A Quick Toolkit for Enhancing Academic Language in Physical Education

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The purpose of this toolkit is to define what academic language in physical education is, why it’s important, and how it can be implemented. The toolkit provides clarifications and examples of language components such as the discipline-specific **vocabulary**, language **function**, **syntax** and **discourse**. A sequential example of how an academic language objective would look in a physical education learning segment, how the teacher can promote this academic language objective and how it can be assessed is provided. Moreover, we propose strategies, tools and tips that can enhance the development of all language components for academic language proficiency.
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What is Academic Language?

Academic language is defined as the language of academia. It differs significantly from informal spoken language used outside the classroom, as it is more formal, complex and sophisticated. Each discipline has its own specialized vocabulary and language function. Syntax, discourse and other general academic vocabulary that cuts across all disciplines are also important parts of academic language.

Students must acquire sufficient knowledge of general academic language to decipher the meanings of a word and how it is used in various settings and disciplines. For example, the word "court" has a different meaning when used in a physical education context than when used in the discipline of law. Similarly, the word "flexibility" has a different meaning when it is used in physical education rather than in a business setting.
Why is Academic Language Important?

Academic language is pivotal for academic and professional success. It is used in writing, testing, classroom instruction and associated professional settings. It is the means of communicating complex concepts and conveying knowledge in each particular discipline.
Vocabulary, Language Function, Syntax, and Discourse are the components of academic language. All four components must be equally developed and individually addressed. Each language component is defined below.

**Vocabulary**
- Specialized words associated with the discipline

**Language Function**
- Contrast, describe, signal, evaluate, sequence, etc.

**Syntax**
- Sentence structure (compound, complex), sentence length, transitions, verb tenses, active vs passive voice, etc.

**Discourse**
- Speaking and Writing - instructing, describing, explaining, questioning, analyzing, evaluating, speculating, hypothesizing, socializing, etc.
It’s More Than Just Vocabulary

Discipline-specific language includes more than just vocabulary. It includes symbols, key phrases, and signals used in the discipline to construct and communicate knowledge within the discipline. Here is how it applies in physical education.

**Vocabulary**
- Motor Skill
- Sport & Games
- Body

**Symbols**
- Lesson plans
- Activity diagrams
- Games strategy diagrams

**Key Phrases**
- V-cut
- Player-to-player defense
- Zone-defense
- Pass and move
- Indirect free kick
- Throw-in
- Offside

**Signals**
Vocabulary

Motor Skills
- Motor Skills: Gallop, skip, jump, slide, hop, catch, throw, etc.
- Movement Concepts: space awareness, personal space, etc.
- Perceptual-Motor Skills: Eye-hand coordination, eye-foot coordination, etc.

Sport & Games
- Volleyball: overhead pass, underhand pass, serve, spike, etc.
- Basketball: lay-up, chest pass, bounce pass, free throw, player-to-player defense, zone defense, etc.
- Soccer: goalie, center, defense, offensive player, striker, long pass, short pass, dribble, corner kick, offside, etc.

Fitness & Conditioning
- Health-related Fitness: Flexibility, muscular strength and endurance, body composition
- Skill-related Fitness: agility, power, reaction time
- Exercise terms: anaerobic exercise, aerobic exercise, flex, fit, stretch, reps, set, etc.

Body
- Bones: scapula, clavical, sternum, radius, ulna, etc.
- Muscles: biceps, brachialis, brachioradialis, deltoid, etc.
- Tendon: Achilles tendon, etc.
- Joints: elbow joint, wrist joint, hip joints, knee joints, etc.
Language function is the component of the language that renders the purpose of using the language. For example, language is used in physical education for the purpose of describing a game strategy or interpreting a referee signal. The cue words listed underneath each language function (Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contrast, Sequence, and Signal) can be used to further guide understanding of the specific language function.

- **Describe**
  - In other words
  - That is to say
  - According to
  - Specifically
  - What
  - Who
  - Why
  - How

- **Analyze**
  - Dissect
  - Investigate
  - Determine
  - Scrutinize
  - Examine
  - Break down

- **Interpret**
  - Estimate
  - Believe
  - Due to
  - Since
  - In light of
  - Conclude that
  - Guess
  - Speculate

- **Contrast**
  - On the other hand
  - Despite
  - Nevertheless
  - Rather
  - Still
  - On the contrary
  - Likewise
  - However
  - Contrary to

- **Sequence**
  - Simultaneously
  - Subsequently
  - At which point
  - At this time

- **Signal**
Syntax & Discourse

**Syntax** focuses on the technical part of the language, including grammar, punctuation, verb tenses, use of the passive or active voice, and transition words.

**Discourse** involves the mode of communication, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, oral or written.

All of these language components must come together seamlessly.
Identifying **Language Components** to be addressed provides a framework for developing the **Language Objective**, the **Teacher Actions** and the **Assessment** part of the learning segment. Using some of the cue words for contrasting, such as **but** and **however**, helps students understand the function of the language and exposes them to complete and more complex sentences.
Connecting the Steps

Students will be able to correctly formulate movement **sentences** showing their understanding of **contrasts** between low, medium, and high **levels** as they move using a variety of movement skills (**skip, hop**) called out by the teacher.

