

Instructional Strategies for Second Language Learning

The following instructional practices and instructional frameworks are integral to instruction in a language learning program and are utilized in bilingual programs:

Academic Conversations

“Academic interactions move beyond typical surface level school activities of reciting facts, making up sentences to show grammar rules, and matching vocabulary meanings. In authentic interaction work, students *use* the facts, grammar, and vocabulary in connected sentences to clarify, fortify, and negotiate complex ideas.”¹

The Bridge

See *Metalinguistic Awareness*

Comprehensible Input

Teachers use strategies to make input (classroom language) comprehensible (understandable): Visuals, Modeling, Realia, Movement (Total Physical Response), Graphic organizers, Adapted texts, Vocabulary previews, and Media/technology. In the early stages of second language acquisition, input is made more comprehensible through use of the following:

- Slower, expanded, simplified, and repetitive speech oriented to the “here and now,”
- Highly contextualized language and gestures,
- Comprehension and confirmation checks,
- Communication that provides scaffolding for the negotiation of meaning by constraining possible interpretations of sequence, role, and intent.²

Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

The term content-based instruction is commonly used to describe approaches to integrating language and content instruction. Natural language acquisition occurs in the context of learning and is never learned divorced from meaning. Content-based instruction provides a context for meaningful communication to occur (Curtain, 1995; Met, 1991). Second language acquisition increases with content-based language instruction, because students learn language best when there is an emphasis on relevant, meaningful, complex, and authentic content rather than on the language itself.

CBI promotes negotiation of meaning, which is known to enhance language acquisition (students should negotiate both form and content) (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Second language acquisition is enhanced by comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, 1985), which is a key pedagogical technique in content-based instruction; however, comprehensible input alone does not suffice—students need form-focused content instruction (an explicit focus on relevant and contextually appropriate language forms to support content learning) (Lyster, 1987; Met, 1991; Swain, 1985). CBI lends itself to the incorporation of a variety of thinking skills, and learning strategies which lead to rich language development:

- Information gathering skills—absorbing, questioning;
- Organizing skills—categorizing, comparing, representing;

¹ <http://jeffzwijs.org/interaction.html>

² [Guiding principles for dual language education](#), 3rd edition, p. 47.

- Analyzing skills—identifying main ideas, identifying attributes and components, identifying relationships, and patterns;
- Generalizing skills—inferring, predicting, estimating (ASCD, Dimensions of Thinking) (Curtain, 1995; Met, 1991)

CBI lends itself to cooperative learning, which has been shown to result in improved learning (Crandall, 1993; Slavin, 1995).³

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an approach to organizing classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. It differs from group work, and it has been described as “structuring positive interdependence.” Students must work in groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Cooperative learning techniques lend themselves well to an integration of modalities. When students work together cooperatively, they have to speak and listen to each other and are frequently engaged in synthesizing information from sources (reading), taking notes (writing), and pulling together their ideas (writing) for later presentation (speaking/listening).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.⁴

Instructional Conversation

Thinking, and the abilities to form, express, and exchange ideas are best taught through dialogue, through questioning, and through sharing ideas and knowledge.

The teacher:

- arranges the classroom to accommodate conversation between the teacher and a small group of students on a regular and frequent basis.
- has a clear academic goal that guides conversation with students.
- ensures that student talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk.
- guides conversation to include students’ views, judgments, and rationales using text evidence and other substantive support.
- ensures that all students are included in the conversation according to their preferences.
- listens carefully to assess levels of students’ understanding.
- assists students’ learning throughout the conversation by questioning, restating, praising, encouraging, etc.
- guides the students to prepare a product that indicates the Instructional Conversation’s goal was achieved.

Metalinguistic Awareness

It is essential that teachers understand what language skills they need to develop at each language proficiency level. Teachers are trained to analyze students’ language development.

³ [Content-based language teaching with technology](#), Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

⁴ Gay, G. (2002). [Preparing for culturally responsive teaching](#), *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 106-116.

