ABSTRACT
        Guidelines are offered for teachers with pupils whose
native language is other than English. They are presented in the form
of eight principles and related classroom practices, derived from
current thinking and research on second language learning and
culturally sensitive instruction. The principles are: (1)
bilingualism is an asset and should be fostered; (2) there is an ebb
and flow to children's bilingualism, and it is rare for the languages
to be perfectly balanced; (3) there are different cultural patterns
in language use; (4) for some bilingual children, code-switching is a
normal language phenomenon; (5) children learn second languages in
many different ways; (6) language is used to communicate meaning; (7)
language flourishes best in a language-rich environment; and (8)
children should be encouraged to experiment with language. (Contains
15 references and lists of reports and videos available from the
National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second
Language Learning.) (MSE)

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FOSTERING SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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FOSTERING SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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Fostering Second Language Development in Young Children: Principles and Practices

Overview

More than one fifth of American school-age children come from families in which languages other than English are spoken (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Many children from such families are limited in their English proficiency. During the last decade, the number of school children with limited proficiency in English grew two and a half times faster than regular school enrollment (August & Hakuta, 1993). Given these changes in classroom demographics, it is imperative that all teachers have knowledge about second language development and instructional strategies for developing language proficiency.

This report sets down some guidelines for teaching these children. It summarizes principles and practices that can be derived from current thinking and research in the field of second language acquisition and culturally sensitive instruction.

INTRODUCTION

As increasing numbers of children with limited proficiency in English enter our nation's schools, all teachers need to face the challenge of educating these children. The challenge is a real one for many teachers who have had no training in how to foster second language development and know little about the process of second language learning.

This report summarizes principles and practices that can be derived from current thinking and research in the field of second language acquisition and culturally sensitive instruction. A fuller discussion of the research basis for these principles and practices can be found in McLaughlin (1984, 1985, in press).

Children come to second languages at different ages. The focus here is on young children, but the same principles apply to older children. Similarly, though the discussion here focuses on children with limited proficiency in English, these principles also apply to native-English-speaking children who are learning second languages in two-way bilingual or foreign language immersion programs.

Principle 1: Bilingualism is an asset and should be fostered.

The issue of language use for bilingual children has been debated for many years. There is no simple answer. In some cases, parents and members of the community feel strongly that children should speak only English in school. In other cases, there is strong sentiment for strengthening the home language, while at the same time teaching English. The decision as to how to introduce English to children who come to school with limited proficiency in English should be left to local discretion.

It seems clear, however, that even when children are instructed entirely in English, efforts need to be made to support their home language. After all, bilingualism is an asset, not a liability—an asset that needs to be protected. Aside from the cognitive and social advantages of knowing another language and culture, being bilingual has definite economic advantages and increases the individual's career opportunities (Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1992). Support for the home language can come from after school classes, Saturday classes, or from a strong commitment on the part of parents.

To allow the language of the home to be lost is to jeopardize the well-being of our children and, ultimately, the well-being of our society. It often happens that immigrant parents do not learn English very well. In such cases, children who do not develop and maintain proficiency in the home language run the risk of losing their ability to communicate well with parents and grandparents (Wong Fillmore, 1991). If, on the other hand, parents and educators foster bilingualism, they provide children with a resource that will be invaluable to them throughout their lives.

Principle 2: There is an ebb and flow to children's bilingualism; it is rare for both languages to be perfectly balanced.

One occasionally hears teachers say that they have bilingual children who do not know either of their languages very well. Sometimes bilingualism is blamed. Introducing a second language is thought to retard the child's normal language development. It is important to recognize, however, that it is rare for bilinguals to have both languages in balance (Favreau & Segalowitz, 1983). One language typically predominates in use and exposure. When this happens, elements of the other language can quickly be lost (Wong Fillmore, 1991). The child can forget vocabulary and even rules of grammar. Many children in our country lose much of their home language as they go through the American school system. Even when parents continue to use the home language with them, that language may not develop as well as the second language does. This is especially true if literacy skills—reading and writing— are not developed in the home language.

In the process of acquiring English, the child may appear to have limited proficiency in both languages. This is most likely a developmental phase during which lack of use of the home language results in a decline in proficiency, while at the same time knowledge of the second language is not yet at an age-appropriate level. In time, most children attain age-appropriate levels in the second language, though they may retain an accent and make grammatical mistakes that mark them as nonnative speakers.

It is important for teachers to realize that this is a temporary phase in language development. Even though a bilingual child's performance in either language may lag behind that of monolingual speakers of the language at some point in development, the child may actually possess a total vocabulary and language skills that are quite similar to those of monolingual speakers. What looks like deprivation in both languages should be more appropriately described as language imbalance, where at certain points in the development of their languages bilingual children do not perform as well as native speakers in either language. Eventually, most bilingual children are able to come up to age-level proficiency in their dominant language given enough exposure and opportunities for use of that language.

