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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study that examined the academic language of middle school social studies education, as found in textual and classroom discourse, and the instructional practices effective in guiding students to accomplish academically and socially meaningful tasks. It involved classroom-based research, analysis of textbook discourse, classroom talk, and student work samples. Student language development was also examined. The study also resulted in development of two thematic units for integrating language and social studies objectives with thinking/study skill practice and multicultural perspectives, on protest and the American Revolution, and conflict in world cultures. Textbook discourse analysis included examination of text structure and content and use of vocabulary. Analysis of functional academic language in social studies looked at its semantic and syntactic features, language functions and tasks, and routine classroom discourse and analyzed its specific features. It was also determined that social studies offers many opportunities for higher-order thinking tasks. It was found that both English-as-a-Second-Language and content area teachers used specific bridging strategies to accommodate student language needs. Limitations were identified in existing instructional materials, and explicit socialization into classroom culture was found to be desirable. Implications for instruction are addressed briefly. (MSE)

THE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE OF SOCIAL STUDIES: A BRIDGE TO AN ALL-ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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SESSION HANDOUT

Overview

Integrated language and content instruction is a growing enterprise in US schools. At least 15% of the schools offer a content-ESL course or program (Sheppard, 1994). There is great variety in content-ESL courses in terms of the type of program, type of teacher, subject area, type of learner, use of L1, and more.

Many factors influence the success of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, among them language learning, access to content classes, sociocultural dimensions, educational backgrounds, and more. The study presented here has examined the interplay of many of the above factors in middle school social studies classes that serve culturally diverse students who are learning English.

Research project background

"Integrating Language, Culture and the Social Studies," sponsored by the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, has been examining the construction of social studies knowledge in middle school classrooms with English language learners (ELLs), and the linguistic and cultural competencies

students need to engage effectively in this domain of discourse and learning. This paper discusses the academic language of social studies found in classroom and textual discourse and effective instructional practices teachers use to guide students to accomplish socially and academically meaningful tasks.

Social studies is appealing, in conceptualization, to students and teachers of ESL. It is often narrative in nature, has recurrent themes, examines world cultures, and provides information to help students adjust to their new country.

In practice, though, we hypothesized that social studies would be academically more challenging for English language learners than other subjects: it demands high literacy skills (including use of expository text and graphic literacy); is predicated on students being familiar with extensive background knowledge; provides fewer opportunities for hands-on practice; and revolves around many abstract concepts. A NCSS Task Force report (Jarolimek, 1989) pointed out that higher-order thinking skills, like interpreting information, drawing inferences, representing print information visually, and identifying alternative courses of action and their consequences, begin to be emphasized at the middle school level. In terms of Cummins' framework (1981), social studies, in general, represents cognitively-demanding and context-reduced communication.

Nonetheless, our research leads us to believe that the skills developed and concepts learned in social studies serve students well as a bridge to mainstream, English speaking classrooms.

Project Design

The research project included several components: classroom-based research; discourse analysis of textbooks, classroom talk, and student work samples; and materials

development. Two thematic units were created that reflect our best thinking to date on strategies and techniques for integrating language and social studies objectives with thinking/study skill practice and multicultural perspectives: *Protest and the American Revolution* and *Conflict in World Cultures*.

Literacy in Social Studies

Social studies is highly language dependent. Most social studies classes still rely heavily on teacher lecture and textbook reading as the prime information sources. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills can be developed that cut across the demands of all core subject areas.

Text Analysis

Text Structures: Sequencing and cause-effect structures are the most prevalent organizational features of the chapters. However, even if one macrostructure were present in a chapter, other microstructures were developed at the paragraph and sentence level. The textbooks used language (e.g., word choice, transition markers) to enhance the logical connections of the structures framing the narrative.

