



“Yes they can!” “Si ellas/os pueden!”
A Discussion-based Approach for
Building Academic Language and
Critical Thinking Skills among First Grade
ELLs (with a scale up to whole school)

MATSOL

Framingham, MA

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Dolores Huerta- Co-Founder of the United Farm Workers of America with Cesar Chavez coined the phrase ” Si se puede!” which translated means: “Yes, it can be done”



Background

- Invited to work with Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) in 2015 to provide professional development for teachers of ELLs in k-4th; began work with one school in low-income area
- Professional development focused on training teachers to use the vehicle of classroom academic discussions to improve second language development, improve L2 reading comprehension, perspective-taking skills, academic writing, and acquisition of academic vocabulary in English
- Exemplary first grade teacher, Doug Mosher, embraces the approach and we design a study to test the impact of the intervention - control/treatment
- Select academic words; develop and administer a curriculum-based pre-test
- Design and implement units
- Collect videos, writing samples, administer post-test
- Analyze results

Demographics

- ❑ The “Mason” School is located in the Metro Nashville area
- ❑ Demographics: 65% Hispanic, 15% White, 14% Black, 3% Asian
- ❑ SES: 89% poverty-level

- ❑ Doug’s intervention classroom is comprised of 100% ELL students scoring between a 2 and 5 on the WIDA ACCESS assessment

