

## *Literacy in history: Language and meaning*



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*This article reports on a professional development program that enhances teachers' understanding of the role of language in history teaching and learning. We present a case study of one teacher's experience, demonstrating the use of a functional metalanguage to engage students in close reading and discussion of school history texts. We also report qualitative and quantitative data that support the effectiveness of the approach in improving students' reading and writing skills as well as their overall understanding of historical content.*

### ***Literacy in history: Language and meaning***

Today's classrooms are composed of students who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this context, it is important for teachers to have instructional strategies that ensure that all students, even those who struggle with academic English, engage with the grade level curriculum and work with challenging content. This article reports on a professional development project that draws on functional linguistics constructs to prepare history teachers to engage students in talk about language and content as they read challenging texts. This enables students to learn language and learn through language (Halliday, 2004) as they read and write history.

### ***Background***

The History Project at UC Davis (UCD-HP) is part of a network of seven projects across California that comprise the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) (<http://csmop.ucop.edu/chssp>), which itself is part of the larger network of discipline-specific sites known as the California Subject

Matter Projects. Through state and federal funding, the CHSSP has provided programming to improve history teachers' content knowledge and teaching skills since 1989. The CHSSP develops and maintains professional history education communities for teacher networking and learning as well as partnerships with school districts to meet the needs of diverse student populations, with special attention to the needs of English language learners. The CHSSP's attention to student literacy development grew out of a larger movement within history education to go beyond traditional definitions of historical content knowledge to focus on improving students' discipline-specific reasoning, preparing students to read and analyse text, weigh evidence, and write reasoned arguments. By the late 1990s, history teachers attending CHSSP events began asking for specific approaches that they could use to address the needs of California's growing population of English language learners. At the same time, the California State Legislature, which authorizes the California Subject Matter Projects, also called for the projects to develop programs to serve English language learners.

In response to these pressures, the project's goals expanded in 2000 to focus on the particular language issues involved in learning history. Linguists were invited to collaborate with UCD-HP leaders, and a new program, *Building Academic Literacy through History*, was developed. The program supports teachers in improving students' reading comprehension in history, helping students develop critical perspectives toward texts, and developing students' academic writing. A key feature of the program is preparing teachers to focus attention on and lead discussion about the language features of history texts.

The *Building Academic Literacy through History* program has served 268 teachers in summer institutes, academic year programs, and an online course since 2003. Supported by state and federal grants, the UCD-HP has collaborated with local school districts to serve cohorts of teachers from area schools. Some of the participants in the program form collaborative teams that work throughout the school year to better understand and apply the concepts to their curriculum. Some of the teachers who participate in these activities then become facilitators and coaches at subsequent institutes.

In this article we first describe a particular innovation of the *Building Academic Literacy through History* program, the use of functional grammar strategies to help teachers engage students in extended conversation about the meaning of the texts they read. We then present a case study of co-author Sarah Taylor's experience as a teacher-participant in the UCD-HP to report on how the strategies work in the classroom and what the approach has offered in her context. Finally, we present Sarah Taylor's qualitative evidence of the program's success and quantitative findings from external evaluation of the program that demonstrate from a larger context that teachers who have participated in the program have had a significant positive impact on students' learning in history.

### *Theoretical framework*

The texts students are expected to read and write in secondary school are quite different from the language through which everyday life is lived. This means that many students get little experience outside of school with the kind of language they encounter in the texts and tasks of school subjects. *Academic language*, the language of schooling (Schleppegrell 2004), presents information and interpretation in new ways, using vocabulary, grammar, and text structures that students can learn to recognize when they read and to adopt when they write. In order to engage students in such learning, teachers need to understand the academic language demands of the subjects they teach. History, in particular, makes great linguistic demands on students, as it is constructed mainly through texts and cannot easily be experienced hands-on. Some teachers respond to this challenge by simplifying texts for students. However, this practice does not engage students with complex concepts or recognize their levels of cognitive development; nor does it develop in students the advanced knowledge about history they need for further advancement in secondary school. While the dense language of history texts can be a barrier to learning, it is precisely this language that students need to be able to read and write to be successful and meet grade-level standards.

