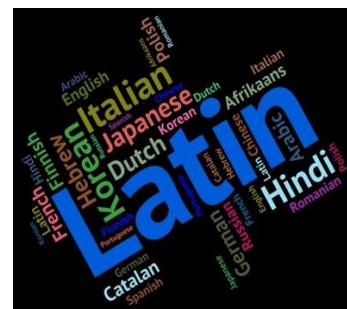


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Ángel A. Toledo-López and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera.

**Language immersion for adult learners: Bridging gaps from
childhood to college**

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English language learners (ELLs) come from different paths of life. Teachers must identify and satisfy the academic needs of a diversity of learners, among which ELLs play an important role. Using the proper teaching and assessment techniques and strategies is, thus, instrumental in providing ELLs with an environment that promotes learning of the content and facilitates the development of skills in all four language dimensions. Theory suggests that adult ELLs are more prone to learn, rather than acquire, language skills. Facilitators must plan and design effective curricula, assess student progress, and modify strategies to help adult learners successfully develop their language skills. This article analyzes the techniques that work –and those that do not– from the perspective of facilitators who implement the *Discipline Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®, the nation’s only dual language model designed for adult learners. In depth interviews were used to seek profound insight of the teaching strategies that have been more effective in teaching language and content to adult learners, and the academic setting that facilitates development and learning of language skills in all four domains.

Keywords: Adult education, Bilingual education, Dual language, Bilingualism

Introduction

Education is the process by which individuals acquire, develop and use knowledge. There are different steps to this process and techniques that facilitate knowledge acquisition. However, different student populations will respond to facilitation techniques in different ways. Facilitators must, thus, focus on planning and designing effective curricula, and constantly assessing student progress to modify their teaching strategies whenever necessary.

The complex processes that underlie successful education determine which strategies will most likely influence student learning and have a greater impact on their academic experience. Determining which strategies to use is not a simple task as it depends on the type of learners, their learning styles, and the language and content objectives that must be met. Choosing the appropriate strategies is particularly important when we work with Second Language Learners (SLL) who must develop language skills while they acquire knowledge about the content at hand. The obstacles that the lack of language proficiency may impose hamper their learning process. However, second language learners, whether they are children or adults, can and do learn.

The learning processes are undoubtedly different mainly due to experience and cognitive ability. Adults, generally, have more experiential knowledge that they can draw from to relate to the topic being discussed and to learn languages. Younger learners, on the other hand, are at a stage in which language acquisition can occur naturally and their use of the language resembles that of native speakers. Nonetheless, their life experiences and cognitive abilities are bounded by their age, and their capacity to learn language through content responds to their prior knowledge and their potential to process information in the language of instruction. Thus, it is likely for teaching strategies to have a differential impact on the learning process of children when compared to adults. Moreover, the process of language acquisition is expected to vary between the different age cohorts. This means that the teaching strategies that will work for learners at any given age group might not work for other students at a different age group, if we hold level of language proficiency constant. That is, emergent learners at an early stage of

their lives will respond to the same teaching strategies differently than emergent learners at a later stage of their lives.

This work analyzes the strategies and methodologies used to teach English language learners at different stages of their academic careers and lives, and identifies techniques that are better suited for an adult population. Research on teaching strategies to help adult learners acquire knowledge is vast, but little is known about their process of language acquisition under a dual language immersion model. These models have been implemented in the K-12 setting to develop language and cultural skills across the curriculum. However, the effectiveness of this model among an adult, college-level population has not been assessed or evaluated. A survey of the current literature related to the implementation of the dual language immersion models in a K-12 environment will give the reader a broad picture of the different ways in which this model is implemented and how it helps English language learners develop literacy skills while meeting standards of learning. This literature will serve as a framework for understanding the application of these models at different academic levels. The teaching methodologies and strategies are discussed and their application in the different grade-school stages is analyzed. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the effectiveness of the Nation's only college-level *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® provides an opportunity to evaluate how Hispanic adult learners can become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural while developing professional skills. The analysis is based on case studies of dual-language professionals who have actively implemented the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model* ® in college-level language and content courses.

Similarities and differences in the implementation of the Model in language courses when compared to content courses will be evaluated and explained.

Early childhood: The first step of language acquisition

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines early childhood “as the period from birth to eight years old” (UNESCO, 2014). During this period of growth, the body and mind of children undergo remarkable changes that lay the foundation for future development. One of the most important events in early childhood is the ability to establish communication through acquisition and learning. Communication in the form of language is “used for private speech and social mediation, both of which are tools that help children learn” (Berger, 2009, p. 256). During early childhood children are introduced to an academic environment where they are expected to participate and improve progressively. This is the best period for children to acquire and learn a language, hence, the best moment to enroll them in language immersion programs if the parents so desire.

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) explains best the linkage between age and the language acquisition phenomenon. Language control and fluency “take place within a specific time limit in order for the acquisition of any language to be natural and spontaneous as the language of native speakers” (Alghizzi, 2014, p.15). We can thus infer that the spontaneity, fluency, and naturalness with which individuals speak, write, listen, and read in a second language depends on the time in which they begin learning such language. If learning occurs during the critical period, it is very likely that the second language learner will communicate like a native speaker would. This is perhaps one of

the main reasons why elementary schools in the United States generally do not accept children into immersion programs after first or second grade, when their critical period has elapsed.

To develop students' language skills in different languages, two main types of immersion programs exist in elementary schools: Dual Language Immersion Programs (Two-way immersion) and Foreign Language Immersion Programs (One-way immersion). The Dual Language Immersion Program, also called bilingual immersion and/or two-way bilingual, contributes in the development of bilingual and biliterate students through a cross-cultural curriculum. It is known as a two-way bilingual program because the "student population consists of majority language speakers and minority language speakers with dominance in their first language and home language support for this language" (University of Minnesota, 2014). However, it is possible to find students whose native language is not English or the minority language but they can communicate to some extent in one of the two languages of the program. A 1:1 ideal ratio of students who speak English as a first language (L1) and students who speak the minority language as their L1 should be maintained, but a minimum of one third of all students must be native English speakers in order for the program to operate (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005, p. 150). The two-way immersion programs vary in the allocation of time given to each language. There are two basic adaptations under the two-way immersion: the 90-10 and the 50-50 models.

In the 90–10 model, "the language other than English is used 90% of the time in early grades, and a gradually increasing proportion of instruction is done in English until sixth grade, when both languages are used equally in instruction" (Gomez, Freeman, &

Freeman, 2005, p. 148). The 10% of this approach focuses on teaching initial English literacy to all students in primary grades, while the 90% focuses on using the other-than-English language to teach content areas. This model is most beneficial for the purpose of improving the literacy and development of students in the other-than-English language at an early stage. However, it fails to provide the necessary English skills to succeed in the standardized tests because the majority of content areas are taught in the other-than-English language and the students are expected to test the same information in English.

“In the 50–50 model, students learn in each language about half the time throughout the program. In many programs, all students learn to read in their primary language and then add the second language” (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005, p. 149). The instruction time in each language may be divided in different ways as far as it is equal, for example: half day in each language, alternate days, and even alternate weeks. Translation is not used when switching from one language to the other. Students are expected to learn and know the information in both languages in all classes. This last component makes the 50-50 approach a realistic model because the students are taught all classes in English 50% of the time. This enables them to learn the vocabulary and keywords needed to succeed in the standardized tests conducted in an English-only format.

