

ECIS ESL and MT Conference –Rome-Many Languages, One Message
Workshop: Whole-brain learning for ESL students

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Time: Thursday March 3rd 4-5pm

Session description: It has been said that 85% of what we know about the human brain has been discovered in the last 15 years. What are the implications of our increasing understanding of how we learn for primary ESL specialists and classroom teachers? In this practical session, Jackie will explore ways to use recent research to enhance teaching and learning in bilingual and multilingual classrooms.

Objectives:

- What it means to be bilingual – the cognitive and cultural implications
- Brain-friendly/Whole brain learning and ESL/EAL students
- Planning, teaching and assessment to support ESL students' access to the curriculum, especially language and literature

A poem: from “Search for my tongue” by Sujata Bhatt

“You ask me what I mean
by saying I have lost my tongue,
I ask you, what would you do
If you had two tongues in your mouth,
And lost the first one, the mother tongue,
And could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.
You could not see them together,
Even if you thought that way.
And if you lived in a place you had to
Speak a foreign tongue,
Your mother tongues would rot in your mouth
Until you had to spit it out
But overnight while I dream,
It grows back, a stump of a shoot
Grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins,
It ties the other tongue in knots,
The bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,
It pushes the other tongues aside.
Every time I think I’ve forgotten,
I think I’ve lost the mother tongue,
It blossoms out of my mouth.”

What does it mean to be bilingual? The cognitive and cultural implications

Myths and misconceptions:

- Learning two languages means one becomes proficient in neither.
- It is better to start reading in L1 than L2.
- It doesn't matter when one learns a second language.
- Both parents should stop speaking L1 in order to help the child develop L2.
- Any kind of bilingual education is better than monolingual.

The main stages of Bilingual development:

- 1) The child builds up a list of words, with words from both languages, but concepts are rarely present with translation.
- 2) Words from both languages are used together in early sentences "Une big bird in the ciel.." However, the mixing of the two languages decreases, during the pre-school years, eg 30% of the sentences contained mixed language at the beginning of a child's 3rd year. By the child's 4th year, it had declined to 5%.
- 3) As vocabulary grows in each language translations occur. Children become aware that there are two (or more) separate languages. Each language is attached to the people who speak it and the child may not appreciate it when the speakers step out of their language boxes!
- 4) Grammatical rules are conflated so the acquisition, understanding and application of separate rules takes longer.
(Adapted from Crystal: 1987)

Being bilingual:

With 5,000 languages and fewer than 200 countries, it is clear that bilingualism is more common than monolingualism. However, less than 25% of countries give official recognition to 2 languages. And only 6 countries recognize 3 or more languages.

There are various kinds of bilingualism :

- *Subtractive*, where a learner's mother tongue suffers by taking a lower status to L2
- *Additive*, where becoming bilingual is seen as positive
- *Simultaneous* bilingualism involves two languages from birth
- *Sequential* bilingualism means L2 is learned after L1 is, at least orally established. However the two languages start, it is likely, by the end of an international school career, that most children will speak at least two languages, including English, fluently enough to claim *balanced* bilingualism.
- *Elite* bilingualism is where both languages enjoy high international status. Many international schoolchildren evolve as elite bilinguals.

[Background - Research into bilingual education:

There has been a great deal of research over the past 2 decades into the development of young bilinguals – international, national, and local including classroom based action research. This has resulted in the development of a number of important theories, principles and knowledge that underpin bilingual pedagogy.

Internationally, the work of Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen has been particularly influential in the development of pedagogy.

"ESL pullout in the early grades, taught traditionally, is the least successful model for students' long-term academic success..."(Cummins p.121 (1996)

The work of Jim Cummins: Canada:

For over 20 years, Cummins, the Canadian educationalist and researcher, has developed several useful theories and models, which help us to look at the interplay between language development and the cognitive and academic domain.

