



# Hallmark 2 of Advanced Literacies Instruction: Classroom Discussion

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## Hallmark 2:

Talk and discussion to build both conversational and academic language knowledge

## Why is this important?

To develop their language skills, all students, but especially ELLs/MLLs, need a lot of practice with language! But we know that in many classrooms, the typical teaching scenario doesn't give our students much of a chance to talk<sup>1</sup>. What is this typical scenario? A teacher asks a question, calls on a student to respond, the teacher then follows by

evaluating the response (i.e., saying whether it's correct or incorrect)—and the interaction is complete. Even though this is a very common scenario, this exchange is not going to get today's students to the levels of language and critical thinking that they are capable of—and that they need for academic and personal success.

How do we get them to those levels? Well, language develops in the classroom if there is an extended back-and-forth process of interactions among students, organized around rich content and topics. Beyond the cognitive and linguistic benefits, we know that extended talk and discussion creates a more engaging learning environment. Recent research shows us that fostering engagement by focusing on building student autonomy and collaboration produces greater gains in achievement and we know that talk-based learning tasks and projects can do exactly this—when there is choice, roles, and collaboration involved, they are a great way to promote students' sense of autonomy as learners.



## What are Advanced Literacies?

Advanced literacies refers to the skills and competencies that enable communication in increasingly diverse ways and promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes.

<sup>1</sup>Eccles, Jacquelynne S., & Roeser, Robert W. (2011). Schools as Developmental Contexts during Adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 225-241.

Because discussions that are text-based often center on negotiating the text's meaning, students are able to struggle productively in a supported context<sup>2</sup>.

## What does this instruction look like in linguistically-diverse classrooms?

### Traditional Instructional Practices

All texts used with ELLs/MLLs are extremely challenging because they are at or above grade-level OR all texts are below grade-level, offering little engaging content and compromising learning activities.

### 21st-Century Instructional Practices

Multiple texts at different levels are read by ELLs/MLLs in order to support them to develop a rich understanding of a topic and to develop their reading comprehension skills. Sets of texts are a key support for ELLs on the path to consistently accessing grade-level texts with ease.

## Building on Linguistically-Diverse Students' Language and Cultural Resources

Students who are multilingual often benefit from instruction that allows them to use all of their language knowledge when discussing complex topics.

Quick Tip: Invite linguistically-diverse students into class discussions by encouraging their use of home language resources and sharing with peers their connections across languages.

From...

To...

Infrequent classroom discussion and talk



Frequent use of formats that promote classroom talk – think-pair-share, jigsaw, debates, and small group work

Using discussion and talk as strategies for processing new content



Also using discussion and talk as a method for demonstrating thinking and learning

Using discussion and talk as a stand-alone strategy for learning



Using discussion and talk to support reading and writing instruction, and vice versa

## **Shifting How We Think About Classroom Talk**

### **Indicators in Curriculum:**

Students are asked to use the target words and other academic language when speaking as part of each lesson in the unit.