The Foreign Language Immersion Programs, also known as one-way immersion programs, are models implemented in areas where the majority of the student population speaks other-than-the-target language. For example, in the United States a Foreign Language Immersion Program is implemented in counties where the majority of students are English speakers and they seek to become fully immersed in a foreign language.

Unlike the Two-Way Immersion Model, this program does not require a specific ratio of enrollment; the only requirement is that majority of students have limited to no proficiency in the target language. The students in this program are mainly exposed to the target culture and language in a classroom or school environment because it may not be strongly present within their community. There are two variations of this approach: the total immersion and partial immersion.

The total immersion program focuses on the teaching of a foreign language 100% of the time from kindergarten to 2nd grade and “instruction in English usually increases to 20%-50% in the upper elementary grades (3-6), depending on the program” (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007, p.1). In the partial immersion, the instruction is divided between English and the target language to approximately 50%. “Initial literacy instruction may be provided in either the target language or English or in both languages simultaneously” (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007, p.1). Students enrolled in this program are not required to have any prior knowledge of the target language, however, they are expected to gain fluency as they progress in grades. Foreign Language Immersion Programs may continue in middle and high school depending on availability and need across the county and state. Recent studies show the demand of immersion programs in 6th – 12th grade is surging, particularly in middle school (Smith & Staff, 2013). This trend reflects the current educational demands of preparing multicultural professionals who are ready for the global job market.

Regardless of the model, specific techniques and strategies must be implemented to facilitate the teaching process in these immersion programs. The goal is to promote language acquisition and development while students learn the course content. After all,

students must develop enough language skills to communicate in their personal and academic setting, but they must also achieve passing scores in state mandated content exams. The challenge of teaching language through content and of developing literacy skills among English language learners must be tackled head on with careful planning, varied strategies, and cultural and social awareness. All students must work in a comfortable environment that engages them in meaningful learning processes.

Some of the most effective techniques for helping English language learners acquire the language skills that they need include sheltered instruction, differentiated instruction, and thematic integration. These techniques assist in the development of language skills in all four dimensions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening while promoting knowledge acquisition in the various areas of content. The focus is on creating an unthreatening academic environment where English language learners can lower their affective filters (Cummins, 2000) and learn in meaningful ways. In this process, teachers, learners, school administrators, and parents must work harmoniously to create spaces for the acquisition and development of academic language skills that will help students succeed.

Sheltered instruction supplies the teaching practices and techniques that “provide second language learners with the same high-quality, academically challenging content that native English speakers receive” (Hansen-Thomas, 2008, p. 166). The focus of sheltered instruction is the development of academic language through content. It creates a learning environment in which students feel safe and where they can develop their language skills at a pace that suits their needs and learning styles. Moreover, it considers

differences among students to develop teaching strategies and activities that are tailored for each individual learner.

Second language learners must overcome the challenges of comprehending content in a language that they do not understand. This challenge can be overcome through instructional scaffolding in the form of explicit and interactive instruction. Scaffolding provides the support that students need to develop different skills in the classroom setting (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2011, p. 15-16). Explicit instruction requires clear explanations and modeling to illustrate what is expected from students. Teachers model the task at hand while providing opportunities for meaningful practice. Moreover, group work and cooperation is necessary to promote integration of knowledge, develop communication skills, and share diversity. It is through group work and collaboration that more proficient students assist our English language learners in using the language in positive ways and in performing within their zone of proximal development (Vigotsky, 1980). Through group work students engage in elaborated conversations that promote the use of key vocabulary, specific linguistic structures, and linguistic fluency (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2011, p. 16).

Teachers must create an environment that promotes and facilitates learning. Research suggests that “the child’s first experience with school, both positive and negative, has... a lasting effect” (Tissington & LaCour, 2010, p. 166). The life-long impact that academic experiences have on children merit careful attention. Lesson planning, choice of activities, and proper assessment are key in developing and maintaining an academic environment that fosters trust and promotes meaningful learning. Moreover, it is important for teachers to know who their students are beyond

mere name recognition. Teachers must identify their students' strengths and areas of opportunity to design activities and strategies that cater to their needs in equal ways. Learning is an individual process that takes place in a collective environment. Despite the significant challenges that teachers encounter in the classroom setting when dealing with many students with different learning needs and styles, identifying the individual characteristics of students is of paramount importance.

Differentiated instruction allows teachers the opportunity to evaluate students individually to identify their specific language and content needs. This, in turn, serves as a tool to develop course objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment techniques that meet each student's specific needs. Proper assessment sets the stage for learning in a differentiated environment where students feel included, considered, and important. After assessing students' strengths and needs, teachers must rely on differentiation to provide them what each need. This entails using varied teaching strategies that motivate and inspire the different learners; developing specific activities that are suitable for the learning styles and needs of each individual learner; and implementing different assessment and evaluation techniques that respond to the abilities of the different learners and allow for modification of teaching strategies and structures when necessary.

Specific differentiation strategies include but are not limited to splitting students into groups according to their language proficiency and working different activities with each group; teaching individual students specific tasks, lessons, or skills that will get them up to par with the rest of the class; or allowing for different forms of expression – speaking, writing, drawing, acting, among others – that let students complete their assignments satisfactorily and with the same level of rigor; and providing for different

forms of evaluation that capture the varying learning styles (Levy, 2008). This includes tests, essays, journals, videos, hands-on activities, songs, and other forms of expression that allow teachers to evaluate learning and language acquisition, and redesign the class if necessary. Differentiated instruction requires thoughtful planning, sensibility to students' needs, and much creativity.

Thematic integration is another teaching tool that facilitates language learning through repetition within the content and context of the different classes (Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, & Peters, 1993; Alberta Education, 2007). Thematic integration requires the joint effort of several content teachers who will plan their lessons around specific topics and concepts that run the gamut of the different subjects. This teaching strategy can focus on key vocabulary concepts, specific topics, or the acquisition of certain language structures or responses that will facilitate communication in the different language domains. This is done across the curriculum and emphasized in each course throughout the day. For example, teachers have chosen to create awareness about global warming. They want to teach students different concepts such as climate, weather, environment, and global warming. Through thoughtful and careful planning, the group of teachers can design lesson plans that will integrate both the theme of global warming and the key concepts in their courses. Social studies teachers could teach the effects of climactic change on the way that people dress and behave while science teachers cover a unit on climate, weather, condensation and precipitation, and the causes of global warming. Math teachers could include the concepts of rain, acid rain, weather, and global warming in a lesson on probabilities, and English teachers can teach question-answer structures around the topic of the climate. They could help students create complete

sentence responses to “how is the weather today?” or teach vocabulary related to pieces of clothing and climate by having them look out the window, determine what the weather is like, and explain what clothing is appropriate for the day’s weather. This will engage students in meaningful learning activities that develop experience, language awareness, and a holistic, integrated view of life. Students can learn the multiple uses of words and key vocabulary, and will be able to use these words correctly in the different contexts.

Previous research has evaluated the effectiveness of these strategies in a K-12 academic setting. Research has concluded that English language learners benefit from a sheltered environment that makes them feel safe and unthreatened. Moreover, differentiated instruction helps young learners feel comfortable in an environment that is shaped and organized to fit their specific needs. Finally, thematic integration stresses language acquisition and helps students develop literacy in all four language domains across the different contexts. When these strategies are implemented within the dual language immersion models, students develop long-lasting language skills. Through collaboration and cooperative learning in an assisted learning environment, the dual language models promote language and content learning to reduce the existing gap between native speakers of English and English language learners. Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson (2005) argue that collaboration through student-student and student-teacher interaction promotes positive results both academically and personally.