TEXT STRUCTURES	
** Chronological, or sequential	Description
*Cause-effect	Enumeration
*Problem-solution	* Comparison-contrast

** Most frequent macrostructure for social studies texts
* Also found, more frequently at the paragraph level (microstructure)

The following page provides an example drawn from the textbook:

SAMPLE ANALYSIS OF TEXT STRUCTURE

Exploring American History (O'Connor, 1991), Unit 5, "America Wins Independence," Chapter 3, "The Colonists Resist Taxation without Representation," pages 186-88.

In March 1765, Parliament **passed a tax law** called the Stamp Act...The American colonists **refused to obey**... *Immediately,* newspaper editors, lawyers, and printers **spoke out strongly against it**. Colonial assemblies **met to protest** the Stamp Act....*During the summer of 1765,* American colonists **increased their protests** against the Stamp Act....*Finally,* colonists **decided to hold a meeting to plan** what other action they could take together. *In October 1765,* nine colonies **sent delegates to a meeting**, known as the Stamp Act Congress...The Stamp Act Congress **called on** Parliament **to remove** the stamp tax...*In March 1766,* Parliament **voted to end** the Stamp Act. The colonists had won their fight against this tax...However to show that it did not agree with the colonists' views about its power to tax, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act...**Because the British government still needed money, Parliament *in 1767* passed the Townshend Acts**... The Townshend Acts **caused more and more colonists to protest** British taxes...

The word choice (e.g., refused to obey, spoke out strongly against, increased their protest, voted to end, caused more and more colonists to protest) and the transition markers (e.g., finally, however, because) reinforce the concept that the colonists reacted to British actions in the hopes of changing the situation. Furthermore, since cause-effect relationships by definition proceed in a sequential order (i.e., a cause must occur before an effect), the author also marks the passage with temporal words and phrases: *In March 1765...Immediately...During the summer of 1765...In October 1765...In March 1766...in 1767.* The use of all these signal words is helpful for second language learners who can recognize and them and their functions as they read and follow the relationships among the presented concepts.

Signal words proved helpful for ELLs when they are explicitly taught to recognize them and understand their functions. Students were better able to follow the relationships among the concepts presented in their text reading passages. Graphic organizers enhanced comprehension too. (see also Coelho, 1982; Early & Tang, 1991; Mohan, 1990). Signal words and text structure knowledge transferred to writing too.

The student work shared at the end of this handout demonstrates student success with using signal words while writing a comparison-contrast essay. This essay was a result of several earlier activities. First the class read two poems, "The Midnight Ride of Paul revere," by Henry Wadsowrth Longfellow and "Sybil Ludington's Revolutionary Ride," by Cindy Mahrer. After analyzing the poem for both its language use and content, students prepared a Venn Diagram comparing Paul Revere and Sybil Ludington. The essay shown here is the final product after some drafts done as part of the writing process used in class.

Vocabulary treatment: Inadequate for English language learners. Key terms are selected per chapter (range 5-10) and highlighted in the text. Some texts define the bold terms within the narrative, but others rely upon the glossary for the definitions. The difficulty for ELLs is that many of the important words are not identified as the key terms. Only two of the ten books examined listed words besides the designated key terms in the glossary.

Functional Academic Language

Broad definition of social studies academic language: semantic and syntactic features (such as vocabulary items, sentence structure, transition markers, and cohesive ties), language functions and tasks (social studies activities), and routine classroom discourse.

Not a restrictive social studies register, instead the academic language used in social studies classes is commensurate with much of the academic language in other humanities courses and in fact, similar to the non-technical language used in math and science classroom discourse when teachers and students are explaining, reviewing, discussing, and so forth. (See also Halliday, 1975; Lemke, 1982, 1990; Spanos, Rhodes, Dale & Crandall, 1987.)

Breakdown of the features: instructional tools (e.g., globes, maps) and related vocabulary; famous people and events (Mercy Otis Warren, boycott; Francisco Pizarro, conquistador); abstract concepts (e.g., patriotism, self-governing, resistance); language functions (e.g., define, give example, compare, sequence, rephrase, extend); language skill tasks (e.g., read expository prose, write a "cause-effect" essay); syntax (e.g., simple past, temporal signals).

