I want to thank the meeting organizers for inviting me to speak to you this morning. It is a great honor to be part of the launching of the important initiative on the languages of schooling that is the focus of discussion and work today and tomorrow. Meeting the needs of the great diversity of children in our schools offers us new opportunities to strive for educational excellence for all, and a focus on language in all subject areas has the potential to create a more equitable educational environment in which all children succeed and are able to contribute to the development of our schools and society.

I have read with great interest the document being launched today, as it promotes an agenda I have also been working toward for many years. The document draws on research being done here in Europe and in many other places around the world, offering a vision for new ways of thinking about the role of language in schooling. It asks us to take language, something that is often in the background, and make it an explicit focus of attention in all classrooms. It offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically sound framework for shaping teaching in all subjects to draw attention to the ways language works in the disciplinary discourses that our children are being apprenticed into through schooling.

Language is, of course, already highly present in all classrooms and curriculum—it is the medium of education, the means through which knowledge is presented and assessed. However, language has been called the hidden curriculum of schooling, because children are often expected to take up new ways of using language for purposes of learning across multiple subjects, without any recognition of the challenges that poses and without making language an explicit focus of consciousness raising and pedagogical attention.

For us in the US, interest in and attention to the languages of schooling has been prompted by two developments in recent years: the increase in English language learners in our schools and the new educational standards that are being adopted by many states. An increase in immigration has focused more teachers on the ways language can be a barrier to learning and not just a means of sharing knowledge. The presence of English learners in greater numbers in classrooms across the country has brought the role of language in learning to teachers’ attention in new ways, as they work with children who do not just easily understand and engage in learning activities. At the same time, the new standards call for pupils to read more complex texts, engage in more challenging writing tasks, and learn to participate in higher level classroom discussion. Many of our teachers are not well equipped to meet these challenges as they recognize that support for language use and development is central to achieving these new goals. This has made a
focus on language more relevant and important for teachers and curriculum planners in all subjects and at all levels.

I’m going to share with you today some of the work I’ve been involved in to support teachers in learning how to make language a focus of attention that supports learning school subjects. Although we still have a lot to learn, I am looking forward to dialogue with you about some of the ways we have approached this task and the challenges we have faced. It is an ambitious goal to bring a language dimension to all subject areas.

What prompted my initial interest in this agenda, many years ago, was the growing recognition in our context that many English language learners in our schools who had developed fluency in English when they were using the language for social interaction, were not succeeding in school subjects. Their teachers would say I know it’s not a problem with English, because I hear him talking in the hallway and he speaks English just fine. I don’t know why he’s not participating in the classroom and doing his work. Researchers like Jim Cummins, who began to study this phenomenon, started drawing our attention to the differences between the language of social interaction and the language expected in the classroom context.

We have been aware now for a generation or more that language learners need to have practice using language in authentic, meaningful contexts (such as are provided in mainstream, content area classrooms), with conscious attention to the ways language works, in order for them to develop the advanced language skills they need for success in school. It is the conscious attention to the ways language works that is often missing for learners. Research on bilingual education and immersion contexts has demonstrated that learners need to be assisted in noticing the relationships between the forms language takes and the meanings that are thereby articulated and shared (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Swain, 1995). As Cummins (2000) and others, including myself (Schleppegrell, 2004) have argued, the languages of schooling have features very different from the language pupils encounter just through the experiences of everyday living. In the context of reading and writing in all subjects, learners need to focus on the forms of the texts they read and write and the meanings and functions of different language choices. As they encounter abstract concepts and complex language in texts and classroom activities, the content learning and advanced mastery of language need to build together.