When reading history, students need to be able to understand what happened in a sequence of events as well as recognize the interpretation that an author inevitably incorporates. To do this, students benefit from conversation about the language choices an author has made and the overall organizing strategies that have been adopted in writing a particular text. Each text represents choices by the author, and understanding this and exploring those choices strengthens the students' reading power. Talking about the way an author has constructed a text encourages conversation about what is included and what is left out; about who is represented and who is not; and about the points of view that are constructed and the kind of interpretation being presented, promoting critical literacy and disciplinary learning as students recognize how language choices contribute to the presentation of history.

To engage in this work, the UCD-HP has drawn on the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1994). SFL provides a framework for linking language choices with meaning in ways that enable us to analyse language patterns as a means of recognizing how information is presented as well as the author's purposes and interpretation. Researchers using SFL have made major contributions to our understanding of the discourses of history teaching and have shown that the language patterns common in school history texts can be brought to students' attention in ways that enable them to read more deeply and more critically (e.g., Coffin, 1997; 2004; 2006; Eggins, Wignell, & Martin, 1993; Martin, 2002; Unsworth, 1999; Veel & Coffin, 1996). In particular, SFL offers a *metalanguage*, a language for talking about text. As illustrated below, the UCD-HP has drawn on that metalanguage to offer history teachers

a means of engaging in conversation about meaning and about an author's language choices (see also Schleppegrell, 2005; Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006).

Using functional linguistics strategies, teachers talk with students about the information in the texts they read, developing richer understandings of the historical content and sensitizing students to the meanings of the different choices the author has made. This is particularly relevant for English language learners and other students who have little opportunity to engage with academic language outside the classroom, as it supports content learning, the learning of history, at the same time that it supports language learning. The work we describe here shows that students can engage in meaningful academic work at the same time they are developing academic language if teachers have strategies for supporting and developing students' ability to read grade-level texts.

### **Implementation**

*Building Academic Literacy through History* is typically presented in a five-day summer institute. UCD-HP staff and teacher-coaches who have used the strategies in their own classrooms present the curriculum and guide teacher-participants in working through demonstration lessons as students would. The teacher-coaches also present the theoretical framework and linguistic rationale for the functional grammar focus and can address the benefits and pitfalls of the approach from their own classroom experience. Teachers learn new strategies for approaching reading and writing and discuss the classroom implications and possible adaptations for their own contexts. The participants then take the strategies and apply them to their own curricula with the assistance of the teacher-coaches, developing lessons they will use in their own classrooms to introduce their students to the strategies. Participants leave the institutes with example lessons as well as curriculum materials they have designed themselves, and with deeper understanding of the way language works in history texts.

Teachers are introduced to a framework for unit planning that involves developing guiding questions, analysis of text organizational patterns, intensive work with vocabulary, and analysis of historical sources, as well as the functional grammar strategies that we describe in detail in this article. The institutes also offer a structured approach to developing students' writing in ways that enable students to work with the new knowledge they develop as they use the functional grammar strategies to read history texts.

The use of *guiding questions* focuses teachers on identifying clear goals by developing a teaching thesis for each instructional unit. Teachers then identify a section of the textbook or a primary source document that students can read closely, using the functional grammar metalanguage to help them deconstruct the text and answer the guiding question. Teachers first analyse the text them-

selves to identify challenges and key meanings. Then, to engage students in the analysis, teachers design activities that highlight the meaning relationships as they guide students in breaking sentences with important information into their meaningful parts; a strategy the teachers call “sentence chunking”. Teachers also develop questions about the information in the text the students have deconstructed. It is not possible to treat all text in this way, so teachers typically choose some text from each unit of study for this close analysis, focusing on text that is dense with important information or where interpretation might be difficult to recognize. In the institutes teachers learn to find the *participants*, *processes*, and circumstances of each clause and think about the meaning relationships that the author constructs in the text. Another functional grammar strategy introduced in the institutes is using reference devices to help students see how meaning builds in a text and how elements are linked. Reference devices are pronouns, demonstratives, and synonyms that enable the author to refer to participants that have been introduced in a text in various ways as the chain of reasoning is developed. Both the sentence chunking and reference devices strategies are illustrated below. Various participation structures are possible in working with these functional grammar strategies.

Through the institutes, teachers learn to talk about language in ways that help their students respond critically to the texts they read by analysing the patterns of verbs, nouns, conjunctions, and other language features while maintaining a focus on the history content. The functional linguistics meta-language of processes, participants, circumstances, and referrers provides a meaning-based means of linking language and content. Engaging this way with text helps students recognize how language works and approach new texts with strategies for more productive independent reading.