These strategies have been tested and proven effective in grade-school settings, but students in different grades or of different ages have varying levels of language proficiency, cognitive awareness, and experiential learning, that may impact the learning process. This may require emphasizing some strategies more than others or incorporating

specific techniques that may help some learners achieve the desired outcomes more effectively. Adult populations have been excluded of these analyses. Adult learners can and do learn, but their cognitive processes and learning skills must be taken into account when determining which strategies are more appropriate for language acquisition and content learning. As with younger children, dual language immersion models facilitate adults' language learning processes, but paying close attention to the adult learners' experience is necessary to determine which strategies work best.

Andragogy: The adult learner experience

The term andragogy comes from the Greek words andra “man” and agogos “leader” and it refers to “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Pews, 2007, p.17). Its origins go back as early as 1833 in Europe. However, the earliest known use in the United States dates back to 1927, evolving in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Andragogy is sometimes described as a theory, but it is most often thought of as a set of assumptions and methods pertaining to the process of helping adults learn. The term andragogy and pedagogy can be easily mistaken, but they are not the same. In pedagogy, the educational focus is on teaching the content subject matter in a teacher-controlled environment (Alexander, 2003, p. 3). “In Andragogy, the educational focus is on facilitating the acquisition of and critical thinking about the content and its application in real-life practical settings”(Pews, 2007, p.17).

Adult education is the lifelong motivational process of acquiring, learning, and developing new skills to become more competitive and proficient in the real world. The term adult education is used to describe “all the activities with an educational purpose that are carried by people engaged in the ordinary business of life” (Stubblefield &

Keane, 1994, p.3). This term is widely used by all adults who learn different skills in their everyday life, whether it is in a traditional or non-traditional environment. The most important concept of adult education is that it does not require formal schooling because it is an informal and personal approach of learning new skills and information.

The teaching practices surrounding andragogy are based upon six assumptions: “(a) Self-Concept, (b) Role of Experience, (c) Readiness to learn, (d) Orientation to Learning, (e) Internal Motivation, and (f) Need to know” (Chan, 2010, p.25). The assumption of self-concept refers to the idea that all adult learners are self-directed and self-motivated and for this reason the educator’s main purpose is to facilitate the learning process, rather than teaching. The idea that adult learners are all the same and have the same goals is inaccurate. Adult learners are diverse in the way they understand their needs, motivations, capacities, interests, and even the goals that they are pursuing with their education. The assumption of role of experience holds that adults are students who come from diverse backgrounds and draw back from their experiences to aid them in their acquisition of knowledge. Adult learners come from all walks of life. Their experiences, ideas, goals, and learning concepts are diverse and, in many cases, religiously or culturally based.

Readiness to learn supports the idea that adults tend to be ready to learn what they need to know and what they are prepared to know. Adults do not seek higher education for pleasure; they have to see a purpose behind their choice and they have to find relevant information that they can use in the real world. Many adults do not see education as important. They decide to learn only the information and tools they need to succeed at their present job. After meeting their professional goal, they choose to stop learning.

Conversely, for the average person, education is more than just a means to an end. For this broad and diverse community of adult learners, schools have developed varied methods of learning and courses to highlight their specific wants and needs. On-the-job training, technical schools, and career colleges provide tailored education opportunities for all adult learners.

Orientation to learning holds the philosophy that “adults learn for immediate applications rather than for future uses. Their learning orientation is problem-centered, task-oriented, and life-focused” (Chan, 2010, p. 28). Adult learners are active and interested learners who want to learn information that will make an immediate impact in their lives. Culture, diversity, and inclusion play an active and important role in this assumption.

Internal motivation is also a relevant assumption of andragogy because adult learners are internally rather than externally driven. Ginsberg & Wlodkowski (2009) assert that the motivation and “the learning processes are connected to who students are, what they care about, and how they perceive and know” (p.130). Learning and motivation are an inseparable combination that dwells at the core of adult education and shapes the focus of adult learners. Finally, the need to know assumption holds that adult students need to know the value of learning and why they need to learn. Thus, andragogy is guided by specific objectives and adults are self-guided individuals in search of relevant knowledge that can be transferred immediately to their everyday life.

In short, adult learners are self-driven individuals with a wealth of experiences that impinge on their learning process. They are willing to learn only what is necessary and relevant to attain their professional goals. Generally, adults learn in practical and

hands-on educational settings that provide them with meaningful experiences that easily translate into the professional world. Finally, their motivation is aligned with their perception of what is valuable and attainable. These characteristics best align with the principles and methodologies of the constructivist approach. This theory requires learners to be actively involved in the instructional process turning the facilitators into helpers rather than providers of knowledge.

Constructivism is a learning theory that supports self-directed and active learning. In a constructivist environment, learners need to make sense of their learning experiences for themselves; they need to connect new knowledge to what they already know, and organize and apply information in ways that are meaningful to them. Constructivism enables students to understand results at a deeper level and it creates autonomous, independent learners. A recent study concluded that this approach to learning highlights the importance of acquiring learning strategies or methods used to aid knowledge acquisition, as opposed to other theories that only allow students to merely acquire information (Vogel-Walcutt, Gebrim, Bowers, Carper, & Nicholson, 2011). The instructional goals of a constructivist-based class often times include providing the students with skills or support (e.g. modeling, coaching, scaffolding) and encouraging the learner to actively construct his or her own personal learning experience (e.g. exploration, articulation, reflection).

Constructivism works well with different populations, but it is particularly effective with adult students. This teaching methodology gives adult learners the opportunity to use their wealth of experiences as a learning tool and to integrate theoretical knowledge with practice of skills that they will use in the professional

environment. Constructivism promotes the identification of immediate applications of concepts and processes, and facilitates integration and transfer of such processes and ideas into other settings or environments. The practical, hands-on, collaborative nature of the constructivist approach suits the adult learners well because it fits their schemas and styles.

This does not mean, however, that all adult learners have the same learning styles or that they process information and approach learning the same way. The differences that we observe among children are recreated in the adult learner. An analysis of the teaching strategies and techniques that best suits this cohort is, thus, necessary. The Ana G. Méndez University System provides a unique opportunity to pursue this task and evaluate the different teaching strategies that best fit the adult population of second language learners. A revolutionary and groundbreaking application of the constructivist approach in higher education is the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model* ® developed by the Ana G. Méndez University System. This model adapts many of the strategies that have proven effective in the K-12 setting to an adult-learner academic environment. It focuses on the teaching of language skills through content and promotes the acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency in both English and Spanish.

***The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model* ®**

The dual language professional is one who confidently demonstrates professional competencies in their field of study and can use both languages, Spanish and English, to communicate effectively. To develop these competencies, the Ana G. Méndez University System's *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model* ® takes into account the students' cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds to create an academic

environment that promotes bilingual and bicultural literacy. Students' academic and language needs and interests are integrated into the curriculum to guarantee that the adult learners acquire the language skills that they need to succeed in the professional environment. The model offers partial immersion through balanced language distribution (50-50) of Spanish and English as a medium for instruction. Courses last 5, 8, 10, or 15 weeks and Spanish and English instruction is alternated every week.