My book, *The Language of Schooling* (Schleppegrell, 2004), which was published about ten years ago, was an attempt to describe the differences between everyday language and school language, and between different kinds of school language(s). I drew on Michael Halliday’s (1978) theory of language in social context, systemic functional linguistics, to describe what I called the language of schooling at a general level, at the level of particular subjects, such as science and history, and in particular tasks, such as the expository essay. Halliday has described the ways language reflects its contexts of use along three dimensions: the content being talked or written about, the relationship of the speaker to listener or writer to reader, and the ways language is being used; whether
spoken or written, and whether accompanying another activity or being the activity. These dimensions are always reflected in language.

Understanding this helps explain why a child might be quite familiar with everyday language while still lagging in control of the language(s) of schooling that they need to use for success in subject area learning. Let’s look at an example of the language of history, keeping the content the same, but illustrating how the language might vary depending on the context. Figure 1 is an example from year 8 history.

Figure 1. Comparing “Everyday” language and “School” language

Pupils read the sentence on the right in their textbook. We can see how densely information is packed into this sentence. It’s not just that the vocabulary is hard or infrequent; it’s also that the concepts being presented are abstract and the relationships being developed are presented in few words.

The “everyday” version, perhaps reflecting one way the teacher might ‘translate’ the school language into what their pupils might more easily understand, expands the meanings by using more familiar wording. We see that more ‘language’ is needed to say the same thing (is it the same thing?) in an everyday way, and that the meanings thereby presented are not as precise. The disciplinary technical language of “social contract” is expressed in terms of what people expect, and while this gets at the meaning, for success as they move on in schooling, the children need to be able to understand and use this more ‘academic’ concept. It could be that a child who understands the everyday version would still have trouble understanding the ‘school’ version, and so what we want to draw attention to through the work we will do over the next two days is how to prepare teachers to help children work with the more challenging ‘school’ language, reading for meaning, speaking about what they understand, and writing with authority about what they have learned. In order to do so, we need to prepare teachers to talk about the particular features of the ways language presents knowledge in their subject areas.

From a linguistic perspective, we refer to these differences in language choices as different registers. While I’ve shown an example of how ‘everyday’ language is different from ‘school’ language, we also can think about how the registers of science would draw on different language than the registers of history, for example. Or about how the
language that a child would use to interact with others while doing a science experiment would differ from the language the same child would use to make a presentation about what they found. Or how the language of a report would be different from the language of a story. We can describe each of these as drawing on different choices from what the language makes available, and can describe these registers at different levels of detail.

Thinking about language in terms of *registers* helps us move beyond a common misconception among teachers, at least in our context, that 'language' is words, and that teaching vocabulary is teaching language. Focusing on features of *registers* expands what language is beyond words into patterns that are functional for doing different things with language, where words are not seen in isolation, but in the patterns of meaning they participate in.

The characteristics of different registers; the features of the language(s) of schooling, are now increasingly well known in ways that are useful for curriculum development and the shaping of pedagogical activities. Thinking about *registers* also highlights the need to offer pupils instruction in how to use language to do the tasks they need to do as they learn, providing instruction in communication processes and strategies (e.g., Bunch et al., 2010; Koelsch et al., 2014).

I’ve been working for many years to introduce teachers to the language(s) of schooling and to study what happens when they implement new approaches that support their subject area teaching through a focus on language. I’ll briefly talk today about my research with secondary school history teachers and with teachers in primary schools with large numbers of English language learners.

**Teaching history**
I’ve been working for many years with a teacher education project in California that has been providing support to history teachers (see http://chssp.ucdavis.edu/). The California History Project began as a resource for teachers to improve their knowledge about history, but as the population of English Learners in California grew, teachers began to ask the Project leaders to help them better work with these children, and they asked me to collaborate with them. California is a state with a large English learner population, so most teachers have pupils who are learning English in their classrooms. Even after a child is no longer designated an English language learner, the learning of English still continues as they encounter new challenges at each grade level and in each subject.