### *Case study: One teacher's experience*

Sarah Taylor attended the *Building Academic Literacy through History* summer institute in 2006 and continued to work with teachers from that institute during the academic year 2006-07, her fourth year of teaching. A middle school (grades 7-8) teacher, Sarah teaches language arts as well as history, as her school presents the two subjects in a core class that combines them in a double period that encourages integrated work on literacy. Sarah had attended UCD-HP historical content seminars during her first year of teaching. At the beginning of her third year, she became interested in how to better integrate the two core subjects and enrolled in the *Building Academic Literacy through History* summer institute she heard about from her colleagues. Below we describe some features of the unit of study that Sarah developed and report on the response she had when she worked with her students in the ways she learned in the institute.

To understand the issues Sarah faced it is useful to know more about her school and district, typical of UCD-HP schools. Sarah's is a large urban district

servicing the California state capital. Almost one-third of the district's 52,850 students are English learners, speaking 42 languages, with large numbers from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and South East Asia. Sixty-four percent of the students are eligible for the free/reduced lunch program, an index of poverty. District students routinely rank in the lowest deciles in the state's Academic Performance Index in all core academic areas. The middle school where Sarah teaches has approximately 800 students. Like the district, it has a diverse student body, with 29% Asians/Pacific Islanders, 24% Latinos, 24% African Americans, 2% Alaska Natives/American Indians, and 21% Whites. Over half the students qualify for free/reduced lunch. 15% are English learners, with Spanish (48%) and Hmong (23%) the most prevalent of the seven languages spoken at the school. In her teaching, then, Sarah was engaging with large numbers of students from low income families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who were encountering academic English mainly in the classroom. In this context, the challenge of supporting academic language development and content learning at the same time was a great concern.

Sarah's Language Arts/History department has 12 teachers who collaborate extensively and successfully. Sarah works with three different groups of students (91 total), some of whose test scores are far below grade level. Each group is a mix of students with varying scores and strengths in literacy. Some students struggle with basic comprehension and others are strong readers, but most of her students struggle with writing.

### **A unit on the fall of Rome**

During the summer institute Sarah created a unit on the fall of Rome that she taught at the beginning of the following academic year. Below we illustrate two of the functional grammar strategies she incorporated: sentence deconstruction or chunking and reference devices or referrers.

The development of a unit of instruction starts with identifying the California history standards that the unit will address. For this unit, a key seventh grade standard was:

#### *7.1 Students analyse the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire*

One of Sarah's guiding questions for the unit focused on the notion of internal weaknesses as a contributing factor in the fall of Rome:

Guiding question: *What were the internal weaknesses of the Roman Empire?*

Teaching thesis: *By the year 500 the western half of the Roman Empire collapsed due to internal weaknesses such as political instability and economic and social problems.*

Sarah recognized that the chapter on the fall of Rome in the textbook she was using (Frey, 2005) was organized into sections that presented political

instability, economic problems, and social problems as three main *internal weaknesses* that led to decline. One of the sections she chose to engage students in the functional grammar analysis strategies was the following:

To finance Rome's huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes hurt the economy and drove many people into poverty. For many people, unemployment was a serious problem. Wealthy families used slaves and cheap labor to work their large estates. Small farmers could not compete with the large landowners. They fled to the cities looking for work, but there were not enough jobs for everyone. Other social problems plagued the empire, including growing corruption and a decline in the spirit of citizenship. A rise in crime made the empire's cities and roads unsafe.

Sarah used sentence chunking and reference device strategies to help students navigate the text and understand information they would need to accomplish the writing tasks in the unit. As she was working with students for the first time on this approach during this unit on Rome, Sarah chose to model the strategies and work with the whole class on this paragraph. Students then worked in pairs to analyse the rest of the text. Afterward, the class reviewed the analysis together so students could check their understanding of the strategies and the text and review answers to the questions in a whole group discussion. Sarah found that after practice with the approach in this scaffolded way, students could deconstruct texts like this on their own without the aid of a worksheet that broke the sentences apart for them, as they began to recognize processes and participants independently and to use this information to understand and think critically about history.

