Effective Instruction for Multilingual Learners: What Can We Learn from Inspirational Practice?

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The University of Toronto

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Overview

- **Goal of presentation**
  What can teachers, school leaders, and policy-makers do to enable multilingual students to succeed academically?

- **Segment 1:** Where I’m coming from

- **Segment 2:** Examples of inspirational practice – Teachers as knowledge-generators

- **Segment 3:** How does this inspirational practice connect with the broader research evidence (the knowledge base) about multilingual students’ educational development?

- **Segment 4:** Identifying causes of underachievement and effective instructional responses to underachievement –
  *Effective instruction is much more than just better language teaching.*
Segment 1: Where I'm Coming From

- Introduction to the politics and pedagogy surrounding language growing up in Ireland 1950s/1960s;

- Fluid disciplinary orientation - draw from Psychology, Applied Linguistics, Education, and Sociology;

- Starting point for inquiry is observing/documenting what is happening in the interactions between students and educators in schools;

- Strong commitment to collaborative work with educators - teachers as the primary knowledge-generators;

- I see research, theory, and instructional practice as in constant dialogue with each other - evidence-based educational policy needs to focus on all three components if it is to be successful.
Students digitally recorded the narrative to accompany the hardcover book in multiple languages (English, Czech, and Romani audio-recorded versions of the book can be accessed at https://digitalstorybooks.wikispaces.com/space/content).
Example 2. Primary School Students Create Dual Language Books
What Is Happening Instructionally in these Examples?
What’s Happening Instructionally in these Examples of Multilingual Pedagogy?

Teachers are:
- Connecting curriculum to students’ lives;
- Scaffolding access to the curriculum and comprehension of academic language;
- Expanding students’ knowledge of academic language;
- Promoting L2/English oral language use;
- Affirming student identities;
- Acknowledging students’ multilingual talents;
- Promoting parental involvement and pride in students’ accomplishments.
Segment 3

A Dialogue between Instructional Practice, Research, and Theory

- The nature of academic language development
- The importance of scaffolding strategies for all teachers
- The need to reinforce students’ knowledge of academic language across the curriculum
- The supportive role of students’ L1 (linguistic interdependence)
- The centrality of literacy engagement for academic success
The Nature of Language Proficiency

**Conversational Fluency**
- The ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations;
- Developed by the vast majority of native speakers by the time they enter school at age 5;
- Involves use of high frequency words and simple grammatical constructions;
- Students learning the school language typically require 1-2 years to attain reasonable fluency in everyday situations.

**Academic Language Proficiency**
- Includes knowledge of less frequent vocabulary as well as the ability to interpret and produce increasingly complex written language;
- Frequent use of passive voice and nominalization (e.g., acceleration) which are rarely used in conversation;
- Because academic language is found primarily in books and printed texts, extensive reading is crucial in enabling students to catch up;
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Studies Vocabulary</th>
<th>(Grade 5 Unit on the American Revolution)</th>
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<td>amend</td>
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<td>revolution</td>
<td>tyrants</td>
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Immigrant Academic Trajectories: 5-7 Years Typically Required to Catch-up to Native Speakers in the School Language:

Cummins (1981) Re-analysis of Toronto Board Data
Implications of Academic Language Catch-Up Trajectory

- Students are likely to require support to understand content long after they have become reasonably fluent in conversational L2;

- 'Mainstream' classroom teachers need to be familiar with scaffolding strategies that help make academic content comprehensible to students; it is unrealistic to expect L2 specialist teachers or study guidance teachers to provide this support over the long-term for students from diverse backgrounds;

- Teachers also need to know how to reinforce students' knowledge of academic language right across the curriculum (e.g., in teaching maths, science, etc.);

- Assessment in L2 must be carried out very cautiously - L2-only assessment will underestimate students' potential abilities and learning for at least 5 years after they start learning L2.
Scaffolding
Enables you to reach places that would otherwise be inaccessible
Scaffold Language

Scaffolding refers to the provision of instructional supports that enable learners to carry out tasks and perform academically at a higher level than they would be capable of without these supports.

