Meg Gebhard, Ruth Harman, and Wendy Seger

Reclaiming Recess: Learning the Language of Persuasion

A teacher uses the tools of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to teach her fifth grade English Language Learners how to use academic language to challenge school policies regarding recess.

"There is no way I can close the gap in test scores by simply testing and re-testing these kids. They need help unpacking this kind of language!"

Wendy Seger made this comment when reviewing one of her student's responses to the practice exam shown in Figure 1. At the time, Wendy was teaching fifth grade at Fuentes Elementary School. Fuentes is a large, urban school serving mostly Puerto Rican and African American students in an economically struggling midsize city in Massachusetts. Because many of the students are English Language Learners (ELLs) and new to using English in academic ways, it is not surprising that many did poorly on this practice test and other state-mandated exams like it. For example, in 2003, 64% of the third graders were assessed as "below proficient" on state exams in reading, 72% in language arts, and 68% in math. To improve these scores, administrators pressed teachers to dedicate more instructional time to testing and test-taking skills. As a result, over the 2003–2004 year, some teachers were required to administer 39 different district and state exams. Wendy felt this strategy was helping some students become more savvy test-takers (e.g., not leaving items blank, making better guesses, filling in "bubble-sheets" more carefully), but she feared that testing was replacing teaching. Wendy also worried that students who were new to English were being set up to "practice failing."

In the context of reflecting on the test data shown in Figure 1, Wendy explained why she was so worried. She noted that this student, Julia (a pseudonym), had tried to answer the questions "using the language of the test." This strategy was one Wendy had explicitly taught, but in this case, "it didn't get her too far because she probably didn't understand the language and symbols used in the question itself." Wendy elaborated that she was sure Julia understood that some animals eat other animals and that the relationship between different kinds of animals could be described to reflect that. However, she ventured that Julia probably didn't understand that in this instance, the relationship under study was captured by the symbol "→" and that this symbol meant something like "grasshoppers provide food for birds." In addition, Wendy was confident that even if Julia knew the meaning of individual words, such as "population,"

33 A food chain is shown below.

GRASS → GRASSHOPPER → SMALL BIRD → HAWK

A sudden decrease in the population of one type of organism in the food chain will affect all of the other organisms in the food chain.

a. Identify two changes that would likely happen to organisms in this food chain if most of the small birds in this area became diseased and died.

Grass If theres no more grass The grasshopper can eat leaves

b. Explain why each change is likely to occur.

each Change is likely occur to eat leaves

Answer to the first question: "Grass if there's no more grass The grasshopper can eat leaves."

Answer to the second question: "Each change is likely occur to eat leaves."

Figure 1. *Julia's response to a fifth-grade practice exam in science*

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"organism," "increase," and "decrease," she wouldn't be able to make sense of grammatically dense sentence structures (e.g., "a sudden decrease in the population of one type of organism in the food chain will affect all of the other organisms in the food chain"), which differ so much from the expected patterns of everyday language (see Figure 2; Christie & Martin, 1997; Paltridge, 2001; Schleppegrell, 2004). With frustration, she said, "There is no way I can close the gap in test scores by simply testing and re-testing these kids. They need help unpacking this kind of language!"

Wendy is not alone in her frustration. Federal and state policy shifts (e.g., *No Child Left Behind* legislation, English-only mandates, high-stakes testing practices), in combination with rapid demographic changes, have placed new demands on all educators (August & Shanahan, 2006; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2005; Zeichner, 2005). Given this pressure, many experienced teachers, like Wendy, are asking new kinds of questions about the nature of their work as educators. Wendy and many of her colleagues want to know what specifically makes academic registers difficult for language learners? How can teachers teach all of their students, especially those learning English, to use academic language in ways that build on what they already know? How can teachers support all students in making sense of academic language (and passing high-stakes tests), but do so in a way that maintains space for reading and writing about issues their students care about?

In this article, we describe how Wendy explored these questions through her participation in a professional development program called the ACCELA Alliance (Access to Critical Content and English Language Acquisition). Among its many aims, ACCELA attempts to support educators in collaboratively analyzing the academic literacy practices of linguistically and culturally diverse students in the context of high-stakes school reform. We begin with descriptions of ACCELA and our use of Halliday's (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2004) theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Next, we provide data from a case study of changes in Julia's textual practices using a Hallidayan conceptual framework. Specifically, we describe how Wendy used the tools of SFL to teach Julia and her classmates to analyze and use academic language to challenge school policies regarding the elimination of recess. We conclude with a discussion of the questions our use of SFL raises for teachers' professional development.

Our Collaboration

At the time Wendy conducted this case study, she was a participant in the ACCELA Alliance. ACCELA is a federally funded professional development partnership between a state university and two urban school districts. Designed by University of Massachusetts faculty members, this partnership was established in 2002 to support teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and researchers in understanding and responding to the combined influences of *No Child Left Behind* legislation, statewide curriculum frameworks, high-stakes tests, the passage of an English-only referendum, and the adoption of mandated approaches to literacy instruction. To date,

Everyday language	Academic language
Greater use of everyday vocabulary	Greater use of content-specific vocabulary
Greater regularity in the grammatical structure of sentences (e.g., subject-verb-object; "Grasshoppers can eat leaves.")	Greater use of a variety of grammatical structures to pack more information into sentences (e.g., adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, *that*-clauses, nominalizations; "A sudden decrease in the population of one type of organism in the food chain will affect all of the other organisms in the food chain.")
Use of the conjunction *and* to convey connections between clauses or sentences	Use of a greater variety of conjunctions (e.g., *however, furthermore, nevertheless*).
More interactive	Less interactive
Greater use of gestures and intonation to convey meaning	Less use of gestures and intonation to convey meaning
Less use of formatting conventions and graphics to construct meaning (e.g., headings, paragraphs, charts, images).	Greater use of formatting conventions and graphics to construct meaning (e.g., headings, paragraphs, charts, images).
Examples: telling a story, chatting online, writing a note to a friend	Examples: Giving a speech, writing an essay, describing a science experiment

Figure 2. *A continuum of some differences between everyday language and academic language (see Paltridge, 2001, and Schleppegrell, 2004, for a review).*

the Alliance has funded approximately 50 teachers, including Wendy, in working toward a master's degree in education and earning a state license in reading and/or teaching English language learners.