Whatever participation structure the students use to analyse the text, an essential part of the functional grammar strategies is to discuss questions about the meaning of the language and recognize how the text analysis helps them find answers. Following is an example of the way Sarah scaffolded the students' work with the text and the questions she discussed with them as they read and worked through the text together clause by clause. As the example illustrates, Sarah developed a worksheet with the clauses from the text followed by boxes labelled with the functional grammar categories; the students' challenge was to identify the information that completes the charts and then to answer the questions below. The first two sentences of the paragraph are presented here to exemplify this. Issues that challenge students' comprehension of the meaning in each clause are presented in parentheses below the analysis:

To finance Rome's huge armies,

Actor/Participant (nouns)	Action/ Process (verbs)	Receiver/Goal: <i>Who or What?</i>
???	to finance	Rome's huge armies

(Here the Actor in the clause, the historical participant who *financed* the armies, is not presented in the text until the beginning of the next clause (*its citizens*).

Students are challenged to recognize the historical agency.)

its citizens had to pay heavy taxes.

Actor/Participant (nouns)	Action/ Process (verbs)	Receiver/Goal: Who or What?
its citizens	had to pay	heavy taxes

(The reference device (pronoun) *its* has to be linked back to *Rome* in the phrase *Rome's huge armies* in the previous clause to recognize *who* had to pay.)

These taxes hurt the economy ...

Actor/Participant (nouns)	Action/ Process (verbs)	Receiver/Goal: Who or What?
These taxes	hurt	the economy

(Again a reference device (*these*) has to be linked to the *heavy* taxes in the previous clause if students are to understand *which taxes* the text is talking about. The *taxes* are a non-human Actor and *the economy* is an abstraction; students can discuss how *taxes* can *hurt*; and *who* is hurt; who the real human participants are behind *the economy* (the *Roman citizens* mentioned in the previous clauses).

...and drove many people into poverty.

Actor/Participant (nouns)	Action/ Process (verbs)	Receiver/Goal: Who or What?
???	drove	many people into poverty

(Here the students need to recognise the participant that is not repeated in this clause, the Actor *these taxes*. How *taxes* would drive people into poverty and the metaphor “drive” into poverty can be discussed.)

### Questions for discussion following the analysis:

*Why would Rome need a huge army? How did the need for this army affect Roman citizens?*

The first question links back to the text students read prior to this passage, and the second question helped Sarah develop the notion of *internal weakness* so students would recognize the *economic and social problems* that she wanted them to understand about the situation that brought about the fall of Rome. Many students in middle school struggle with these big history concepts about economic or political issues. This discussion helped students understand the meaning of these terms in a non-superficial way and talk about how they are related to the *rise* or *fall* of a society or civilization.

This pattern of Actor/Participant, action process, and Receiver/Goal is only one of the patterns found in history text. Different parts of a text use language in other ways to present different kinds of information (for more on

this, see Fang & Schleppegrell, forthcoming). The literacy institutes help teachers recognize these different patterns and develop strategies for talking about them with students. Key to having rich conversations about text is the meta-language that provides a meaningful way of understanding how the language 'means' what it does. Identifying the elements of a clause as *processes*, *participants*, and *circumstances* and discussing the *reference devices* gives students general categories for seeing patterns in the ways history is written.

The key goal of history teachers is that their students will learn to be historical thinkers. For this to happen, students need to comprehend and critically analyse the texts they read. Teachers report that talking through a text in this way slows down the reading and enables all students to participate. The discussion about language encourages students to analyse what the author is presenting in the text by focusing on what is going on, who the historical actors are with the ability to influence events (who has *agency*), to whom or what the action is directed, and the circumstances under which the event is occurring. It focuses the conversation about the text on the meaning at the clause level, stimulating discussion about the choices the author has made. Rather than just asking students to read a passage and answer questions about it, it engages them in analysis of the meaning of the passage in a concrete and productive way. As students focus on how meaning is constructed sentence by sentence in a text, they learn to recognize the different ways the grammar works in chronicling historical events, in discussing the views that informed historical actors or the debates they engaged in, in describing how things were at a moment in history, or in explicitly laying out the factors that contributed to historical outcomes. Recognizing common patterns of language in history supports the development of critical reading as students become aware of the ways historians implicitly present interpretation and position the reader.