One of the challenges of learning history is that it is a field that is constructed solely through the language through which it is reported, interpreted, and argued about. Unlike science, where concepts can be demonstrated through hands-on experimentation, history is all discourse. The language of history classrooms include narratives about the past, technical documents, laws, and declarations, explanations about causes and effects, and arguments about how to interpret past events. The discourse of history is very abstract, and learning history requires that pupils read dense texts, often texts with archaic or outdated language, and texts that present different perspectives on the past.
In this context, the California History Project adopted the perspective that to support all children in achieving at the highest levels in reading, writing, and critical thinking in history, teachers need both knowledge of the discipline (history content and processes of historical investigation) and knowledge of discipline-specific literacy skills.

One way we have worked together to support teachers is by helping them learn more about the different genres their pupils will encounter as they learn history so they can consider the reading and writing demands of different types of texts (see Figure 2). History writing is often thought of as narrative, and many of the texts read in history classrooms are recounting events in the past. However, pupils also encounter a range of other kinds of texts, many of them not organized along a timeline, but instead organized rhetorically to provide an explanation or make an argument. Rhetorical organization typically draws on more abstract and complex linguistic formulations.

![Figure 2. Historical genres](image)

As Figure 2 shows, narratives and historical accounts typically use more familiar patterns of language as they present concrete events that involve people and things, with simpler language, organized according to passing time. As children move into reading historical explanations and arguments, the concepts they encounter are less familiar and less connected with the everyday, and the language is more abstract and complex.

Here’s an example of a textbook passage from year ten, organized according to passing time in a narrative account:

In 1760, when George III took the throne, most Americans had no thoughts of either revolution or independence. They still thought of themselves as loyal subjects of the British king. Yet by 1776, many Americans were willing to risk their lives to break free of Britain. 

*(Modern World History, pp. 183-184)*

Note here that the text is about people and what they did: *George III, most Americans.* This is a pattern of *narration,* a historical account that situates events in time.
In contrast, look at this text:

In the end, however, the Americans won their war for independence. Several reasons explain their success. First, the American’s motivation for fighting was much stronger than that of the British, since their army was defending their homeland. Second, the overconfident British generals made several mistakes. Third, time itself was on the side of the Americans. … Finally, the Americans did not fight alone.

Note here that the text is not about people and what they did. Instead, it is an explanation about the success of the war for independence, something much more abstract that is presenting causes and consequences. The text is about the American’s motivation, overconfidence of the generals, and time being on their side. This requires a different kind of reading for understanding, and it is doing something quite different from the first example.

Becoming conscious about genre helped teachers in our project recognize that they often assigned writing tasks that called for rhetorical organization, and that this was very challenging for their pupils, because most of what the children were reading was organized along a timeline. Beginning to recognize the overall shape and flow of different kinds of texts gave teachers new tools for talking with their pupils about language and meaning. On the one hand, they were able to help the children recognize meaning in the text they read, and on the other hand, they were able to provide better models for their pupils for the texts they wanted them to write.

In addition, we supported teachers in unpacking the grammar of the dense technical language, offering teachers a language to refer to language that connected with meaning. This grammar, from the systemic functional grammar of Michael Halliday, offered a means of focusing on meaningful segments rather than individual words, and of looking for connections across a text. Let’s consider this small text from a year seven history book:

To finance Rome’s huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes hurt the economy and drove many people into poverty.

The teacher’s goal is to introduce the notion that both internal and external causes contributed to Rome’s decline, and here she sees an opportunity to talk about both. So she slows down the reading for a few minutes to focus in more detail on this text excerpt. Figure 3 shows the support she used for doing this; an analysis of the text, using functional grammar metalanguage to identify its meaningful constituents so her pupils could more clearly see its structure and talk about its meanings.

In working with this text, the focus on analyzing the grammar is not just to label parts of a sentence, but instead to show relationships so that the children can better recognize what is going on. When the teacher asks Who had to pay taxes, and why?, the pupils need to recognize how its citizens, those who had to pay taxes, are citizens of Rome, introduced in the initial clause, To finance Rome’s huge armies. This is where the referent for the its in its citizens is found, as the initial clause presents the citizens as those who are doing the financing of the armies as well as paying heavy taxes, and situating the
taxes as needed to finance the armies through the phrase to finance. This kind of sentence construction, where the motivation for an action is expressed at the beginning of the sentence, before the actor and action are introduced, is common in history text, and helping the children recognize how the author has constructed this sentence will help them read many other sentences that are constructed using a similar pattern.