- Graphic organizers
- Visuals in texts
- Demonstrations
- Hands-on experiences
- Collaborative group work
- Encouraging L1 use (e.g., writing) as a means of transferring knowledge and skills from L1 to L2
- Learning strategies (planning tasks, visualization, note taking/summarizing, questioning for clarification)
- Language clarification (explanation, dictionary use, etc.)
Consider the language teaching possibilities in the following mathematics word problem:

Is 3 + 8 greater than 10, equal to 10, or less than 10? Explain.

Students will learn not only the specific meanings of the terms greater than, equal to, and less than, but also synonyms for these terms (e.g., a synonym for great is big, and the meaning of greater than is similar to the meaning of bigger than).

This particular mathematics problem also gives the teacher an opportunity to teach students the general concept of comparatives and the typical conventions for forming comparatives (e.g., great, greater, greatest; big, bigger, biggest).

The fact that not all comparatives take exactly this form can also be taught in relation to less, lesser, least.

Finally, the meaning of the word “explain” can be taught (e.g., describe, tell about, tell why you think so) and related to its use in other subject areas (e.g., science).
Different languages don’t occupy separate spaces in our brains: There is overlap and interdependence among languages.
Two Languages Are Better than One

The positive effects of L1 development on L2 academic development has recently been demonstrated in a large-scale longitudinal study involving 202,931 students carried out in the **Los Angeles school district in California**.

These students entered Kindergarten (age 5) as English language learners between 2001 and 2010. Thompson (2015) examined the length of time these students required to develop sufficient English academic proficiency to be reclassified as no longer needing English language support services.

Students who entered kindergarten with high levels of **L1 academic language** proficiency were **12%** more likely to be reclassified as English proficient after 9 years than students who entered with low levels of L1 academic language proficiency.

Those who entered kindergarten with high levels of **English academic proficiency** were **13%** more likely to be reclassified than those with low levels of initial English proficiency.

Students who entered kindergarten with high levels of proficiency in both their **languages** (English and L1) were **24%** more likely to be reclassified than students who entered with low levels of academic L1 proficiency and low levels of academic English proficiency.
I think using your first language is so helpful because when you don’t understand something after you’ve just come here it is like beginning as a baby. You don’t know English and you need to learn it all from the beginning; but if you already have it in another language then it is easier, you can translate it, and you can do it in your language too, then it is easier to understand the second language.

The first time I couldn’t understand what she [Lisa] was saying except the word Hebrew, but I think it’s very smart that she said for us to do it in our language because we can’t just sit on our hands doing nothing.
About The Authors
We are three best friends. Our names are Madiha Bajwa, Kanta Khalid, and Sulmana Hanif. We are in grade 7 at Michael Cranny E.S. in Maple, Ontario. This story we wrote mostly describes how hard it was to leave our country and come to a new country.
Sonia’s dad for the first time had his own car. He drove the family to their new apartment. The apartment had an elevator and Sonia actually thought the elevator was her home. She also thought that when she would press each button, things would pop out. Then when the elevator opened, Sonia saw a lot of doors in front of her. She thought they were all rooms in her new apartment.
Kanta’s Perspective

- And how it helped me was when I came here in grade 4 the teachers didn’t know what I was capable of.

- I was given a pack of crayons and a colouring book and told to get on colouring with it. And after I felt so bad about that--I’m capable of doing much more than just that. I have my own inner skills to show the world than just coloring and I felt that those skills of mine are important also. So when we started writing the book [The New Country], I could actually show the world that I am something instead of just coloring.

- And that’s how it helped me and it made me so proud of myself that I am actually capable of doing something, and here today [at the Ontario TESL conference] I am actually doing something. I’m not just a colouring person—I can show you that I am something.
Chat About It

What Is Happening Instructionally in these Examples?
What Is Happening Instructionally in these Examples?

Teachers are:

- Actively engaging students in literacy and task-oriented oral language;

- Scaffolding instruction by engaging students' multilingual repertoires;

- Connecting curriculum to students' lives;

- Affirming students' identities by enabling them to showcase their imaginations and multilingual talents;

- Expanding students' knowledge of academic language through writing and enabling them to connect their knowledge in L1/L2 (teaching for transfer).
The Literacy Engagement Framework

Logic: If academic language is found primarily in printed text, then students who engage actively with printed text have far greater opportunity to learn academic language.

