Getting to Know your Students’ Linguistic and Cultural Assets: Opening Spaces for Bilingual Pairs’ Voices

PLUS:
- Influencia del vocabulario académico en la competencia lectora de estudiantes con español como lengua de herencia
- Facilitators’ Perspectives: Strategies that Work in Higher Education Dual Language Immersion Settings
- Funtastic Apps and Web-based Resources for Korean Language Development
Contents

Cover Story

Getting to Know your Students’ Linguistic and Cultural Assets: Opening Spaces for Bilingual Pairs’ Voices
María G. Arreguín-Anderson and Iliana Alanis ................................................................. 6

Columns & Articles

Influencia del vocabulario académico en la competencia lectora de estudiantes con español como lengua de herencia
Ana R. Carlton ..................................................................................................................... 12

Facilitators’ Perspectives: Strategies that Work in Higher Education Dual Language Immersion Settings
Ángel A. Toledo López and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera..................................................... 16

Funtastic Apps and Web-based Resources for Korean Language Development
Grace McField.................................................................................................................. 23

Departments

Contributing to Perspectives - Guidelines for Writers...................................................... 2
Facilitators’ Perspectives: Strategies that Work in Higher Education Dual Language Immersion Settings

Ángel A. Toledo López, SUAGM - Universidad del Este
Luis Javier Pentón Herrera, Concordia University Chicago

Introduction
Teaching is the art of promoting the retrieval of prior knowledge, however much that may be, and providing the tools to integrate such knowledge to a new base of information with which to expand our understanding of the world around us (Ausubel, 1968; Meyer, 2004). Learning occurs through informal and formal experience. That is, individuals learn as they walk through life. People learn about nature, family, pain, perceptions, and preferences as they live different experiences that may be unexpected or unplanned. Other more formal experiences, like the ones that teachers plan, prepare, and include in their lesson plans, provide a space for learning that is problem or inquiry-based. These formal learning experiences allow students to make meaningful connections with knowledge that they have previously acquired (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). In the end, the art of teaching requires that educators use techniques and strategies that promote effective, life-long learning.

The process of teaching, however, is not one-size-fits-all. No single teaching technique or strategy works for all students mainly because they learn in their “own ways, using different methods, different styles, and at different speeds” (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008, p.1). What is consistent in classrooms across the nation is the diversity of learners with which teachers must work. This means that teachers must adopt and use teaching strategies that cater to the different needs and interests of their students. In an ever-changing learning environment, it also means that professional development is necessary to help teachers evaluate their beliefs, reinforce their professional practices (Guskey, 2002), and understand diversity to create an equitable academic environment.

One of the most significant changes that classrooms in the United States are encountering is the dramatic increase of first-generation Hispanic students (Harper & de Jong, 2004) and other non-native English speakers (Honigsfeld, 2009). This trend is expected to continue as the Hispanic population continues to grow, and immigrants and their children seek for opportunities that formal education can provide. This demographic shift has had a dramatic impact in the practices and procedures used in schools and colleges to provide for a diverse population of learners (Toledo López & Pentón Herrera, 2015). While the teaching strategies that help English language learners (ELLs) acquire knowledge of both content and language are also effective for native speakers of English (Tissington & LaCour, 2010), some teaching techniques and strategies clearly work better than others and provide students with different modes of engagement and expression that facilitate the learning and assessment process. After all, there is not one single method of teaching, and the needs of ELLs merit special attention (Harper & de Jong, 2004). Knowing which techniques work and which do not is, thus, key if teachers want to create an equitable environment that motivates young and adult students to learn and participate. This article explores the different learning environments that are suitable for adult ELLs. It also identifies, from the facilitators’ perspective, the teaching techniques that work in an adult setting. Throughout the article, teachers, professors, or educators are referred to as facilitators to highlight their role as guides and mentors of the students’ learning process as opposed to being owners of the shared knowledge (Burden, 2004), and to remain true to the duties and responsibilities that the Discipline Based Dual Language Immersion Model vests upon them. There is some discussion concerning the differences between teacher and facilitators, but this goes beyond the scope of this work.