After Sarah taught this unit she was struck by how much the students remembered as they moved on to new topics in history. Throughout the school year, as she used the terms *internal and external weaknesses*, she found that the students remembered these from the Rome unit and could apply them to new contexts. For the first time in her teaching experience she felt that her students came away with solid knowledge about the role of internal and external strengths and weaknesses in an empire or government, and she and her students were able to come back to these notions throughout the year as they learned about empires and cultures other than Rome. Sarah explains what the strategies helped her do:

After the institute I realized that I cannot expect my students to simply read the text and gain the necessary knowledge of history. The text needs to be broken down and students need strategies to help them comprehend. The sentence chunking helps students analyse what is happening in history by looking carefully at the processes and participants in the text ... An instructor at the institute talked about how he was frustrated because his students' test scores were low; they were making what

he considered to be strange errors. He finally figured out that students were getting answers wrong because they were confused about the reference devices and didn't recognize who the history textbook was referring to. Students need to be taught and to practice skills that help them figure this out. Once students have these skills they are able to read expository text with more confidence and therefore, to really comprehend and analyse history. These skills provide the foundation for students to be critical thinkers in history.

Sarah's unit on Rome is just one example of how teachers implement the functional grammar strategies, and her experience provides one perspective on what teachers can do when introduced to these strategies. We have seen teachers take up this way of talking about language in different forms and with different approaches, but the central common feature is that teachers are talking about text in new ways that connect language with meaning and enable students to engage with text that they formerly found too dense, abstract, and challenging.

### *Evaluation*

Both qualitative and quantitative data are now providing evidence that students of teachers who have participated in the program are achieving greater success in learning history. Sarah's reports and reflections on her experience exemplify what has been reported by other teachers in the program as well. In addition to these reports from teachers, external evaluation of the nationally funded institutes, involving UCD-HP/school district collaboration, has found significant differences in the achievement of teachers who have participated in the program compared with their colleagues who have not.

The key innovation in the *Building Academic Literacy through History* program has been the functional, meaning-based focus on language in history, and we believe that this innovation has been instrumental in achieving the results we report here. Other components of the program such as the university-school district collaboration, the standards-based approach to historical content knowledge, support for the development of collaborative teacher teams, and recruiting of teacher-leaders from project participants also undoubtedly contributed to the positive outcomes, as they established the context in which the innovative work with functional grammar could be accomplished.

Sarah's school has shown steady improvement in helping students meet state standards over the past several years. While the UCD-HP work is only one part of this, the functional grammar approach has been adopted in Sarah's department collaboratively between grade levels, introduced in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and refined in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and teachers believe that this has contributed to their success. Sarah reports that students, with practice, have begun to use the strategies naturally in reading expository texts in all subjects:

Our goal in using these strategies is for students to become independent, competent and successful in their reading of history and expository text. I found that my

students were able to use these strategies very successfully and confidently. Participation with the textbook and in class discussions increased because students actually interacted with the text in a meaningful way instead of passively reading information which is then hard to retain.

Sarah also found that her students showed greater progress in comparison with writing her students had done in previous years and she saw steady improvement as they progressed from writing a single paragraph into essay writing. For the first time she was getting papers that were solid presentations of historical reasoning with a thesis statement, evidence, analysis and clear conclusions. Some students needed more ongoing support than others to continue to draw on the strategies they had practised, but all students had success with the new approach.

Reflecting on her experience implementing strategies from this professional development program, Sarah concludes:

This new approach gave me tools to help my students read expository text. We have so many strategies in Language Arts for how to read literature and to increase comprehension skills, and students in my district get a lot of practice in those skills in elementary and middle school. However, many students have only had limited exposure to history, and it is usually in the form of an article or story in their elementary Language Arts books. This means that many students come to me in middle school without the skills to navigate history textbooks. ... Once students have these skills they are able to read expository text with more confidence and therefore, to really comprehend and analyse history. These skills provide the foundation for students to be critical thinkers in history.

Sarah's experience provides one perspective on what teachers can do when introduced to these strategies. Most teacher-participants report making changes in the way they discuss text with students as they use the lessons they create during the institutes. We have been impressed with the creativity with which teachers have engaged students in talk about history through a focus on language, and many teachers report that they are pleased with the questions and insights that students offer as they engage with history texts in this way. But others struggle to incorporate these strategies into the rest of their curriculum without further training and support, and we recognize that many teachers need more coaching and opportunities to explore the language challenges of a variety of text passages and develop lessons to address these challenges. Many teachers report that they do not have enough planning time for this during the school year, and while the UCD-HP offers follow-up training and coaching for interested teachers, only about 10% have taken the opportunity to participate in this follow-up training as Sarah did.