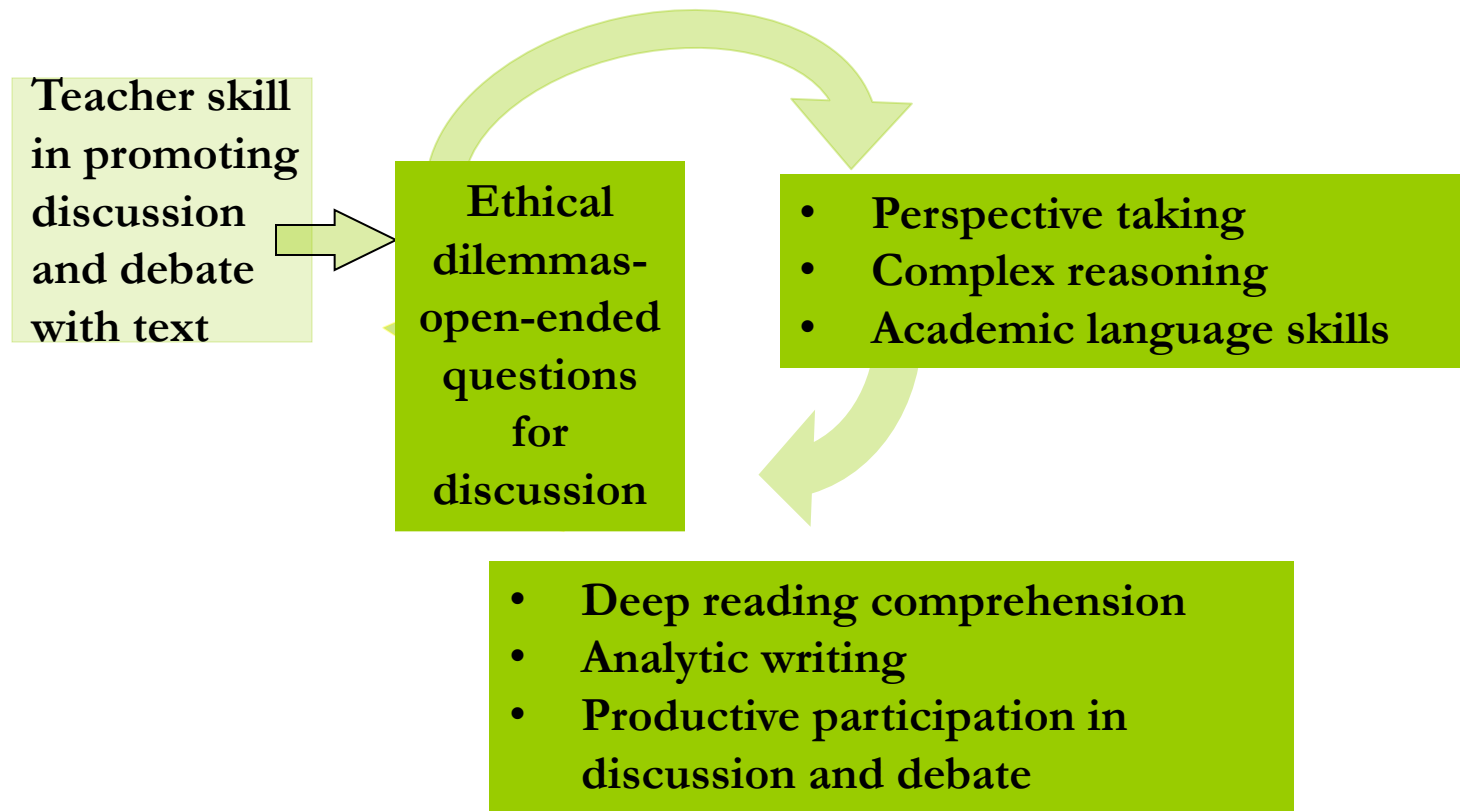
“Mason’s” History and Background

- ❑ In 2014, “Mason” Elementary was identified as performing at the bottom 1.5% of the state and subsequently placed on the priority list
- ❑ More than 70% of the school speaks a language other than English at home
- ❑ State-wide assessment data revealed that “Mason” had a significant gap in English language skills

The purpose of our presentation is

- ❑ To make the case that academic language is a second language (for all of us) and one that is valued by society and school but is often not developed in school, especially **in the early grades and often not with low income and/or ELL children**
- ❑ To develop an understanding of how to develop materials/texts with open-ended questions, controversies, moral dilemmas, and to use these in structured classroom **discussions** to promote L2 acquisition, academic language, deep reading comprehension, and more persuasive and evidence-based writing
- ❑ To present an intervention study with first grade ELL children in one school in the Metro Nashville Public Schools district

Theory of Action for building academic language in L2 for ELLs (Word Generation)



1st grade intervention

1st grade intervention: Treatment classroom

- Chose 18 academic words to focus on from January to March 2016
- Developed and administered Test 1 in January, post test in March
- Chose 18 new academic words to focus on from March to May 2016
- Administered Test 2 in May 2016
- During these two time periods, Mr. Mosher implemented a discussion-based approach with open-ended questions with embedded academic words that offered a variety of perspectives:
 - “Should you be able to **adopt** a wild animal?”
 - Are zoos **humane** or are they **unethical** places?
 - Should homework be **banned** over holidays or should students be **required** to do homework?

Units with academic words: January – March 2016

- Unit 1- Should homework be **banned** over holidays or breaks or students be **required** to do homework?
- Unit 2- Should everyone **receive** a prize?
- Unit 3- Should students **receive rewards** for doing chores?
- Unit 4- Should kids **receive** or be able to use cell phones?

- **Units with academic words: April– May 2016**

- Unit 5: Are zoos **humane** or **unethical** places?
- Unit 6: Should you be able to **adopt** a wild animal?
- Unit 7: Should the sale of tropical fish be **banned**?

Academic Discussion: implementation steps over the course of two weeks

- **Step 1:** Introduce academic vocabulary
- **Step 2:** Handout: Pro-Con (turn and talk) Cards to students which list a variety of perspectives on the dilemma of the week
- **Step 3:** Teachers and administrators are interviewed and video-taped; they provide personal, multiple perspectives on the open-ended question (Doug created signs to make a physical connection to the target word which students practice and learn)
- **Step 4:** Students watch video for the first time and listen for the words and collectively make the word's corresponding sign. They watch video a second time and listen for the content. Students then summarize what the various positions/perspectives are but are invited to add their own.
- **Step 5:** Introduce and review power point over the course of 2 days
- **Step 6:** Students discuss and write their own position
- **Step 7:** Review and finish draft

Doug has introduced the academic words; in this clip he reviews the corresponding signs to create a physical connection to the word/concept

- Video clip

Reviewing signs for **thrive, roam, humanely,**
contain, treat for “*Are Zoos Humane?*”

Introduce 'pro/con cards' with varying perspectives on the dilemma –Should you be able to adopt wild animals?

What does Diego think?

- People should be able to adopt wild animals.
- Wild animals soon adapt to their new homes.
- Wild animals are born and raised in farms in the US so it is fine to obtain a wild animal as a pet.



