



Advanced Literacies For Academic Success

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Why is this important?

Reading and writing—language-based competencies—have become prerequisites for participation in nearly every aspect of day-to-day, 21st-century life. There was a time when basic literacy skills provided a clear path forward, when extended reading and writing were the business of education and only necessary for participation in white-collar professions. But today, students need to develop an increasingly complex set of advanced literacy skills and competencies in order to access social and economic opportunities. Importantly, the press for advanced literacies for all does not reflect a decline in the population’s literacy rates. Instead it is a recognition that what counts as “literate” has changed dramatically over the last few decades¹.

Today’s school leaders—especially those serving large numbers of linguistically diverse learners—face a new normal that guides their instructional work. To be academically and personally successful in today’s literacy- and knowledge-based society and economy, each of their students need to develop what we refer to as **advanced literacies**. Advanced literacies refers to the skills and competencies that enable communication, spoken and written, in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly



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.

COMMUNICATE

Communicate (orally and in writing) in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences.

UNDERSTAND

Understand and use print for a variety of purposes.

ACCESS

Access and participate in academic, civic, and professional communities, where knowledge is shared and generated.

¹Levy, F., & Murnane, R. (2004). *The New Division of Labor: How Computers Are Creating the Next Job Market*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

diverse audiences. Advanced literacies also promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes. Likewise they make way for participation in academic, civic, and professional communities, where knowledge is shared and generated.

Advanced literacies support each student to:

Advanced literacies reflect and acknowledge the changing educational landscape. It is the case that many U.S. schools have been guided by a series of assumptions about the instruction of linguistically-diverse students that no longer hold in today's instructional settings. Shifting our understanding of the instructional landscape begins with understanding a new set of guiding assumptions.

Outdated Guiding Assumptions and Principles

- Students learning academic English at school represent a small subpopulation of learners.
- The strengths and needs of English learners and their classmates are distinct and necessarily demand different approaches.
- The instructional core is preparing the majority of students to engage in advanced literacy tasks.
- Those who struggle need supplementary intervention.

21st Century Realities and Guiding Principles

- The school-age population is linguistically diverse. There are 400+ native languages in the U.S., and by 2030, 40% of the school-age population will speak a language other than English at home.
- In many classrooms, the literacy strengths and needs of English Language Learners, Multilingual Learners, and their English-only peers are more similar than they are different. Learning academic English, oral and written, should be an instructional priority for all.
- In many settings, the instructional core needs to be updated to match today's literacy demands.
- When large numbers of students are struggling, the core should be adjusted as the primary line of defense and response.

What does advanced literacy instruction look like across the school years?

While it may at first seem like advanced literacies are most relevant for older learners, this isn't the case. Even our youngest learners need advanced literacies—these skills and competencies support learning at all grade levels, even as students are acquiring foundational literacy skills (word reading, spelling, basic communication skills).

ADVANCED LITERACIES IN PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTINGS

Prekindergartener Adriana takes a bite of her apple. "This is scrumptious!" she says, demonstrating her recall of a vocabulary word that appeared in today's read aloud. She then exclaims that, 'scrumptious' is the same as, 'deliciosa' in Spanish and like 'yummy.'" She then engages in an extended conversation with her teacher about when, why, and with whom she might use each descriptor.



1st grader Sugat dictates an informational book to his teacher that discusses the steps involved in the preservation of turtle habitats after a class fieldtrip to the aquarium. He then illustrates his text and adds labels to his drawings, including 'turtl' for 'turtle' and 'digh' for 'dig.' Sugat is simultaneously demonstrating his knowledge of the types of information included in non-fiction texts, while sharpening his knowledge of how spoken language maps to print as he engages in invented spelling.



3rd grader Ana and her peers discuss their hypotheses about whether an object will float or sink. Ana demonstrates her awareness of the language used in academic settings to explain thinking by saying, 'I agree with Sean, but think that...'. Her teacher, Mr. Flores, has taught these language structures and emphasized active listening to support his 3rd graders to engage in collaborative talk.



5th grader Brian, a struggling reader, works with peers reading at multiple grade-levels and his teacher, Ms. James, to read a short segment of the grade-level text, *Echo* by Pam Munoz Ryan. Ms. James poses a series of questions about the text to focus attention on the language and sentence structures, connect students' prior knowledge of the language and topic of the text, and generate a paraphrase of the text segment.



ADVANCED LITERACIES IN UPPER ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS



6th grader Rose writes a short blog post arguing for a ban on plastic bags in her neighborhood for an audience of peers. Later, she revises the language, argumentation structures and content of this post in order to write a persuasive essay to be shared with members of the city planning commission.



