Laying the Foundation with Academic Language

Supporting and developing a foundational understanding is important for ELLs. Short and colleagues (2018) stress that certain considerations should be made during the design and delivery stages of instruction. Teachers must consider how and why particular language and vocabulary is used. With this activity, students review the language of observation, analysis, and interpretation along with vocabulary critical to being able to analyze evidence, demonstrate understanding, and argue their own opinions (i.e., academic and lesson vocabulary). These types of language supports provide ELLs with key words and model language/structure, promote independence, and help them remember connections among words and concepts. As each chart is discussed, students should be directed to find the equivalent phrase or vocabulary in their home language.

The language of observation is the language used to describe “what we see” and what is actually there. Students are able to pull from the vocabulary listed in figure 1 to share their observations. They learn to make observations in simple, short sentences.

Figure 1. The Language of Observation Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Tense</th>
<th>Past Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I observe...</td>
<td>I observed...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see...</td>
<td>I saw...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I notice...</td>
<td>I noticed...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I recognize...</td>
<td>I recognized...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered...</td>
<td>I discovered...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify...</td>
<td>I identified...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can describe...</td>
<td>I described...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The language of analysis is the set of vocabulary used to figure out what our observations are telling us. These phrases (figure 2) help students go beyond what they simply observe. It provides them with the necessary structure to verbalize the connections they made from their observations.

Language of interpretation is the set of phrases used to draw conclusions and articulate understandings. This chart (figure 3) provides students with the structure and opening statements that make sense of their analyses and present their conclusions in clear statements.

Figure 3. The Language of Interpretation Chart

| Therefore...                      |
| We can conclude that ____________ |
| Clearly, then, ____________       |
| From this we can understand that  |
| This tells us that ______________ |

In addition to these language charts, the teacher reviews examples of academic vocabulary and language objectives that students will see as they continue the activities such as develop, the result of, compare/contrast, increase/decrease, interpret, predict, and draw conclusions about. Key lesson vocabulary is also identified and reviewed with students. Examples include population, statistics, region, poor/poverty, scarce, resources, starvation, shelter, safe, and dangerous. Finally, the teacher focuses on the language used in collaborative conversation. Language used in collaborative conversations consists of different phrases and prompts (see figure 4).

The benefit of this chart is that it provides ELLs with a template of phrases and responses to actively participate in dialogue.

Developing Literacy through Exploration and Argument of Global Issues

The students utilize the language charts introduced in the previous activity to produce their arguments. These charts allow them to deconstruct and reconstruct their argument. To build upon students’ content knowledge and ensure that everyone has adequate knowledge to formulate their argument, they participate in three pre-argument activities.

In the first pre-activity, the teacher starts by discussing the meaning of “population” and asks the students to list the factors that make up a population,