

Students' and Teachers' Perceptions: An Inquiry Into Academic Writing

“Why do we have to do this?” Students often ask this question about written work. Let’s be sure we teach them worthwhile skills.

Thomas DeVere Wolsey | Diane Lapp | Douglas Fisher

After one last look, Caleb (all names are pseudonyms) uploaded his paper comparing the economic systems of two neighboring countries, one a democracy, the other a kingdom. He was certain he had captured the essence of academic writing for this assignment in his social studies course. When asked what made his paper a good example of writing for an academic audience, Caleb explained that he had avoided the use of first person, checked spelling for errors, and followed the format prescribed by his teacher.

His operational definition of academic writing had emphasized his attention to surface structures. He thought he knew exactly what his teacher wanted, but she was looking, instead, for evidence of deep connections with content through academic discourse. This misinterpretation is not uncommon. Awareness of the discrepancies between teacher expectations and student perceptions of academic writing can help teachers formulate an approach to student writing.

Academic writing is a window into what students can do in the larger domain of academic discourse within disciplinary communities. In many ways, Caleb explored content in the important ways his teacher intended; however, his view of what was expected differed markedly from his teacher's. He is, after all, a novice in a secondary school (Heller, 2010) who has a ways to go in developing disciplinary expertise.

Teachers often have well-defined perceptions of what content knowledge is and how that knowledge should be conveyed. Sometimes these perceptions are tacit and hard to define without sustained discussion, because they represent one's beliefs about linguistics, pedagogy, culture, and command of specific disciplinary knowledge and language.

How students navigate academic discourse is evident in their written and oral classroom work. Realizing this, we wondered if students and teachers viewed academic discourse in the same ways. This inquiry focuses on students' and teachers' perceptions of written discourse in science, social studies, and English language arts in 10th grade.

Literature Review

Coming to an understanding of what academic discourse might be is complicated by a set of overlapping and complementary terms. These include academic language (Cummins, 2005), disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), academic vocabulary (Coxhead, 2000), academic writing, and academic register. Further, what constitutes academic discourse in one disciplinary community may look somewhat different in another (Vacca & Vacca, 2008); however, academic discourse shares attributes across many content areas as well.

When teachers understand the dynamics of discourse moves in the general domain of academic writing and within their disciplines, their capacity for making the nature of that discourse visible to students increases. They often attend to the characteristics of language within and across content areas as a way to assist students in understanding how an academic use of language helps construct and share knowledge within a community of scholars. In this vein, we focus on academic writing within the larger domain of academic discourse.

Academic Register

Register suggests constraints on use of language including vocabulary used, awareness of specific content, understanding of context along a continuum between casual and formal, and application of accepted norms for language use in a given environment. Constraints provide context and convey information.

Researchers focusing on the features of academic register have attempted to understand it in order to ascertain why acquisition is problematic for many students (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005). “Academic English is...a register of English used in professional books and characterized by specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines. The term *register* refers to a constellation of linguistic features that are used in particular situational contexts” (Scarcella, 2003, p. 19).

Further, realizing the complexity of language registers can enable teachers to value the language variations students bring to the classroom and to be supportive in helping students to understand the linguistic features of academic English (Bailey, Huang, Farnsworth, & Butler, 2007). Thus, the space

students need to construct meaning in academic environments can be successfully built on the command of written discourse that students bring with them to school.

Elements of register applied to written work may include attention to traditional school grammar (Hillocks & Smith, 2003) and formats for discourse such as the five-paragraph essay (Dean, 2000). Nuthall (2005) notes that educators may work under the belief that if students are working toward a format deemed “proper” that learning is automatically taking place.

Just as work written by students must account for features of academic language, in order to comprehend texts written by others, students must learn to attend to the constraints found in those texts as guideposts to comprehension (Dymock, 2005). Constraints on written discourse in schools include time limits for speeches or to produce written texts, word or page counts, number of sources on which discourse participants must draw, and so on.

Academic writing might be conceptualized in terms of global moves and local operations (Wolsey, 2010). Global moves include attention to the work of others. Such moves embrace working with discipline-specific content, summarizing others’ contributions to the discourse, anticipating objections, and situating one’s point-of-view within the work others have done.

Local operations, by contrast, demand the language user’s knowledge of conventions such as word choice, use of discipline-specific terms, use of passive voice and choice of pronouns, or complex sentence constructions. Teachers have long been aware of the troubling relationship between local operations and global moves (Sipe, 2006; Weaver, 1996).