A language will be maintained only if there is exposure to speakers of that language and opportunities to use it. Children should be encouraged to speak their home language and opportunities for use should be sufficient to maintain that language. Teachers need to do everything they can to foster the child's language development in the home language. If the language is not used in the school, they should encourage parents to use the home language with their children, even in the face of resistance by the children. Especially when they are older, many students regret having lost proficiency in their home language. The cost for the family can be great if older children and adolescents cannot communicate well with their parents (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Principle 3: There are different cultural patterns in language use.

Our schools typically reflect and operate according to middle-class European-American cultural standards. Children from different cultural backgrounds can experience culture conflict in such classrooms, because their accustomed ways of learning and communicating may not match the routines of the classroom.

A child may be silent and not participate in classroom activities, not out of ignorance or a lack of understanding of what is requested, but because the culture from which the child comes does not support certain patterns of interaction. Studies with Native American children, for example, have shown that in some such cultures, children are not accustomed to speaking alone in front of other children and resisted the teacher's efforts to have them do so. Being asked to "take the floor" and to call attention to oneself in order to participate or show one's knowledge are regarded by these children as overly assertive and even arrogant forms of behavior (Philips, 1972).

Teachers need to be sensitive to these cultural differences in communication. They need to be aware that ways of expressing basic emotions—such as joy, excitement, frustration, and fear—differ widely from culture to culture. Some ways of talking can be misinterpreted by children from certain cultural backgrounds. For example, the teacher who says, "You should be proud of yourself," in an effort to boost a child's self-esteem, may find it to be ineffective. A more appropriate statement for many Latino and Asian children might be, "Your family will be proud of you."

Classroom communication patterns can be shifted to reflect the types of communication patterns that children are used to experiencing in their families. Teachers can vary the pacing of activities in a way that is culturally sens'..ve. They need to give some children more time to answer questions. Latino children have been found to respond well in classrooms characterized by a close and caring personalized relationship between teacher and student, by reminders to the children of norms of interpersonal respect, and by expressions of the teacher's knowledge of her students' family life (Cazden, Carrasco, Maldonado-Guzman, & Erickson, 1980). Cultural validation and the use of subtle communication patterns familiar to the children are much richer and more effective approaches to culturally sensitive instruction than is a focus limited to occasional celebrations of the history and traditions of different ethnic groups.

Principle 4: For some bilingual children, code-switching is a normal language phenomenon.

To many teachers it seems that bilingual children often confuse their two languages. The child's speech appears to be a hodgepodge of constructions and vocabulary items, some drawn from one language and some from the other. Consider these examples from the speech of Latino children:

> "I put the *tenedores* on the table."
> "I want a motorcycle *verde*."

The children seem to scatter Spanish words and phrases throughout their English speech—and vice versa.

Research indicates that when young bilingual children mix their languages, they tend to insert single items from one language into the other (McClure, 1977). Children over the age of nine and adults tend to switch languages for at least a phrase or a sentence, although they also switch single items within sentences. Younger children mix languages to resolve ambiguities and clarify statements, but older children and adults typically switch codes (or languages) to convey social meanings.

Studies of code-switching in adults show it to be a sophisticated, rule-governed communicative device used by skilled bilinguals to achieve a variety of communicative goals, such as conveying emphasis, role playing, or establishing cultural identity. Such code-switching is preferred to other rhetorical devices because it has meaning deriving from shared values and from the bilinguals' common problems relative to the society at large (Pease-Alvarez, 1993).

The use of Spanish expressions in English and English expressions in Spanish is a speech style common in many Mexican-American communities, especially in the Southwest. This is nothing new; the same thing occurs in other ethnic groups. American Jews use certain Yiddish expressions and Italian-Americans use certain Italian expressions to mark in-group identity.

Children in such communities are in the process of learning to switch language in the sophisticated manner they hear around them. Teachers who switch languages are merely adjusting their speech to the language of the child's community and culture. The goal must always be to communicate with the child. This is why it is a mistake, in such situations, for bilingual teachers to maintain a rigid rule of speaking only one language at a time or in certain circumstances. Teachers should aim at communicating, even if that means switching languages. Furthermore, code-switching is a sophisticated linguistic device that should not be devalued.

Principle 5: Children come to learn second languages in many different ways.

There are a number of different ways that a child becomes bilingual, the principal ones being the *simultaneous* acquisition of two languages and the *successive* acquisition of a second language. These two terms refer to the child's exposure to a second language. For some children, exposure begins at a very early age; for other children, exposure to a second language occurs later. A rule of a thumb is to say that exposure to two languages before the age of three leads to simultaneous language acquisition, in which the child can be said to be learning two languages at once. Because most aspects of a language are acquired by age three, the introduction of a new language after that age can be said to lead to successive acquisition of a second language.