The second question, What does “these taxes” refer to?, asks the children to consciously recognize the connection between ‘heavy taxes’ and ‘these taxes’, something that is done unconsciously by skilled readers but is often missed by struggling readers. Again, pointing out what a referent like these refers back to is a reading strategy that here, in context, also helps the pupils understand the meanings in this text at the same time it shows them how English works. The third question, How can taxes hurt an economy and what does it mean to ‘drive someone into poverty’? leads the readers into the next paragraphs of the text where more examples of the economic problems will be described. The question also draws attention to the metaphor drive into poverty, generating classroom discussion about what this figurative language means. The questions about the language, then, here set up a context where the teacher can be confident that all of the pupils grasp the point here: that huge armies hurt the economy and made people poor—so that the discussion about how taxes hurt the economy will be understood and can be answered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance /Connector</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To finance Rome’s huge armies,</td>
<td>its citizens</td>
<td>had to pay</td>
<td>heavy taxes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>These taxes hurt the economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>drove</td>
<td>many people</td>
<td>into poverty.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Questions:
  - Who had to pay taxes and why?
  - What does “these taxes” refer to?
  - How can taxes hurt an economy and what does it mean to ‘drive someone into poverty’?

Figure 3. Analyzing sentences for meaning (Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008).

This kind of unpacking of text takes time, of course, and as we began this work with the history teachers, we encountered initial resistance to taking time that slowed down instruction in this way. Teachers complained that they are not language teachers and that other teachers should be responsible for teaching about language. But after trying some of these strategies in their classrooms, in many cases the resistance disappeared, because teachers found that this kind of deconstruction of important passages and talk about language helped them more quickly focus with their pupils on the main points of the lessons. Teachers reported that challenging history concepts were more easily taught when they worked with children to deconstruct text and look at the way the author had used language to present the concepts. In addition, doing these tasks with language gave pupils ways to find meaning in dense texts on their own; for example, by recognizing that they can jump ahead in their reading when something is hard to understand, unpacking
the meaning of a sentence from the middle rather than from the beginning. We have published a number of studies of this work that describe it in more detail, showing how the focus on language was in support of learning history at the same time the pupils learned about English and how it is used to present knowledge about history (see, e.g., Schleppegrell, 2011; Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006), and the project website offers resources you can access as well (http://chssp.ucdavis.edu/el-support).

Reading and writing science in the primary school

Primary school teachers can also take on this kind of focus on talk about language. Over the past several years I’ve been working with primary school teachers in a district that has a majority of English learners, and one aspect of our work has been a focus on reading and writing in science. Teachers often do hands on work in science, but as Pauline Gibbons (2006) has shown, it’s important for children to move from interaction in the context of shared activity into opportunities to speak and write in authoritative ways about the concepts they are learning. The new standards in our schools call for children to write arguments in science in which they make claims and support them with evidence and reasoning about the evidence. What we noticed in evaluating the writing children were doing is that they often made very strong claims and took extreme positions, something that science writing rarely does.

We worked with the teachers to develop their own understanding about how scientists present their findings, exploring with them the ways scientists present claims that are measured and constrained. Take this example, where I’ve highlighted the claims about the findings being reported:

**Scientists Highlight Link Between Stress and Appetite**

Researchers at the University of Calgary have uncovered a mechanism by which stress increases food drive in rats. This new discovery could provide important insight into why stress is thought to be one of the underlying contributors to obesity.