**Language Components**

- **Language function**: **Contrast** (Cue words: **but, however**)
- **Syntax**: **Correct grammar & complete Sentences**
- **Discourse**: **Written exit slip**
- **Specialized vocabulary**: **skip, hop, run, level, etc.**

**Assessment – Written Exit Slip**

An elephant moves at a __________ level, but a/an __________ moves at -a __________ level. A turtle moves __________. **However**, a/an ____ moves ______________.

This shows how the language components are reflected in the objective and tied into the assessment.
Tools and Opportunities for Promoting Academic Language

Graphic organizers and other tools can greatly assist the teacher in incorporating academic language into physical education. Other opportunities can be presented during homework, end of the class period, and during assessment time. Examples of various tools are presented on the next few pages.

Tools
- Graphic organizers
- Venn diagram
- Word quilt
- Word walls
- Bulletin boards

Assessment
- Exit slips
- Test
- Quizzes
- Write/discuss activity/game strategies

Homework
- Research projects
- Reflective journals
- Compare and contrast activities/sports

End of class
- Discussion
- Summaries
Here is an example of a graphic organizer that can be used to help students understand the purpose of language function when contrasting. Other types of graphic organizers might be more appropriate for the purpose of sequencing or describing.
The word quilt tool can be used to promote Syntax and Vocabulary. Post it on the gymnasium wall and have students contribute to it. They can translate, define a vocabulary word, or use the vocabulary word in a sentence.

Word Quilt Tool

- List the **vocabulary** being taught
- **Translate** the vocabulary into a different language
- **Define** using a picture or in writing
- Use the word in a **sentence**

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<th>Pass</th>
<th>Translate</th>
<th>Define</th>
<th>Use the word in a sentence</th>
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<td><strong>περασμα</strong> (Greek)</td>
<td>To move the ball/object from one person to another</td>
<td>Petros <strong>passed</strong> me the ball and I was able to score.</td>
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Strategies for Promoting Academic Language at the Elementary Level

**Teacher's Strategies**

- Add an academic language objective, e.g., say it, post it on the wall, reinforce it
- Add specialized vocabulary, e.g., gallop, slide, jump, level, personal space, pathway, etc.
- Spell the warm-up activities, e.g., g-a-l-l-o-p and then have the students figure out the word and perform it
- Adapt a concept or a general academic word for the day, e.g., heavier or lighter
- Adapt a language function for the day, e.g., contrast or describe. "Describe the pathway you took across the gym."

**Students' Response**

- To be aware of the academic language focus and recognize its use during class
- Repeat and say out loud the words of the day and move around correctly
- Understand /figure out the word, attempt to perform it - after figuring out "gallop" the students gallop
- Say the words, use them in a sentence, e.g., a "A nerf ball is lighter than the basketball."
- "I moved in a zig-zag pathway across the gym."
Strategies for Promoting Academic Language at the Middle and Secondary Levels

Teacher's Strategies

- Be explicit about discipline specific vocabulary -- e.g., lay-up/corner kick
- Model the use general academic vocabulary -- e.g., progress/advantage -- and encourage students to do the same when communicating with peers
- Provide opportunities for language function -- e.g., sequence/analyze. Incorporate problem-solving situations for students to use language skills
- Use/provide cue words sequencing -- e.g., Simultaneously/Subsequently -- to guide the process
- Adapt a language function for the day, e.g., contrast. "Contrast the strategies used in badminton with those used in tennis to move an opponent around the court."

Students' Responses

- Write/communicate using discipline specific language in whole sentences
- Work with partners, share ideas individually/small groups/whole class using the focus vocabulary in complete sentences
- Work individually or cooperatively to solve problems or develop game strategies
- Use the cue words during oral or written assessment
- "In badminton I _____ whereas in tennis I _____ to move an opponent around the court."
**Tips for Promoting Academic Language**

- Use academic language yourself
- Expect / hold students accountable for using academic language
- Check for understanding
- Use technology and visual aids
- Be positive & embrace academic language
Incorporating academic language in physical education may seem challenging at first. In many cases, these challenges can be met by making what we are already doing more transparent to students. Having an explicit academic language objective planned into the teaching segment informs and guides teacher’s as well as students’ actions. Graphic organizers, word quilts and other visual aids can make this task easier for the teacher and enjoyable for the students. Simple strategies, such integrating vocal spelling and specialized vocabulary in the warm-up activities, can greatly enrich the learning experience for all students.

Dedicating a few minutes for written or oral assessment gives students an opportunity to practice academic language skills, and helps teachers identify areas for improvement. We, as physical educators, need to embrace academic language and help students acquire the discipline-specific academic language that will contribute to their academic and professional success.
References


**Other Resources**

Cool Tools for 21st Century Learners. Ideas for efficient and Effective Teach integration, created by Susan Oxnevad:

http://d97cooltools.blogspot.com/2012/09/commoncoreunpackingacademicvocabulary.html#.UrRu5dJDuSp

Padlet: http://blog.padlet.com/2013/02/a-new-beginning.html


YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqFjDdM4djI