ACCELA differs from other school–university partnerships in a number of important ways. First, teachers complete their degrees by taking courses on-site. Second, these courses are organized in part around teachers' emerging research questions. Third, teachers are supported in conducting inquiry projects by faculty and doctoral students, who assist them in developing questions to fit local issues, collecting and analyzing data, interviewing students and families, and creating action plans for future work in their schools. Last, participants regularly present their data to their colleagues, principals, and district administrators as a way of collectively reflecting on the implications of their work for teaching, learning, and policy making across institutional contexts.

The ACCELA courses, which focus on understanding second language literacy practices from a sociocultural perspective, brought together the three authors of this article. Meg Gebhard, the first author, is also a researcher of second language literacy practices and issues of school reform. She taught these courses and supported Wendy and her colleagues in reading research, reflecting on curriculum and instruction, and conducting case studies of their ELLs' uses of texts in school. Ruth Harman, second author, is a project assistant with expertise in functional linguistics and critical literacy. She co-taught courses in the areas of SFL and Critical Multicultural Children's Literature. Through this work, Ruth assisted ACCELA teachers, including Wendy Seger, the third author, in analyzing their students' texts using the tools of SFL. At the time Wendy enrolled in ACCELA, she was an experienced elementary school teacher who had worked in a number of urban contexts, but had never worked extensively with an ELL population. In addition to earning a master's degree and a state license, her interest in ACCELA centered on connecting her knowledge of curriculum and instruction with a deeper understanding of second language literacy development.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Our approach to analyzing the academic literacy practices of ELLs draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the work of educational linguists who have explored the potential of SFL to support teachers and linguistically diverse students as they negotiate the language demands of schooling (Christie & Martin, 1997; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Gibbons, 2002; Halliday & Matthiesen, 2004; Hammond & Macken-Horarick, 1999; Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Kress, 1999; Luke, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Rothery, 1996; Schleppegrell, 2004; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002). Despite important differences among researchers using Halliday's theories, all share a social perspective of grammar and language learning. Namely, from an SFL perspective, grammar is not understood as a set of decontextualized rules teachers should drill and practice as a way of teaching students to use language "correctly" or "properly." Nor do SFL scholars view students' ability to learn academic discourses as an innate capacity that will develop naturally in due course through exposure and interaction with academic texts (e.g., Krashen; see Schleppegrell, 2004, for a critique). Rather, SFL scholars view grammar as a dynamic system of linguistic choices that students learn to use to accomplish a wide variety of social, academic, and political goals in and out of school (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). From an SFL perspective, the job of the teacher is to heighten students' awareness of the importance of linguistic variation and broaden students' ability to use language more expertly across a variety of social and academic contexts (Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007). For instance, teachers can help students make more expert linguistic choices that are sensitive to their immediate context by exploring the way language functions to enact relationships among participants, convey meaning or ideas, and reflect the medium or mode of communication. These three functions, which Halliday calls interpersonal, ideational, and textual, operate simultaneously and offer a basis for analyzing how texts vary in relation to who is communicating with whom (e.g., student to teacher), what they are communicating about (e.g., ecological relationships in science), and the modes through which they are interacting (e.g., paper-and-pencil testing situation, see Figure 1).

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A second important difference between a traditional versus SFL approach to understanding grammar is that SFL focuses on the range of

linguistic choices available to students from different cultural backgrounds in performing various kinds of school-based tasks, such as narrating events, providing definitions, writing descriptions, or describing a process (see Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Martin, 1989; Schleppegrell, 2004). In this respect, linguistic choices operate at the word, sentence, and discourse levels and reflect the degree to which students have been socialized into and wish to align themselves with valued ways of knowing and being in school. As many studies have shown, schooled ways of using language, knowing, and being differ from everyday practices in significant ways (Cazden, 1988; Christie, 2002; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981).

For children learning English and speakers of non-dominant varieties of English, these differences are even greater and take on even more significance as students are required to read and write about unfamiliar topics using technical language and drawing upon meaning-making resources that differ from the language practices used at home or valued by their peers (Dyson, 1993; Ibrahim, 1999; Olsen, 1997). As such, one of the goals of SFL research has been to make visible the workings of school language and to support teachers and students in becoming critically aware of the differences between everyday and disciplinary language practices or "registers" (Martin, 1992; Schleppegrell, 2004; Figure 2). For example, the sentence in Figure 1, "A sudden decrease in the population of one type of organism in the food chain will affect all of the other organisms in the food chain," differs from everyday language in a number of ways that pose problems for language learners. Specifically, a language learner, drawing on their knowledge of everyday uses of English, most likely is going to have trouble figuring out what the subject of this sentence is (and therefore answering the test question) because it does not follow a typical subject-verb-object pattern. For example, the subject is not "a sudden," " a sudden decrease," or even "a sudden decrease in the population," but rather the complex noun phrase "a sudden decrease in the population of one type of organism in the food chain." The complexity of this clause illustrates how academic language is often lexically and syntactically denser than everyday talk. Specifically, there are more nouns than verbs (six to one), and actions normally conveyed by verbs are realized as complex noun phrases (e.g., the nominalization of the verb phrase "to decrease suddenly" into the noun phrase "the sudden decrease").

