

Sla: language acquisition vs learning



Bilingualism

10/1/17 – Introduction to Bilingualism

During this lecture, I learned the definition and the importance of bilingualism. Throughout the years, the definition of bilingualism has changed slowly from ‘ possesses native-like control of two or more languages’ (Bloomfield, 1933) to ‘ operates in two languages on a daily basis’ (David, 1999, pg 157). As well as this, I also came to realise that there are a number of interconnected issues that affect bilingualism such as race, power, society, and culture. This interested me because I did not realise how much in the world affects bilingualism and how all of these issues are interconnected. For example, if a family are racist and have strong political views against immigrants, they are less likely to support bilingualism and their child/children are less likely to be open to learning a new language due to their parents’ views. Learning about bilingualism and understanding the importance of it will help me in my role as a teacher as it will help me to make bilingual children feel more comfortable and welcome in myclassroom[A1].

In this lecture, we were put into groups and given a scenario about a bilingual child coming into the school. In the group that I was part of, our scenario was “ a young Spanish girl coming into primary 2.” In our group, we discussed the importance of making this child feel welcome and ensuring that she understood what was going. To begin with, we thought that asking the child if she feels comfortable enough to share her background with class would be a good way to show her that as her teacher, I am interested in where she has come from while at the same establishing the level of English

the child understands and can utilize. We also thought that having, for example, the colours up on a wall display in both English and Spanish would help the child to differentiate between both languages and get used to the English whilst still having the comfort of her first language.

Using the Learning in 2+ Languages (2005) document during this lecture made me realise how important bilingualism is and how beneficial it can be for both young children and adults. I learned that bilingualism does not delay a child's cognitive development like some believe but brings a number of cognitive advantages such as a greater creative potential and a greater awareness of how languages operate.

17/1/17 – Second Language Acquisition: Language Acquisition Vs Learning

Throughout this session, I was introduced to a number of different hypotheses, and their criticisms, surrounding how a person acquires / learns a different language. According to Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (1982) there are two distinct processes to learning a language: Acquisition or acquiring a language and Learning a language. Acquiring a language refers to the passive process of obtaining the subtleties of a language through natural learning however learning a language refers to the active process in which learners become aware of the rules of the language they are trying to learn. However, McLaughlin (1978) states that this theory is impossible to prove. This interested me as I had never realised that there was a belief that acquiring and learning a language were two different processes. Reflecting back to my own experiences of learning a language [A2], I was always taught the rules and grammar of language rather than acquiring it through natural

processes therefore, in my own opinion, I believe that they are definitely two separate processes but I also believe that these are closely inter-connected.

For me, the most interesting hypothesis that we were introduced to in this lecture was The Affective Filter Hypothesis. This is the idea that emotional variables can have an effect and prevent someone from learning a language. These include motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. The lower the affective filter, the more language the student will acquire. This shows that a child with low self-confidence may not pick up a language as easily as a child with high self-confidence. According to the ONS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey (2004), 2.2% or about 96,000 children have an anxiety disorder. This shows that most likely, teachers will be faced with the challenge of trying to teach a language to a child who cannot acquire it as easily as the other children in the class. However, Krashen claims [A3] that children do not have the same affective filter as adults but also experience differences related to the affective filters. An affective filter only accounts for individual variation in language acquisition, it cannot be applied to all children.

As well as this, we also looked at the Count Us In - A Sense of Belonging (2009) which highlighted the importance of improving the learning of some pupils. As well as this, the document made me aware of the shift in patterns of migration, especially since 2004. Due to easier access and cheaper travel, the number of immigrants coming to Scotland has increased dramatically. Many of those immigrating to Scotland bring with them young children who have to be put into the schooling system. This Count Us In document emphasises the importance of teachers in supporting newly-arrived children

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and ensuring that they can access the curriculum. As a trainee primary teacher, this is extremely important to me as children must be able to access the curriculum in order to learn and succeed.

24/1/17 – Language and Society

Watching Jane Elliot's 'experiments' in prejudice both shocked me and intrigued me. The method that she uses to teach the children about discrimination is both effective and intriguing but it is also very wrong. However, this experiment took place in the 1960s therefore even though it is wrong in the current educational context, it may not have been as wrong then.

By telling the children one day that the blue eyed people were better than the brown eyed people, it changed their attitudes towards each other drastically and even resulted in some children being aggressive to one another. As soon as the teacher mentions that the people with blue eyes are better and more superior than the children with brown eyes, the brown eyed children look upset and shocked whereas the blue eyed children think it is funny and they are excited. Jane Elliot forces the brown eyed children to wear 'collars' and doesn't allow them to play on any of the playground equipment. She gives the blue eyed children special privileges and they take full advantage of these. In the reverse situation, the blue eyed children become upset and come to realise how the brown eyed children felt the day before. As well as this, we see that when the children are given privileges and are treated as 'superior', they do their work quicker and their learning is improved. At the end of this day, the children all come back together and discuss how being discriminated against made them feel. One child

described it as feeling like “ a dog on a leash”. Many of the children came to realise that being discriminated against for something that you cannot control is one of the worst feelings and that no one should be discriminated against.

This experiment made me realise that in my role as a primary teacher, it is essential to teach my pupils the importance of respecting everyone and treating everyone the same. Tomlinson (2005, pg 154) states that ‘ Failure to develop a curriculum for a multiethnic society has contributed to an increase in xenophobia and racism’. This made me believe that equality is something that children need to become aware of at a young age and it is part of my job to make them aware of it. If, for example, a child of another race came into my classroom, my job would be to ensure that all the children in my classroom were respectful and did not treat them any different just because of the colour of their skin. While this experiment made me realise all of this, it also made me realise that when in a classroom, treating children differently can have a massive effect on their attitudes to one another therefore teachers need to be careful[A4].