Literacy Achievement

Print Access/Literacy Engagement

Scaffold Meaning (input and output)

Connect to students' lives and extend intellectual and imaginative horizons

Affirm identity

Reinforce language across the curriculum

A multilingual instructional orientation (translanguaging) can be integrated into all of these components of the framework.
Reading Engagement in the OECD’s PISA Studies

- Data on the reading attainment of 15-year olds in 27 countries showed that “the level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages” (OECD, 2004, p. 8).

- Guthrie (2004) cites the PISA data as showing that students whose family background was characterized by low income and low education, but who were highly engaged readers, substantially outscored students who came from backgrounds with higher education and higher income, but who themselves were less engaged readers. Based on a massive sample, this finding suggests the stunning conclusion that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income. (p. 5)

- OECD (2010) – about one-third of the negative impact of SES is mediated through reading engagement (or lack thereof). In other words, schools can significantly reduce the negative effects of low-SES by strongly promoting literacy engagement.
Segment 4. How Can Schools Reverse Underachievement?

- Which groups of students underachieve?
- Why do they underachieve – what causal factors are operating?
- What high-impact evidence-based educational interventions are available?

There are 3 overlapping but conceptually distinct groups that tend to experience disproportionate underachievement:

(a) immigrant-background students who are learning the school language as L2,
(b) Low-SES students
(c) students from socially marginalized groups who have been subject to racism and various forms of exclusion from educational and social opportunity, often over generations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student background</th>
<th>Linguistically Diverse</th>
<th>Low-SES</th>
<th>Marginalized Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of potential disadvantage</td>
<td>- Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences;</td>
<td>- Inadequate healthcare and/or nutrition; - Housing segregation; - Lack of cultural and material resources in the home due to poverty; - Inadequate access to print in home and school;</td>
<td>- Societal discrimination; - Low teacher expectations; - Stereotype threat; - Identity devaluation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based instructional response</td>
<td>- Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum; - Engage students’ multilingual repertoires; - Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;</td>
<td>- Maximize print access and literacy engagement;</td>
<td>- Connect instruction to students’ lives; - Decolonize curriculum and instruction;</td>
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Linguistically Diverse Students

- **Source of potential disadvantage**
  Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences.

- **Evidence-based instructional responses**
  Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum;

  Engage students’ multilingual repertoires;

  Reinforce academic language across the curriculum.
### How Arabic and English are different?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) starts from left to right</td>
<td>Starts from right to left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Noun comes after adjective e.g. The green apple</td>
<td>Noun comes before adjective e.g. The apple green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) English we say “yes” To our parents we say <strong>جواب</strong> which is more respectful and serious. It means “I'm here” or “I'm ready,” but the meaning changes depending on country.</td>
<td>To our parents we say <strong>نعم</strong> which means “yes.” The word <strong>نام</strong> is used in the expression <strong>نام وداع</strong> meaning “goodbye” or “I'm going away.” It is also used in the expression <strong>نام يا يا</strong> meaning “get away from me.” Depending on the country, the word <strong>نام</strong> can be used to mean “speak,” “tell,” or “say.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Uses less words to describe something e.g. A short girl</td>
<td>Uses more words to describe details when we speak about something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) E is capitalized for English</td>
<td>You don't capitalize the first letter of the word in Arabic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our language group is Arabic.

Group members: Faisal, Wegdan, Osama M, Osama A
Students from Low-SES Backgrounds

- The OECD PISA research has consistently demonstrated that students from low-SES backgrounds perform at significantly lower academic levels than those from higher-SES backgrounds both with respect to the SES of individual students and the collective SES of students within particular schools.

- Sources of potential disadvantage
  - Multiple factors that will vary across contexts; for example, housing/school segregation; overcrowding; nutritional/medical issues; lack of access to books and other forms of print etc.

- Evidence-based instructional responses
  - Immerse low-SES students in a print-rich pre-school and school environment;

  Reinforce academic language across the curriculum.
Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment: Multilingual Books in the Library (Crescent Town School, Toronto)
Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

Linking Literacy Engagement with Identity Affirmation

Reading makes me powerful because I get smarter and I learn more facts. I learn new words and I will never forget.
Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

Linking Literacy Engagement with Identity Affirmation

Reading makes me powerful because I learn new words and I love reading!