Moreover, part of learning to read and write this kind of language means developing disciplinary-specific conceptual understandings of events that may differ from how we might understand and present events in everyday practices (Lee, 1996; Lemke, 1990; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002). For example, in learning to participate in science, students need to develop specialized vocabularies that allow them to create taxonomies that differ from everyday classification systems (Lemke, 1990). Students also need to learn new, disciplinary-specific ways of recognizing and establishing relationships between ideas. For example, in addition to conjunctions such as "and," which are typical of everyday talk, students need to use a broader and more specific range of "connective" words that function to establish temporal, causal, and comparative relationships within texts (e.g., first, second, next, therefore, as a result, in contrast). Last, in a discipline such as science, students often need to learn how to present their ideas in a more impersonal, detached, and authoritative manner that differs from a presentation of self in other contexts.

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In sum, SFL-based scholarship offers a highly social and dynamic understanding of grammar and academic literacy development. Applied to teaching and learning in the context of current school reforms in the United States, this perspective centers on teachers critically supporting linguistically and culturally diverse students in analyzing and learning to use academic language to accomplish meaningful social, academic, and political work. The goal of SFL, therefore, is not to canonize academic language practices or try to replace valuable home and peer ways of using language. Rather, SFL scholarship works to acknowledge and value the multiple social and linguistic worlds to which students already belong and to support them in participating and creating possible future worlds by expanding the meaning-making resources available to them (e.g., New London Group, 1996). In what follows, we describe how we used this conceptual understanding of grammar and language teaching in designing and researching a curricular unit of study for Wendy's fifth-grade students. The purpose of

this unit was to teach students how to analyze the genre of argumentation as a way of contesting school policies and as a way of supporting her linguistically and culturally diverse students in learning how to use academic language.

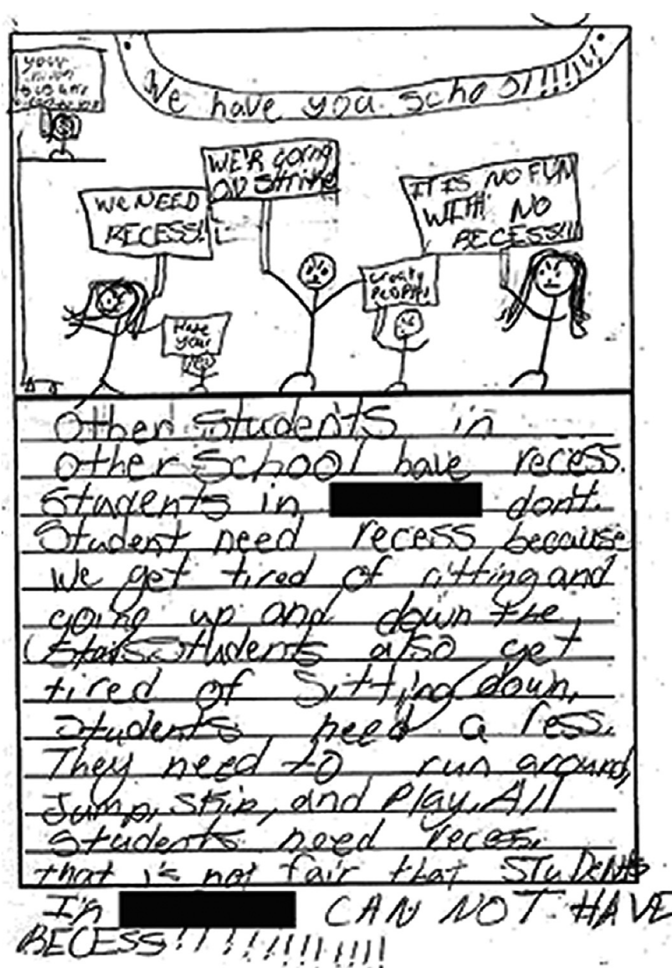
Wendy's Case Study

Wendy's concern about how testing was replacing teaching was exacerbated by the school's elimination of recess to make more time available for test-preparation activities. In response, Wendy decided to apply an SFL approach to her language arts block as a way of both unpacking academic language and giving her students a voice in this new school policy. To this end, Wendy designed a unit of study to teach her students how to analyze and use academic language to get their recess back through a letter-writing campaign to the principal. To reflect on the effectiveness of this approach for newcomers to academic English, Wendy focused her data collection and analysis activities on Julia, the bilingual student whose work is shown in Figure 1. At the time, Julia was a highly motivated 11-year-old Latina who got along well with peers and teachers. As a new arrival from Puerto Rico, Julia received K–3 instruction mostly in Spanish and tested as a fluent, grade-level reader in her first language. After the passage of the anti-bilingual education initiative in Massachusetts, which eliminated public support for bilingual education and limited ESL support to just one year, Julia was "mainstreamed" in fourth grade and received no additional language support from bilingual and ESL specialists. This lack of support, however, left Julia unprepared for the language/content demands of high-stakes testing, as her response in Figure 1 illustrates.