The next page shows a chart of the features of social studies language.

Thinking and Study Skills

Social studies offers many opportunities for higher-order thinking tasks. Students should move beyond information recall to information processing, analyzing and synthesizing. Many social studies tools are useful in other content areas: timelines, outlines, charts, graphs. Activities connected with the subthemes of the units–symbolism, mulitple perspectives, perceptions, alternatives–promote higher-order thinking.

SAMPLE FEATURES OF SOCIAL STUDIES LANGUAGE

Tools of Social Studies	**Related Language**
textbook	on page..., at the top, chapter, illustration
map	north, south, east, west, land features
globe	latitude, longitude, continents
timeline	years, dates
graph, chart	title, percent, bar, pie, column, heading

Famous People/Events	**Related/Technical Vocabulary**
Samuel Adams	rebel, speech
Mercy Otis Warren	boycott, correspondence
Stamp Act	taxes, 'tar and feather'
Francisco Pizarro	conquistador, invader, soldier
Reformation	theses, Protestant, religion

Concepts

propaganda	protest	taxation	negotiation
patriotism	rebellion	conflict resolution	conquest
self-governing	independence	imperialism	resistance

Language Functions

Students and Teachers		*Teachers*	
explain	sequence	ask recall questions	rephrase
describe	compare	give directions	extend
define	evaluate	encourage	review
give example	justify	clarify/restate	preview

Language Skills Tasks

read expository prose	find main idea, supporting details
take notes	present an oral report
conduct research	write a "cause and effect" essay

Syntax

Simple past	Sequence words
Historical present	Active voice

Bridging Strategies

Both ESL and content teachers taught American History and World Studies successfully using specific strategies to accommodate the students. In particular, use of thematic units, vocabulary and concept preparation (development of schema - associations with student experiences, current events), pre-reading and pre-writing activities, and activity modeling were very effective. Graphic organizers were particularly useful for reading and writing tasks and made connections between the two for students.

Additional strategies that teachers relied on: emphasis on higher order tasks, teacher shaping of student utterances (repeating, rephrasing, prompting and extending), cooperative learning, hands-on activities (craft work, drama), peer tutors (especially English speaking), reading and writing extended discourse, explicit instruction in text structures and signal words.

In general, teachers provided communicative skills practice to master social studies objectives. Specific practice in note-taking, reading authentic materials, and giving oral presentations benefit students moving to mainstream settings.

Caveats and Cautions

Representation of Diversity: Textbooks frame the history of pre-revolutionary America from the Patriot viewpoint (Patriot) and present a Eurocentric focus, largely ignoring the roles and contributions played by other, non-Europeans to the development of the United States. Little information about the roles of women, African Americans and Native Americans as well as the Loyalists and the colonists who remained neutral during the war. World Studies often focus on the "winners" of conflicts and rarely discuss the minorities groups in the various country histories being studied.

Some references to the diversity exist, but information was tagged onto the end of a chapter, sidebarred outside the main narrative, or added in a new chapter in a new edition, usually at the beginning or end of a text unit. Overall impression: information about diverse peoples is less important . (See also Apple & Christian, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Love, 1989a, 1989b.)

Culture of the Classroom: Students benefit from explicit socialization into the culturally appropriate behaviors and interactional styles of the classroom (see Erickson & Schultz, 1991). Teachers and students should work towards creating a composite culture in the classroom (see Jordan, 1992). Teaching should be responsive to culturally different ways of learning and using language. Supplementary materials must accompany judicious use of the textbook.

Implications

English language learners can master social studies material with teacher support, especially for vocabulary development, adjustments for limited background knowledge, and success with literacy tasks.

ELLs can learn cues to recognize text structures to aid comprehension. Graphic organizers can reflect text structures. Because textbooks send a subtle, negative message about societal diversity, teachers need to supplement traditional texts to offer multiple perspectives and diversity information.

The academic language and social study skills required in social studies suggest a sheltered social studies course may be pivotal in terms of bridging students—out of language support and into the mainstream classroom.