Because dual language learners transfer knowledge from one language to another (known as cross-linguistic transfer), it is important to help them develop metalinguistic awareness, which is an understanding of how the two languages are the same or different. This skill should be explicitly developed and planned for as the teacher “bridges” the two languages.

One popular strategy for developing metalinguistic awareness is the Bridge. The Bridge is the instructional moment when, after students have learned a concept well in the language of instruction, the teacher strategically and purposefully brings the two languages together to transfer content from one language to the other and to engage the students in contrastive analysis of the two languages. After the Bridge, extension activities in the other language allow students to use and apply the new labels. The Bridge is an effective instructional strategy for [teaching for biliteracy](#).

Oral Language Development

Extensive oral language development must be incorporated into successful literacy instruction. Literacy programs that provide instructional support for oral language development, aligned with high-quality literacy instruction, are the most successful.⁵

Process Writing

This approach promotes writing as a generative, reflective process that requires multiple revisions, encouraging students to view writing as a process and write as real authors do. The approach includes brainstorming, drafting, giving feedback, editing, revising, and publishing. The writing process approach has been championed and developed by Lucy Caulkins at Teachers College at Columbia University. It is recommended for all types of writing in all content areas at all grade levels.⁶

In language learning settings, additional supports are needed to support the explicit teaching of language features, grammar, and syntax, as well as opportunities for oral language development that support academic writing.⁷ For example, language learners may need to spend less time in independent writing and more time in whole-group instruction where writing is scaffolded.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is a dynamic classroom approach in which students actively explore real-world problems and challenges and acquire a deeper knowledge. Project-based learning (PBL) integrates the development of knowledge and skills with the goal of producing a culminating project that evidences student mastery. When used with scaffolding and sheltering techniques, PBL promotes interdisciplinary learning while integrating language development and literacy skills.⁸

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is “a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his [or her] unassisted efforts.” Scaffolding means support, but “it is the nature of the support—support that is responsive to the particular demands

⁵ August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in second language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Minority-Language Children and Youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

⁶ New York State guidance, [Two-way bilingual education programs: A resource guide 2010](#)

⁷ O’Day, J. (2009). Good instruction is good for everyone—Or is it? English language learners in a balanced literacy approach. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 14(1), 97-119.

⁸ <http://bie.org/>

made on [students] learning through the medium of a second language—that is critical for success.”⁹

For more on scaffolding supports, see WIDA’s description of visual, graphic, and sensory supports in [2012 Amplification of the English Language Development Standards, Kindergarten–Grade 12](#)

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered instruction uses special techniques to make content comprehensible, and to stimulate language output (speaking) by language learners. They include language objectives, visual aids, teacher and peer modeling in the context of cooperative learning, and assessment in two languages. Teachers have a good understanding of second language acquisition and incorporate the practice of speaking, reading, and writing skills into lessons. In addition, teachers are trained to integrate language objectives into various content areas, and to differentiate them based on students’ academic language proficiency. Currently, the most widely used sheltered instruction protocols are: [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol \(SIOP\)](#), [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol for Two-Way Immersion Programs \(TWIOP\)](#), and [Project GLAD](#).

Sheltered techniques include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using visual aids such as pictures, charts, graphs, and semantic mapping
- Modeling instruction, allowing students to negotiate meaning and make connections between course content and prior knowledge
- Allowing students to act as mediators and facilitators
- Using alternative assessments, such as portfolios, to check comprehension
- Providing comprehensible speech, scaffolding, and supplemental materials
- Using a wide range of presentation strategies.¹⁰

Theme-Based Instruction

This approach makes use of selected topics or themes from a subject area (e.g., social studies) or across the curriculum (e.g., Uses and Conservation of Water) in order to facilitate both language and content learning. When it incorporates content areas across the curriculum, it is often referred to as interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary instruction.¹¹

⁹ Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

¹⁰ [Guiding principles of dual language education, 3rd edition](#), p. 47.

¹¹ *New York State guidance [Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs: A Resource Guide 2010](#).*