Making Room for Student Voices

By early spring, when the weather got warmer, Wendy's students began to complain bitterly about how unfair it was that they didn't have afternoon recess and how much they disliked practicing for the state exams. To add to their frustration, the students had no regular physical education program because the school's gym had been damaged in a fire. While the gym was being repaired, students often were asked to run up and down a narrow stairwell or play ball in cramped hallways. As a way of seeing if students were interested in pursuing the topic of recess and the need for more physical activity in a substantive way, Wendy asked them to document their thoughts through writings and pictures, and they set to work immediately. They used illustrations, bold letters, and print to show how strongly they felt about the issue. In the context of this free-writing activity, as illustrated in Figure 3, Julia wrote, ". . . we get tired of going up and down the stairs," students need "to run around, skip, and play," and it "is not fair that students in [Fuentes] CAN NOT HAVE RECESS!!!!!!!!!"

In comparing this text with her almost indecipherable response on the Science practice exam, Wendy noted that Julia's multimodal free-write



Julia's use of language in "free writing"

Ideational: Choice of nouns and verbs (e.g., *students, recess, need, have, get*)

Interpersonal: Use of angry faces in her drawings; use of strong claims convey a position of strength and stance toward the topic (e.g., *We have you school*)

Textual: Images accompany print to convey meaning; use of "and," capital letters, and exclamations convey an oral quality and tone of anger; repetition of same nouns and verbs

Figure 3. *Julia's free-write*

was very effective in its use of everyday language and in communicating how she felt to her peers and teacher. Wendy also saw that Julia was positioning herself as a vocal member in the classroom through these textual choices. For example, Julia used the repetition of certain nouns and pronouns, exclamation marks, and the drawings of the angry strikers to convey her feelings about the topic and the administration ("We have you school!" "You are mean!"). The challenge for Wendy was to provide Julia and her classmates with the kind of instruction that would allow them to convey these ideas and strong feelings in academic language that might appeal to an audience who had the authority to address the elimination of recess in the school.

After sharing their free-writes with one another, Wendy and her students brainstormed ways of taking action. They discussed a number of possible measures and voted on each idea (e.g., writing a letter to the President of the United States, organizing a protest). After voting on each idea, they decided to engage in a letter-writing campaign to the school principal. Wendy promised she would be their advocate in this process, but they would have to take on the task of learning new ways of using language seriously, if they wanted to be effective.

Identifying and Analyzing High-stakes Genres

Wendy felt that teaching her students how to present a persuasive argument in writing would serve two purposes: it would make space for their voices regarding the recess policy and it would teach them the difference between everyday language and the kind of academic language they encounter on high-stakes tests. She based this conclusion on work she conducted with her ACCELA colleagues that centered on analyzing the differences between everyday language practices and written, disciplinary ones. In analyzing the genre of argumentation, Wendy consulted state curriculum frameworks, curricular resources in her school (First Steps, 1999), and texts made available through ACCELA course work (Dyson, 1993; Kamberelis, 1999; Kern, 2000; Schleppegrell, 2004). Based on this research, she made a graphic organizer reflective of what she believed to be the salient elements of a persuasive essay (e.g., stating a thesis, providing supporting arguments, providing counter-arguments, and reevaluating/restating the main thesis). Next, she analyzed the lexical and syntactic patterns she wanted students to recognize and use in their own writing. For example, she wanted students to notice that in making an argument in an academic text, authors often acknowledge multiple points of view and then take a stance. In making these points, authors tend to use conciliatory types of modal verbs (e.g., it *may* be, it *could* be). In addition, she noted that more "academic-sounding" texts tend to replace the conjunction "and" with a variety of "connector" words and phrases to signal causal or contrastive relationships within a text (e.g., *therefore, however, although, whereas, as a result*). Last, given that students would also be using a letter to make their arguments, Wendy knew she needed to draw their attention to textual conventions associated with formal letter writing (e.g., layout, addressing, closing).

Wendy also saw that Julia was positioning herself as a vocal member in the classroom through these textual choices.

Modeling, Explicit Instruction, Collaboration, and Feedback

Wendy developed a series of mini-lessons that showed students how words, sentence patterns, and organizational structures function in academic writing. For example, she engaged students in a collaborative letter-writing exercise in which she and her students explored how they might write a letter to a hypothetical restaurant owner, urging him or her to ban smoking. In this mini-lesson, she and the students highlighted (literally) the organizational structure of a sample letter, its use of specific "connector" words (e.g., *therefore, although*), and its use of specific types of sentence structures (e.g., if/then syntactic structures). Wendy also discussed how the linguistic choices they might make in drafting such a letter are based on their understanding of their audience (e.g., an adult business owner they didn't know) and the purpose of their letter (e.g., persuading a restaurant owner that banning smoking would be good for business). By drawing explicit attention to the textual features of more formal, academic writing, Wendy hoped to expand her students' awareness of the linguistic choices available to them and to make them conscious of the connection between linguistic choices and social functions.