What does Maria think?

- People should not be able to adopt wild animals.
- Wild animals should remain where they are born.
- Wild animals don't belong in a human home because they will be contained.



What does Briana think?

- People should be able to adopt wild animals.
- People should not be prevented from buying a wild animal. It should be a personal choice.
- People will care for the animals and treat them humanely.
- If people adopt wild animals, this will prevent the wild animals from being harmed in the wild.



What does Kamari think?

- People should not be able to adopt wild animals.
- It can be dangerous to adopt a wild animal because you do not know how big or dangerous the animal will get.
- The animal could harm you.
- Some owners will abandon these pets because they don't know how to care for them when they get big.



Video clip of two students using academic words and accountable talk moves: *Should you be able to **adopt** wild animals?*

- Listen to the pair for their use of the following academic words and accountable talk moves
- Target words:
 - *Harmed*
 - *Adopted*
 - *Abandon*
 - *Remain*
- Accountable talk moves: *I agree, I disagree because, can you tell me more?*

Destiny and Danny: ELL students – Speak Spanish at Home

Introducing teacher videos “Should wild animals be **adopted**”?

Mr. Saul- listen to him say the following academic words and watch the students’ gestures/signs for each of these words

- ❑ **Adopt** – children put their hands on their hearts
- ❑ **Obtain** – children grab with their hand
- ❑ **Remain-** pointing to the ground
- ❑ **Abandon** – waving goodbye
- ❑ **Treat** – high five
- ❑ **Humanely** – petting your arm
- ❑ **Suffering** – sad face with pouty lip

**First graders listen and watch a teacher interview
on the topic of adopting wild animals: video**

Alan at the Zoo

“Alan” (ELL) at the Zoo- Mr. Mosher asks:
do you think these birds have room to
roam and are able to **thrive**?

“Alan” (ELL) at the Zoo- Mr. Mosher asks:
do you think these birds have room to **roam** and are
able to **thrive**?

- “I don’t think they are able to **thrive** because there’s a fence and they can’t go over there because they’re stuck in a cage. And they can’t **roam** cuz they’re not **thriving**, because they’re **contained**, to a cage- and um- they cannot **roam** because there’s bamboo all over the cage so they cannot fly.”

What results did we get after four months of academic discussions in Doug's first grade classroom?

Scoring the pre-test results

- “Mason” School: Levels of Mastery
 - Proficient: 80-100%
 - Close: 70-79%
 - Likely: 60-69%
 - Not likely: 59%-below

Pretest 1: January – March – Academic Words embedded in multiple choice assessment

- ❑ 1. participate
- ❑ 2. thrive (2)
- ❑ 3. assigned
- ❑ 4. banned (2)
- ❑ 5. deprived
- ❑ 6. received
- ❑ 7. encourage
- ❑ 8. award
- ❑ 9. strive
- ❑ 10. motivates
- ❑ 11. earns
- ❑ 12. empowered
- ❑ 13. requires
- ❑ 14. communicates
- ❑ 15. concentrate
- ❑ 16. concerned
- ❑ 17. harm
- ❑ 18. design

Pre-test 1: comparison of control and treatment first grade classrooms: January 2016

□ Control

- Proficient: 5%
- Close: 20%,
- Likely: 10%
- **Not likely 65%**

□ Treatment- Mosher

- Proficient: 0%
- Close: 0%,
- Likely: 33%,
- **Not likely 67%**

Post-test 1: comparison of control and treatment first grade classrooms, March 2016

□ Control

- Proficient: 17%
- Close: 17%,
- Likely: 17%
- Not likely: 50%

□ Treatment- Mosher

- **Proficient: 67%**
- Close: 28%,
- Likely: 6%,
- Not likely 0%

Test 1: **Treatment** pre and post comparison

□ **Mosher**

- Proficient: 0%
- Close: 0%,
- Likely: 33%
- **Not likely 67%**

□ **Mosher**

- **Proficient: 67%**
- Close: 28%,
- Likely: 6%
- Not likely 0% (was 67%)