8th grader Roscoe reads a newspaper article on the topic of immigration, as well as a historical account of immigration to the New York region. He uses information gleaned from both texts to write an argumentative essay.



10th grader Lisa Chan uses segments of primary source documents in her history class to explore Cold War era propaganda produced in the United States. As a struggling reader, Lisa is assigned to work with peers reading at a diversity of levels to analyze what makes propaganda effective. Each student then designs their own propaganda poster as a pre-exercise to studying this historical period.

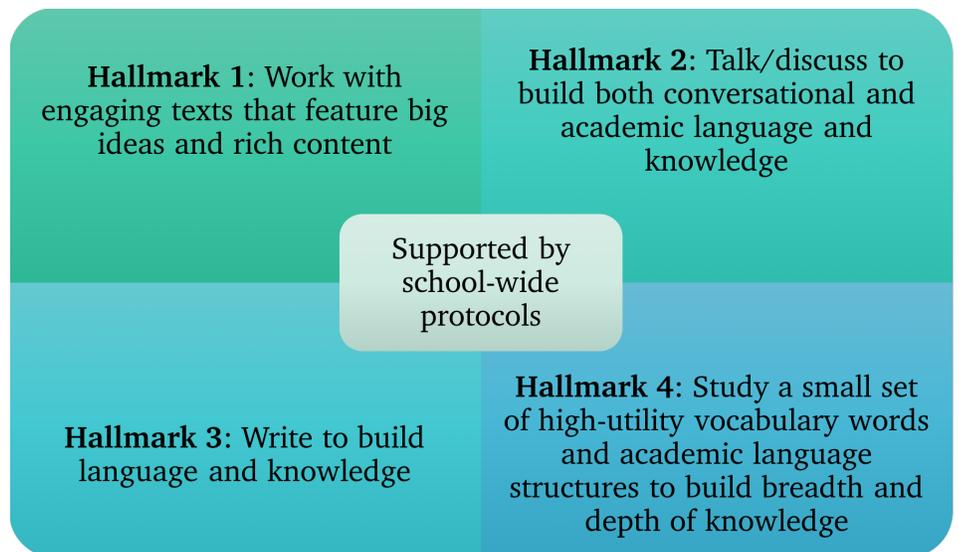


12th grader Sami prepares for a class debate on whether funding should be allocated to support medical research that might decrease maternal and infant deaths internationally. By reading a series of articles, watching YouTube videos, and interviewing a doctor participating in Doctors Without Borders, Sami produces a series of arguments she uses when debating her peers. After the debate, she writes a position paper on the topic to be shared with others.

How do we foster advanced literacies in today's classrooms?

Meeting today's demands for what counts as 'literate' requires a new approach to instructional leadership for school leaders; they must change the way their schools organize for and approach instruction. Most importantly, there is a need to focus attention on strengthening the instructional core. The instructional core, which refers to the day-to-day instruction that all students receive—this is where our students spend the majority of the school day *and* where our efforts to improve students' advanced literacies can have the most impact.

The instructional model that is needed for 21st century advanced literacies for all differs in striking ways from the traditional model. That is, historically, our grade-level instructional goals focused on teaching students content (dates, places of historical importance) or discrete skills (the ability to read 100 words per minute). These instructional goals—as well as the instructional practices used to achieve them—often differ from classroom to classroom and from content area to content area.



When schools adopt advanced literacies as a universal instructional end goal, they adopt a common set of instructional practices and guidelines to be implemented in science, math, social studies and English/language arts—what we are referring to here as 'the hallmarks.'