Another important factor in becoming bilingual relates to the child's own motivation. Individual differences play a major role in second language acquisition. Some children are highly motivated to learn the second language and utilize all opportunities to use the language. Other children are more shy, more afraid to make mistakes, and are less likely to take risks in using a new language.

Putting these two factors together—the conditions of exposure to the two languages and the child's opportunities and tendencies to use the two languages—we arrive at the possibilities for bilingual experience shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
BILINGUAL EXPERIENCE

		Subsequent Experience	
		High Opportunity/ Motivation to Use Both Languages	Low Opportunity/ Motivation to Use One Language
Prior Experience	High Exposure to Both Languages	*Simultaneous Bilingualism (Type 1)*	*Receptive Bilingualism (Type 2)*
	Low Exposure to One Language	*Rapid Successive Bilingualism (Type 3)*	*Slow Successive Bilingualism (Type 4)*

This table risks simplifying what is in reality quite complex. These four types of bilingualism by no means exhaust the possibilities, though they represent some typical instances of child bilingualism.

Type 1, simultaneous bilingualism, represents the case of children who develop both languages equally or nearly equally as they are exposed to both and have good opportunities to use both. Many school children have already been exposed to two languages and use both at age-appropriate levels. For example, many children speak Spanish with their parents and older relatives, but English with their siblings and other children.

Type 2, receptive bilingualism, represents children who have had high exposure to a second language throughout their lives, but have had little opportunity to use the language. For example, many immigrant children from Asian countries hear English on television, in stores and so on, but use Chinese or another first language in everyday communication. When they enter school, these children are likely to make rapid progress in English because their comprehension skills have been developed.

Type 3, rapid successive bilingualism, and Type 4, slow successive bilingualism, represent children who are learning a second language sequentially, that is, after the first language is established. Type 3 children have had little exposure to English before entering school, but use English as much as they can and so are likely to be more rapid learners than Type 4 children. In the case of Type 4 children, there has been little prior exposure to English and they have few opportunities—or avail themselves of few opportunities—to use English.

Individual differences in the use children make of the opportunities to use a second language have been noted by many observers (McLaughlin, 1984). Some children not only use the language as much as possible, but get people around them to use English in ways that are most helpful to their learning. Other children tend not to use the language very much and as a result do not get as much help as they could. Teachers need to pay special attention to these children. The child's motivation to learn the second language is greatly dependent on the social context that the school provides.

Principle 6: Language is used to communicate meaning.

Nothing is quite as important in teaching children who have limited proficiency in English as being careful to assure that the child understands what is being said. Sometimes children give the appearance that they understand, when in fact they do not. Effective teachers constantly check for feedback from the child that indicates that he or she understands what is being said by the teacher or other children.

For children who are just beginning to learn English, certain strategies can be quite helpful in fostering language development. Wong Fillmore (1985) recommended the following:

- *Use demonstrations, modeling, role-playing.* Teachers can demonstrate for children with limited proficiency in English how one makes a polite request, expresses gratitude, apologizes to another person, and so forth. In this way, the child learns how to use the language for specific purposes. Role-playing can also help children learn how to use English in specific circumstances.

- *Present new information in the context of known information.* Children with limited proficiency in English should receive new information in a context that is familiar. This is one reason it is helpful to choose themes and materials for reading and other activities that are appropriate to the cultural background of the children. New vocabulary should not be presented in isolation, but in a context where the child can determine the meaning. It is especially important that language occurs in the context of the here and now.

- *Paraphrase often.* If the child is only capable of using a few words at a time, teachers should repeat what the child says with more elaboration. Rather than correcting the child's errors, the teacher should paraphrase what the child has said with the correct grammar. If a child says, "Not understand," the teacher might respond, "Oh, you don't understand, Thu. What is it you don't understand?" It also helps if the teacher varies the vocabulary somewhat. For example, if the child says, "That tree is big," the teacher might say, "Yes, that is an enormous pine tree, isn't it?"

- *Use simple structures, avoid complex structures.* In paraphrasing, the tendency is to make constructions more complex grammatically. When Luis says, "I don't have book," the teacher might say, "It would be nice if someone were to share their book with Luis." A better way of responding would be to say, "Luis needs to share a book." It is important to keep language a little beyond the child's own language, but not too far. As the child's language develops, teachers should gradually increase the complexity of their language. Stories read to young children beginning to learn English should also have simple constructions—again, a little beyond what the child is capable of, but not too far beyond their abilities to understand.