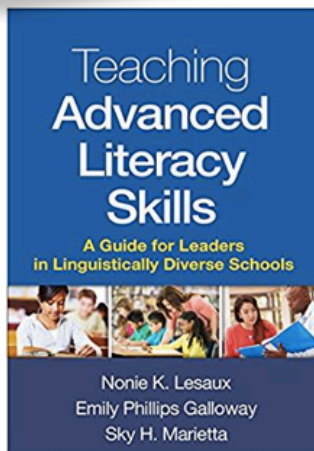
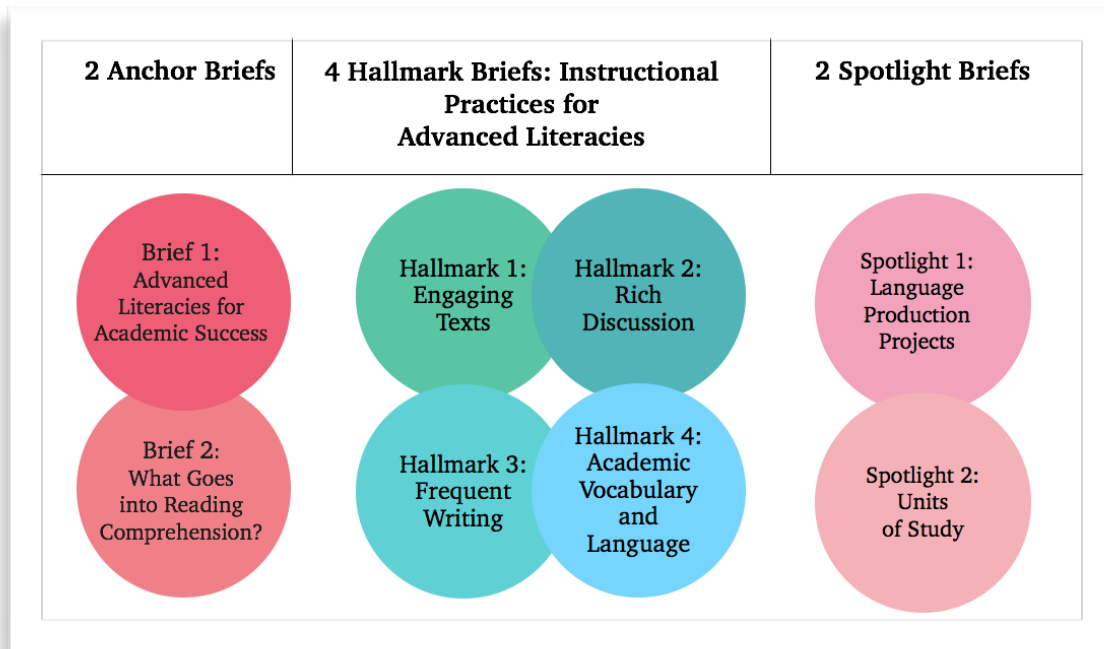
- Speaking and listening routines (e.g., weekly debates, interviews and other role play) occur consistently and predictably throughout each unit. This provides students with the time and opportunities to develop mastery of these learning processes.
- Students are engaged in speaking and listening as part of *each* lesson.

### **Indicators in Instruction:**

- Instructor communicates the importance of using target words when speaking.
- Instructor acknowledges the challenges associated with learning language and conveys an attitude that values experimenting with language by *praising students' attempts* at using target language when speaking, i.e., an expectation that students will *not* likely use words correctly or precisely at first.
- Instructor builds in talk routines if these are not already an integral part of the curriculum.
- Students are aware of talk routines—and demonstrate a level of comfort with them.
- Student discussion is part of each lesson, e.g., peer-to-peer interaction (brief or extended), debates, interviews.
- Students are encouraged to use peers as language resources when speaking.
- Students are asked to use previously taught words, language structures, and strategies for academic language learning when speaking, i.e., an expectation that students will *not* likely use words correctly or precisely at first.
- Instructor builds in talk routines if these are not already an integral part of the curriculum. Students are aware of talk routines—and demonstrate a level of comfort with them.
- Student discussion is part of each lesson, e.g., peer-to-peer interaction (brief or extended), debates, interviews.
- Students are encouraged to use peers as language resources when speaking.
- Students are asked to use previously taught words, language structures, and strategies for academic language learning when speaking.

## **A Map of this Brief Series**

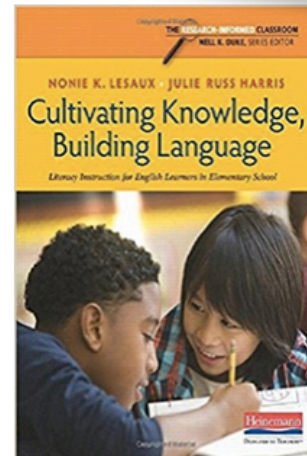
This is Hallmark 2 in a series of briefs designed to aid New York State educators in implementing the revised standards, particularly in settings serving linguistically diverse learners. This series includes:



 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>



## Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages:

**Visit:** <http://www.nysed.gov/program-offices/office-bilingual-education-and-world-languages-obewl>

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## NYS Next Generation P-12 Learning Standards:

**Visit:** <http://www.nysed.gov/aimhighny>