Excessive attention to usage and mechanics can be counterproductive to students’ understanding of global moves (Beach & Friedrich, 2006). Local operations do matter, but students struggle with local operations to convey meaning in contexts that require navigating the complex conceptual understandings that teachers’ value.

Academic writing might be conceptualized in terms of global moves and local operations.

Taken together, notions of purpose in academic discourse align with global moves, such as discipline-specific literacies and context for language use. Academic discourse also incorporates local operations at the word and sentence levels, including academic vocabulary, knowledge of style (e.g., Modern Language Association, 2008), and stance relative to the perceived or actual audience that help to communicate and streamline the message for the knowledgeable other participating in the discourse through dialogue or written text.

Constructing Identity

Writing is always an act of asserting oneself as a being in the world. Writers, Yagelski (2009) noted, are not just demonstrating what they know, but they are creating a space for themselves as cognitive beings in the world. This notion fits well with those of Erikson (e.g., 1968) who characterized the task of adolescence as creating an identity through integration into society as it is perceived and the adolescent's need to be distinguished as an individual within that society.

Erikson (1968) captured the confusion and conflict of establishing identity as a person in the world that bears substantively on the challenges of navigating academic discourses for the adolescent, "the adolescent fears a foolish, all too trusting commitment, and will, paradoxically, express his need for faith in loud and cynical mistrust" (p. 119). Adolescents must simultaneously navigate the academic work of those in whom they can place their confidence while pushing back against societal faith.

In written discourses, students must assert their identity as knowledgeable participants in and outside of the classroom while constructing an identity with a unique voice within the learning community. This presupposes awareness of the student as an individual capable of constructing worthwhile knowledge, not just replicating the expertise of others that includes the texts students read and overall discourse in the classroom.

Grobman (2009) addressed authorship and assumption of an authoritative voice by proposing a continuum wherein student writers participate in a kind of cognitive and societal apprenticeship. Essentially, when students engage in the construction of knowledge, they become participants in the

discourse community. In an authentic discourse community, the transformative power of knowledge comes from being an active part of its production rather than from merely possessing it.

The intended audience for students' written work affects their use of academic language, as well. Carbone and Orellana (2010) grappled with the ways sixth-grade students expressed their identities as authors of academic texts. By varying the intended audience for persuasive texts, they scaffolded use of academic language by offering choices to student writers.

For student authors, their identities as knowledgeable and competent participants in the discourse community of the classroom and in the world are constructed through a difficult navigation of the no-man's land between expertise and learning in which students sometimes perceive that they are to replicate knowledge rather than develop expertise in deep and meaningful ways (Grobman, 2009). Sometimes the features of written discourse, such as the assertion of authority through the use of the first person (Williams, 2006) or through use of directives (Hyland, 2002), may appear to conflict with students' claims to knowledge (Moll, 2010) in domains they may not think of as academic in nature or quality.

Students may pretend to use academic discourse (Postman, 1969; Smagorinsky, Daigle, O'Donnell-Allen, & Bynum, 2010) by attending to surface elements of academic discourse, such as format and strategic use of conventions. For teachers and researchers, the problems inherent in helping to make the language practices visible to students that are implicit to the expert (Olson & Truxaw, 2003) remain problematic.

Part of this quandary rests with how students navigate the knowledge they encounter and produce in academic environments and the knowledge they have of the world as they understand it (Graff & Birkenstein, 2007; Moll, 2010, Toulmin, 2003). Conversely, the nature of academic discourse also rests with the degree and type of constraints placed on the discourse by disciplinary demands.

Methods

The question explored here is how teachers and students define academic writing. In this convergence

model, mixed-methods case study (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Clark, 2007), quantitative and qualitative data were collected from surveys, interviews with students, interviews with teachers, and students' written work.

The case is thus inclusive of all 10th-grade students and their teachers at one charter school. Survey objectives (Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliott, 2002) were designed to provide data as a baseline for comparison of interview data and to determine student experience with academic writing.

Students were interviewed using a standard protocol with copies of selected work from their 10th-grade year in front of them for reference. Using a protocol similar in structure, the students' teachers were also interviewed and had available to them the same student work samples.