Advanced Literacies and Bilingual Instructional Models

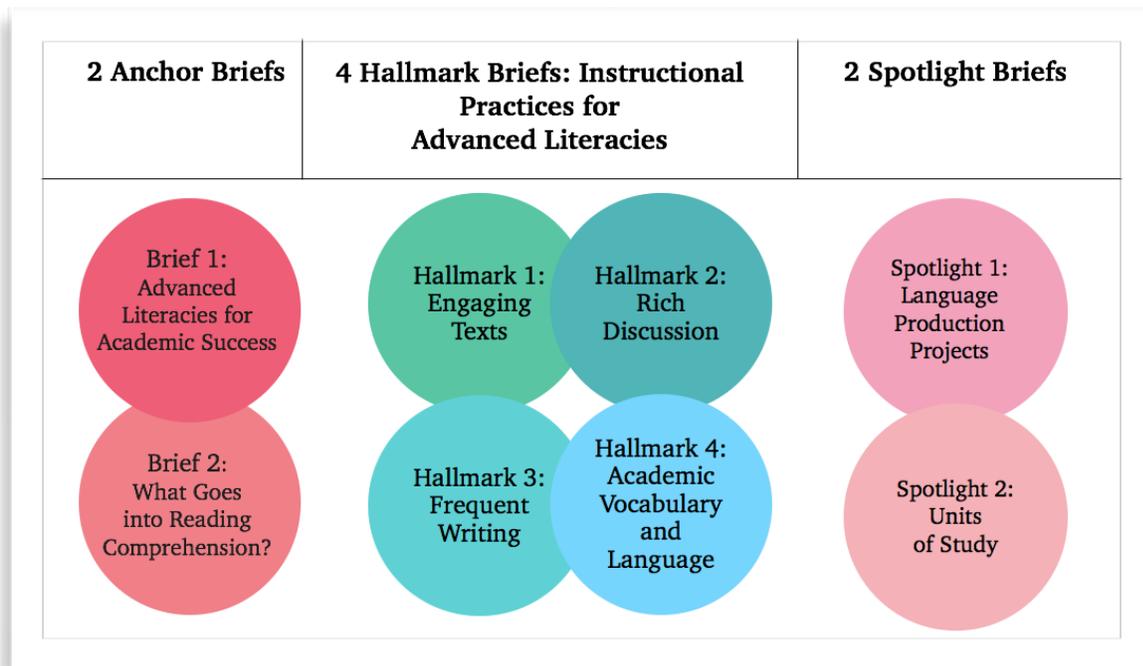
In settings where students are acquiring two languages, achieving advanced literacies in both languages should be the instructional goal. In fact, models that aim to advance students' skills to understand and communicate with a broader range of people across languages and cultures, whether by maintaining and building upon students' home languages or by fostering skill in an additional language, *are* advanced literacy models.

What happens in schools that effectively implement the hallmarks?

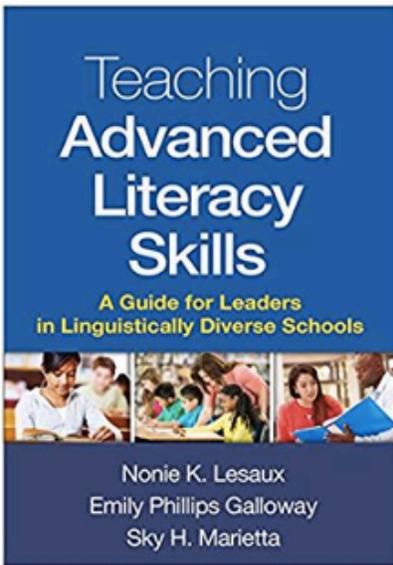
Implementing the Hallmarks is all about strengthening the instructional core—or the day-to-day instruction that supports all students to develop advanced literacies. In schools where the Hallmarks have been put into place, we expect to see a series of outcomes for learners and adults, including increased organizational coherence. These hallmarks lead to growth in the language and literacy skills of English Language Learners (ELLs), Multilingual Learners (MLLs), and their peers, provide a common set of instructional practices, and establish a shared language for discussing instruction amongst educators and school leaders. When teachers in all classrooms use similar instructional approaches and strategies to achieve their goals, and their lessons routinely feature rich texts, discussions, writing and instruction in high-utility vocabulary, learning and teaching is enhanced. For instance, when children in all classrooms in an elementary setting are making use of a common set of discussion guidelines (Academic Conversations, Accountable Talk), there are many more learning opportunities across the years, to lead to mastery. For teachers, the benefits of the vertical alignment are evident: students enter their classrooms better prepared to learn.

A Map of this Brief Series

This is the first 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:



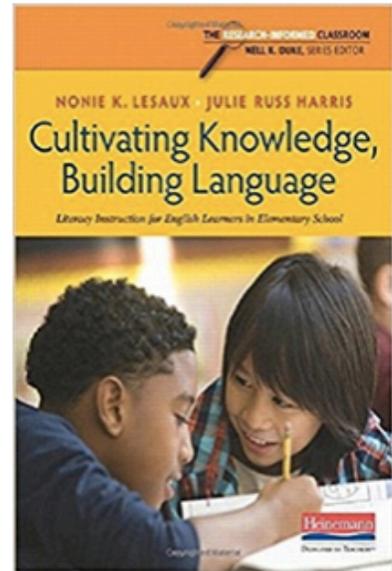
For more on this, see...



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>



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