The *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® is founded on seven basic elements that, taken together, ensure the success of dual language education at the university level. The use of both languages in content courses guarantees that students develop knowledge in their professional field of interest while developing the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) that they need to communicate in the professional environment of their choice. The adult student learns concepts that are germane to their discipline in both English and Spanish. This element is integrated with the second basic element, which fosters language development across the curriculum. In this sense, the adult learner develops language skills in all four domains in both language arts and content courses. Because of this, it is essential for all the faculty and staff to be bilingual in the multicultural academic environment in which the adult learner develops. All the facilitators of language and content courses are teachers of language and must be fully bilingual. Facilitators must strive to develop both languages through the coursework and distribute language arts domains systematically according to the course modules and the Model. In addition to the academic and linguistic support that the adult learner receives inside the classroom, all students must complete a placement test to determine their level of English and Spanish language proficiency, which will, in turn, allow the

program to place them in the corresponding language course. They also can obtain online language assistance and tutoring through an E-Lab that contains software that allows them to practice their language skills, check their work prior to submission, and perform research in areas related to their coursework. This comprehensive academic framework provides the adult students with the tools that they need in sheltered environment that fosters learning and successful implementation of academic and language skills.

According to Soltero and Ortiz (2012), bilingualism acquired through the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® helps the adult learner develop the ability to speak, understand, read, and write the basic terminology of both languages. It also develops in the student the ability to manage academic language that includes content-specific vocabulary, complex sentence structure, and academic discourse. Finally, bilingualism facilitates the demonstration of mastery of content-area knowledge on different academic measures. Thus, language proficiency as sought and developed through the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® serves the purpose of acquiring speaking proficiency, attaining literacy in both languages, developing cross-cultural awareness, gaining content knowledge, understanding contexts and contents, and demonstrating content mastery.

As a teaching methodology, the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® is based on Cummins' (2000) principles of bilingual development and focuses on constructivist strategies that promote effective engagement and retrieval of prior knowledge. The adult learner is motivated to engage in meaningful experiences that promote interaction, modeling, and retrieval of prior knowledge. With the appropriate techniques, facilitators help the adult learners actively construct their own knowledge.

Students engage in hands-on activities that allow them to collaborate with their peers and share their knowledge. In this learning process, linkage to past learning experiences, whether formal or informal, is key. Sheltered instruction, scaffolding, and literacy transfer techniques are used to guarantee that students receive the linguistic support that they need to acquire reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that they can use and develop in class and in the professional environment.

The successful implementation of the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® is demonstrated through enrollment growth, student profile, the diversity of program offerings, increase in the number of graduates, and results of assessment activities. Today, four campuses with over 3,000 students and 30 academic programs exist in the U.S. mainland. A total of 2,139 students have graduated from one of the four branch campuses and students continue to enroll. There is student representation from 17 North, Central, and South American countries, 1 from Africa, 2 from Asia. Likewise, 16 countries between North, Central, and South America are represented among the faculty members. Finally, the Ana G. Méndez University System's *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® has received an Honorable Mention and a Finalist Award from *Examples of Excelencia* in 2008 and 2012, respectively. *Examples of Excelencia* is the only national initiative to identify and promote programs and departments at the forefront of advancing educational achievement for Latino students in higher education.

Practices associated with teaching and learning languages have evolved from learning a language through grammar and repetition to learning new languages through culture and immersion. Perspectives on adult education have changed exponentially over

the last decades with the inclusion of critical thinking, application of prior knowledge, and use of authentic assessment techniques in the learning process. Many of these techniques are compatible with those used in the K-12 setting. However, some of these teaching and assessment techniques are more effective than others when handling an adult population that responds to the pressures of time and a highly demanding job market.

In-depth Interviews

The final part of this work analyzes in-depth interviews of three facilitators who teach at the Ana G. Méndez University System and apply the teaching methodologies of the Nation's only dual language immersion program tailored for adult learners. The *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the teaching and evaluation strategies that best fit the adult population. The in-depth interviews of these three facilitators provide a profound insight of the teaching strategies that have been more effective in teaching language and content, and the academic setting that facilitates the acquisition and development of language skills in all four domains.

The interviewees

Three facilitators who implement the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*® were interviewed. One of the facilitators is a Ph.D. in Political Science and a Juris Doctor. He has been teaching for the Ana G. Méndez University System for over 13 years, two of which have been implementing the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®. He is a facilitator of content courses in the areas of social sciences, statistics, research methodology, and criminal justice. The second facilitator completed a

Master of Arts in Spanish Linguistics and Literature and a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature. She has been teaching language arts courses of Spanish for the past 18 years, two of which have been at the Ana G. Méndez University System. Finally, the third facilitator is professor of Spanish and English language arts, and Education. He has been teaching for the past year at the Ana G. Méndez University System and holds a teaching license from the state of Virginia with endorsements in Spanish and ESL education. He completed a Master of Sciences in Spanish Language Education, a Master of Education in Bilingual Education, a Master of Education in Adult Education and Development, and just recently started his Ph.D. in Leadership with a specialization in Reading, Language, and Literacy. All three interviewees provide professional development workshops for faculty in the areas of learning styles, facilitation techniques, and dual language assessment. Two of them are also certified in the reading component of the Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL) Institute led by Dr. Margarita Calderón, Emeritus Professor at the Johns Hopkins University, and two hold a certification in Distance Education. For processes of identification, we will refer to the facilitators as R1, R2, and R3, respectively.

Interview Protocol and Process

The interview protocol consists of seven open-ended questions that seek in-depth explanations of procedures and practices that the facilitators implement in the classroom setting. Facilitators were asked to provide extensive answers to these questions and to provide as many details as they deemed necessary to explain their positions and thoughts. Their thoughts relate to what they deem are the best practices to promote the acquisition of language skills in all four dimensions among adult learners. Moreover, they discuss

techniques that can be used for time management and for summarization after finishing their lessons. Finally, due to the facilitators' experience in diverse academic settings, they were asked to focus their responses on their experience teaching adult learners at the Ana G. Méndez University System. Each interview was completed in a single interview session, except for the Spanish facilitator's interview. This interview was interrupted and required a continuation because the professor had to facilitate a course.

Analysis

Question 1: How do you set the stage for learning in your academic environment?

Setting the stage is key for our adult learners. They need guidance and they need to feel that they are in control of what is going on in the classroom setting. R3 argues "the students at Ana G. Méndez are non-traditional adult learners who come from different paths of life...many of them have been out of the classroom for over 10 years". Younger students, posits R1, are more likely to wait for the teacher to initiate discussion and take control of the learning process. He asserts, "adult learners want to be in control of their own learning process and must feel that concepts and objectives are clearly laid out from the very beginning". As a result, the facilitators agree that there are specific strategies that must be implemented to set the stage to initiate discussion and foster an appropriate collaborative learning environment.

To set the stage for learning, R1 begins by discussing the content and language objectives for each workshop. This gives the adult student control of the learning process and enables them to hold facilitators accountable for the attainment of the goals and objectives. Moreover, he asserts that setting time frames for each activity is also important. While there has to be room for flexibility to accommodate the needs of

students and specific discussions, the adult student wants to know that time schedules are honored and that the class objectives are handled as planned. R2 also suggests rearranging the classroom setting to foster discussion and group work. She argues that setting the stage is done not only through discussion with the students, but also by moving tables and arranging them in a way that four to five students can sit to share thoughts, experiences, and work.