The following essay was written by a 6th grader in a sheltered US History class. He had been in the US for less than two years and his first language is Spanish. The essay was written after the class had read and analyzed "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" and "Sybil Ludington's Revolutionary Ride" and had prepared Venn Diagrams comparing the two messengers.

The Story of Paul Revere and Syvil Ludington

When the British soldiers were attacking Massachusetts and Connecticut in the Revolution, there were two people who help their nation, their names were Paul Revere and Syvil Ludington. I will tell you'll three ways that Paul and Syvil were the same and using the trandiction [transition] words. The first way that they were the same is that they both save their people like these [this] they both were shouting to there people like these [this] the Red coat are coming, the red coat are here and that's how they save their people. Furthermore they both were valiant or brave to ride their horses and to notify or let know their people. They knew if the British soldiers catch they will be dead, but they were very valient or have [brave] anyway. In addition they both rode their horses at night because if they rode their horses in the day the British will kill them. And that's how Paul and Sybil were

On the other hand I will tell you'll three nice ways that Paul and Sybil were different. The first way the [that] they were different is the [that] Paul sound the alarm in Massachussetts and Sybil she sound the alarm in Connecticut. Furthermore when Paul was saving lives with his horse he got a fullmoon and a nice weather in fact, he did have a lanter [lantern], but Sybil she didn't have a really bad weather she's weather was really modly with a thunderstorm and guess what, she didn't have any lanter. In addition Paul rode his horse above 17 miles and I think he when [went] to 2 or 3 places, but Sybil she rode hers horse above 40 and she when to 10 or 11 places, which is alot for a girl who has 17 years old. And that's how Paul and Sybil were different.

No [Now] it comes the big part. Now I will tell you'll what I think was the biggest hero. Guess who was the biggest hero Paul or Sybil. Sybil. you are right Sybil was the biggest hero because she did all the things the no men couln't do in Connecticut. The first thing the [that] Sybil did to be the biggest hero is that she was the only person and the only women to be a voluntary to help hers nation for example to tell their people that the [British] were coming. Furthermore she rode 40 miles and that's mean the no women couldn't support all those miles and shouting in fact she rode 40 miles that Paul couldn't dued [do]. In addition she rode hers horse in that night which was terrible with rain, and very very dark, I think if other girl shout be riding hers horse in that night she will shouting like these [this] dad, dad, mom, mom. And that's how she was the super hero.

Jorge's essay demonstrates how the teaching of language skills and content knowledge can be woven into practice. Jorge relied on a graphic organizer as his bridge between reading and writing. After analyzing the two poems, he listed the similarities and differences between Paul Revere and Sybil Ludington on a Venn diagram. In this manner, Jorge not only demonstrated comprehension of the text he read, he also organized the information in a way that would lead to his writing task. Because the teacher had explicitly instructed the class in temporal (when), comparative (both), enumerative (in addition, furthermore, the first way) and causative/conditional words (because, if-then), he was able to incorporate them as he drafted and revised his work.

By looking closely at Jorge's essay, we see a high level of sophisticated sentences. Very few are simple sentences, most are complex or even compound-complex. He uses a variety of subordinate clauses (e.g., temporal, relative), embedded sentences (introduced by *that*), and phrases to provide details connect ideas. Although he still needs additional instruction in some of

the mechanics of writing, such as punctuation, spelling, capitalization and run-on sentences, he has clearly communicated information in a satisfactory and compelling manner. He even uses topic and concluding sentences in his paragraphs and his linguistic signals cue the reader to his comparative and enumerative frameworks. Moreover, concerning the social studies objectives, he uses key vocabulary (e.g., British soldiers attacking, valiant, sound the alarm, Red coat) and demonstrates understanding of important concepts (e.g., use of messengers in wartime, saving people in a nation, heroism and bravery). The only instance where his communication breaks down is when he reports "...she *didn't have* a really bad weather...". He is confused in describing the bad weather Sybil did have during her journey and but later explains there was "a thunderstorm."