31/01/17 – The Scottish Context

The number of families immigrating to Scotland has increased throughout the years and, particularly in 2004, the number of immigrants that came to Scotland increased considerably (Count Us In, pg 2). During this lecture, we examined the statistics of both immigration and the number of immigrant children moving into new schools. For me as a developing primary teacher, it was interesting to see how the number of immigrants coming to Scotland affected the schooling statistics. The reasons that people move to another

country can vary drastically. Many move for family reasons or new careers whereas others move because they want a place of safety.

Immigration has a huge impact on both Scottish society and schools. As a society, we have to be more welcoming as a whole as well as just in the communities where the immigrants move to. Showing respect to all families and becoming aware of what some of these families will face every day is essential. When a family immigrate to Scotland and put their child(ren) into a school, it affects the schoolsector[A5]. As primary teachers, we must think about bilingualism and become aware of diversity. Inside the classroom, we have to ensure that the child is comfortable and understands what is going on at all times as it is our responsibility to make sure that they do not fall behind on the work and are learning.

In my role as a primary teacher, it is important for me to expose children to a second language at a young age as this is the best window of opportunity and is more likely to lead the child to become bilingual than exposure to a second language in teenage or adult years. Many parents believe that they should not introduce a second language until they have fully established one language however it is more difficult to introduce a second language later on. As well as this, introducing a second language later on makes it difficult for parents to interact with this language and use it around the house. According to the Count Us In - A Sense of Belonging document, a child learning a second language can benefit from a number of cognitive advantages that are associated with bilingualism.

14/02/17 – Language and Identity

The people that we spend the most time with have the biggest influence on our language and our identity. According to Baker (2006, pg 136)[A6]“ we construct our identities yet they are created and confined by other people, situations and influences on us.” Everyone forms multiple social identities depending on the group and interactions with other people. Learning a second language is affected by our interactions with others and helps us to find a voice within a social group. As well as this, it is more than just gaining vocabulary and grammar, it is about being believed and being respected as language says things about our values and knowledge. There are many layers to our language and when we first learn to speak, we speak in the same ways as those around us. Introducing a second language at this stage can encourage a child to acquire the language quicker while learning it alongside their first language.

During this lecture, we discussed the issues around age and second language acquisition. Younger learners are neither more nor less successful in second language acquisition than older learners however children who learn a second language in child do tend to achieve higher capability levels than those who begin after childhood. Even though length of exposure is an important factor in learning a second language, in a formal classroom setting, older learners tend to learn quicker than younger learners do. In the early years, second language acquisition is dependent on the teacher providing suitable materials and resources to children and ensuring that learning is enjoyable. As a primary teacher, it is important to make learning a second language more enjoyable for my pupils through resources such as

songs etc. By doing so, they are more likely to remember what I have taught them and they are more likely to be engaged in the lesson.

28/02/17 – Supporting Bilingual Learners in the Classroom (1)

Meeting the needs and supporting bilingual children is an essential role for a primary teacher. When a bilingual child first comes into a teacher's classroom, it is important for you to find them a 'buddy' that they can talk to, or if they are not comfortable talking, just listen to. This not only benefits the bilingual child, but there are also cognitive benefits for monolingual learners who work with bilingual learners and good practice for bilingual learners is good practice for all learners. In my role as a primary teacher, I need to ensure that I am supporting bilingual learners at all times as well as supporting all other children in my classroom. It is important to ensure that everyone in the classroom knows what is happening throughout every lesson.

Cummins (1976) refers to 'The Threshold Theory' which describes the relationship between cognition and the level of bilingualism. The theory is represented as a house which has three floors and two 'linguistic' ladders, representing L1 and L2, on each side. The further up they are on the ladders and floors, the greater chance the children have of being bilingual and obtaining cognitive advantages. As well as this, Cummins (1980, 1981) uses an 'Iceberg Analogy' and describes a common underlying proficiency between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Cummins explains that when using two or more languages, there is a common source where ideas come from meaning that individuals can use two or more language with ease. Listening, reading, speaking and writing in the L1 or L2

helps to develop the cognitive system however the language that the learner uses must be well developed in order to be able to process the cognitive challenges of the classroom.

Towards the end of this lecture, we focused on discussing the importance of supporting the development of English as an additional language (EAL) in the classroom. New arrivals must feel welcomed and be placed in an appropriate group based on their age and ability meaning that the school and class teacher must take into account the child's previous education background. By carefully placing the child into an appropriate group, the teacher can carefully monitor them and take account of the advantages of collaborative learning. Class tasks must be appropriately planned and appropriately scaffolded to support EAL learners. Supporting beginners in English is essential and there are a number of strategies which can be used to help these children. For example, composing sentence halves to be matched or creating gaps in sentences to be filled. As previously mentioned, good practice for bilingual children is good practice for all children therefore activities like this not only help EAL learners but also help all other children in the classroom. Pairing a child who has a good grasp of the English language with an EAL learner can help when these activities take place as they can help the EAL learner to understand how the sentences work and why the halves go together if they do not fully grasp the concept.

[A8]

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171

[A1]Good point

[A2]good

[A3](ibid.)...?

[A4]Good commentary

[A5]How/in what way(s)?

[A6]

[A7]And why?

[A8]Well written and fluent; make sure that all LOs can be covered by your
choice of journal entries: we will discuss