Both R1 and R2 argue that icebreaker activities are extremely important to set the stage for learning. R2 argues that her icebreaker activity helps students determine whom they will be working with during a particular workshop. She argues that the icebreakers vary from one class to the other to guarantee that students do work with different groups in each class session. She believes that sharing different experiences with different groups of students expands students' knowledge and fosters diversity and critical thinking. R1 asserts that his icebreakers "bring students back to the previous session" in an attempt to set the stage, retrieve prior knowledge, and establish the foundation for further discussion. He argues that these activities "show students that all of us come to class with at least some prior knowledge about something that will be discussed during the workshop or the course. This gives them confidence and gets them talking and sharing experiences".

R2 shared an icebreaker activity that has helped her with her adult learners to prepare them for the class discussion and get them going about the course topic. This activity is summarized here.

I give each student a puzzle piece. This activity serves a double purpose. The activity is centered on the main topic for the workshop. I print or bring large puzzle pieces and give one to each student. I ask students to

write behind their puzzle piece one adjective that describes them and to share them with the class. I use this [activity] to promote oral communication, vocabulary, and other language skills. After reading their adjective, students walk to the front of the class and tape their puzzle piece on the board. I tell them that each is an essential part of this class's puzzle and that their participation is important. Then, I divide them in groups based on the adjectives that they used. I always use a different activity that allows me to get them to talk, write, and read, and to divide them into groups. Usually the activity reviews concepts that were covered in the previous class. This [icebreaker] usually takes between 10-30 minutes.

They all focus on the objectives for the day and begin the class. R3 argues that the main goal of setting the stage is to “create and foster a learning environment that is welcoming and helps them in their transition back to education”. R1 asserts that this goal is also achieved by posting the class material and presentations on Blackboard prior to the class. These presentations include the basic information that will be covered during the workshops and serve as a guide for class discussion. These presentations make students aware of the material to be discussed in each workshop prior to their class. However, they need to be supplemented with additional material, class activities, authentic assessments, and discussions to cover the duration of the workshop.

Question 2: How do you teach new vocabulary to guarantee that students understand the important content in the context that you are teaching?

Teaching vocabulary is an essential component of second language learning mainly because “vocabulary development is a correlate of reading” (Cowan & Albers, 2007, p. 34). There is a reciprocal relationship between vocabulary learning and reading (Carlo, August, McLaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, & White, 2004, p. 191) inasmuch as vocabulary learning facilitates reading and “vocabulary increases as a function of the student's reading of text that is rich in new words” (Cowan & Albers,

2007, p. 34). Many of the students at the Ana G. Méndez University System completed their grade-school education in their countries of origin and may not have the vocabulary they need or the reading comprehension capacity to evaluate and process information in academic texts. Thus, both content and language courses must focus on the development of relevant vocabulary that they can use throughout their academic and professional career.

R1 emphasizes the importance of developing vocabulary when he argues, “we can use question and answer sessions, debates, or general discussions to retrieve prior knowledge, but learning new concepts require additional strategies”. All three facilitators agree that looking up words in the dictionary and writing down the definition or sentences with the key words does not work. They argue that students usually end up copying and pasting the definitions or sentences that they found on the Web even when they do not match the course content or are taken out of context. This hinders the learning process and delays the students’ acquisition of new vocabulary.

R3 posits “the key to increasing vocabulary is the direct exposure to words in a relatable context”. In this sense, he agrees with his other two colleagues in that referencing the context is necessary when developing vocabulary skills. He asserts that, as a facilitator, he must understand the diverse backgrounds present in his class to facilitate the teaching and learning of the new vocabulary. Focusing on each student’s background, R1 and R2 give students words and ask them to figure out meanings based on the context in which they are being used. Once they have figured out the meaning, R1 asks students to look up the words in readings that relate to the class so that they can integrate the definition with the course content. This fosters critical thinking and

promotes discussion. It is important to note that these strategies are equally implemented in R1 and R3's content courses and R2 and R3's language arts courses.

R3 developed an interesting teaching strategy to promote the acquisition of new vocabulary and to practice language skills in an Education course for students who are learning to be English as Second Language (ESL) teachers. During their first workshop, students had to learn the meaning of the words "differentiation" and "scaffolding". The activity is summarized below.

I decided to introduce these two terms by creating a class where I, the teacher, would only speak Tagalog, and all my adult learners would be Tagalog learners. I began teaching using only Tagalog to speak to my students. I was speaking Tagalog while handing out worksheets. Needless to say, all my students were confused and lost. I started by asking them to complete an activity that I knew was impossible for them to complete. Little by little, I provided different cues and used scaffolding techniques to support their acquisition and understanding of what was being asked, while differentiating as necessary. I wanted my adult learners to experience the same feeling English Language Learners (ELLs) go through when they go to school for the first time in the United States, and it worked. After the activity, we talked about their thoughts and comments, and how I incorporated scaffolding and differentiation. That was the first time that I used these two terms in class, but my students understood them because they were able to see both of these terms put into practice. They were easily able to relate to these concepts because they had witnessed how these concepts translate to the real world.

Thus, an essential strategy when teaching adult learners new vocabulary is to make it relatable and evident. They can use context and experience to draw definitions in significant and meaningful ways. Through repetition of concepts in different contexts, R1 argues that students learn definitions and application in ways that they will be able to retain and use later in the class and in their career. R2 asserts that these strategies are most effective when students contribute the meaning of words. The facilitator can

scaffold the process and model different techniques, but it is the student who goes through the process of deriving the meaning of the new vocabulary and using it correctly.

Question 3: How do you integrate reading comprehension strategies into the content area?

Previously cited research suggests that a good vocabulary base is necessary to facilitate reading comprehension, and that reading skills promote the acquisition of an ample vocabulary. However “reading texts in which more than 2% of the words are unfamiliar blocks comprehension and novel word learning” (Carver, 1994). Thus, there is not only a reciprocal relationship between vocabulary development and reading comprehension, but also a vicious circle that hinders learning if vocabulary is not acquired and if reading skills are not developed. Researchers suggest that reading is the “principal language experience for enlarging a student vocabulary” and that “increasing the amount that students read is the single most productive thing we can do to increase their vocabularies” (Cowan & Albers, 2007, p. 34). Thus, integrating reading comprehension strategies into both content and language courses among adult learners is essential if their vocabulary skills are to be developed to an academic level.

R1 argues, “integrating reading activities is quite difficult with today’s adult learners”. His experience is that adult learners do not want to read mainly because they do not have much time after work, family, and class. Nonetheless, he argues, students must be required to read. Moreover, an activity that has certainly failed, according to R1, is to assign chapters or long readings from the book and expect students to come prepared to discuss in class. “Very few students, if any, complete this assignment and come to class ready for the discussion. Some of them scan readings only to find the answer to the

assigned questions, but not to understand the content, context, or the underlying message”, asserts R1. He finds it most productive to engage adult learners in reading activities during the workshops and to have them summarize in groups what they learned from the readings. He concludes, “the controlled classroom environment promotes engagement in activities that they would not otherwise do at home by themselves. It is very likely that sharing information, reading in pairs, engaging in discussions, and collaborating with each other sparks their interest in completing reading assignments”.

On the other hand, R3 argues that reading is a multifarious process that requires time and practice. Moreover, he asserts that reading proficiently in one language is difficult enough and that achieving reading proficiency in two languages requires much dedication. A welcoming and safe academic environment is, thus, necessary for students to feel safe. This lowers students’ affective filters and helps them connect to the information at a personal level.