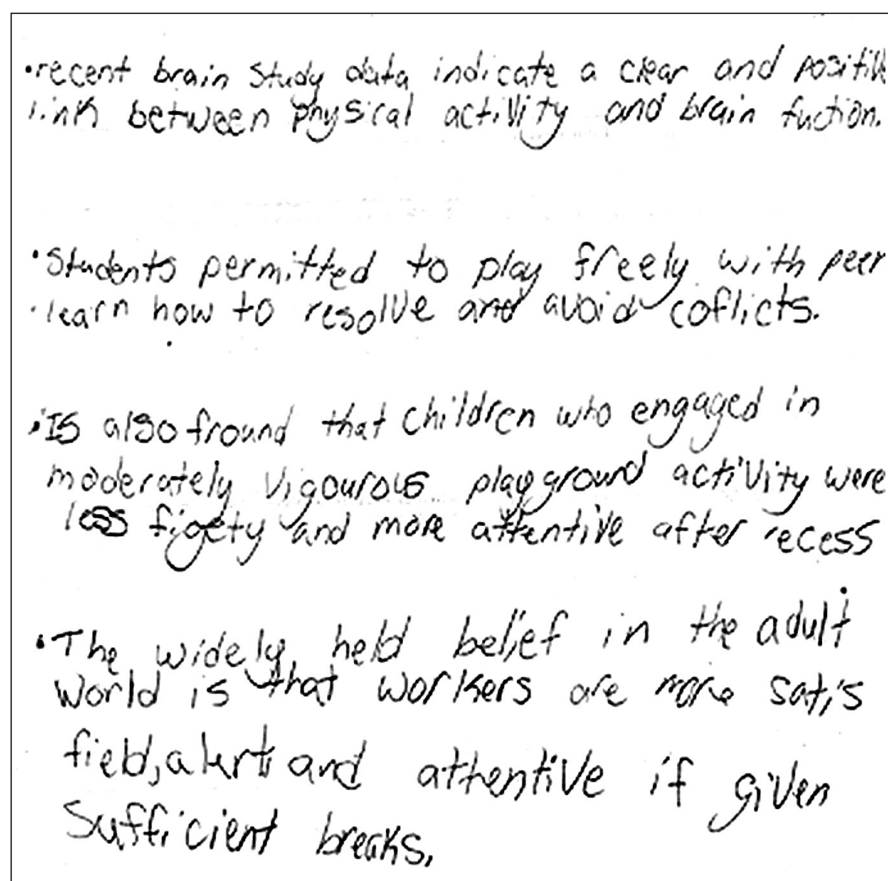
To support students in using insights from this discussion, Wendy asked them to return to their

thesis regarding recess and to brainstorm their reasons for maintaining this position. For this assignment, Julia's thesis stated, "Students learn better when they have a break outside." As evidence, she stated: "When we had recess earlier in the spring, we only went out for 10 minutes and then we went right to work inside." In analyzing Julia's written notes, Wendy could see that she was already beginning to use more variety in her sentence structure than in her free-write (e.g., use of temporal clause and adverb "When we had . . . then we went").

To provide Julia and her classmates with more examples of how expert writers linguistically convey their arguments about the topic of recess, Wendy provided her students with a research article from *Educational Forum* (Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay, 2001). This article, "The Fourth R: Recess and Its Link to Learning," uses the genre of literature review to make a case for the importance of recess in elementary school. Before giving her students the article, Wendy and her teenage daughter had already highlighted certain passages to help students identify key ideas/lexical items/syntactical structures they might want to use in their own letters. With a partner, the students discussed evidence that matched their own arguments and jotted down what they found most compelling. Julia, for example, substantiated her claim that "Students need a break in order to learn" by copying key points from the article (Figure 4).

Julia's Texts

After attending to the specific linguistic choices she wanted students to notice and use in reading and analyzing a published text on the topic of recess, Wendy told them to use their notes and the text models posted on the classroom wall to write the first draft of their own letters. In her first draft, Julia used some of the formatting conventions of a business letter exhibited in these models (e.g., addressee, double space between paragraphs, signature). She also chose to use certain grammatical phrases from Wendy's mini-lessons to establish common ground with her audience in making her request (e.g., "I know you think" and "We know you will be concerned"). In setting up her



•recent brain Study data indicate a clear and positive link between physical activity and brain fuction.

•Students permitted to play freely with peer
•learn how to resolve and avoid coflicts.

•Is also fround that children who engaged in moderately vigourous playground activity were less figety and more attentive after recess

•The widely held belief in the adult world is that workers are more satis fied, alert and attentive if given sufficient breaks,

Complex noun phrases used in scientific discourse (e.g., *Recent brain study data . . .*)

Information packed into single clauses (e.g., nominalization: *many adults believe* versus *the widely held belief . . .*

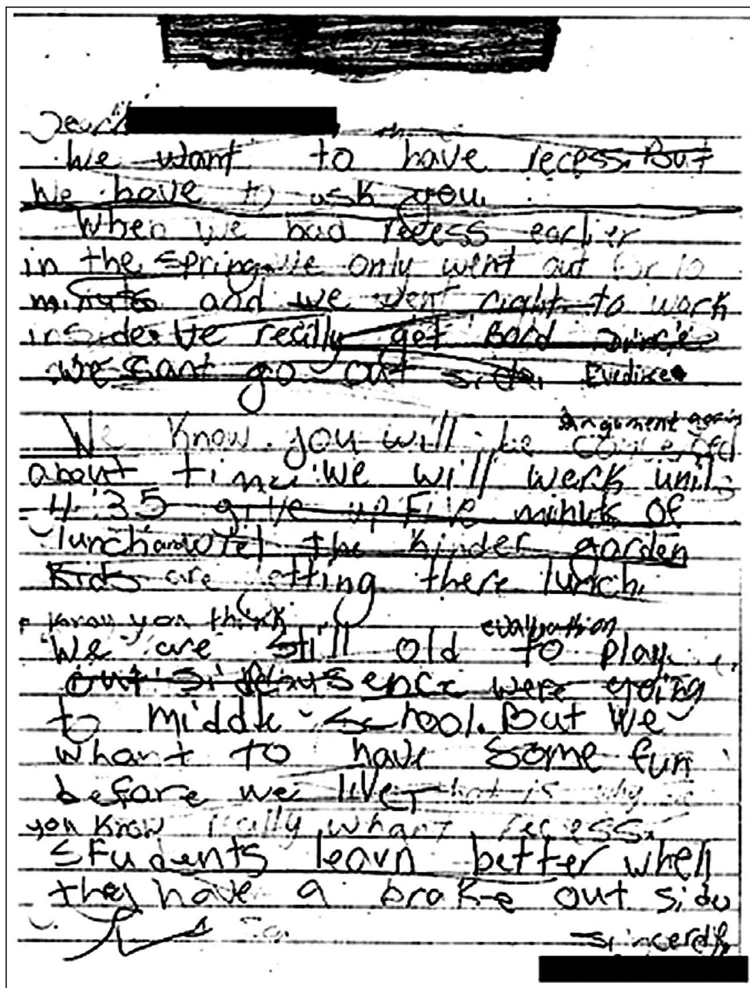
Condensed subordinate clauses (e.g., *if given sufficient breaks*)