Normally, the brain produces neurotransmitters (chemicals responsible for how cells communicate in the brain) called endocannabinoids that send signals to control appetite. In this study, the researchers found that when food is not present, a stress response occurs that temporarily causes a functional re-wiring in the brain. This re-wiring may impair the endocannabinoids’ ability to regulate food intake and could contribute to enhanced food drive.

If similar changes occur in the human brain, these findings might have several implications for human

**U.S. News and World Report**

Even without reading this report about links between stress and appetite, notice the highlighted language that shows that the writer uses could, may, if, and might to temper the claims being made. Scientists often express some degrees of uncertainty in order to be more precise about the strength of their claims. To draw attention to this use of language, we introduced what we called the usual/likely scale (see Figure 4). As the children read science, they found words that showed how usual or likely the phenomenon they were reading about was presented by the author and considered where the statement would fall.
on these continua. The use of these modal expressions of usuality and likelihood is very challenging for English learners, and drawing attention to them not only helped the children learn about English, but also helped them think about the strength of the evidence they were using to make their claims and the force with which they would argue (Palincsar & Schleppegrell, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How usual?</th>
<th>How likely?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>always, is, does</td>
<td>will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td>will almost definitely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequently, often</td>
<td>is very likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most times</td>
<td>is likely, will probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might, can,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could, may,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maybe, possibly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>will unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>will not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never, is not, does not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Usual/Likely Scale

Children learning language while learning school subjects are capable of succeeding at challenging tasks (Gibbons, 2006; Hammond, 2006). They bring cognitive skills commensurate with their age, whether or not they speak the classroom language (Harper & de Jong, 2004). They can be active participants in processes of learning language and content, and we need to take advantage of the linguistic and cognitive strengths they bring and engage them in challenging learning tasks appropriate to their grade levels. We have found that when teachers provide language supports for children’s learning of content, the children perform in ways that surprise the teachers. Teachers are often unaware of the potential their pupils bring when the children are unable to participate because of language proficiency. When pupils are assisted in learning through attention to language, those whose performance would otherwise be weak often are able to match the level of performance of their native speaker peers. In other words, providing support for language development in the context of teaching content is a step toward greater equity of opportunity to learn.

I don’t have time to talk about other subjects today; I and others have also done research in mathematics (e.g., Herbel-Eisenmann & Schleppegrell, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2007) and in literacy and language arts (e.g., Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2010; 2014; see also Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008) that can inform the work you are going to take on, much of it also referenced in the document we will be discussing, and I’m glad
to share references to other helpful resources. But a key finding across all of the work that is trying to bring language into content classrooms is that the language teaching that is supported needs to serve teachers in achieving their content-area goals. In my own research, we have found that our most fruitful efforts result from paying attention to what teachers want to teach and offering them strategies for focusing on language in ways that support their content goals. The focus on language needs to be in service of learning the subject, not a linguistic exercise in rules and labeling structures. As in the history examples and the example from science, the key to engaging and involving teachers in this work for us was in identifying aspects of language that teachers could see as relevant to the teaching of the content, with activities that explored language in service of strengthening the children’s engagement with content and abilities to read, write, and speak in ways that demonstrated learning. That focused our research and curriculum development on the goals teachers have and offered teachers support for attention to language in support of their disciplinary goals.

The point is not that every teacher should stop teaching school subjects and instead turn to teaching the language of instruction to children who are still learning it. Instead, the goal for us is that teachers talk about language in ways that help their pupils, not just their immigrant children, but all children, better learn the subject. Our experience shows that we can support teachers in teaching their subjects by providing them with knowledge and skills they can use to focus on language as a means of teaching content; as a new pedagogical tool.

**Learning from other contexts**

Going beyond my own experience, now, I’d like to share some discussion of issues that have emerged and been reported by others who have taken on this agenda. My own work focuses on identifying linguistic challenges and developing approaches teachers can use to put a focus on language and meaning, but the challenges of this work are not just linguistic, but also relate to the roles and goals of teachers of different subjects, the organization of schools, and the preparation of teachers. Implementing this new agenda will have an impact on the work of language teachers, subject teachers, the ways they work together, and the ways they are prepared. Curriculum developers and teacher educators will need to consider these new impacts as they work to provide support for this initiative.