Both R2 and R3 made reference to the process of selecting which readings to include in class. They assert that the best readings for adult learners are those to which they can relate and that are clearly associated with the course topic. R2 teaches Spanish to a mostly Hispanic group of students. She chooses readings from geographic regions where her students were born and chooses topics like immigration, dictatorship, and roles of women, which are pertinent and relevant to them and their life experiences. She asks students to join in groups and read out loud during class to facilitate comprehension and analysis. Concept maps serve as a good tool to summarize the story, synthesize concepts, analyze topics, or develop writing skills.

R3, on the other hand, focused on strategies to promote reading of English text among Hispanic students. He, too, argues that graphic and semantic organizers are excellent tools to promote reading literacy and comprehension. He divides his class in four or five teams and asks each team to read a theory for class discussion, an excerpt of a story, or some interesting passage. After reading, each group chooses a graphic organizer to summarize what they have read. Finally, they present the information to the entire class. R3 argues that this activity has proven highly effective “because students are engaged and have the opportunity to work collaboratively to create a presentation that will impact the entire class”.

R3 also speaks in favor of Socratic seminars. He uses them as the opening activity for class. These seminars are based on question and answer sessions in which students can explain their thoughts about the readings they did at home and share how they find the readings relatable to their everyday life. However, he asserts that this method will not work effectively if students have not read before class or if they were unable to understand the topic of the reading. If such is the case, like R1 suggested, in-class reading techniques are the solution.

Question 4: How do you teach writing in each of your content areas?

“In my English and Spanish classes, writing is an essential part of language development. The strategies used in each class depend on the level of the class and the needs of my students”, argues R3. He maintains that an essential first step of teaching adult learners how to write is to help them understand the responsibility of becoming university students and how their assignments reflect their commitment to their learning process. Moreover, R1 argues that students must write not just to show that they master

the course content, but also to show that they know how to communicate. This frames writing activities in a holistic learning process that emphasizes writing as an academic, professional, and life skill.

Both R1 and R2 argue that one of the biggest difficulties when working with adult learners is that they tend to write how they speak. They ignore the syntactical and grammatical conventions that are observed in writing but are not as important in spoken language. Thus, R1 argues that meaningful writing activities must include word order and syntax, passive and active voice, word choice, and general composition. Moreover, he asserts that students must master verb conjugation, subject-verb agreement, spelling and, in Spanish, accentuation. This does not mean, however, that his content courses become grammar drills. As a matter of fact, he argues that language arts courses that aim to develop good writing skills in the adult learner should not be transformed into drills of grammar where facilitators repeat rules after rules. Instead, he believes that the best way to teach students to write is to get them to write. That is, it is through meaningful and relevant writing experiences that students learn the nuances of academic composition, verb conjugation and spelling.

R1 posits that when working with adults who are learning composition in both Spanish and English, modeling the writing process is key. He finds it difficult to have students engage in writing activities in content courses because students are scared that they do not know the content too well to produce a good piece of written work.

I begin by teaching them how to write a complete sentence. Many of them are scared of writing because they do not know the basic composition of a simple sentence, much less of a paragraph. Once they have the idea of how to write a complete sentence, we move on to writing paragraphs. I use examples related to the course topic to teach them about the course content while

they learn writing skills. This helps them develop an understanding of what main ideas and topic sentences are, and to write meaningfully about the course content. This also saves me some time because I can teach language and content simultaneously. As adult learners, they find this effective and they appreciate it. This is a long process. It requires teaching step-by-step writing techniques while covering the course content. It also requires practicing, re-writing, modeling, and observation.

He argues that this process is particularly difficult in content courses because there is a large amount of material to cover in 5 or 8 weeks. He concludes that much of the writing is done in-class and not as assignments to do at home because adult students want immediate feedback.

R3 also finds it useful to discuss the writing process during his language arts and content courses. He argues that the writing process activity helps student break down the process to five easy steps that can be easily understood.

The first step of the writing process is prewriting. In this step, I emphasize the importance of using tools such as graphic organizers or brainstorming activities to formulate questions and find answers about their topic of choice. This step focuses on thinking rather than doing, and the main purpose is to find the message they want to transmit in their assignment. The second step is drafting. When we practice this step in class, I tell my students to simply write everything down to clear their mind. The second step is meant to clear the brain and give writers the opportunity to see their thoughts in paper. The third and fourth steps – revising and editing – are the steps to improve and make changes as needed. It is not usual for me to ask my students to work in pairs during these steps to get a different point of view about their project. The last step of the writing process is publishing, which is when students feel confident in their work and are ready to share or submit their essay. I strongly encourage my students to read aloud their work during each of these steps in order for them to see, write, and hear what they have produced.

When used during a language arts workshop, this process helps adult learners work systematically and follow easy steps that will lead them to produce good writing. The facilitator observes the process, provides guidance, and assesses student progress as

they generate ideas in writing. The adult learner feels guided in the process of independent or collaborative production of written work.

R2 breaks down the writing process in another way that suits the needs of adult learners. During the first week, students work on choosing the topic for their paper and producing a single paragraph related to the chosen topic. During the second workshop, students are expected to write a longer paragraph or more than one paragraph. They must submit a short essay during the fourth week of class. This helps them organize their thoughts and not leave their writing assignment for the last minute. They have time during class to work in pairs to develop their final paper, which is submitted during the 8th week. “During this process, I observe and guide them, but I give them the space to produce their own work; one that they will feel proud of”, concludes R2.

R2 recommends another activity to develop writing skills among adult learners. She feels that it engages students in the writing process and makes it entertaining and systematic.

The class is divided into several groups of students. Each group sits in a separate working station. The first group writes a sentence about an assigned topic. It must be a complete sentence with subject and predicate, and it must fulfill the requirements about topic and style discussed in class. This sentence is passed on to the second group, which adds on a second sentence. The second sentence must be related to the first and must support the main idea. Proper transition words must be used if necessary. The two sentences are passed on to the third group, which adds a third sentence, and so on until we have gone around the class. In the end, we have a complete paragraph. Students learn that paragraphs must have unity, idea, and support. Moreover, they must be coherent and complete.

Finally, R2 argues that her adult learners need intensive help with rules of accentuation in Spanish. She finds that students in higher-level courses show the same

difficulties of those in lower level classes. She uses Socratic techniques to have students think about the grammatical errors that they make when writing. Instead of giving them the right answer, she asks them why they think that the word is incorrectly accentuated or where they think that the accent should go. They have to provide detailed explanations, which gets them to think about the rules of accentuation and about the writing process. She also finds that there is much difficulty differentiating the use of “c”, “s”, and “z” in Spanish, because they could sound the same. This also occurs with “j” and “g”, and “v” and “b”. R2 uses multiple ways of representation to get students with different learning styles to understand the uses of these consonants. For example, she shows videos that allow students to listen to these consonants used in words, and presents word charts or visuals that contain many different words that use these consonants. Many of these visuals are available for the adult students to use or to take home for future reference.

All three facilitators agreed that one technique that does not work for teaching writing skills to adult learners is lecturing about the rules of grammar, composition, and writing. The adult learner tends to be a more hands-on, practical learner that needs to see the immediate application of what they have learned. Lecturing about the topic and assigning work to take home and complete individually does not motivate them. As a matter of fact, the three facilitators agreed that when this is done, students usually come back with their assignment undone or take a long time to submit the assignment. They do not engage into the activity, they tend to get lost, and, usually, they submit incomplete assignments that do not reflect the writing process as it was discussed in class.