Cummins adapted the metaphor of an iceberg to distinguish between basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive and academic language proficiency (BICS and CALP for short). All children develop conversational skills first, in face to face, contextualised situations, but take longer to develop academic language. The distinction between these 2 types of language and their rates of development is now recognised in the OFSTED framework for inspecting EAL in Primary Schools.

Thomas and Collier (USA)

In 1995, (USA) Thomas and Collier's conducted a longitudinal study with 42,000 students. Successful bilingual programmes are two-way and developmental.

The characteristics are:

- integrated schooling, with English and language minority speakers learning each other's languages
- equal status for languages
- close home-school links and parental involvement
- staff development "emphasising whole language, natural language acquisition through all content areas, co-operative learning, interactive and discovery learning, cognitive complexity for all proficiency levels."

The data reviewed clearly imply

- that bilingualism and biliteracy should be promoted for all students
- bilingual instruction should place a strong emphasis on developing literacy in the minority language.

LOTE (Australia)

"Our experience of working with teachers in Australia, England and Canada, both mainstream "content" teachers and ESL specialists, suggest that effective ESL pedagogy, built on a clear concern for content learning and communication skills, is beneficial for ESL and native-speaking English students alike." (Mohan B et al, 2001: p. 218-219)

SIOP (USA)

An instructional model for mainstream teachers working with ESOL students, made available in Europe from 2002. The acronym stands for Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. The model is based on 6 years of the research conducted by the National Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) in the USA.

It has eight components designed to make content comprehensible to EAL students:

Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice and application, Lesson delivery and Review / Assessment.

Teachers are encouraged to plan and assess language and content objectives separately and to use a multi-sensory approach to teaching.

EAL research (UK)

Recent research undertaken in the UK on behalf of the DfES or OFSTED has looked at:

- The language and literacy skills of bilingual learners: *Cameron (2003) More advanced learners of English as an additional language in schools and colleges.* This research looked at students in Key Stage 4 and post 16 but Lynne Cameron is currently undertaking similar research looking at the writing of pupils at the end of key Stage 2. See also the work of Eve Gregory and Tony Cline

Elite bilingualism: International schools:

The work of Coreen Sears (1998) and Anita de Meija (2002) has explored bilingual education in international and European schools, where students tend to come from an affluent global diaspora.]

The bilingual brain:

All bilinguals start with the language they hear inside the womb. Baby's react favourably to the mother's language tones and intonations because they are most familiar with them. By 1, babies have already forged 500,000 connections
By 2, they have more than adult!
By adolescence, they have half the synapses of a 2 year old!

Joy Hirsch's MRI based research (1998) shows that early bilinguals develop language in shared areas in the brain. Late bilinguals, however, keep separate areas for each language. This may have implications for bilingual education.

Ricciardelli (1992) reviewed 24 studies of bilinguals and found that in 20 of these bilinguals performed at higher levels than monolinguals, in both convergent and divergent thinking.

Several studies also suggest that syntactic and phonological awareness and communicative sensitivity are better developed in bilinguals.

Fascinating fact:

The brain is the consistency of raw egg.

Whole brain? The brain and how we learn:

“Most of the knowledge that matters to us ...is not developed in a passive way. We come to know through processes of active interpretation and integration. We ask questions...We have strategies of many kinds for finding out. We struggle – and it can be a long, hard struggle- to make sense....”

(Donaldson, 1992: p.19 Human Minds : an exploration. London, Allen Lane)

Myths and misconceptions:

- We only use 2-10 % of our brain
- Children can only concentrate for their chronological age in minutes plus two....
- Other animals have larger brains and are more intelligent
- There are left and right brain thinkers/ learners
- There are multiple intelligences
- We have a three part brain

Fascinating fact:

The brain is only 2.4 % of our body weight but it consumes 20 % of our energy .

How can cognitive neuroscience inform education?