Pretest 2 March, 2016: Academic Words embedded in multiple choice assessment

- ❑ 1. humane
- ❑ 2. treat
- ❑ 3. thrive
- ❑ 4. suffer
- ❑ 5. contain (“control”)
- ❑ 6. roam
- ❑ 7. ban
- ❑ 8. collect
- ❑ 9. generate
- ❑ 10. protect
- ❑ 11. object (v)
- ❑ 12. preserve
- ❑ 13. deplete
- ❑ 14. obtain
- ❑ 15. adopt
- ❑ 16. prevent
- ❑ 17. abandon
- ❑ 18. contain (“hold”)

Pretest 2: March 2016

□ Control

- Proficient: 22%,
- Close: 17%
- Likely: 17%
- Not likely: 44%

□ Treatment- Mosher

- Proficient: 0%
- Close: 6%
- Likely: 6%
- **Not likely: 88%**

Post-test 2: March 2016

□ Control

- Proficient: 22%*
- Close: 17%
- Likely 22%,
- Not likely: 39%
- *(remained the same as pre-test)

□ Treatment-Mosher

- **Proficient: 89%**
- Close: 11%
- Likely: 0%
- Not likely: 0%

Pre and post test comparison Test 2: Mosher

□ Mosher-pre

- **Proficient: 0%**
- Close: 6%
- Likely: 6%
- **Not likely: 88%**

□ Mosher-post

- **Proficient: 89%**
- Close: 11%
- Likely: 0%
- Not likely: 0%

Discussion-based approaches impact writing and academic language development

- Daney- writing samples from November 2015 to May 2016

November 2015: Daney – “Should kids be **allowed** to take on **dangerous challenges?**”

- No kids should not climb mountains because they can get lost.
- (11 words/0 academic words)

January 2016- “Should kids be **required** to do homework during their breaks or should homework be **banned**?”

- We should **require** homework so we can be smart. If we **require** homework we can *soft*.
- We should **require** homework for we can get *redy* for high school.
- (28 words/3 academic words/used correctly)

February 2016 – “Should kids be **required** to do chores?
Or should they be **rewarded** for doing chores?”

- We should be **required** to do chores because prizes are not *inproten* because cleaning your house can **empower** you. We should be **required** to do chores because doing chores are *inpronet*.
- (31 Words/3 academic words/used correctly)

March 2016 – “Should kids be allowed to have cell phones?”

- I do not think kids should have cell phone because when you play *gams* on their cell phone because when you go to sleep they would be **concerned** that you *dident* do their homework. Kids should not have cell *phons* because you need to **concentrate** on your homework. I think kids *shold* not have cell *phons* because when you are trying to do their homework they will be **distracted**.
- (69 words/3 academic words/used correctly)

April 2016 – “Are zoos humane?”

“I think zoos are **inhumane** because they can not **roam** around in the zoo. And the animals **suffer** because they are **contained** and they want the animals to **thrive** in the zoos and they *want* them to **treat** them **humanely** but they do not **treat** them well. The animals **suffer** because they don't keep []the flamingos **suffer** because they did not have space to **roam**. And the animals in the *Peking* zoos did not have space to **roam**.

(78 words- 12 academic words/used correctly)

May 2016- “Should you be able to **adopt** a wild animal?”

- ❑ You should not be able to **adopt** a wild animals because **adopting** a wild animals can **harm** you and it needs to **remain** in the wild and when there small there cute but when there big they can **harm** you. And you can **suffer** because you got **harm** and you need to go to the *docter*. You should not **obtain** a Fox as your pet. It needs to **remain** in the wild. And if you **adopt** a wild animal you will **abandon** it. Animals [should be] in the wild.
- ❑ (89 words- use of 11 academic words; used correctly)

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- ❑ We attribute the gains on the curriculum-based measures and growth in writing to the provision of more opportunities for rich discussions about engaging topics and more opportunities to write about dilemmas that students have become deeply involved with over the course of two weeks
 - ❑ In addition to these open-ended linguistically rich questions, added visual supports, videos, pro-con position cards for easy reference, a living breathing word wall also provided all students, especially ELLs, the critical supports they need for acquiring academic English

- Because of the compelling quantitative and qualitative data from Mr. Mosher's class, the principal mandated the implementation of this approach school-wide
- We just finalized year 3- First year pilot with Doug, two years with scale-up to whole school
- Mason is now known as an exemplary school in the district and is no longer in the under-performing category
- Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) credit this academic language initiative with moving Mason Elementary from the bottom 1.6% of the state to now exceeding the bottom 10%
- District, local and other school districts administrators and teachers, come to observe rigorous instruction, especially for second language learners at the Mason.