Thirty-nine 10th-grade students responded to a survey from which demographic data were drawn as well as responses to questions regarding the nature of academic writing. Sixty-five percent of students characterized their homes as urban, and the remainder characterized their homes as rural or suburban. Twenty-four participants were boys, 15 were girls and one student did not respond.

At the time of the study, the school was new and drew from a large metropolitan area. As a result, students' experiences as writers represent attitudes and perceptions from a wide range of educational experiences beyond the study school.

Twenty-seven different schools were named by 39 students during the previous school year. Seven teachers, who made up the entire faculty with whom students regularly interacted, responded to a similar survey. In some cases, participants did not respond to a question or participate in all aspects of the study; thus, the number of responses reported varies.

Analysis and Findings

From survey data, students characterized academic writing in a variety of ways. Among the most common were references to the local operations of mechanical and usage features of writing; for example, spelling, complete sentences, and "proper punctuation" were frequently identified as important.

Also common were references to formats such as lab reports, five-paragraph essays, research papers, and summaries. Features related to word choice and vocabulary were mentioned only four times in 37 responses received. Specific content was mentioned only three times in the students' responses.

Teachers' survey responses were more varied and generally reflected greater depth of understanding, as one might expect. Six responses generated three references to global aspects including higher-order thinking, two references to traits of writing (Education Northwest, n.d.), and three references to research or gathering information. There were no references to spelling or usage and only one reference to format in general ("students write organized essays that show a command of the language").

Tables 1 and 2 summarize analysis of students' and teachers' responses. The difference between teachers' understanding and that of students is noteworthy. In Table 1, student survey responses were read and coded for the concepts and terms students used to describe academic writing.

The responses were then reread, recoded, and consolidated. For example, a student response indicating a five-paragraph essay as representative of academic writing was coded as "organization" then recoded as "format."

Teachers' expectations were coded during initial reading, and categories were determined during a

Table 1 Student Definitions of Academic Writing

Definitional features identified by students	Frequency
Mechanics	13
Format	10
Vocabulary	3
Content	4
Literary devices or response	3
Personal	2
Purpose	2
Register	2
Effort	1
General writing competence	1

Note. *N* = 37

Table 2 Teacher Definitions of Academic Writing

Definitional features identified by teachers	Frequency
Bloom's Taxonomy including synthesis	4
Organization/format	2
Use of language	2
Writing traits (e.g., ideas, voice)	2

Note. *N* = 6

second reading. For example, "audience and purpose" from one student were included in the broader category of "writing traits" (Education Northwest, n.d.) with responses such as "voice of school" from another student.

References to synthesis were coded using Bloom's Taxonomy (cf. Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Responses that included a wide range of skills normally found on the taxonomy were coded as "wide range." An example of such a response is "gathering of information, synthesis, analysis, interpretation and summary."

Respondents who included only the lower three levels of the taxonomy were coded as "low range." Students focused heavily on mechanics and format, while teachers were concerned with levels of cognition and organization of ideas.

To further explore how students and teachers perceived academic writing tasks, each participant was asked to describe a recent assignment. Students described a task they had completed; teachers described a task they had assigned. Teachers' perceptions differed from that of students in their descriptions of a specific task as they did in describing academic writing in general.

Students favored format of the assignment with purpose for the assignment following a distant second (Table 1), while teachers favored content and description or summarization in their descriptions of the task (Table 2). Note how, during an interview, one student highlighted the academic writing task as a concern for grades and unimaginative prose: "It was pretty hard to do, because in order to obtain a good grade, I would need a lack of creativity and write more so like a research paper."

By contrast, teachers were more interested in content learning and concern for the texts with which

they hoped students would engage as they considered that content. Format of the written product appears to be far less important as long as students are getting at the essence of the content. As one teacher noted in an interview,

"I recently asked students to summarize their findings from a simulation of biogeochemical cycles in which each student represented a nitrogen atom, a carbon atom, or a water molecule. They could write the results in the form of a poem, song, or biography."

In general, teachers tended to describe academic writing in terms of the content (Table 3). Content includes discipline-specific concepts and tasks related to interpretation of data and other texts such as summarization. Students describe academic writing in terms of format, mechanical control of language, and purposes for writing (Table 4). Purpose, as explained by the students in the survey and in interviews, was

Table 3 Description of a Recent Academic Task—Teachers

Teacher descriptions of academic tasks	Frequency
Content-specific	4
Description or summarization	3
Format	2
Questions (response or answer)	1
Recall	1
Use literary device	1

Note. *N* = 6

Table 4 Description of a Recent Academic Task—Students

Student descriptions of academic tasks	Frequency
Format	16
Purpose	8
Literary device	5
Content	3
Essential question—synthesis	3
Creative	2
Mechanics	1
Other	1

Note. *N* = 36

generally specific to the prompts or directions they were given for writing.