Adult Education: One Side of The Coin
Different experiences occur in the lives of individuals that shape how they act, believe, think, and process information. These factors are all important when designing teaching methodologies and lessons that facilitate the learning process for different types of learners. From an early stage in life, individuals develop the ability to extract meaning and significance from their experiences. However, thought processes and patterns, and learning experiences in children differ from those of adults (McLeod, 2015).

Adults come to their learning processes with a broader spectrum of ideas and a wider array of experiences. They have more information where to draw from and their schemas have been constructed, adapted, and transformed to accommodate new realities. Andragogical principles are established to help adults learn and focus “on facilitating the acquisition of and critical thinking about the content and its application in real-life practical settings” (Pew, 2007, p. 17). These principles are based on six assumptions that summarize the intentions and motivations that adults in first world settings have to pursue higher levels of education (Chan, 2010). These assumptions include: (a) self concept; (b) role of experience; (c) readiness to learn; (d) orientation to learning; (e) internal motivation; and (f) need to know.
The self-concept assumption refers to the notion that adults are self-directed and self-motivated. It is, thus, the responsibility of the educator not to teach, but to facilitate the learning process. Moreover, the role of experience assumption is consistent with constructivist models of learning that place emphasis on prior knowledge and experience as a base for new knowledge. Thirdly, andragogical principles sustain that adults are ready to learn what they need to know and what they are prepared to know. This is largely associated with the fourth assumption, orientation to learning, which holds that “adults learn for immediate applications rather than for future uses. Their learning is problem-centered, task-oriented, and life-focused” (Chan, 2010, p. 28). In essence, adults must see a purpose behind going back to school to learn, and whatever information is given to them must have a relevant and meaningful application to their real world. The last two assumptions, internal motivation and need to know, relate to the idea that adults’ “learning processes are connected to who students are, what they care about, and how they perceive and know” (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 130). When adult learners value the need to learn, they develop an internal motivation to connect to sources of information and acquire the knowledge that they need for immediate application to their everyday life.

Adults, like children, have different learning styles and ways of perceiving and processing information (Gardner, 1983). Because of this, teaching and assessment mechanisms must be planned and differentiation techniques must be used. Careful attention must be paid to differentiation to guarantee that activities are interrelated and appropriate for the students’ varied needs (Pappano, 2011). Through modeling, accommodation of new realities, and active experiential participation, teachers can create “interesting and challenging learning environments that encourage the active involvement of students” (Vosniadou, 2001, p. 8). Group work, collaborative learning, scaffolding, and sheltered instruction are techniques that good teachers use to facilitate learning and to clarify content to all students alike (Hansen-Thomas, 2008; Pray & Monhardt, 2009), including adult learners.

**Adult English Language Learners**

Vygotsky (1962) argues that learning is a social process, and language is the mechanism through which individuals interact and communicate their thoughts and visions about the world. Speech and language are the means that facilitate the expression of thoughts and ideas. However, language is also used to construct internal visions of the world, perceptions, and thoughts. These constructions must be intelligible to the individual for them to be transformed into verbal expressions. Because social interaction is necessary for learning and language is necessary for social interaction to occur, we must guarantee that our students, particularly the non-native speakers of English, develop language skills in all dimensions to facilitate social interaction and effective learning (See Figure 1). Language learning is, thus, necessary to level the playing field for students who have the ability to learn and succeed, but must acquire linguistic tools with which to materialize their thoughts and express their ideas.

Many English language learners come to classrooms in the U.S. with different levels of language proficiency and literacy. Some need to develop language skills in English while others must endure the task of mastering both content and language. It takes longer for students with less formal schooling to acquire and learn a second language than those who have completed more years of formal schooling (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Moreover, research suggests that high level of language proficiency in students’ native language facilitates second language acquisition (Cummins, 1996). However, teachers cannot and do not control who comes into their classrooms or their levels of cognitive and linguistic sophistication.