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- Those visitors were invariably directed to Doug Mosher's classroom where he modeled the approach and where his young charges were able to display their linguistic prowess, their civic-mindedness, and their ability to hold multiple perspectives on complex and often difficult topics.

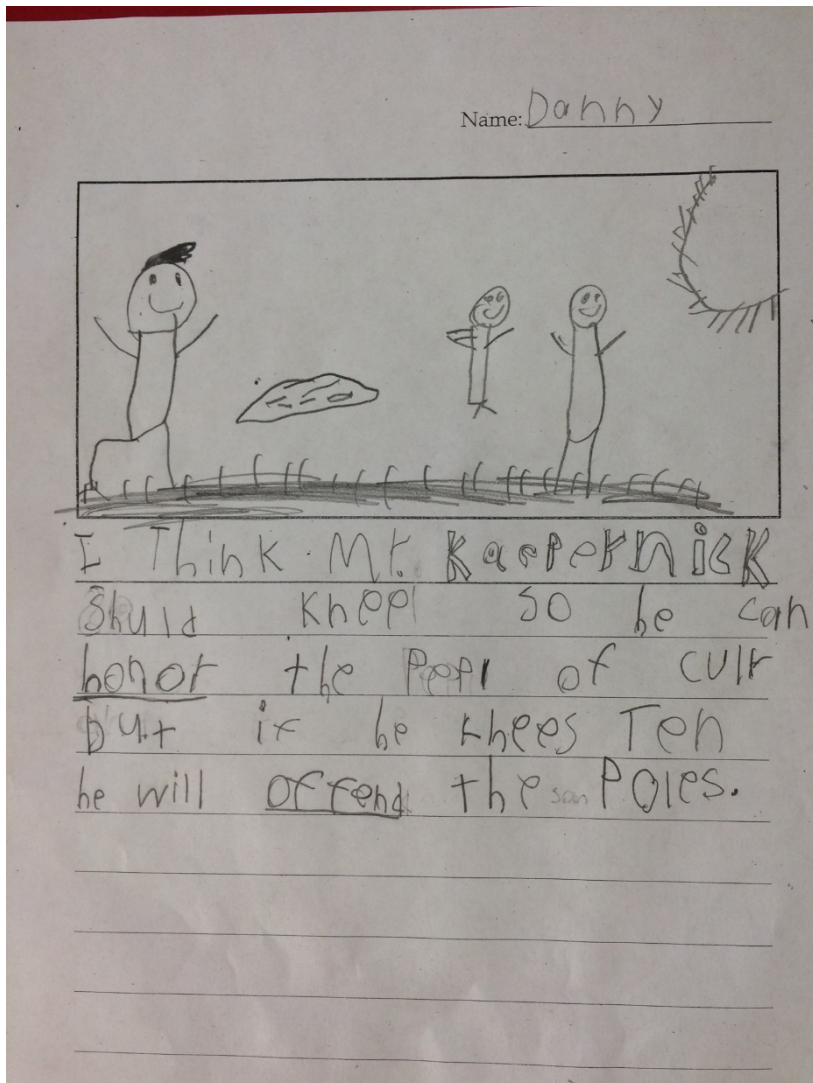
To conclude..

Let's give our students something to talk about !

- Embedding rich academic language in dilemma-based discussions boosts academic language acquisition for all students, especially ELLs
- Select those words that do not usually get taught but are necessary for thinking, speaking effectively, writing, reading and listening comprehension
- Embedding debate and discussion-based classroom activities school-wide has the potential to accelerate the reading and academic achievement of struggling learners and ELLs while engaging them civically in the world
- Providing students with world knowledge and powerful language gives them access to greater academic and professional opportunities and gives them a voice they need and deserve

Kimberly: The Power of Power Words

Should Kaepernick kneel or stand during the National Anthem?



- “I think Mr. Kaepernick shuld kneel so he can honor the peopl of culr but if he knees ten he will offend the poles.”

Questions?

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