Students' views of purpose seemed to coincide with teachers' notions of learning about content. For example, one student wrote, "We were assigned a creative writing piece where we had to incorporate certain literary devices into our stories. The story could be whatever you wanted it to be, but somewhere you had to use a combination of hyperboles, similes, metaphors, or idioms." In this student's view, command of literary devices was an academic task even though the format of the assignment was a creative piece. Her purpose for writing was to gain control of literary devices or to demonstrate such control.

An important feature of academic writing in secondary schools highlights the length of the student-created text. Page length, word count, and paragraph-counting criteria are often features of assigned academic tasks in middle and high schools.

Length requirements may promote deep thinking via elaboration, reference to other texts, and consideration of the complexity of the concept. In some cases, a length requirement for an academic task may be a call for concision or brevity, as well. At the study school, paragraph requirements appear to be the most common means of thinking about the length of a given paper. Survey responses bear this out (Table 5).

Expectations for Academic Writing

Students fully expected to write in all three disciplines examined in this study (English, social studies, and

science), and they expected to write at least one paragraph of connected text at least once each week (Table 6). When asked about the frequency of tasks in academic style per month, the responses seemed to agree with the assignment of academic writing in all three disciplines. In each, students indicated that they write 10 or more times each month in each discipline.

Teachers take a different view. Four of the six teachers responding indicated that they only assigned writing in an academic style three times each month. Only one teacher assigned six pieces per month. If there is a one-to-one correspondence between teachers' assignments and students' completion of those assignments, a problem of perception arises. Many 10th-grade students reported more than 10 academic writing tasks each month. Clearly, there is a discrepancy between what teachers and students perceive as an academic writing task.

The view of academic writing is a transaction (Britton, 1992) with other participants within a domain of inquiry. To determine the transactional nature of academic writing, participants were asked to indicate whether selected features of academic writing were expected or employed when students were assigned to write. In self-reporting expectations of students, teachers favored description, classificatory structures, and evaluation over narration. Similarly, content-specific vocabulary and complex structures were valued by teachers.

However, the distribution for students in each category was spread across the continuum from always to never. For example, eight students believed their academic writing tasks sometimes required

Table 5 How Long Should It Be?

Length	Teachers (N = 7)	Students (N = 36)
Paragraphs	All 7 teachers indicated a paragraph requirement.	Twenty-six of 36 responses indicated a specific number of paragraphs.
Pages	Two teachers indicated a page or format (e.g., double spaces, font size and style) requirement.	Twenty-five of 36 responses indicated a specific number of pages. Of those, 14 students indicated a one-page minimum. Five indicated a two-page minimum. Two students indicated that the length had to be short to meet the requirement. Two students indicated that the assignment had to be "enough."
Words	Three teachers indicated a word length requirement.	Eight students indicated a minimum word length. Two students responded by providing a page length instead. All other responses indicated that page length was not specified.

Table 6 Students: Writing Frequency

Subject	Response count
English language arts	35
Social studies	29
Math	9
Science	26
Art	2
Other	7

Note. $N = 37$

complex sentence structures, while four believed those assignments rarely or never required complex sentence structures. Three students did not know what the question was asking of them.

Related to sentence structure and uptake of new vocabulary, Mr. Boxer and Ms. Roper indicated that students sometimes “lifted” phrases from other text sources. Both thought of lifting phrases as a cause for concern reflecting a general requirement that students use their “own words.”

Sources Students Rely Upon in Writing for Academic Purposes

We explored how students situate their understanding with that of others and asked students to identify which data sources they used in support of their written work. Again, the perceptions of students were quite different from that of their teachers. To learn how students and teachers perceived and understood the need to attribute sources of information and how that information was provided, two survey questions were asked of each participant group.

In comparing the data provided by students and teachers, we noticed that both student and teacher participant groups believed that they share the responsibility for identifying sources for academic writing tasks. However, 27% of students believed that they select the sources, while no teacher believed that students identified the sources relied upon in academic writing. This leads to the question: What sources do students rely upon in constructing a written product?

