



A VISION FOR USING AN ARGUMENT-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDITY APPLIED TO A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SECONDARY GRADES

Brief I: Perspective on Language Development

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The Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) Framework presents a vision for a system of assessments for English Learners in secondary grades that brings assessment closer to the classroom and fully involves teachers in assessment development and validation.¹ The CAS Framework is intended to signal a new and

equitable direction and to provoke reflection and debate among all those concerned with improving outcomes for English Learners. This brief describes the perspective on language development for secondary-grade English Learners that underpins the CAS Framework and notes its implications for assessment.

Language Development

English Learners need opportunities in the classroom to develop their language competencies during interactions with peers and teachers while simultaneously learning academic content. Content and language development are not treated as separate entities. Learning disciplinary concepts and analytical practices

is not distinct from the linguistic means through which the understanding is developed and expressed; the demands of understanding concepts, practices, and relationships are not privileged above the demands of linguistic resources, nor vice versa.

This perspective on the integration of content and language development incorporates three additional concepts:

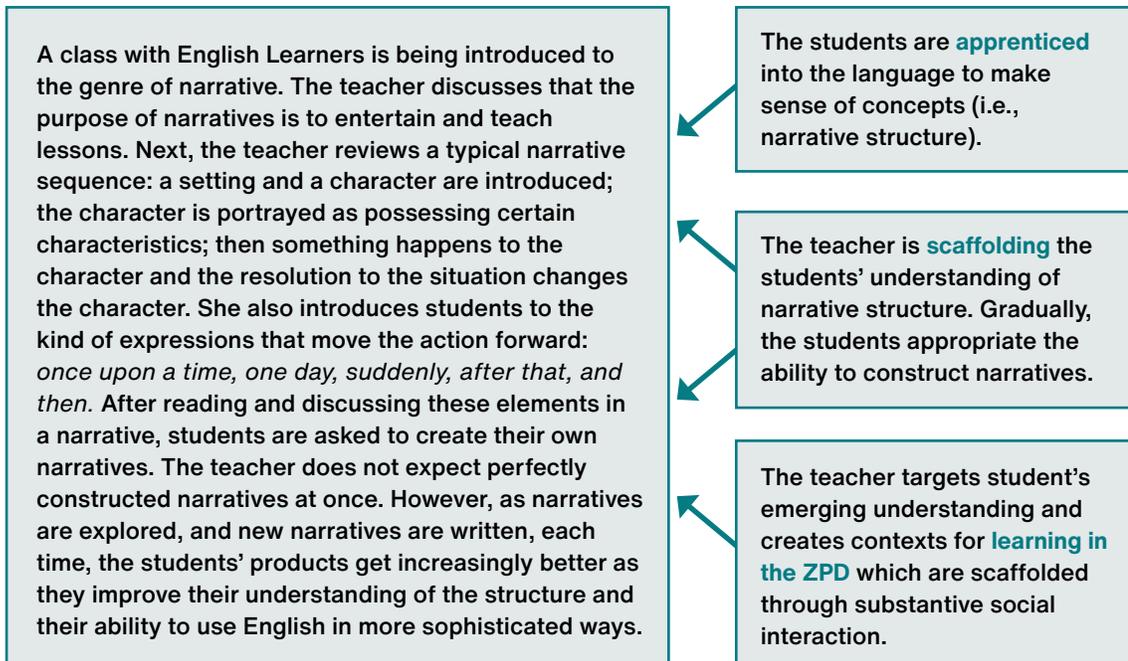
Apprenticeship. Involves active individuals participating with others for the purpose of developing the mature participation in the activity by the less experienced people.⁴

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Defined as the distance between what the individual can accomplish during independent problem-solving and the level of problem-solving that can be achieved with the assistance of an adult or in collaboration with a more expert peer.⁵

Scaffolding. A process of ‘setting up’ invitations for students to engage and learn in ways that make the student’s entry easy and successful and then, when teacher observation determines, gradually pulling back and handing the role to the students as they become skilled enough to manage it.⁶

This perspective on language development has its roots in **Vygotsky’s** theory of the relationship between language and thought.² Vygotsky maintained that thought is not merely expressed in words, it comes into existence through them.³

In the following example of practice, we can see how these three concepts are employed to support integrated content and language development in an English language arts lesson.



Effective Pedagogy

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of effective pedagogy that follow from this perspective on language development and contrasts it with traditional pedagogical practices for English Learners.

Table 1. Changes in Language and Content Teaching⁷

FROM . . .	TO . . .
Seeing language acquisition as an individual process	Understanding it as a social process of apprenticeship
Conceptualizing language in terms of structures or functions	Understanding language as action
Seeing language acquisition as a linear and progressive process aimed at accuracy, fluency, and complexity	Understanding that acquisition occurs in nonlinear and complex ways
Emphasizing discrete structural features of language	Showing how language is purposeful and patterned
Treating content and language standards as separate atomistic entities	Weaving clusters of standards together to integrate the development of conceptual understanding, analytical practices, and language development
Engaging in activities that pre-teach content	Engaging in activities that scaffold students' development and autonomy as learners with the ZPD
Establishing separate objectives for language and content learning	Establishing objectives that integrate language and content learning
Using simple or simplified texts	Using complex, amplified texts
Using lessons focused on individual ideas or texts	Using clusters of lessons centered on texts that are interconnected by purpose or by theme

Implications for Assessment

Assessment of English Learners needs to reflect the nature of the learning context and students' experience in learning content and language simultaneously in order to support changes in pedagogical actions outlined in Table 1.

Endnotes

- 1 Heritage, M., Wylie, C., Faulkner-Bond, M., & Walqui, A. (2021). *A vision for using an argument-based framework for validity applied to a comprehensive system of assessment for English learners in the secondary grades*. WestEd.
- 2 Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 3 Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 4 Rogoff, B. (1995) Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory, appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In J. Wertsch, P. del Rio, and A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139–164). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- 5 Vygotsky, *Mind in society*
- 6 Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's talk*. p.60. New York, NY: Norton.
- 7 Heritage, M., Walqui, A., & Linqunti, R. (2015). *English language learners and the new standards: Developing language, content knowledge, and analytical practices in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.



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