By提高了
Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

Linking Literacy Engagement with Identity Affirmation

Reading makes me powerful because...

When I grow up I can find a better job than people who can't read. Somebody can also trick you to do something that will get you in trouble.

Reading gives you new words to learn. It gives my brain new ideas. It helps your vocabulary so when you need to write something you can use longer and harder words. In school you can get a better mark using more words.

By Tasneem
Students from Socially Marginalized Communities

- **Sources of potential disadvantage**
  
  Societal discrimination;
  Stereotype threat (students’ task performance deteriorates when negative stereotypes are communicated to them);
  Low teacher expectations;
  = Devaluation of identity reflecting societal power relations.

  **Gloria Ladson-Billings:**
  “The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society” (1995, p. 485).

- **Evidence-based instructional responses**
  
  --Connect instruction to students’ lives;
  --Decolonize curriculum and instruction;
  --Affirm students’ identities in association with literacy development;
  --Enable students to use language (L1/L2) in powerful (identity-affirming) ways;
Take away identity and what do you have?
If you have a student that doesn’t know who they are, do you think they care about what goes on in the classroom?

Cassandra Bice-Zaugg, Mississauga of the New Credit First Nations, Ontario
This experience gave me a gift of poetry. I started to develop a passion for poetry during this project. I didn’t know I had this passion. Since this project I have written and shared many pieces of poetry. …

Participating in this project was like hearing a collective voice telling me: ‘We are proud of you. We care about you. You have a future.’

Being able to express my thoughts about who I am as an Anishinaabekwe (an Ojibwe woman) made me feel like I belonged and was connected to a larger community. (Montero et al., 2013, p. 88)
Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

Validating Home Language and Culture
All our languages in our school
Grade 5
Data Management Unit:
Thornwood’s Diversity Project

Teacher: Tobin Zikmanis

School: Thornwood P.S.
Grade 5 - Languages Spoken

- English: 28.80%
- Urdu: 13.50%
- French: 8.40%
- Portuguese: 5.10%
- Spanish: 5.10%
- Hindi: 3.40%
- Bengali: 3.40%
- Cantonese: 3.40%
- Vietnamese: 3.40%
- Pashto: 3.40%
- Sinhalese: 5.10%
- Other: 3.40%
What Image of the Child Are We Sketching in Our Instruction?

Capable of becoming bilingual and biliterate?

Capable of higher-order thinking and intellectual accomplishments?

Capable of creative and imaginative thinking?

Capable of creating literature and art?

Capable of generating new knowledge?

Capable of thinking about and finding solutions to social issues?
Summary

- **Print access/literacy engagement** is the strongest instructional variable predicting literacy achievement - its effects are greater than the effects of SES;

- **Societal power relations (e.g., stereotypes) and their reflection in teacher-student identity negotiation** exert a major effect on the achievement of students from marginalized social groups; students who come from social groups whose identities (culture, language, religion, etc.) have been devalued and subordinated in the wider society experience disproportionate academic failure.

- Maximizing students’ literacy engagement and creating opportunities for students to use language (L1 and L2) in powerful (identity-affirming) ways are crucial components of effective instruction.

- This interpretation of the research relating to achievement gaps and how to bridge them is very different than the interpretations that have dominated recent educational policies in many countries.
Fundamental Principle

If you want students to emerge from schooling after 12 years as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented, then treat them as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented from the first day they arrive in school.

Rationale:

The interactions we orchestrate with students in our schools involve a process of *negotiating identities*. If students are given little opportunity to demonstrate their imagination and creativity in school, they will not come to see themselves as imaginative or creative.

If students’ bi/multilingual accomplishments are seldom acknowledged or fostered in the school, students will not see themselves as linguistically talented and will devalue their linguistic accomplishments.
Appendix 1

Research supporting the centrality of literacy engagement for literacy achievement
Research Supporting the Role of Literacy Engagement


Research Supporting the Role of Literacy Engagement


References and Resources
References and Resources

- http://www.multiliteracies.ca/index.php/folio/viewProject/8 (Multiliteracies project)
- http://www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/ (Dual Language Showcase)
- Roma Chumak-Horbatsch’s website focusing on home language maintenance http://www.ryerson.ca/mylanguage