Speaking first to the language educators among you, from a US perspective, I want to acknowledge that many of us in my country who care about language education envy the opportunities for development of multilingualism that are available to and typically considered expectations for the education of Europeans. As many of you may have experienced or know, we suffer in our context from a hegemonic monolingualism that is not always respectful of the value of knowing more than one language. That is likely not an issue for those of you who work on language curriculum and teacher education. But of course what is similar in the European experience and our experience in the U.S. now is that all of our schools are educating many children who do not already speak the language of instruction. That means it is not just ‘foreign’ language education that concerns the language teacher, but increasingly, teaching the language of instruction to
children who speak other languages at home. Helping these children learn school subjects in the language of instruction at the same time they are learning the language presents a set of challenges and opportunities for our schools and education systems that can benefit from dialogue across our contexts.

Although we are focused here on infusing a focus on language into all subject, there is of course still a role for language teachers to teach the language of instruction as a separate subject, as children learning a new language will continue to need support for learning about that language from a specialist teacher. We still need classrooms where children coming without much proficiency in the language of instruction have opportunities to learn the language well enough to participate in mainstream classrooms. The state of California, where half of the children in elementary schools come from homes where a language other than English is spoken, offers an example of the policy approach being taken in this regard. A recent initiative there has resulted in a new Framework for English Language Development.

In a letter sent to school administrators across the state (see Figure 5), the school superintendent and the president of the state board of education “recognize [English learners’] unique challenge of learning English as they are also learning grade-level content through English,” and introduce the policy that English learners at all levels and at all ages be supported with both integrated and specialized attention to their language learning needs; what they call designated English language development. The integrated attention comes in mainstream subject area teaching contexts and the specialized or designated attention comes from work with English as a Second Language teachers.

Figure 5: Letter from Superintendent Torlakson and School Board Chair Kirst to County and District Superintendents and school administrators
This policy is supported by a professional development effort across the state to offer current teachers new strategies for both integrated and designated English instruction. The Framework offers resources for teachers at all grade levels and in all subjects, illustrated with videos that present classroom vignettes that show new practices to support language learning. I’m glad to share links with you to the different sections of this framework (Figure 6) and the authors encourage you to explore it and contact them if you have questions, as it offers resources complementary to those you are developing in Europe.


**Introduction:** Lays out the vision for preschool-12th grade students in CA and why there’s a special emphasis on ELs in the framework. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 might be particularly interesting.


**Chapter 2 (Key Considerations):** Theoretical foundations and key themes and focus areas of the framework. Section on comprehensive ELD (pp. 104-119), focused on language development in the service of content learning.


**Chapter 9 (Access and Equity):** The section on culturally responsive teaching (pp. 916-919) discusses language status, language awareness, language equity, promoting an asset-based approach to culture and language.


**Ch. 3-7 (Grade span chapters):** Concrete examples of pedagogy. Each chapter has grade level sections with short snapshots and longer vignettes of instruction illustrating integrated and designated English Language Development.


The authors (Nancy Bryneson, Helle Yopp-Slovic, and me) explain the ELA/ELD Framework in a webinar:


For more information:

Pamela Szycher, Ph.D.
Project Director, Leading with Learning, WestEd
p.szycher@wested.org

Figure 6. California English Language Development Framework links

The Framework recognizes that for some children, separate specialized instruction to support their English language development will still be needed, but that separate instruction is not the answer to all of the language development issues English learners face in our context. Children who are learning in a second language do not just learn the language once and for all, just as they do not learn science or history once and for all. Instead, at every new level, as they grow and move through school, they need to grapple again with new language: new wordings, new meanings, and new discursive tasks in writing and speaking. As they learn to engage with more challenging subject area learning at each new grade level, the language they need to work with also becomes more challenging, and they need continuing support for language development. That means we also need integrated language development support from all teachers; language development that is built into regular, mainstream classroom activities in the ways the Handbook being launched today calls for and the activities I have described today support.