Participants identified the source by type rather than by naming who chose the source. Students

believed they selected their own sources of information far more than their teachers indicated in their expectations. Both students and teachers identified course textbooks and the teacher as significant models of academic writing.

In interviews, students and teachers indicated that they relied on single sources of information, such as a textbook or lecture, as potential sources for academic writing. However, where students indicated they did research on their own, using Internet sources to supplement textbooks and lectures to inform their writing, teachers bemoaned the students’ preference for doing so.

Alan, a student we interviewed, recounted his use of the Ask.com website to find information about seals in San Francisco in order to enhance his writing about endangered species. He was aware, too, of the video he watched in class, but neither of these sources was cited in his paper. In contrast, Isabella described her writing by indicating the importance of claim, data, and warrant. We asked where she had learned those terms for argumentation; she replied that she learned to use those terms from her fourth-grade teacher.

Discussion and Implications

Throughout this study, students’ perceptions were built on their earlier experiences with academic writing tasks but clearly differed from the perceptions of their teachers. Students should know that the language they use every day is honored by their teachers as the complex and useful tool it is (Townsend & Lapp, 2010).

Because students drew heavily on their prior knowledge of what defines academic writing and other discourses, this sometimes overshadowed the prompts that their 10th-grade teachers provided. Thus, the problem transcends simply providing better directions to adolescent writers. Our findings indicate that what students know about writing from earlier experiences can serve as a bridge to academic writing proficiency.

As students become comfortable with academic writing appropriate for their grade levels and disciplines, their language variations must be accepted within many at-school contexts if educators want to build increased

proficiency with academic writing. Once they begin to access rich academic discourse, they will be able to use it effectively in the context of academia.

Local operations features are relatively visible to students and teachers. Global moves are much more difficult to teach and for students to grasp, in part because they require understanding abstract constructions, such as what ideas should be attributed or how to link evidence in an argument with a claim.

Though teachers in our study, and presumably teachers at the students' previous schools, rely on format requirements such as page length, paragraph requirements, style guide requirements and so on, their intentions were to promote proficiency with academic discourse in their disciplines. Thus, the local operations requirements served as a lens through which students would address tasks involving written, academic discourse. However, students tended to focus solely on local operations without perceiving the connection between format, content, and command of written academic discourse within the concept development and construction of their own identities as cognitive beings.

As students become familiar with the complexity of the domains of language and inquiry they encounter in school, their understanding may increase as they grapple with the nuances found in various texts and realize that the view of one writer may not agree with that of another writer. Teachers promote nuanced and intricate thinking on the part of student writers when students have multiple texts from which they can work.

Such texts serve as rich sources of content and require students to synthesize ideas from these sources. At the same time, students see how writers use local operations to focus their work and communicate ideas.

Text sets (Short & Harste, 1996) are one route to rich experiences with academic discourse on which students can draw for models of both local operations and global moves toward conceptual understanding. Text sets are defined collections that support discussion and writing, and they represent a variety of texts students can read (e.g., Allington, 2002). Because the texts with which students work are often the foundation of the knowledge they construct in written work, complex and creative thinking can be promoted when students read a variety of texts.

Explicit instruction might include models of the teacher referring explicitly to sources. Such models might include the following stems:

- “In reading our textbook, I agreed with the author who claimed...”
- “Please log on to a reliable news website and find an article about...”

Students benefit when they understand why knowing a source and being able to refer to it helps them learn by establishing context. Recalling the idea, its source, and the author responsible for it builds solid connections in memory on which other ideas might be built.

Moreover, students begin to rely on these sources as models of local operations and global moves in their own use of academic discourse when they write. Further, Isabella's application of the Toulmin (2003) model of argumentation more than five years after she learned about it indicates the possibility that elementary and secondary students are capable of attributing ideas to specific sources and making appropriate inferences from and about those sources.

Explicitly teaching the local operations of word choice and sentence construction (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010), as well as the global moves writers make as they negotiate ideas in their own writing, assists with uptake of academic discourse structures. Students develop robust notions of academic writing when they are explicitly taught what such written work looks like.

At the same time, the structures of academic discourse taught in context help students with the conceptual development that is often the aim of academic writing. Berninger and Richards (2002) propose that student writers are novices, not simply young versions of expert writers. This may seem evident, at first, but student writers have not learned the control functions (Baddeley, 2004) that help them to understand when to employ the complex local operations and global moves required of academic composing processes.