Adult learners have long passed their critical period where language learning occurs naturally and spontaneously (Alghizzi, 2014). It is unlikely that they will acquire language skills like children, but they can learn the mechanics of the language and use them effectively to communicate.
An academic environment that promotes equitable learning and that engages adult learners in their educational process must be constructed. One alternative is the dual language enrichment models, which is deemed the best in helping close the achievement gap in second language (Collier & Thomas, 2004). This model helps develop bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate students through a cross-cultural curriculum that engages students in meaningful and relevant learning.

Both the 90-10 and the 50-50 two-way immersion models are beneficial for improving literacy and helping students acquire content knowledge while they develop English language skills. The 50-50 model helps “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 (Gómez, Freeman & Freeman, 2005, p. 149). In this model, the instruction time in each language can be divided in different ways as long as it is equal. Translation is not used when moving from one language to the other because students are expected to learn the information in both languages in all classes. Teaching supports and strategies are used to create a sheltered environment where students can use their prior knowledge, make cultural links that facilitate comprehension, and construct their own learning processes guided by clearly laid out objectives and standards.

While these models were designed for a K-12 academic setting, the Ana G. Méndez University System developed the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® for adult learners. This model resembles the 50-50 two-way immersion model and 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 dual language immersion model for adults takes into account the students’ cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds to create an academic environment that promotes bilingual and bicultural literacy. The model "is founded on seven major elements that determine how education is imparted to promote language learning through content” (Toledo López & Penton Herrera, 2015, p.25). These elements are summarized in the figure below.

**Figure 2: Elements of the Dual Language Immersion**

The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® is built on the constructivist notion that learning is best promoted in a student-centered environment that encourages learners to become active participants of their academic process and use prior knowledge to construct a deeper understanding of the world around them. This vision seems reasonable for adult learners who come to school with a wealth of experiences and knowledge, and with readiness to learn what they will need for immediate application in their professional environment. With the constructivist methodology comes the different teaching and assessment techniques that facilitate learning in a dual language environment. Facilitators must be fully bilingual and must create an equitable learning environment through the use of sheltered instruction, differentiation, and cognitive-academic language learning strategies. Scaffolding and technological aids are also used with adult learners who need the additional support to get a better grasp of both language and content skills. However, ELL programs and dual language models are not one-size-fits-all (Honigsfeld, 2009). Some teaching techniques and strategies work better than others. Knowing which teaching techniques help set the stage for learning, and facilitate the development of oracy, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills is necessary in a demanding academic environment with adult learners who expect the best.
Facilitators’ Perceptions: What Works and What Doesn’t With Adult Learners?

In-depth interviews were administered to four facilitators who teach at the Ana G. Méndez University System and apply the teaching methodologies of the dual language immersion program tailored for adult learners. Two facilitators of language courses and two of content courses were selected to provide an overview of the teaching techniques and strategies that work best when teaching both language and language-through-content. Facilitators were asked to provide detailed explanations of techniques and strategies that they consider appropriate to develop students’ reading, writing, vocabulary, and oracy skills. They were also asked to explain what works in an adult setting to set the stage for learning, manage time, and close their academic sessions. In general, these in-depth interviews provide an insight of the teaching and assessment strategies that facilitate the management of this adult-based academic environment. The results of these interviews are summarized in the tables below.