Question 5: How do you develop oracy in your classroom setting?

In addition to learning academic vocabulary that allows students to communicate effectively in the classroom setting, students must learn to pronounce the words correctly. Oracy skills are the ones necessary to pronounce words correctly in the language of choice. Because with naturally embedded accents among adult learners, and the different dialects that Hispanic students bring to the classroom setting, developing oracy skills is particularly challenging, but it is possible. Many students have yet to learn the correct pronunciation of some words in their native language, and must develop oracy skills in a second language that they have not mastered yet.

Many non-native speakers of English are under the impression that there is a correct way to pronounce in “American English”. They want to speak fluently, use the right pronunciation, and intonation, but they sometimes forget their accents and regional dialects. R1 and R3 both emphasize the importance of identifying, cherishing, and respecting their native language when learning English as a second language. R3 argues that the variations and regional differences in meaning and use of the Spanish language make it challenging for facilitators and learners to communicate effectively. He speaks about how important it is for facilitators to understand that they are language professors as much as they are professors of content. They are required to model to students and show them the correct pronunciation of key terms in both English and Spanish.

R1 also argues that it is important for the adult learner to understand and feel confident about their accents. Very rarely will an adult learner be able to make their accents disappear to pronounce English the “American way”. R1 teaches them that “there are many different accents in the United States. This teaches them that pronunciation and

accents are two different things. It also makes them more confident about their own accents”.

For R3, modeling and collaborative activities are necessary to promote and develop oracy in his students. He focuses on teaching adult learners relevant information that is transferrable to their everyday lives. The focus is on relevant vocabulary words that can be immediately integrated into their toolboxes to use as needed. According to R3, adult students value turning regular class discussions into casual conversations. Not only do their affective filters lower, but they also get to practice their pronunciation skills in a non-threatening environment that helps them build confidence, self-reliance, and motivation to continue growing.

Every content or language workshop should work with the four language domains, according to R2. She uses oral reports or casual conversations to practice oracy skills in Spanish and to get them to talk in an academic environment. R1 agrees that pronunciation is better taught through casual conversations that are relevant to the students and that teach them both content and language skills. He argues that facilitators should be ready to correct students the very moment that they make a mistake. They must be careful, however, not to embarrass the adult learner who is less likely than a child to accept being corrected in front of others. He suggests practicing oracy as a group effort. “We all review, repeat, and pronounce our key words together. I teach them the difference between long and short vowel sounds, and I compare English and Spanish vowel pronunciations. I also show them how different letter combinations in English produce different sounds”.

The goal, according to all three facilitators, is to include different activities that require talking. Discussions, debates, oral presentations, read alouds, and think-pair-and-share activities are some examples of activities that can be used to enhance students' pronunciation skills. Either informally through peer discussions, or formally in a final oral presentation, R1 suggests evaluating their speech, pronunciation, and fluency. He uses the list of mispronounced or misused words to review meaning and pronunciation during class.

For example, in a master's level course we were discussing the legal statutes that guide non-profit organizations' activities for fund raising. Some students used the word "status" instead of "statutes". In this case, I first showed them the spelling of both words so that they would see that they were two different words. Then, I gave them the definition of each and asked them to use each word in a meaningful sentence. Finally, I explained them how these two words have different pronunciations that distinguish one from the other. In this exercise, the students developed not only vocabulary skills, but also oracy skills and spelling. Now, they are expected to use these words in classroom discussions and oral presentations in a way that shows that they have learned their meanings and the right pronunciation of each.

Finally, R2 uses constructive criticism to help students develop their oracy skills. Since criticism can be taken badly if it is not used appropriately, she models first during the entire first class. Students are allowed to participate in constructive criticism from the second workshop on. Constructive criticism must be respectful and guided. That is, it must focus on the specific details that can be worked on and it must include suggestions for improvement. In order to attend to the particular needs of each student, R2 provides specific comments to each student individually after class.

In essence, the biggest challenge when working with adult learners of Hispanic origin is the embedded accents and the different dialects that they bring from their

countries of origin. There is not a set standard from where to start, and each student is at a different level of language proficiency. Working oracy skills is necessary, but challenging. It must be carefully done and incorporated in every content and language class. Students must understand that it is unlikely that they will lose their accents, but that they can certainly pronounce correctly if they are properly trained.

Question 6: How do you manage your time to cover these components while discussing the course content?

Time is of the utmost importance when working with adult learners. They are very serious about honoring time limits, especially because most of them have to get home to their families immediately after class to start doing chores, working, or doing school work. Many of them have limited time to dedicate to schoolwork, and they want to be able to handle their class material as soon as possible. Thus, managing time during each session is an art that every facilitator must manage.

R1 argues that time management is definitely a challenge, especially in content courses. He is constantly juggling between the course content and the language objectives during each workshop. “I have to teach them about sociology, statistics, politics, or criminal justice at the same time that I am teaching listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. It seems like a complicated task for just four hours of class session, especially when you have students at different proficiency levels. Planning and redesigning is of utmost importance”. R1 asserts that facilitators of content courses must be flexible enough to restructure and redesign their classes as they teach. They must also be focused enough to be able to cover all the content objectives in the time allotted.

Planning is of central importance to R3 as well. He argues that he plans his classes a week ahead of time to make sure that he has enough time to cover the content and language objectives. According to R3, a regular 4-hour workshop takes him between 4-6 hours to complete because he creates a step-by-step plan that states where each activity fits and how it will be carried out. He argues that “the secret to keeping adult learners engaged and covering all the information is balance”. He finds it important to find balance in the activities that will be implemented because too many activities could result overwhelming, but too few would turn the class into an undesired lecture.

R2 asserts that time management is possible if she divides her class into blocks. There is some space for improvisation due to unforeseen situations, but, in general, her class is planned into three or four blocks of time each of which comprehends a particular topic related to the course objectives.

During the first time block, I review what was discussed in the previous class. This helps students set the stage and retrieve prior knowledge to prepare them for the new discussion. It also helps clarify questions or doubts that were carried from the previous class. During the second block, students engage in individual or group writing activities. They can work in the library or in the classroom, and they can use computers or large pieces of paper that allow them to brainstorm, draw, and organize their ideas. While they are working, I assess what they are doing and provide them with suggestions. The third block is for oral presentations. They explain what they wrote during the previous block and engage in meaningful discussions about the class topic. Finally, during the fourth block, students read and engage in analyses about the readings.

Differentiated instruction must be applied in the process of teaching both content and language skills. R1 argues that the different levels of language proficiency make it necessary for all facilitators to use differentiation techniques that satisfy the needs of all the adult learners.

Sometimes students with the greatest set of skills in the content areas are not necessarily the most language proficient. This requires constant evaluation and assessment of learning. It also requires keeping track of the subject matter to guarantee that the course content is covered. We must have the set of academic and educational techniques that enable us to switch gears, reinvent our classes in a second, and incorporate activities that fit the needs of students who require extra attention. Thus, planning is essential, but it is not sufficient when dealing with our adult student population.

Question 7: What strategies do you use to bring closure to what students learned?

Closing activities are, perhaps, one of the most important parts of the session, overall. These activities can be used to review important concepts, clarify doubts, and ensure that the course's content and language objectives were met. Different assessment activities fit the needs of the course design when it comes to bringing closure to what students learned. It is important, however, that facilitators choose the right closing activity for the right group of students.