Providing integrated language teaching calls for preparing teachers in all classrooms with knowledge about how subject matter is presented in language and the challenges that
poses for learners. They need to consider how their pupils are expected to interact as they learn, and with what kind of voice and perspective they are expected to speak and write about what they’ve learned. They need to better understand how the discourses typical of their discipline are organized. This will be a new aspect of teacher learning for many. New Zealand and Australia have also had experience with this goal and in a recent article, Gleeson (2015) describes her experience working with secondary teachers across subjects in ways that resonated with my own experience. She found that while subject area teachers have expertise in their disciplines, they often lack explicit understanding about the discourse practices and language choices that are functional in presenting the content. Nor do they typically have pedagogical knowledge about how to raise their pupils’ consciousness about how language constructs knowledge in their subject. Even teachers of mother tongue language and literature may need new skills for helping language learners analyze and write about literature in the ways expected in their subject area. And we can’t expect that these language arts teachers will be able to help their pupils learn to read and write in the ways expected in other disciplines; for example, to read science the ways science teachers do, or to read history with the lens of the historian. That’s why science teachers and history teachers need to be the ones who take on this task. Reading history calls for a certain lens to read critically in ways that recognize the author’s perspective, and writing in science calls for using language in ways that English teachers would likely not value.

Both the work I’ve described with the history teachers and the work we’ve been doing with primary school teachers took several years of effort to get established and take hold, as it calls for challenging teacher learning and for new kinds of collaboration between language specialists and subject area teachers. In that collaboration, each party brings specialized knowledge: the subject teacher brings knowledge about the technical content and the processes of learning the subject, as well as knowledge about the goals for learning and what needs to be achieved. The language specialist brings knowledge about language development and can offer ways of talking about language that bring consistency within a school on the use of terminology, or metalanguage, for talk about language, something that benefits the learners as they move from grade to grade (de Oliveira & Schleppegrell, 2015; Schleppegrell, 2013). In addition, language specialists can play an important role in identifying where a focus on language can be helpful in supporting content goals.

In Australia and New Zealand, subject teachers and language teachers, ESL teachers, have been collaborating for some years now in bringing a language focus to subject area classrooms, and have published research that helps us recognize the challenges of this collaboration. Arkoudis (2003; 2006), for example, reports that the subject teachers’ knowledge is typically given priority over the knowledge of the language teacher, and subject area teachers may quickly dismiss suggestions that they do not see as centrally supporting their teaching of the discipline. This makes it incumbent on the language teacher to listen carefully, learn about the goals of the subject teacher, and consider how a focus on language can help the teacher achieve those goals. This may mean offering language teachers opportunities to develop additional skills, learning to assess needs,
recognize how texts are structured, and identify the relevant language skills that can be in focus to best help children meet the linguistic challenges of the content learning.

From the side of the subject teacher, the challenge is to be open to new ways of thinking about what is to be taught, to learn about the discourse features of the texts and discursive genres of the subject, and be willing to explore new ways of supporting their pupils in reading, writing, and speaking in classroom activities. But since subject area teachers are focused on their own goals for the children’s learning of the subject, they are only likely to add new activities to their already busy classrooms if they are able to see that they will achieve those goals more readily if they have means of enabling their pupils to engage with and have explicit attention to the linguistic challenges. I’m suggesting here today that it is in fact up to the language teachers to take the lead in working to better understand and articulate ways of putting language in service of the goals of the content teacher. Perhaps we can have some discussion about this challenge.

In working with both the secondary history teachers and the primary school teachers, we have found that building teams of collaborating teachers, especially at the same school site, has enormous benefits and positive impacts. Teachers benefit from discussion and sharing, and children benefit when their teachers talk about language in similar ways as they move from year to year and from subject to subject. So I encourage you to work at the level of the school, if possible, providing incentives for teachers to plan together and share outcomes and experiences.

