



Advanced Literacies Instruction: Spotlight on Language Production Projects

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Why is this important?

With the building of 21st-Century literacy skills comes certain shifts in instructional approaches. One strategy that can help educators as they make this transition is the use of language production projects. Language production projects are content-based, purpose-driven opportunities to craft (i.e., plan, generate, and revise) an oral or written product. These projects, which can take many forms, ultimately provide opportunities to promote students' oral and written language skills, reading comprehension skills, content area knowledge, and academic motivation. Despite their many forms, at their core they have one key feature in common: they are designed to support students to **consolidate and extend their understanding of the content studied over the course of a unit or instructional cycle**, while building students' oral and written language skills.

A combination of the unit's content focus and learning objectives, and students' developmental stage will drive the design of a language production project. The project might be a debate, a letter-writing campaign, a public service announcement, a mock trial, a presentation, or even some kind of performance (e.g., giving a speech, creating a commercial, or acting out a student-generated play). Unlike the all-too-familiar speaking and writing assignments that are brief and disconnected to content under study (e.g. responding to prompts about summer vacations, the weekend, assignments about favorite U.S. state, etc.), language production projects do much more than ask students to complete a task that is isolated from the rest of their classroom learning experiences. They are

APPLY ADVANCED LITERACY
SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

CONSOLIDATE CONTENT
KNOWLEDGE

FOSTER ACADEMIC
MOTIVATION

critical tools for extending learning and getting to advanced literacies. Integrating language production projects throughout the school year extends learning and, in so doing, is a crucial step toward equipping students with a sturdy academic foundation.

Making Language Production Projects Happen

Principles for Designing Language Production Projects

1. Organize the Project Around a Compelling Purpose

Language production projects that promote academic motivation are driven by compelling purposes for communicating with others¹. As long as it's connected to the instructional cycle and/or unit of study, a purpose can take many forms, including:

- ▶ conveying information to an audience that students are eager to connect with (e.g., the local mayor, principal, parent or peers)
- ▶ learning more about an aspect of the unit's big idea that seemed particularly intriguing
- ▶ solving a problem that concerns students
- ▶ going deeper on scientific phenomena and social issues (e.g., climate change, urban development, protecting threatened and endangered species).

Three Principles for Designing Language Production Projects

1. Organize the project around a compelling purpose.
2. Build on content knowledge acquired in the unit.
3. Build in opportunities for students to use target words.

2. Build on Content Knowledge Acquired in the Unit

Language production projects do not call for simply summarizing the knowledge acquired in the unit; instead, these projects require students to think deeply about the content. Given this, an important aspect of successful writing and speaking in the context of language production projects is having sufficient knowledge of the unit's topic. After all, being able to articulate a stance on an issue, engage in a debate, or write persuasively about a topic is only possible if students have comprehended the multiple texts that comprise a unit, mastered the language needed to discuss the unit's topic and had multiple opportunities to grasp the nuances of the topic through discussions with peers and writing about the topic.

¹ Duke, N.K., V. Purcell-Gates, L.A. Hall, and C. Tower. 2006. "Authentic Literacy Activities for Developing Comprehension and Writing." *The Reading Teacher* 60 (4): 344-55; Guthrie, J.T. 2011. "Best Practices in Motivating Students to Read." In *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, 4th ed., ed. L.M. Morrow and L.B. Gambrell, 177-198. New York: Guilford Press.

3. Build In Opportunities for Students to Use Target Vocabulary Words

Each unit or instructional cycle should be focused on the study of a corresponding set of target academic words required to express this idea—and the language production project should have students using these. Because these academic words that we teach in a given unit are relevant to the unit’s big idea, these words are naturally useful to students as they complete a language production project. However, we must explicitly and intentionally support English Language Learners and their peers to use this language, for example:

- ▶ including target words in the written and oral questions and prompts posed to students around the project
- ▶ creating routines that involve brainstorming how target words might be used to communicate ideas
- ▶ providing sentence frames that include, or beg the use of, target words

Questions to Ask When Designing Language Production Projects

To make the design of Language Production Projects concrete, we turn now to a unit designed by a 3rd grade teacher, Ms. Parkin. Ms. Parkin’s students will design a pamphlet at the end of this unit. For this project, she is supporting students to learn about and generate solutions to a local issue: How can communities support animals’ survival in modern, urban environments?²

What is the topic?	• How can we better coexist with wildlife?
What compelling issue will students focus on?	• How can we be good neighbors to animals, supporting their survival in and around our community?
What research will they need to undertake?	• Document dangers that animals face every day (e.g. snowy owls mistake the low and flat land around the nearby airport for the Arctic tundra; migrating birds that collide with illuminated windows of high-rise buildings; and salamanders and frogs that migrate to vernal pools, i.e. seasonal ponds, to breed, only to find that these often flooded areas are occupied by a housing development.)
What product will they generate?	• Create pamphlets for their state’s Audubon Society, focused on how to coexist with local wildlife. This organization posts “Quick Guides” on their website, focused on advocating for particular species. Her students will add to the organization’s library of Quick Guides, generating their own pamphlets that describe local species (including their adaptations), the dangers these species face, and the strategies to support their survival.