- *Repeat the same sentence patterns and routines.* With young children, songs and rhymes are useful in promoting language development because they repeat sentence patterns. Young children should be encouraged to share their favorite songs with the class. Teachers can help children understand if they repeat certain patterns and phrases, such as "Let's get our book out," so that children can attach meaning to actions.

- *Tailor questions for different levels of language competence and participation.* It helps if teachers use "yes/no" questions with beginning English learners, because these questions are easier than "what" questions, and "what" questions are easier than "where" or "when" questions. "How" and "why" questions are the most difficult for new speakers of the language. Teachers should also provide children with lots of feedback on their responses to questions so that they learn how to deal with questions appropriately.

Principle 7: Language flourishes best in a language-rich environment.

Teachers of children with limited proficiency in English need to create language-rich environments. Teachers need to be good models of the language the children are learning, by speaking clearly and coherently. They should expand and elaborate on the child's speech—not only when lan-

guage is being taught in language arts classes, but throughout the day in all subjects. Teachers of children with limited proficiency in English should explain vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the children and constantly try— throughout the day—to develop their vocabulary.

It is especially important to stimulate social interactions among children. Teachers should redirect children's requests to other children, providing a model if necessary. They should allow children to talk, so that they experiment with the language and increase their competence in using it. The classroom should provide many opportunities for language use and interaction. There should be rich and interesting activities worth talking about.

Some children of immigrant parents come from low-literacy backgrounds. Their parents may not read or write, and they may never have seen books before entering school. They are not aware of the basic rules governing literacy and have little appreciation of the characteristics of print and printed material. It is important, therefore, to provide a wealth of books and other printed materials in the classroom.

Because published materials are typically not directly related to the experiences the child has had or to their current daily lives, reading and writing may seem to be artificial and meaningless activities. It becomes important in such cases for teachers to develop child-generated texts that reflect the learners' own cultural experiences. Such materials are more meaningful to the child and make literacy a meaningful activity, rather than a tedious classroom chore. It is especially important that literacy materials be interesting and involve significant people in children's personal lives. Children will never learn the joy of reading and writing if these are meaningless and frustrating tasks.

Principle 8: Children should be encouraged to experiment with language.

As they learn their first language, children make many errors that generally go uncorrected. One of the most dramatic findings in studies of child first language acquisition is how similar this process is from child to child. For example, as they learn to form noun and verb endings, most children go through a stage in which they will say "foots" instead of "feet," "goed" instead of "went," and "mines" instead of "mine." These mistakes and others like them are part of normal language development and show that children are trying to figure out the patterns or rules that govern the language.

Teachers need to allow children learning a second language to go through a similar process. They will experiment and play with the language, making numerous mistakes along the way. Teachers need to recognize that this is part of an active and creative process. However, this does not mean that they should not correct the child's language. But they should correct as parents do, expanding and rephrasing what the child has said in more correct speech.

One of the hallmarks of child second language development is the use of formulas. Formulas are chunks or phrases that the child uses without

understanding how they function in the language. They are used in certain situations because children have heard other children using these phrases in these situations. Analyses indicated that children use these chunks of the language to enable them to continue to engage in activities that promote language learning (Hakuta, 1974; Wong Fillmore, 1976). Children make guesses as to the conditions under which particular expressions could appropriately be uttered and test their conclusions by using these formulas. They receive feedback from other children that tells them whether their guesses are right or wrong. Formulas provide the tool to learn more and more about the language.

This is another reason to be tolerant of children's mistakes. What looks like a mistake in the child's language can actually be a sign of progress. As children move from formulas to an increased understanding of the rules of the language, there is an apparent movement backwards, with increasing mistakes. This is a temporary process and will eventually lead to a rapid increase in proficiency.

CONCLUSION

More than one fifth of American school-age children come from families in which languages other than English are spoken (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Many children from such families are limited in their English proficiency. During the last decade, the number of school children with limited proficiency in English grew two and a half times faster than regular school enrollment (August & Hakuta, 1993). Given these changes in classroom demographics, it is imperative that all teachers have knowledge about second language development and instructional strategies for developing language proficiency.

This report sets down some guidelines for teaching these children. The focus is on language development rather than on general teaching strategies. However, the two are closely linked. The teacher of children with limited proficiency in English will inevitably need to modify her instructional style to meet the language needs of this population of students. This means keeping language in the forefront. Teachers need to assess constantly whether children with limited proficiency in English understand what is being said. Subject matter cannot be learned if the children do not understand the language in which it is taught.

Current reform efforts in American schools stress the need to hold all children to high standards. In many cases, however, children with limited proficiency in English are seen as needing remedial instruction and are not expected to do as well as other children. Certainly, adjustments need to be made in teaching these children, but expectations and standards should be the same as for other children. Keeping expectations and standards high for *all* children is a major challenge for the future of American education.

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