For example, "activities such as exit slips, random questioning, 1-minute reflections, and 1-minute paper have all proven effective" for adult learners, according to R3. He argues that these activities actively engage students in the discussion that the facilitator guides with comments or suggestions. R3 feels that this is better than closing the class with a personal comment or with his own summary of what was discussed. R1 agrees that these activities are very useful with an adult population, but that facilitators must be aware of the levels of language proficiency of their students. Some activities may be too demanding for students who are still learning the language and unable to express their thoughts in writing or in an oral exposition, whichever is the case.

R1 recommends getting the students to work in groups and write a summary of the most important topics that were discussed during the workshop. This helps them bring different concepts and ideas together while they work with other students. The less proficient can benefit from the skills of the more proficient, but they can all share what they know and what they

learned. Through this interaction, they all practice the concepts that were discussed in class and, perhaps, clarify questions that were left unanswered to them because they did not feel comfortable asking. Collaboration and interaction in these closure activities also help students integrate concepts from other classes in a way that makes sense to them and that is useful for their academic and professional development.

R1 also argues that his goal is to help the adult learner understand that the courses they take are not isolated from one another.

My goal is to make sure that my students understand and that they feel comfortable with what they have learned. I want them to use language freely and confidently, while using course content in a way that makes sense to them and to the discipline. I want them to see themselves as professionals who are able to use the tools they acquire throughout the class. Course topics must be relevant and students must see their use and application in the real world. Usually, the activities that I use to close an entire course help students see the relevance of the class in the broader framework of the discipline.

Finishing classes with spoken reflections might be a good alternative for students who do not feel comfortable writing at the academic level. These reflections, according to R1, get students to talk about what they learned, use the key concepts discussed in class, and practice language skills that they have acquired. As students think critically about the topics discussed in class, they come to conclusions that show their level of engagement and cognitive ability. R2 also considers that it is important to ask students to reflect on the utility of the assignments and activities done in class. This helps them think about their learning process and take a critical look at the different exercises and activities that put into practice the theoretical matter of the course. It also helps them reflect on their mistakes and find alternatives to solve them with relative ease.

Conclusion

Bridging learning gaps between ethnic minorities who learn English and their native monolingual counterparts is imperative if we want children to pursue formal education at the

college level. Research has shown that, given the right conditions and necessary tools, the cognitive processing capabilities of minority students is similar to that of their mainstream classmates (Fuller & García Coll, 2010). Schools, teachers, parents, and communities must, thus, contribute in providing the tools that students need to be successful academically and professionally.

Sometimes, however, some students do not have the opportunity to pursue their careers at an early age and must wait until later during their lives to obtain an academic degree or to complete high school. These adult learners can and do learn, and are productive both in the academic setting and in the professional arena. Nevertheless, these adult learners have specific needs that must be considered when developing curricula, classroom activities, and assessment tools. This means that the needs of an adult population are different, and so are the techniques and strategies necessary to reach out to them intellectually, cognitively, and academically.

This work analyzes the teaching and assessment strategies that work with an adult population of English language learners. The first part discusses the characteristics of early childhood education and the methodologies that are implemented to teach children at an early stage of their lives. This discussion includes a survey of current literature related to the implementation of dual language immersion models in a K-12 setting. This literature sets the stage for an in-depth discussion of how adult English language learners develop literacy skills while meeting standards of learning. Specific strategies and methodologies are discussed and their application is analyzed.

The Ana G. Méndez University System provides the setting for the analysis portion of this work. The analysis is based on the implementation of the Nation's only college-level *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®, which provides a unique opportunity to evaluate how Hispanic adult learners can become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural while developing professional skills. Two language professors and one content professor shared their

insights about the effective practices and strategies that facilitate the teaching of language and literacy skills throughout the curriculum to a population of adult English language learners. Their recommendations and suggestions of what works in this specific academic setting and what does not are included and discussed.

One significant implication of this study is the importance of continuous professional development training to facilitators teaching adult learners. Studies show that the current professional development training “offerings do not appear to meet the needs of adult education providers” (Henry, 2013, p.46). Unlike K-12 educators, facilitators of adult learners are typically not required to complete yearly trainings that incorporate cutting-edge instructional practices and technological advances in education. Educators of adults need ongoing training that will avoid fossilization and will equip them with updated tools to succeed teaching learners in the 21st century. Moreover, student-centered instruction rather than teacher-centered activities is imperative. In andragogy, the focus is to equip adult learners with the necessary tools to succeed in the real world. It is important for educators to include engaging activities that promote the application of theoretical matters discussed in the classroom. The effectiveness of the skills learned by adult learners is measured by their ability to transfer the knowledge acquired in the classroom into the outside world. Only activities that promote critical-thinking and hands-on learning will give students the opportunity to accomplish their purpose for learning.

The current analysis is the second of a series of works that look into the implementation and effectiveness of the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®. It is limited to the impressions of only three facilitators who put into practice the teaching and assessment strategies of this academic model. Their evaluation and recommendations help determine which strategies, techniques, and methodologies are more effective and productive with their students. Thus, further analyses will look into the impressions of adult learners who study under the *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®. They will share their thoughts about the effectiveness

of the model in helping them develop literacy skills while they acquire content knowledge in their academic areas of choice. This will provide a broader and clearer picture of the model, its implementation, the teaching strategies, and their effectiveness in the classroom setting.

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About the authors

Dr. Angel A. Toledo-López completed his Ph.D. in Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University where he majored in American Politics, Research Methodology, and Comparative Politics. He attended the Institute of Survey Research at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and was co-primary investigator of Puerto Rico's second wave of the World Values Survey that is conducted from the University of Michigan. After completing his Ph.D., Dr. Toledo-López pursued a law degree from the University of Puerto Rico School of Law, and obtained his Juris Doctor in 2006. He worked both as a full time professor at the Universidad del Este in Carolina, Puerto Rico, and as a litigating attorney, until he relocated to the state of Maryland. He is Associate Professor of Social Science at the Universidad del Este and teaches at the Ana G. Méndez University System, Capital Area Campus in Wheaton, Maryland where innovative teaching methods are used in the implementation of the System's *Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model*®. He facilitates social sciences, statistics, and criminal justice courses, and trains faculty members in processes and techniques related to the Dual Language Immersion Model. Most recently, Dr. Toledo López completed a M.Ed. in Bilingual Education from the American College of Education. His most recent publications and his research interests run a gamut of topics that include political psychology; perception and conduct of actors in the judicial system; research methodology; and language acquisition among adults. lcdotoledo@gmail.com

Professor Luis J. Pentón-Herrera is a Cuban-born United States Marine Corps Veteran. His academic career began in the state of Maryland immediately after completing his military service. He obtained a Master's of Education in Adult Education from Strayer University and a Graduate Certificate in Teaching of English as a Second Language from the American College of Education. His passion for teaching and languages led him to pursue another Master's of Science degree in Spanish Education from NOVA Southeastern University that he completed in May of 2016 and a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with specialization in Bilingual Education from the American College of Education. Professor Pentón-Herrera is a certified K-12 teacher in the state of Virginia and Maryland where he has both Spanish and ESL endorsements. He is also an Adjunct Professor at several colleges and universities where he teaches Spanish, English, and Education courses. Professor Pentón-Herrera is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Reading, Language, and Literacy at Concordia University Chicago. His current research focuses on language acquisition, bilingual and multicultural education, and teaching techniques and strategies for ELLs. luis.penton@gmail.com