Figure 4. *Julia's notes taken from Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay (2001)*

argument, however, Julia decided not to use any of the points from the research article directly, but instead finished her letter by maintaining her own strong position and words, "Students learn better when they have a break outside" (see Figure 5).

To support students in further developing, revising, and editing their texts, Wendy next scheduled individual conferences with students. In working with Julia, Wendy read the letter aloud and asked her what sounded like "it was working." In the context of this conference, they talked about the interpersonal relationship Julia was establishing with the principal through the letter and whether she wanted to modify some of her statements. For example, in her first draft, Julia wrote, "We want to have recess. But we have to ask you." By combining these two sentences and changing two words, she was able to establish a different tone that acknowledged the principal's position of authority: "We want to have recess but we need to ask you first." Julia and Wendy also discussed how she could build her argument more coherently for this more formal context by using more conditional and temporal connectors: "*If* you want us to learn better, then give us a break," and "We will finish our work *while* the kindergarteners are getting lunch." In a second conference with Wendy, Julia also worked on spelling and punctuation. With Wendy's help, Julia corrected certain Spanish-to-English spelling mistakes before she produced her final copy (e.g., *we whant, we whent, sence, brake*).

In Julia's final copy (Figure 6), the structure of her letter reflects the linguistic features Wendy explicitly taught: it has an opening statement, a thesis, arguments, evaluation, and a concluding request, but it also retains the strong message that Julia established in her first free-write. In very careful, neat handwriting, Julia uses a variety of sentence structures (adverbial, conditional, sim-


Dear
We want to have recess. But we have to ask you.
When we had recess earlier in the spring we only went out for 10 minutes and we went right to work inside. We really get bored since we cant go out side. Evidence
We know you will be concerned (argument against) about time. We will work until 4:35 give us five minuts of lunch and while the kinder garden kids are getting there lunch.
I know you think (evaluation) We are still old to play out side sence were going to middle school. But we whant to have some fun before we leve. That is why you know i really whant recess.
Students learn better when they have a brake out side.
Sincerely

Ideational:

Additional ideas conveyed by the use of more varied nouns and verbs

Interpersonal:

Explicit concession to an audience in a position of authority (e.g., *we know you will be concerned about time*); formal tone (e.g., *sincerely*)

Textual:

Use conventions of letter writing; use of a variety of connectors to convey ideas about time/condition and create coherence in the text (e.g., *since, when, until, but*); less repetition

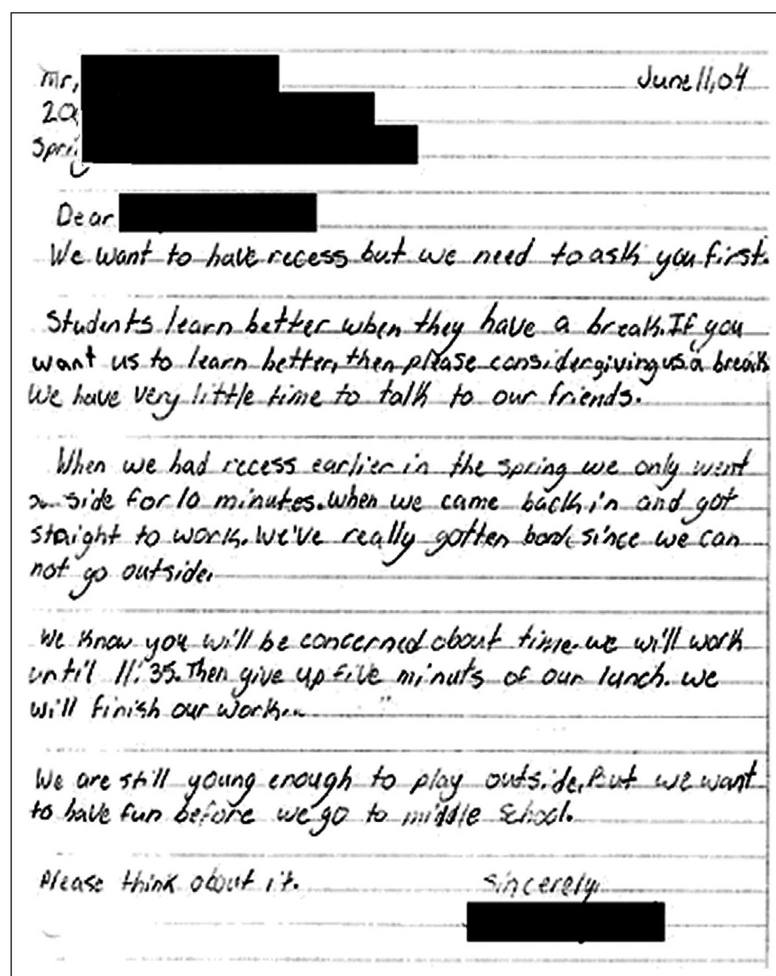
Figure 5. *Julia's first draft*

ple, and noun clauses) and ends with a very polite appeal to the principal, "Please think about it"—a forceful, yet civil way of demanding attention to the matter at hand.

