the power to take action and do something about injustices in their lives. And we teachers, with pressure from politicians and the public, know that curriculum content standards can still be met while engaging students in something much more meaningful and important. (Cummins et al., p. 145)

It is clear that the pedagogy incorporated within Project FRESA addressed all of the instructional components of the Literacy Engagement framework and also responded explicitly to many of the causal factors related to the underachievement of low-SES, immigrant background, and marginalized group students. Literacy engagement was pursued across the curriculum and the language forms and discourse conventions necessary for effective academic communication were taught in the context of students' use of language to effect social change. Students' identities as competent, engaged and intellectually powerful individuals were affirmed as were their bilingual abilities which enabled them to engage in dialogical inquiry (Wells, 1999) with their family members and peers in Latin American countries.

6. Conclusion

The new emphasis on teaching academic language across the curriculum embodied in the CCSS is likely to exert minimal impact on student achievement if it is implemented only within a transmission orientation to pedagogy where teachers focus on one-way transmission of content specified within the curriculum. As project FRESA illustrates, student engagement is

likely to increase dramatically when instruction enables them to co-construct knowledge with their teachers and to develop the critical literacy skills necessary to understand and act on the world around them. Successful implementation of the CCSS will require that educators go beyond language and implement instruction that maximizes students' literacy engagement, affirms their identities, and connects to their lives and the funds of knowledge in their communities. The choice is essentially between evidence-based as opposed to evidence-free policies.

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