Model of Academic Discourse Uptake

We postulate three interactive and overlapping phases (see Figure) to assist teachers in bridging the gap between what students perceive and teachers expect. The first phase recognizes the role of linguistic and

Take Action!

When students write, what they understand about purpose is paramount. More explicit directions are not sufficient to overcome or expand students' perceptions of what academic writing is in a given writing situation.

Purpose includes exploring the topic or content. When students attend to local operations at the expense of global moves, instruction and clarification of the role of local operations guides students. Students may confuse local operations with the rhetorical purposes they serve; thus, they may not realize:

1. Why length or format requirements are included in some writing tasks and the relative importance of those requirements in terms of grades, the overall rhetorical purpose of the writing, and so on.
2. What sources they must consult and what options for further learning exist (research on the Internet, multiple genres, and creative departures from the disciplinary norm, etc.).
3. What role matters of style, spelling, usage, and mechanics play in the work they submit.

Teachers Can:

Encourage greater facility with global moves in and across disciplines, provide multiple models with key attributes identified. For example, students benefit when they see how a writer's ideas are creatively incorporated among the ideas of others.

Encourage students to consult multiple sources: Students who read widely are more likely to have questions that lead them to deeper inquiry which leads to more effective writing. Among sources, students notice similarities and contradictions, interesting details, and challenges to their own thinking prior to and during writing.

Highlight connections between discussions and informal writing tasks with longer or more involved writing tasks.

visual sources that students draw on as they begin to formulate their thinking about disciplinary concepts. From these, students encounter academic language common to the discipline while learning the academic concepts required by the discipline.

What students know about those concepts and how they use them in discussion and exploratory writing assists in shaping their notions of what they are learning. In low-stakes environments, such as labs, journal writing, and small-group discussions, students try their use of discipline-specific language.

In the second phase, students continue uptake of the concepts with increasing sophistication, and they use discussion, visualization, and written expression with increasing authority as they come to know and comprehend concepts they have encountered. As Heller (2010) suggests, our goal is "to teach students to read and write and argue in various ways and in various genres, dealing flexibly with the situations in which they find themselves" (p. 272). In doing so, students become increasingly proficient with disciplinary concepts, and they use academic language structures in their academic writing.

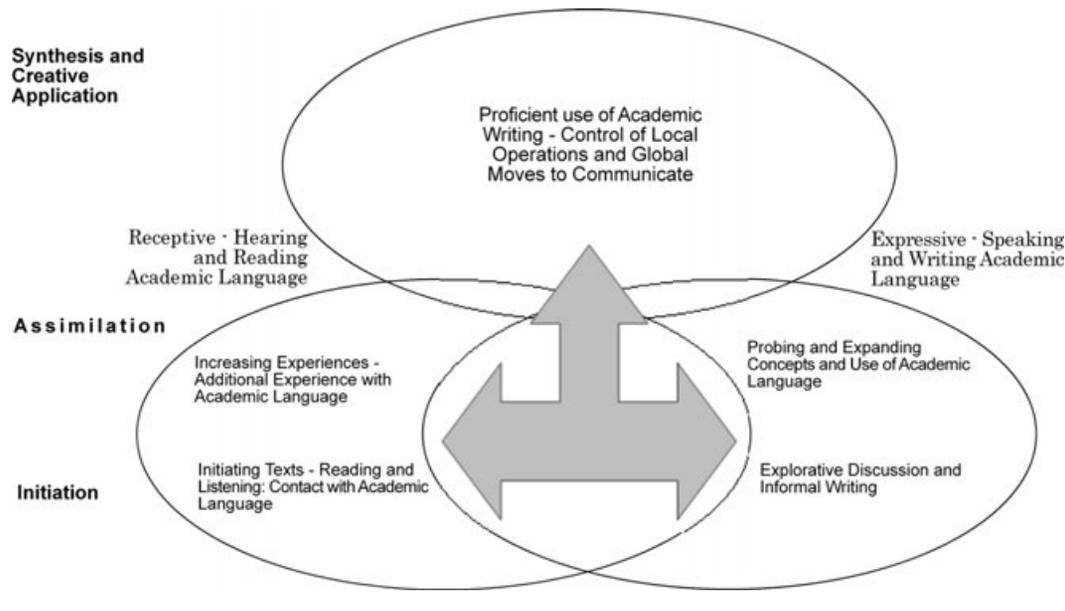
In phase three, students demonstrate knowledge of academic language structures with relative ease while navigating the concepts specific to the discipline in their written work. As students become increasingly proficient with academic language structures in school disciplines and at their grade levels, it becomes increasingly possible for students to note patterns, compare sources, and construct understanding that is increasingly complex and sophisticated. Moreover, students add to their identities the notion that they are capable of thinking about difficult concepts in content areas they encounter in school.