1. It can confirm good practice
2. It can help resolve educational dilemmas
3. It can suggest new possibilities in pedagogy or curriculum design

“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think”
(Socrates)

Socrates “saw education as a continuous quest, of endless speculation, with a focus on questioning, rather than answering pre-set questions. When thinking Socratically, people discover that they cannot easily define ideas that are central to the beliefs they often hold with such certainty. This ignorance in turn inspires authentic curiosity and critical reflection upon one’s own thinking and experiences.”

(Murriss: 1998: 138 , in An Introduction to Oracy- Frameworks for Talk. Cassell)

Fascinating fact: Neo cortex

The neo cortex is still developing through adolescence. It is responsible for coherence, for whole-brain operation and for problem solving. It is reputed to deal with higher order thinking skills and the rational mind.

Thinking:

All thinking involves:

1. the generation of mental variance, ie potential actions, choices
2. the selection of one choice for action, based on what it feels best to do
3. remembering how good or bad the outcome was, ie learning from experience

Creative thinking involves:

1. resolving apparent paradoxes
2. lateral thinking
3. divergent thinking

It is rarely used in everyday thinking.

Typical occupations: advertising, media

Academic thinking involves:

1. Finding out and applying rules
2. Resolving formal paradoxes
3. Focussed, convergent thinking

Typical occupation: computer programmer, lexicographer,

Everyday thinking involves:

1. Making analogies so that the new becomes familiar
2. Exploiting our experiences of the world.

Typical occupation: driving car, cooking, teaching

Slow thinking, a concept devised by Guy Claxton (1997) involves using the “undermind” to contemplate a problem from a distance and over time, which allows a fresh perspective and often leads to a solution.

QUESTION: How do our bilinguals/ESL students relate to the different types of thinking?

Edward de Bono's Approach to Thinking

“Being a thinker is a totally different self-image (from “intelligent” or “not-intelligent”)

It is an operating skill. You can do something about it. You can get better at it....Being a thinker involves consciously wanting to be a thinker...So intention is the first step.”

(1985) Six Thinking Hats (pp 17-18) Penguin (1990)

Thinking is the operating skill with which we use our intelligence and perceptions. The excellence of the brain is its ability to make, organise and use patterns.

What kind of pedagogy?:

Mainstream educationalists whose theories of learning have been influential in the development of bilingual pedagogy include :

- **Bloom** for his work on higher order thinking skills-
Eg.knowledge, comprehension, application, evaluation, analysis, synthesis
- **Bruner** for his work on the link between higher order language functions and thinking and learning skills. Also for his concept of scaffolding children's learning.
- **Vygotsky** for work on language and conceptual development, socially constructed knowledge and the 'zone of proximal development.'
- **Maslow** for recognizing the importance of socio-cultural factors; all children need to feel safe and valued in order to learn. They need a sense of belonging.
- **Gardner** for his work on multiple intelligences and deep learning.

Fascinating fact: Limbic or Mammalian brain:

This controls sleep and the emotions. It is where we ascribe affective value to things. It also controls or influences memory.

Fascinating fact: Reptilian brain

11 out of 12 nerves end in the Reptilian brain. It is responsible for reflex actions, eg fight or flight...

Brain-friendly or brain-based learning and teaching:

These terms are merely catch phrases used to describe ways in which teachers can consider applying theories about the brain to help children maximise their potential for learning. Brain –friendly activities are designed to:

- enhance motivation and self-esteem
- fulfil Maslow’s hierarchy of needs eg. satisfy young children’s need for movement and for rest
- stimulate the senses and engage both sides of the brain
- provide the BIG picture and identify objectives
- support memory and recall through reviews
- ensure challenge by working in the child’s ZPD
- stimulate critical enquiry
- engage the emotions and support the development of emotional intelligence
- develop children’s “other” intelligences
- develop children’s metacognitive awareness

Fascinating fact: The corpus collosum is usually smaller in males than in females. It is reputed to be responsible for the “dialogue” between hemispheres and for multi-tasking..

We can if.....