Social Action

After collecting the students' final copies, Wendy walked, with some apprehension, to principal Loretto's office (a pseudonym). Although the students had stayed focused and had invested in the work, as promised, Wendy wasn't sure Mr. Loretto was going to grant their request. After he reviewed the letters, he and other administrators who happened to be in the room told Wendy how impressed they were. Specifically, they noticed how the students stated their points very clearly through their use of carefully developed arguments and counterarguments. Under time pressure, Mr. Loretto asked Wendy to draft his response to say that the students could have a ten-minute recess for the remainder of the year if they were prepared to find these minutes during other parts of the day (e.g., transitions between activities, lunch). On Monday morning, he personally delivered the letter to the students and complimented them on how articulate they were. When he left, Wendy described the atmosphere in the room as electric—the students realized that their hard work had paid off as they read Mr. Loretto's letter. Some students even commented on the textual features of his letter and compared it with the ones they had been taught to use. For example, they noted how his letter was formatted and how he incorporated some of their ideas in communicating with them (e.g., his reference to their willingness to give up some time at lunch and his use of business letter conventions, which matched the ones they had been taught to use).

In addition, social action did not end with Wendy's students simply getting their recess back. Rather, Wendy used her experiences from this project and her knowledge of SFL to continue to advocate for her students. Specifically, Wendy


Mr,
20
Spri
June 11, 04

Dear

We want to have recess but we need to ask you first.

Students learn better when they have a break. If you want us to learn better, then please consider giving us a break. We have very little time to talk to our friends.

When we had recess earlier in the spring we only went outside for 10 minutes. When we came back in and got staight to work. We've really gotten bad since we can not go outside.

We know you will be concerned about time we will work until 11:35. Then give up five minuts of our lunch. we will finish our work.

We are still young enough to play outside. But we want to have fun before we go to middle School.

Please think about it.

Sincerely,

Figure 6. *Julia's final copy*

Ideational: Use of a variety of generic and specific nouns (e.g., *recess, break, time, minutes, lunch, work*); use of a greater variety of verbal processes (e.g., *want, have, give, go, finish, ask, learn, consider, know, think*)

Interpersonal: Use of adverbs and modals (e.g., *please, will*)

Textual:

Use of formal business letter format; neat, careful print

collected and analyzed district writing prompts and students' writing samples using the tools of SFL. As a result of this analysis, she became convinced that writing prompts could be re-worded in ways that retained their disciplinary character, but were also fairer to newcomers to academic English. Namely, she noticed that some prompts contained phrases that created what she called "genre confusion" by signaling that students should use conflicting genre structures in producing their responses (e.g., prompts containing words that signaled students should simultaneously narrate an event and take a stance in making a persuasive argument). In the spring of 2005, after carefully reviewing how such prompts led to disjointed responses, Wendy presented her analysis to district-level administrators and faculty at an ACCELA-sponsored event. As a result of this presentation, district administrators decided to pay closer attention to the language of their assessments and asked Wendy to consult in this process.

Summary and Implications for Teachers' Work

In analyzing Julia's texts, from her free-write to her final letter, we see a movement away from a sophisticated cartoon-like register to a more academic use of language. In these later drafts, Julia uses organizational structures, syntactic patterns, and word choices to convey urgency in a more diplomatic, yet authoritative tone. In accounting for this shift, we have described how Wendy explicitly taught the genres of argumentation and business-letter writing and provided students with time and social supports for learning how to use these new language practices (see Figure 7). These social supports included paying close attention to students' concerns and making these concerns part of the official curriculum; creating a meaningful purpose and authentic audience for their reading and writing activities; strategically matching an analysis of various academic genres to their immediate purposes for using print; discussing the functions of students' linguistic choices and broadening the linguistic options available to them; and dedicating classroom time to drafting, revising, and editing. With these supports, Julia was able to hybridize the linguistic features of argumentation and business-letter writing to make an effective case to her principal. She constructed a logical and coherent argument using varied sentence structures, cohesive devises, paragraphing, and neat handwriting. And, she presented herself as an engaged, capable language learner, as opposed to a struggling student.