What about curriculum developers and teacher educators? Those of you in those roles will need to take the lead in developing, modeling, and supporting new ways of teaching across subject areas, and in making it seem natural that teachers would develop deeper knowledge about language as part of their preparation and ongoing professional development. This is just a natural evolution of the ways we have for many years now distinguished between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). That is, we recognize that it’s not enough for someone to know mathematics. To be an effective teacher of mathematics, the professional also needs to understand how children learn, the problems children encounter in learning the subject; the kinds of errors they are likely to make and the misconceptions they are likely to develop. They need to understand the typical trajectory of development of knowledge in the subject and the kinds of atypical developmental paths that some children will follow.

Building on this notion, researchers are now describing the knowledge that teachers need to support language development across disciplines in various ways: as literacy pedagogical content knowledge (Love, 2010), pedagogical language knowledge (Bunch, 2013), or disciplinary linguistic knowledge (Turkan et al., 2014). This refers to knowledge about language in its spoken and written forms, knowledge about the language and literacy practices distinctive to different subject areas, and skills for designing teaching and learning activities that support children in learning subject-specific literacies and language practices. Whatever we call it, the document we will discuss over the next two days points us toward new kinds of knowledge that teachers need to develop in order to be more effective teachers of their subjects.
Promoting a wider understanding of the languages of schooling during all teachers’ pre-service training and supporting practicing teachers in developing such knowledge requires that we recognize that teachers draw on deeply held disciplinary ways of thinking that may influence the ways they respond to this challenge. We often see differences between the ways teachers of mathematics and science respond, for example, compared with teachers of history or language arts. Some subjects build their knowledge through more structured learning trajectories, while others may see the subject knowledge as concepts that evolve through reading of texts and analytical discussion (Christie & Maton, 2011; Gleeson, 2015). We have seen in our work that the varied classroom practices that different teachers are comfortable with also call for different ways of building in support for a focus on language. Some teachers use teacher modeling and explanation and student practice and review, while other teachers may encourage student dialogue and collaboration. These different practices will call for different language learning support approaches; there is no one solution that will work for all contexts. But whatever their differences, we have found that all teachers recognize that their subjects are cognitively demanding and want their pupils to achieve at higher levels. This gives us common ground to work on if we stay focused on the ways attention to language can support subject area learning.

Conclusion

The opportunity we are seizing here is to build on an increased recognition of the role of language in schooling that has the potential to lead to better preparation for teachers to support all children in learning. Teaching the language(s) of schooling does not only support language learners, but also has the potential to improve the quality of education more generally. All children encounter the knowledge taught in schools through language, and all children need to use language to participate and learn. Meaningful focus on language can support that learning. While it may be the increasing numbers of children from other language backgrounds that has drawn attention to language in new ways, recognizing and addressing this challenge can lead to better education for all. The teachers I have worked with report that when they implement language-focused activities in their classrooms, it is not just English learners who benefit. Many children in our schools who speak the language of instruction do not have opportunities outside of school to engage in the wide range of social experiences necessary to develop fluency in the language(s) of schooling. Like English learners, these children will also benefit from support in learning to use language as a means of engaging in the tasks and discourses of the subjects.

The big idea we are taking up in our work over the next two days is that language teaching can no longer be seen as something done only in a classroom separate from other subjects. For equity and quality in education for all, we need to infuse attention to language into classrooms across the years and disciplinary areas of schooling. The document we’ll discuss deals with all of the issues I have raised here in greater detail and with strong support from research. I look forward to engaging in discussion about how to realize the goals of the document in your own educational contexts. As you draw on and build from what the conference document is calling for, I hope we can learn from each
other about how to deal with the challenges and opportunities that this important work presents. I look forward to our conversations today and tomorrow.

References