Fostering Robustly Written Discourse

If most students, like those in our study, define or conceptualize academic writing largely in terms of the local operations while their teachers tend to define their notions of academic writing in a more robust way, some guidelines may help teachers plan writing tasks. The following features stand out to us based on this research and in our experience.

- Students need multiple models of effective language use in each content area or discipline.
- Students should be expected to build from the oral, visual, and written models of academic discourse they have encountered in the literacy-rich environment of the classroom.

Figure Model of Academic Writing Uptake



- Students should be supported in understanding how features of academic writing may also be integral components of some informal tasks.
- Explicit instruction can help students understand why local operations and global moves can help students know when to use these structures.
- Rubrics and grading criteria should feature academic discourse, including the global moves and local operations that students should acquire.

These suggestions extrapolated from the study findings support a developmental approach to instruction in writing. What students can do tomorrow will be constructed from what they learn today. Explicit instruction of discipline-specific language makes clear to students how their words shape and share their understanding of concepts, while their understanding of concepts helps them to become increasingly precise with the words and language structures they employ.

Understanding the nature of disconnects between students' perceptions and their teachers' expectations of written discourse can help teachers refine their expectations and instruction. Because we recognize the need for additional inquiry into the perceptions of students, demands of curriculum, and the expectations of teachers regarding academic writing tasks, we encourage further research in this area.

Understanding the current condition while exploring pedagogy can only improve student learning.

How teachers bridge the gaps is as important as acknowledging that the discrepancies exist.

