Common Questions
about Teaching in a Diverse Classroom
and Informed, Evidence-based Answers

Scharff Rethfeldt, W., McNeilly, L., Abutbul-Oz, H., Blumenthal, M., Garcia de Goulart, B., Hunt, E., Laasonen, M. R., Levey, S., Meir, N., Moonsamy, S., Mophosho, M., Salameh, E.-K., Smolander, S., Taiebine, M., Thordardottir, E. (2020).

The Multilingual-Multicultural Affairs Committee of the

(d|b|a) **International Association of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

The non-profit worldwide organization of professionals and scientists in communication, voice, speech language pathology, audiology and swallowing.

https://ialpasoc.info/committees/multilingual-and-multicultural-affairs-committee/

Contents

What are the benefits of learning in a group for multilingual children?

Groups that consist of students who speak the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) within the classroom and second language (L2) learners allow students to gain experience in communicating in the second language. These groups can be organized with structured tasks (e.g., a project) or unstructured tasks (e.g., interviews among students that target favorite activities or other informal topics).

The group context allows L2 learners to interact with first (L1) or majority language speakers. In this way, language exposure occurs within a task, along with allowing informal interaction among students. Given that L2 learners' social language skills are acquired earlier than academic language skills, group interaction provides a positive context for social interaction. This interaction among students link to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that knowledge is constructed in interactions (Green, 2014).

Group learning increases exposure to different thinking strategies. Moreover, different perspectives are shared, which enhances world views. In so doing, learners develop respect for other learners' perspectives and realize that their world views are valued too. The teacher scaffolds the discussion so that the L2 learner is able to contribute to the task at hand. The L1 learners are able to model language structures in context, during a task/activity. Working in a group context presents a perfect platform for exposing the children to various cultures, empowering the children to present various aspects of their culture such as: words in their home language, unique customs, songs, traditional food etc. Teaching in diverse classroom requires cultural competence from a teacher.

What is cultural competence?

Cultural competence is a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together to enable a system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Lum, 1999). Including cultural competence in the class or therapy setting should be a mutual ongoing journey of respect and acceptance.

Cultural competence in practice in a diverse classroom context requires a teacher who 'acknowledges and incorporates – at all levels – the importance of culture, assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance toward the dynamics that result from cultural differences, expansion of cultural knowledge, and adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs' (Betancourt et al., 2003: 294).

Verdon et. al. (2015) identified six overarching Principles of Culturally Competent Practice (PCCP)to enhance the cultural competence of SLP's in Australia:

(1) identification of culturally appropriate and mutually motivating therapy goals,

(2) knowledge of languages and culture,

(3) use of culturally appropriate resources,

(4) consideration of the cultural, social and political context,

(5) consultation with families and communities, and

(6) collaboration between professionals.

Which method could be used for teaching/learning(?) language in a diverse classroom?

Content based instruction (CBI) is a teaching approach that focuses on learning language through learning about information on a particular classroom topic (Cenoz, 2015; Stroller, 2008).

Learning language occurs through group interaction and discussion, rather than teacher instruction or lecture. In this approach, steps consist of choosing a subject of interest, finding sites with information on this subject (e.g., websites, books, videos, or images), and forming small groups to focus on the subject. Within groups, students will be encouraged to discuss information. The final goal is for the group to create a report or presentation. In this approach, students are able to produce the language associated with the task while addressing a language objective in the class. As education reflects the sociopolitical situation, it should not be taken for granted that all students speak the same L1 or share the same culture and this must be considered when implementing CBI (Cenoz, 2015).

In lower grades, a content-based approach can consist of students creating a graphic presentation (e.g., pictures or images) of the life cycles of butterflies. The corresponding language approach consists of verbal explanations and labels. Later, students can be asked to verbally explain the graphic representation and guided in using connective terms to develop narrative skills (e.g., first, next, then).

In higher grades, topics can address science or math problems. In one high school classroom, instruction integrated math with a functional task. The small group task required students to calculate clothing costs given a percentage of discount. This strategy demonstrates the integration of content and language, Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) state that CBI allows for language to be learned within meaningful contexts.

Pre-teaching of concepts is essential. The teacher can pre-teach the vocabulary or concepts so that a foundation is created before the content-based instruction follows (Wium, 2015). This provides all learners with an understanding, upon which new concepts can be built. Pre-teaching is useful strategy, as diverse learners may present with different levels of competence in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

Pre-teaching of vocabulary concepts benefits both oral discussion and literacy lessons (Wium, 2015).