Barbara MacGilchrist (2005) and Margaret Buttress's project in Redbridge, London (2005) emphasised a "We can if..." approach to improving the quality of children's learning, eg.

"We can develop our teaching practice to enhance pupils' learning if we:

- Encourage thinking and learning skills
- develop the language of learning in classrooms
- Stimulate the learning brain
- Develop emotional intelligence

MacGilchrist and Buttress's colleagues introduced :

WALT : "We are learning to...": teachers set objectives
and

WILF: "What I'm looking for...": teachers outline their expectations

Planning, teaching and assessment strategies to support ESL students' access to the curriculum

What ESL/EAL teachers can do:

- Help children feel they belong
- Encourage a state of relaxed alertness
- Provide optimal learning conditions
- Start with the Big Picture.
- Help children make connections
- Connect to prior knowledge (eg IPC's Knowledge Harvest)
- Clear learning objectives and expectations
- Present new information in context (context not content is often what we recall best)
- Use the Accelerated Learning cycle.
- Help learners learn how they learn
- Use VAK teaching styles
- Involve the senses and the emotions
- Activate the neglected hemispheres, using music, movement etc
- Change states and use brain gym (Laterality/ Centring/ Focus- Dennison) brain-breaks, eg Brain buttons, Cross Pat/walk, Neck Squeezes, reading fingers and ankle hold,
- Remember brain food: Rest, Protein, Oxygen and Water

Sustain good ESL practice:

Teachers can further support children's bilingual education if they:

- Give prior warning re topics so students can research them at home, in L1
- Plan and assess language and content objectives separately
- Refer to students' experience
- Supply key words and explain vocabulary
- Check textbooks for language problems
- Check student is familiar with genre of text and knows how to "read" the genre
- Simplify wording on board/ worksheets
- Overtly teach language forms and structures as well as vocabulary
- Use small co-operative learning groups
- Differentiate appropriately:

eg by Resources, Tasks, Support, Response, Outcomes

- Teach in multisensory way, eg support oral with written form
- Teach/practise metacognitive strategies
- Provide practical demonstration
- Use diagrams and videos
- Make the question formats simpler
- Repeat instructions and provide model answers
- Use concept questions to check understanding
- Ensure learning is "brain –friendly" and provide Brain-breaks-
eg. brain buttons, cross walks etc, to encourage Laterality, Centring, Focus

Implications for resources and materials?

Materials used in school need to :

- reflect students' interests and experiences
- be supportively visual
- highlight key words
- have simplified/controlled syntax
- encourage communication
- contain clear task instructions
- provide model answers
- provide scaffolding
- allow for differentiation and extension
- enable conceptual understanding to be assessed

Literacy For Bilingual Learners

International schools could do more sometimes to explore issues relating to biliteracy and the literacy teaching of bilingual pupils . These could be more overtly integrated within general school policies.

Factors in successful literacy arts programmes include:

- detailed analysis of the language demands of the curriculum and of how bilingual learners at different stages can be helped to meet them;
- close attention to the links between learning of the spoken and written language;
- effective management of the contribution of support staff, whether teachers or teaching assistants;
- relevant and appealing resources which would encourage literacy skills in both English and home languages, including literature and ICT.

Providing a “literary heritage” in a multilingual school context

International schools need to work extra hard to provide children with a rich and shared experience of language and literature. Teachers could consider some or all of the following steps:

- policies and frameworks for all students, including EAL
- language rich environments
- emergent writing principles
- share literary language on a daily basis
- celebrate creative writing
- expose children to a wide range of literary genres
- share creative writing from other cultures, (bilingual parents can serve as translators)
- ensure texts are not too anglo-centric.
- help children understand features of “book language.”
- use Storysacks with younger children

Creative writing and EAL students

Just as proformas and structured guidance for reading in EAL can be helpful, EAL students, benefit from structured support in writing. This may take the form of writing frames (Lewis : 1997) with questions and prompts to “scaffold” students’ thinking.