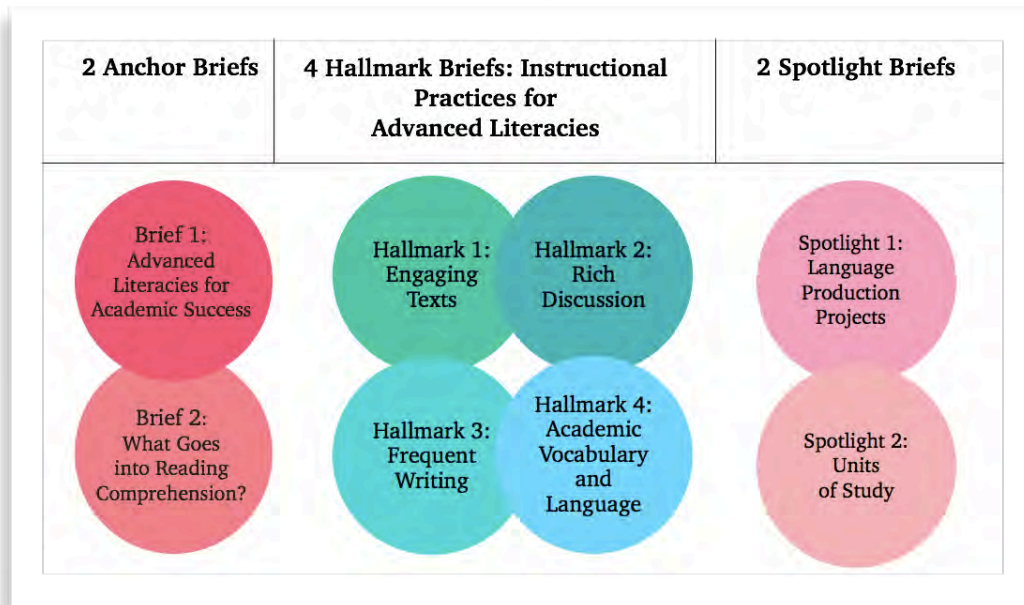
Building on Linguistically-Diverse Students’ Language and Cultural Resources

Quick Tip: Focusing on issues that are relevant to students’ communities often supports deeper inquiry. Whenever possible, examine topics that have a direct impact on linguistic and cultural communities in your area and build language production projects around those themes.

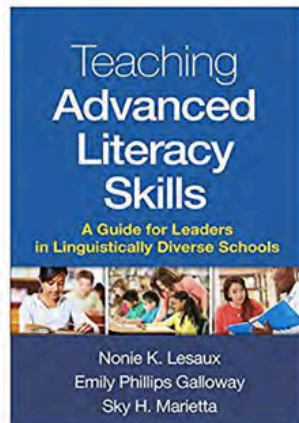
² Lesaux, N., & Harris, Julie Russ. (2015). Cultivating knowledge, building language : Literacy instruction for English Language Learners in elementary school (Research-informed classroom series). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

A Map of this Brief Series

This is Spotlight 1 in a series of briefs designed to aid New York State educators in implementing the revised standards, particularly in settings serving linguistically diverse learners. This series includes:



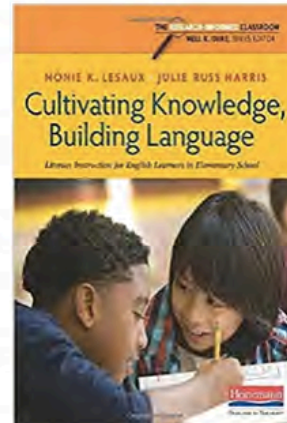
For more on this, see...



 Language Diversity & Literacy Development
RESEARCH GROUP

The **Lead for Literacy** initiative is a series of one-page memos that revisits assumptions that guide current policies and practices, outlines common pitfalls, and presents feasible solutions to pressing issues.

Access these briefs at <https://langlit.gse.harvard.edu/lead-for-literacy>



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