Table 1: Summary of findings: Language dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Reaching Comprehension</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Oracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct exposure to new words in a relatable environment.</td>
<td>Use readings that are relevant to the student both culturally and professionally.</td>
<td>Help students identify differences between casual and college writing.</td>
<td>Use oral presentations of relevant topics. They can apply their findings to real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive learning: words are practiced not memorized.</td>
<td>Pre-reading activities help students share their thoughts and beliefs. They frame readings in a context.</td>
<td>Teach students the steps of the writing process: prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and publish.</td>
<td>Engage students in simple oral exercises in every workshop. Use different tasks to assess oracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffold using visuals and total physical response.</td>
<td>Group readings and summaries. Students take turns reading sentences. They will summarize paragraphs in their own words.</td>
<td>Scaffold the writing process with sentence starters, transitions, and conclusions.</td>
<td>Adult learners want to speak “good English.” They should know that there are different accents in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use native language and cognates to make connections.</td>
<td>Use Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction Text (RAN) charts.</td>
<td>Have students read aloud their written work to identify errors</td>
<td>Timely and tactful corrections of pronunciation errors are necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in groups to get meaning from context.</td>
<td>Students engage in question and answer sessions after reading.</td>
<td>Use group writing. Students take turns writing sentences of a paragraph about a topic of their choice.</td>
<td>Model appropriate pronunciation of key words. Select those words carefully.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitators of Language Don’ts

| Do not ask them to look up words in the dictionary. | Do not assign long readings for them to read individually. | Do not ignore the different types of writing. Ignore differences between narrative, argumentative, and expository writing. | Do not force students to speak in public; they will speak in public when they feel ready. |
| Do not provide the meaning of words. | Do not select any reading just to get them to read. | Do not ask beginner students to write extensively or about topics they dislike and are not interested in. | Do not correct them on the spot for every single error to avoid loss of motivation. |
### Table 2: Summary of findings: Language dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators of Language Dos</th>
<th>Reaching Comprehension</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Oracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Use articles or short journal articles related to the students’ areas of interest.</td>
<td>Clearly model that we do not write how we speak.</td>
<td>Adult students want to speak “American English.” Show them that there is no such thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highlight key words in presentations and readings.</strong></td>
<td>Have students discuss meaning and content with peers.</td>
<td>Show students the difference between colloquial writing and college writing.</td>
<td>Help them develop confidence. Having and accent is not equivalent to bad pronunciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use activities where students can identify the meanings of key concepts.</strong></td>
<td>Choose readings that relate to the course content and that are relevant for students’ professional work.</td>
<td>Begin teaching how to write short sentences. Many do not know the basic structure of a simple sentence.</td>
<td>Proper and timely correction is useful. Make them feel comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have students infer meaning from the assigned readings.</strong></td>
<td>Have students read in pairs or groups and summarize readings one section at a time.</td>
<td>Use explicit examples related to the course content. Make writing meaningful.</td>
<td>Be specific and direct in your corrections and suggestions. They expect clear and specific suggestions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have students write meaningful sentences with key concepts.</strong></td>
<td>Provide guidelines or questions to guide reading.</td>
<td>Teach step-by-step writing techniques. Let students know exactly what you expect.</td>
<td>Provide meaningful opportunities for students to hear themselves speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encourage the use of key words in oral presentations and written assignments.</strong></td>
<td>Use pre-reading tasks before class. Have them do research on specific topics and come to class ready to read.</td>
<td>Provide them with immediate feedback in both content and language use.</td>
<td>Promote positive interaction between more proficient and less proficient peers. Students can comment on each other’s work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators of Language Don’ts</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do not ask students to look up words in the dictionary and write sentences with those words.</strong></td>
<td>Do not make reading a chore. Many adult learners do not have time to read unless readings are relevant.</td>
<td>Do not assign long and burdensome writing assignments. Do make writing important and meaningful.</td>
<td>Do not criticize overtly or embarrass them in public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do not use web dictionaries. Students will not discriminate between different definitions of polysemous words.</strong></td>
<td>Do not assign long and uninterrupted reading. There must be a short term, immediate purpose for reading.</td>
<td>Do not ask students to write about uninteresting and irrelevant topics.</td>
<td>Do not use condescending comments or sound patronizing in your corrections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do not ask students to write about uninteresting topics.</strong></td>
<td>Do not make writing important and meaningful.</td>
<td>Do not ask students to write about uninteresting and irrelevant topics.</td>
<td>Do not use condescending comments or sound patronizing in your corrections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**NABE PERSPECTIVES**  ★ JULY–SEPTEMBER 2015
Finally, the facilitators agreed that closing the lesson or workshop with summary activities is important to tie the different topics together and to establish expectations for the next meeting. Adult learners want to be guided through their learning process.