Teachers can also encourage writing more effectively if they:

- give students “here-and-now” writing assignments, eg monitoring the hatching of an egg or chrysalis; planning a science investigation; describing a picture.
- provide written prompts, eg sentence beginnings or questions to answer.
- create visual vocabulary banks, related to the theme of the writing, eg the Water Cycle or Dinosaurs.
- give students whole or part sentences to rearrange and copy down.
- ask EAL students to draw a labelled diagram or storyboard instead of an extended essay.
- encourage poetry reading and writing. Poems are shorter and often provide good models of intonation and repetition.
- ensure students understand the links between literacy skills by teaching Writing and Reading together,
- avoid over-correction. Students who have been successful writers in L1 may find it daunting to make a lot of corrections. Teacher feedback should focus primarily on the students’ ideas and feelings, while identifying a maximum of three (max) surface features and three (max) language or syntax features to master or practise.

Ways forward : partnership teaching

In a bilingual/ESL context, it must be agreed that the overall responsibility for language development is shared between the partnership teachers. These questions may support school-based discussions and staff development.

- **PEDAGOGY:** What are the development priorities in terms of pedagogy and brain-friendly teaching?
- **LANGUAGE POLICY:** What are the development priorities in bilingual language and literacy development?
- **INDUCTION:** How could the school's current induction, monitoring and assessment procedures be improved?
- **INCLUSION:** How do individual teachers plan to ensure that the needs of all the pupils are met?
- **PLANNING:** When will teachers plan together? In planning the work will teachers allocate areas of specific responsibility eg teaching part of the lesson,/preparing resources?
- **SUPPORT:** When are additional staff available and is the current arrangement meeting student needs?
- **LIAISON:** As partners, when will the teachers feed back to each other and how?
- **PROGRESS:** How is the ESL assessment file managed and shared?
- **PARENTS:** How are parents kept informed of and involved in their children's ESL/ bilingual development?

Pupils learning two or more languages will reach their full potential only if attention is paid to their language needs. Effective learning and teaching across the curriculum require teachers to understand and apply the key principles from the pedagogy of the two cultures and Second language pedagogy in their daily practice.

Summary:

Bilingual/ESL students need:

- Brain-friendly staff who are able to plan, scaffold and assess the curriculum
- Accelerated learning pedagogy to enable them to "catch up" with rest of class
- Collegial/collaborative staff who are child-centred
- Whole school policies and effective management
- Informed staff who understand and value bilingualism
- Careful induction and social support of students and parents
- Targeted instruction- differentiated but challenging
- Developmentally appropriate tasks
- Fine-tuned input : simplified, adapted
- Clear language objectives as well as content objectives (SIOP model)
- Planned and monitored learning outcomes for language and content
- Suitable resources- human and material
- Classroom-based formative assessment

Weblinks:

- Min of Ed, New Zealand (a comprehensive overview of Bilingualism research and models of best practice: highly recommended)
- <http://minedu.govt.nz>
- Teaching English as a Second or Other Language:<http://www.tesol.edu/>
- NALDIC, National Association of Language Development in the Curriculum
<http://www.naldic.org.uk>
- www.learning-solutions.co.uk/brain-gym.
- ECIS: <http://www.ecis.org/>
- ESL resources – general: <http://www.prairienet.org/community/esl/GenESL.htm>
- ESL Café: <http://www.eslcafe.com/>
- FORUM- English Teaching Forum: ETFORUM@USIA.GOV
- IATEFL(Int Association of English as a Foreign Language): <http://www.iatefl.org>
- National Association for Teaching of English -NATE(UK):<http://www.nate.org.uk>
- OUP: <http://oup.co.uk> (ELT Journal articles- OUP/ British Council and IATEFL)
- TESOL: <http://www.tesol.edu/>
- V.B.M.Butterworth: Gathering Evidence: <http://www.canteach.gov.uk>
- Power of Babel: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/multilingual>

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