Create a positive learning environment

Create a positive view of diversity and differences. Tell students "good try" if errors occur, rather than focus on errors. This will aid the students' learning as a positive environment is essential to eliminate anxiety and negative feelings.

Teachers should display sensitivity to diverse learners' contributions, with barriers to learning are avoided. The teacher can use language elicitation strategies of expansion to model language structures. Forced alternatives also give L2 learners the choice of the target word, providing them with the feeling of owning their response. The quality of the teacher's feedback to a learner's response is important (Pascoe, Harty & le Roux, 2015) and will encourage the learner to develop confidence her/his replies.

Classroom goals and lessons

Posting information on topics, goals, and lessons on walls, with labels presented in native languages spoken in the classroom will enhance learning. This approach will value all languages, making all children feel welcome and proud of their native languages, while embracing the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). It also allows the learners to hear the phonology of the different languages.

Depending on the grade of the learner, phrases in the LoLT that are on the walls will provide support for the L2 learner when writing in the school language. Learners can also be encouraged to have their personal word dictionaries that they make up according to the activity they are engaged in. This will help them to be independent when these words are needed for written activities in subsequent lessons (Moonsamy & Durbach, 2016). Provide bilingual tools in the classroom, such as dictionaries. Picture dictionaries are available for younger aged classrooms in a number of different languages (e.g., Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and a number of other languages).

Within the classroom, sessions devoted to the school language allow greater exposure and experience with the second language to second language learners. During these sessions, spoken language can be accompanied by visual supports to aid comprehension. Other sessions can be devoted to bilingual lesson learning. Allowing students to express ideas and lesson content in the language they chose to use. Such exchanges will support the learner in their transition into the LoLT. This will also act to create a positive learning environment.

Code switching

Within the classroom, treat code switching as a positive way for students to communicate. This is a device used to request help in finding a target word in a second language or a means for creating a longer and complex sentence. "Code switching follows the 'agreed upon' community rules. It occurs to enhance meaning, emphasize a

shift in topic, conveys humor, ethnic solidarity and attitude towards the listener (Owens, 2014, p.178). When assessing, note code switching and the context (audience), as you would with non-linguistic cues. Code switching will depend on the individual's mastery of the two languages.

Background knowledge

It is important to not assume background knowledge. Within the diverse classroom, students have different experiences, culture, language, and knowledge. These are factors that play an important role in learning. Each learner brings their world view to their learning and this experience bridges new learning with prior knowledge (Moonsamy & Durbach, 2016). Learners who have not had a particular experience should be allowed to develop the experience, through video clips, films and pictures.

Informal assessment of learning skills

Informal and ongoing assessment (formative assessment) allows monitoring of students' learning This can take place through some of the strategies described earlier: informal quizzes, or submission of best and least learned information or material at the end of a class. Younger students can be given a list of learning goals or topics and asked to put a plus or minus sign next to those best or least learned. In higher grades and college classrooms, students can be provided with sample questions for exams and quizzes to provide monitoring and ongoing assessment of successful learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) addresses the variability associated with students' learning and the diversity found across the world's classrooms (CAST, 2011; CAST, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Ralabate, 2011: Ralabate et al., 2012). UDL provides ways to remove barriers to students' learning for those with/without disabilities from primary school through college. UDL also uses a formative approach to learning, based on continued assessment of students' learning.

In contrast, traditional approaches to learning utilize summative assessment (e.g., quizzes, exams, and a final exam) that assesses learning at discrete points. However, a final exam is offered too late in the academic year of a course to offer support for learners' difficulties. UDL guidelines provide ways for Multiple Means of Representation (multiple ways that information can be presented), Multiple Means of Action and Expression (multiple ways that students can act and express learning), and Multiple Means of engagement (multiple ways that students can be engaged within a classroom) (CAST, 2011).

<u>Multiple Means of Representation</u>

Information can be presented in videos with text and sound, vocabulary items and main ideas can be highlighted, verbal directions can be presented with images and text for children who learn better through visual, auditory, or tactile means.

<u>Multiple Means of Action and Expression:</u> Students are given the opportunity to share what they have learned, to ask questions and tell stories or draw pictures about their personal experiences, or to retell a story from a book that was read to them. They are given ways to express their learning through the means that are available to them through verbal or other means.

<u>Multiple Means of Engagement:</u> Children have different interests, cultural and language backgrounds, and experiences. Some are shy. Awareness of these differences allows a teacher to consider ways to engage children's participation within the classroom. Thus, children can be engaged through the opportunity to present through drawing, recording, or through verbal means of engagement.