In spite of this, Sarah's comments are supported by results from an external evaluation of the project that show that the program has been successful in helping students develop academic literacy in history in the context of a rigorous curriculum. Even when teachers implemented the approach in limited

ways, the evaluation demonstrates that they have had a significant impact on student achievement.

The success of the UCD-HP federally-funded collaboration with school districts has been evaluated by an external examiner who used a cluster-randomized trial, an experiment in which teachers volunteered to participate in the program and then were randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions by attending UCD-HP institutes either in the summer of 2004 or in the summer of 2005. Those who attended in 2004 participated in an evaluation of the progress of their students compared with the progress of the students of the participating teachers who had not yet attended the institutes.<sup>1</sup> One aspect of the evaluation of students' progress took the form of testing students' knowledge of history and ability to write about history using an essay test aligned with the California standards. The writing test asked students to write an essay that framed and developed an argument about a curriculum topic such as the causes of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> Based on essays written by a random sample of 357 students from classes of participating 8th grade teachers (5 treatment, 5 control), and controlling for prior achievement and student demographic variables, the evaluation found a statistically significant treatment effect.<sup>3</sup>

In the second year of the study, because two 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (1 treatment, 1 control) left the study, compromising the original experimental design, a quasi-experimental analysis was employed to assess the treatment effect on the same essay test administered in 2006. Essays for 259 students of the 8 remaining teachers (4 treatment, 4 control) were scored and analysed using a two-level hierarchical linear model. The analysis again controlled for prior achievement and student demographic variables in addition to the teacher's propensity to be in the original treatment group. A statistically significant treatment effect was again found.<sup>4</sup> Essays were scored on a scaled writing rubric with six criteria: thesis, claims, historical evidence, analysis, essay structure, style, and conventions. The students of project teachers scored higher on all elements, with the greatest differences in presentation of a thesis, claims, and evidence. This indicates that students of project teachers learned more history and were able to present what they had learned in well structured essays (see Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006, for more on the essay analysis).

### *Conclusions*

One measure of the success of an intervention is what teachers experience and report when adopting new approaches. Sarah's comments are consistent with evaluations of other teacher participants in the UCD-HP Institutes, who are finding that the conversations they are able to have with their students about history are enriched by the close attention to language that the functional grammar strategies enable (Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteíza, 2007). At the same time, evaluation of students' actual performance is also important for identifying interventions that enable students' learning, and the external

evaluation results provide evidence that students of teachers who attended the UCD-HP Institutes learned to write history more effectively than students of teachers who did not attend the institutes. While the improvement cannot be attributed solely to the sentence deconstruction activities described here, this is an innovative approach that took the teachers beyond the typical strategies used for reading and writing, enabling them to talk with their students about history in great depth. The functional metalanguage gives teachers concrete tools for thinking and talking about meaning in the texts they read and write. We believe that this aspect of the program made substantive contributions to students' ability to make claims and present evidence.

The success of the UCD-HP's *Building Academic Literacy through History* program indicates that when a challenging curriculum is supported by strategies for talking about language in meaningful ways, students who may otherwise be unlikely to succeed can demonstrate strong growth in history achievement. Students who learned from teachers who participated in the literacy institutes grew as readers, thinkers and writers of history. This provides evidence that it is not necessary to give struggling students a simplified curriculum. Instead, by teaching them strategies to analyse the discipline-specific language of their academic courses, teachers can empower students to engage with the grade-level content that will enable them to succeed as they move ahead into secondary schooling and beyond.

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## Notes

- 1 Sarah was not part of the evaluation study reported here; she attended the institute in the year following the completion of the study.
- 2 The essay test, administered in May 2005, was double-scored and yielded a Cronbach's reliability (internal consistency) of 0.93 and an inter-rater reliability of 0.88.
- 3 Each essay received a score between 0 and 30; a student of a treatment teacher had an expected essay score of 10.02 out of 30 (33%) whereas a student of a control teacher had an expected essay score of 7.70 out of 30 (26%), a treatment effect of 2.32 points or 0.37 standard deviations – a moderate effect size.
- 4 A student of a treatment teacher had an expected essay score of 12.47 out of 30 (42%) whereas a student of a control teacher had an expected essay score of 9.13 (31%), a treatment effect of 3.34 points or 0.51 standard deviations – a moderate to large effect size.