Other important factors to consider when working with adult learners are: setting the stage, time management, and closing activities. Many adult learners have been out of the academic environment for some time, and returning to school is a big step and challenge. Creating a welcoming and equitable learning environment for adult learners is necessary to help them succeed. To set the stage, the facilitators recommended organizing the classroom in a way that fosters group work, collaboration, and interpersonal communication. This class arrangement helps establish clear and realistic expectations and helps students know from the beginning what they must do, how they will be evaluated, and what they will learn. The facilitators also argued that adult learners expect them to know the time frames for the different activities and to allow some flexible space to accommodate their needs. Informing students about time frames and possible modifications was identified as another convenient strategy for setting the stage in an adult environment.

In addition, the facilitators argued that time management is a challenge, especially in content courses. Facilitators of content must juggle between teaching of content and ensuring that students meet the language objectives. Flexibility is the key in time management. One facilitator recommended laying out a blue print of the different activities that will take place during the lesson or workshop. This gives facilitators a clear notion of what to do and when. It also allows them to make necessary changes to adjust to the schedule or to determine which material will be covered in an upcoming workshop if that were necessary. Planning ahead is essential. The secret to keeping adult learners engaged is balance: too many activities will overwhelm the adult learners, and too few activities will turn the class into a lecture.

Finally, the facilitators agreed that closing the lesson or workshop with summary activities is important to tie the different topics together and to establish expectations for the next meeting. Adult learners want to be guided through their learning process. They come to class with a wealth of knowledge, but they are somewhat scared about coming back to school and being able to meet the expectations. The facilitators agreed that full disclosure of activities, assignments, expectations, and upcoming work is necessary to lower the students’ affective filter and give them a sense of control of their learning process. Closing activities are, perhaps, one of the most important parts of the workshop. Activities such as exit slips, random questioning, 1-minute reflections, and 1-minute papers all proved effective and adult learners enjoy them. As they think critically about the topics discussed in class, they come to conclusions that definitely show that they were engaged and thinking. The goal is to make sure that students understand and that they feel comfortable with what they learned.
Concluding Arguments

Sound teaching practices are essential for the appropriate management of academic settings. Having clear views and ideas of who their students are will give teachers an extra edge that will facilitate their understanding of the academic environment and the development of effective and meaningful lesson plans. Children and adult learners differ in many ways. Their motivations and aspirations are different, and their learning processes vary greatly depending on their age, personalities, and styles. Teachers must be prepared to work with a diverse environment to make it welcoming for all students alike.

The United States has experienced a significant increase in adult education and literacy programs during recent years (Sticht, 2002). This increase presents new opportunities and challenges in the educational field and requires that educators understand the individualities of this increasing diverse population. Adult learners must focus on acquiring and learning information they can apply immediately in their work and everyday lives. For immigrant Hispanic adult learners, as a minority within andragogy, pursuing higher education can be a challenge. Hispanic adult learners seek the same educational goals of self-improvement, but language and English literacy can act as barriers to participate in adult literacy programs. The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model is a teaching approach that helps Hispanic adult learners overcome those barriers and be successful. This model can be successfully implemented in higher education, but it is important to follow strict guidelines and recommendations to make it feasible and practicable.

References


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 the Ana G. Méndez University System-Capital Area Campus where he teaches Spanish, English, and Education courses and trains faculty members in areas related to the System’s Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model. 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. He can be contacted at luis.penton@gmail.com.