Although Julia's apprenticeship to the language of schooling was far from complete, we believe that Wendy's use of the tools of SFL offers a robust conception of grammar and academic literacy development that can support other teachers in negotiating the demands of school reforms in their work with language learners. Specifically, Wendy's library research into the linguistic fea-

- Attend closely to students' interests, concerns, and investments. Develop a purposeful project that makes students' interests part of the official curriculum.
- Identify an authentic audience with whom students can communicate about this topic to accomplish a purpose they find compelling.
- Identify an academic genre that is well suited to students achieving their purposes in writing about this topic for this audience.
- Analyze the salient linguistic features of this genre with attention to specialized vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, rhetorical conventions, and other genre-specific practices. Use school, district, community, and library resources to support this analysis (Gibbons, 2002; Kamberelis, 1999; Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Paltridge, 2001; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004). Given the current influences of mandated curricula and high-stakes testing practices, this kind of genre analysis can also support teachers in designing instruction that is both critical and responsive to student needs, while also meeting local and state standards.
- Design materials to support students in developing the ability to recognize and use genre-specific vocabulary, sentence structures, and rhetorical conventions (e.g., graphic organizers, guidelines for revision, assessment tools).
- Provide students with multiple models and explicit instruction in analyzing the linguistic features of this genre. Discussion of these models should be geared toward heightening and broadening students' linguistic awareness and control over targeted vocabulary, syntactic structures, rhetorical conventions, and other genre-specific practices.
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate with each other and teachers as they plan, draft, revise, and edit their texts. Collaboration and feedback should explore and weigh the merits of how linguistic choices support students in achieving their purposes in the context of writing about this topic for this audience.
- Track changes in students' use of targeted, genre-specific practices as a way of reflecting on and modifying instruction and assessing student linguistic and academic development.
- Reflect with students on the process of using academic language to attempt to enact social change.

Figure 7. *Planning curriculum using the tools of SFL to support the academic literacy of children learning English.*

tures of academic genres (e.g., review of curriculum guides, reading research) led her to a deeper conceptual understanding of the discipline of language arts and an ability to be more focused and strategic in designing instruction to support literacy development of *all* of her students, including those new to using academic English. In this respect, we see SFL as a powerful tool that can support teachers in developing their own understanding of the language/content demands associated with particular genres and passing that understanding along to students who are working at varying levels of linguistic development. As revealed by our analysis of changes in Julia's texts over the course of this curricular unit, this deeper, more fine-grained understanding of SFL and genre-based pedagogy enabled Wendy to reveal the "hidden" workings of the academic practice of argumentation by explicitly teaching the language used in this practice (Christie, 1985; Schleppegrell, 2004). Wendy's approach highlights the belief that the "language of schooling" will not develop without explicit instruction (Schleppegrell, 2004). Language learners, and indeed all students who speak nonstandard varieties of English, need explicit instruction because they often lack access to these practices at home and/or attend schools that have historically denied them access to academic discourses through tracking mechanisms and other forms of marginalization (see Harklau, 1994; Gebhard, 2002).

In discussing the limits of our use of SFL, a review of the data suggests a number of important issues. First, even though Julia was still in the process of learning how to use academic English, she was proficient enough to participate in instruction delivered entirely in her second language. We can only speculate, but had she been less proficient in English, her participation in these instructional activities may have been very different. In addition, from an SFL perspective, we are aware that one of the most important meaning-making resources Julia had at her disposal for doing academic work was her first language. This resource is one that needs to be recognized and supported in schools because all students, not just ELLs, will be called on to participate in the social, political, and economic demands of a rapidly changing and increasingly globalized world. At the very least, they need assistance in learning to read and write in more than one language (New London Group, 1996).

Second, we cannot be sure that Wendy is representative of all ACCELA teachers. Specifically, despite the often crushing demands of juggling teaching all day, caring for her family, attending classes, reading research, and collecting and analyzing data, Wendy was still interested in analyzing the "nitty gritty" of academic language. In our research meetings, she talked about how exciting it was to analyze the workings of academic texts—almost like cracking some secret code for "doing school" she didn't know existed, but could now share with her students. In addition, administrators at Fuentes gave her considerable leeway in modifying mandated approaches to curriculum—an advantage that may not exist in other schools. This is not to say other ACCELA teachers did not engage in powerful research or that they rejected an SFL-based approach to professional development (e.g., see Harman, 2007; Willett, Harman, Lozano, Hogan, & Rubeck, 2007; Gebhard, Habana Hafner, & Wright, 2004). On the contrary, most ACCELA teachers were truly eager to try their hand at designing curricular interventions using the tools of SFL to support their students in appropriating disciplinary language practices and deploying them to accomplish meaningful social, academic, and political work. However, many teachers, especially novice ones, reported that doing so would cost them their jobs given that their school's funding (e.g., Reading First funds) hinged on their faithful adherence to particular teaching scripts. In these instances, teachers often adopted a more behavioral (as opposed to social) conception of grammar and language teaching, a stance dictated by the mandated drill-and-practice approach that values producing standardized text-types over learning new language practices to achieve authentic purposes.

This difference in how teachers used the tools of SFL and genre-based pedagogy in their classrooms indicates to us that any attempt to support teachers in using a more critical conception of SFL must involve teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and researchers working collaboratively. This process needs to involve sustained analysis of changes in students' abilities to interpret and produce academic texts as a way of facilitating true reflection, innovation, and organizational learning within the school system as a whole. The ACCELA Alliance was founded with this goal in mind and continues to work to support educators at all levels—teachers like Wendy and her colleagues, principals, district administrators, teacher educators, and researchers—in enacting changes that have purchase for historically marginalized learners.

Authors' Note: Faculty from the University of Massachusetts who have been involved in designing and implementing the ACCELA Alliance include Theresa Austin, Francis Bangou, Costanza Eggers-Pierola, Meg Gebhard, Sonia Nieto, Pat Paugh, Fatima Pirbhai-Illich, and Jerri Willett.

In our analysis of this student's texts, we have selected only some aspects of Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. See Halliday & Matthiesen (2004) for a comprehensive explanation of all three.

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