References

- Achugar, M., & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2005). Beyond connectors: The construction of cause in history textbooks. *Linguistics and Education*, 16(3), 298–318. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2006.02.003
- Allington, R.L. (2002). You can't learn much from books you can't read. *Educational Leadership*, 60(3), 16–19.
- Anderson, L.W., & Krathwohl, D.R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.
- Baddeley, A.D. (2004). The psychology of memory. In A.D. Baddeley, M.D. Kopelman, & B.A. Wilson (Eds.), *The essential handbook of memory disorders for clinicians* (pp. 1–13). Danvers, MA: John Wiley and Sons.
- Bailey, A.L., Huang, B.H., Farnsworth, T., & Butler, F.A. (2007). *Developing academic English language proficiency prototypes for 5th grade reading: Psychometric and linguistic profiles of tasks*. University of California. Los Angeles: The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.
- Beach, R., & Friedrich, T. (2006). Response to writing. In C.A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research* (pp. 222–234). New York: Guilford.
- Berninger, V.W., & Richards, T.L. (2002). *Brain literacy for educators and psychologists*. Boston: Academic.
- Britton, J. (1992). *Language and learning: The importance of speech in children's development* (New ed.). London: Penguin.
- Carbone, P.M., & Orellana, M.F. (2010). Developing academic identities: Persuasive writing as a tool to strengthen emergent academic identities. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 44(3), 292–316.
- Coxhead, A. (2000). A new academic word list. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 213–238. doi:10.2307/3587951
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J.W., & Clark, V.L.P. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (2005). Teaching the language of academic success: A framework for school-based language policies. In C.F. Leyba (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical-practical framework* (3rd ed., pp. 3–32). Los Angeles: LBD.
- Dean, D.M. (2000). Muddying boundaries: Mixing genres with five paragraphs. *English Journal*, 90(1), 53–56. doi:10.2307/821731
- Dymock, S. (2005). Teaching expository text structure awareness. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(2), 177–181. doi:10.1598/RT.59.2.7
- Education Northwest. (n.d.). About 6+1 Trait® Writing. Retrieved February 16, 2011, from educationnorthwest.org/traits
- Erikson, E.H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Fang, Z., & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2010). Disciplinary literacies across content areas: Supporting secondary reading through functional language analysis. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(7), 587–597. doi:10.1598/JAAL.53.7.6.
- Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2007). *They say, I say: The moves that matter in persuasive writing*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Grobman, L. (2009). The student scholar: (Re)negotiating authorship and authority. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(1), 175–196.
- Heller, R. (2010). In praise of amateurism: A friendly critique of Moje's "call for change" in secondary literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54(4), 267–273. doi:10.1598/JAAL.54.4.4.
- Hillocks, G., Jr., & Smith, M.W. (2003). Grammars and literacy learning. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J.R. Squire, & J.M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (2nd ed., pp. 721–737). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Directives: Argument and engagement in academic writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(2), 215–239. doi:10.1093/applin/23.2.215
- Modern Language Association [MLA]. (2008). *MLA style manual and guide to scholarly publishing* (3rd ed.). New York: Author.
- Moll, L.C. (2010). Mobilizing culture, language, and educational practices: Fulfilling the promises of *Mendez and Brown*. *Educational Researcher*, 39(6), 451–460. doi:10.3102/0013189X10380654.
- Nuthall, G. (2005). The cultural myths and realities of classroom teaching and learning: A personal journey. *Teachers College Record*, 107(5), 895–934. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9620.2005.00498.x
- Olson, M.R., & Truxaw, M.P. (2003). Preservice science and mathematics teachers and discursive metaknowledge of text. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(5), 422–431. doi:10.1598/JAAL.52.5.6.
- Postman, N. (1969). Bullshit and the art of crap-detection. [Essay]. Retrieved June 11, 2011, from criticalsnips.wordpress.com/2007/07/22/neil-postman-bullshit-and-the-art-of-crap-detection/
- Scarcella, R. C. (2003). *Accelerating academic English: A focus on English language learners*. Oakland, CA: Regents of University of California.
- Schonlau, M., Fricker, R.D., & Elliott, M.N. (2002). *Conducting research surveys via e-mail and the web*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2008). Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(1), 40–59.
- Short, K.G., & Harste, J.C. (with Burke, C.). (1996). *Creating classrooms for authors and inquirers* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sipe, R.B. (2006). Grammar matters. *English Journal*, 95(5), 15–17. doi:10.2307/30046582
- Smagorinsky, P., Daigle, E.A., O'Donnell-Allen, C., & Bynum, S. (2010). Bullshit in academic writing: A protocol analysis of a high school senior's process of interpreting *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 44(4), 368–405.
- Toulmin, S. (2003). *The uses of argument, updated edition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Townsend, D.R., & Lapp, D. (2010). Academic language, discourse communities, and technology: Building students' linguistic resources. *Teacher Education Quarterly, Special Online Edition*. Retrieved December 21, 2010, from teqjournal.org/townsend_lapp.html
- Vacca, R.T., & Vacca, J.A. (2008). *Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum* (9th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Weaver, C. (1996). *Teaching grammar in context*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Williams, B. (2006). Pay attention to the man behind the curtain: The importance of identity in academic writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(8), 710–715. doi:10.1598/JAAL.49.8.7
- Wolsey, T.D. (2010). Complexity in student writing: The relationship between the task and vocabulary uptake. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 49(2), 194–208. doi:10.1080/19388070902947360.
- Yagelski, R.P. (2009). A thousand writers writing: Seeking change through the radical practice of writing as a way of being. *English Education*, 42(1), 6–28.

Wolsey is literacy specialization coordinator in the Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership at Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, USA; e-mail tom.wolsey@waldenu.edu.

Lapp is Distinguished Professor of Education at San Diego State University, and a teacher and instructional coach at Health Science High and Middle College, San Diego, California, USA; e-mail lapp@mail.sdsu.edu.

Fisher is a professor of education at San Diego State University, and a teacher leader at Health Sciences High & Middle College, San Diego, California, USA; e-mail dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu.

More to Explore

ReadWriteThink.org Lesson Plan

- "Modeling Academic Writing Through Scholarly Article Presentations" by Laura Hennessey DeSena

IRA Book

- *Adolescent Literacy, Field Tested: Effective Solutions for Every Classroom* edited by Sheri R. Parris, Douglas Fisher, and Kathy Headley

IRA Journal Articles

- "Standardized Students: The Problems With Writing for Tests Instead of People" by Bronwyn T. Williams, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, October 2005
- "When It's More Than You, Jesus, and the Pencil: Reflections on an Academic Writing Mentorship" by Jennifer D. Turner and Patricia A. Edwards, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, November 2006