I read to the children in my classroom. Can the Universal Design for Learning help me read successfully so that children are engaged and learn?

The following model was used in a preschool class that followed UDL guidelines. The teacher read a book about a child who comes to school without food in his lunchbox and other children each share a piece of food from their own lunchboxes. Before reading the story, students were introduced to the vocabulary words used in the book *(Multiple Means for Representation).*

During this task, students were asked questions by use of the vocabulary words in the story: have you ever been surprised, shared, or forgotten something *(Multiple Means for Action and Expression and Multiple Means for Engagement)*. Vocabulary words were also accompanied by pictures to demonstrate the meaning of words. In summary, vocabulary words are presented before reading a story, children are engaged by asking questions regarding the vocabulary words (e.g., *forgotten – have you ever forgotten anything? Lost – have you ever lost anything).* The goal is to engage children to support their interest.

I teach in a high school class. How can I use the Universal Design for Learning in my classroom?

The following the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines can be used in high school and college classrooms to ensure that barriers are removed for variable and diverse learning skills.

Multiple Means of Representation

Digital presentations, videos, handouts, and posts in the classroom or on a webpage can be used to address visual and auditory learning. Posts and discussion about goals for specific lessons in the classroom can be used, along with consistent and frequent feedback to students on their learning skills.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Encourage the formation of small groups to discuss material related to the lectures, as recommended earlier in this section. Each group can appoint a speaker to express questions, conclusions, or issues that emerge during discussion. Students can be asked to anonymously turn in questions at the end of a class. This is a formative assessment approach that allows identification of students' strengths and weaknesses in learning and removes the anxiety associated with speaking in a classroom (Multiple Means of Engagement).

Multiple Means for Engagement

Students can be provided with sample questions for exams and quizzes to prepare them for the material to be studied and learned. Sample questions from a final exam allow students to understand the scope of the classroom learning goals. Practice quizzes can be used with questions that are similar to those in the actual quiz to prepare students for later learning goals. The opportunity to retake a quiz can be offered if learning requires further study, based on findings that students are able to achieve higher scores on retakes through awareness of what they did not understand or learn.

Are there any technological apps or devices that are available for the classroom?

Some students have visual problems, some have difficulty with memory, and others have problems expressing themselves.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines emphasizes the need for accessible information for students with disabilities (large print, technical devices and apps, and interpreters), and multiple formats (computers or software, graphic organizers, manipulatives, and PowerPoint). High-tech (e.g., computers, iPads, videos) or low-tech (e.g., picture cards or alphabet boards) approaches can be used within the classroom.

Computers allow enlarged text for students with visual difficulties. Students with reading disorders can be offered text-to-speech software. Assistive features can be built into an iPad for students who require support for visual, hearing, motor, or literacy needs.

The following are some of the technological supports that allow teachers to remove barriers for children's learning.

- Dyslexia Toolbox allows students with dyslexia a variety of assistive technology features; see https://www.readingrockets.org/literacyapps

- Kidspiration is software for early grade learners that uses pictures, text, numbers, and spoken words for vocabulary, word recognition, reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills. This software can be downloaded and used for all areas of study; see http://www.inspiration.com/Kidspiration

- Scene and Heard is an app that can be used for storytelling and images for those who require larger context. The app provides a communication book, color coded visual timetable, and options for adding audio and video to a program or task. This app can be downloaded to an iPad, see https://therapy-box.co.uk/scene-heard

- Smart Notebook allows an instructor to create learning activities though animation. Students can use desktop computers, tablets, laptops, or any other device to engage in and complete the activities created the instructor. With the use of this program, classroom tasks can address a variety of topics (e.g., match, science, shapes, language tasks, and any task chosen by the instructor); see https://education.smarttech.com/products/notebook

- SmartPen. This pen captures the audio and ties it to written notes on special paper. The recording can then be played back with a simple touch of the pen on the paper

- ModMath is a free iPad app that provides students with dyslexia and dysgraphia to solve math problems without the use of a pencil; http://www.modmath.com

- MyTalkTools is an app for students with communication difficulties. This app allows students to communicate by the creation of words, sounds, and pictures; see https://www.mytalktools.com/dnn/Products.aspx

- Stop, Breathe & Think is an app that addresses the users' feelings and moods; see https://www.stopbreathethink.com

- Voice Dream Reader is an app that benefits students with reading disabilities and an attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is This app allows students to highlight text which can then be read to them; see https://www.voicedream.com

For students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), there is a number of apps for children with the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder; see https://www.educationalappstore.com/best-apps/best-autism-apps-ipad-android

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