Supporting Dual Language Learners,
Exploring Large Group and Shared Reading Experiences

By

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Abstract

According to the Center for Public Education, the face of our nation is changing, and nowhere is the change more evident than in school classrooms. Compared with the last century, we are increasingly aging and white on the one hand and young and multi-hued on the other. More and more of us were born in other nations, speak different languages, and carry different cultural traditions with us. The number of school-age children in the United States whose native language is not English is increasing. Reports on ways to accommodate these dual language learners (DLLs) cite many case studies, highlighting strategies that prove successful. In this study, the phenomenon of the whole group lesson and ways to support language learners within this context are examined. Curricular shifts and practices that make large group time more meaningful and interactive are important to accommodate both language learners and all of the learners in the group (Sancho Passe, 2013, p. 7). Over the course of the academic year, a case study of three native Russian speaking students enrolled in an English-based Montessori preschool was conducted. Observations were made of these DLL's response to and/or participation in whole group gathering, over time and given specific interventions. What we witnessed caused us to conclude that, overall, group lessons are supportive and certain strategies are more engaging than others. Not surprisingly, during periods of pure conversation the language learners all showed signs of inattentiveness. Books, songs and movement proved to be more engaging than lessons with props, except when the children were actively involved in discussion about or handling the visual aid.   A slower pace, individualized support from an adult, and reinforcement and repetition resulted in engagement, participation and advancement by all of the participants.

Introduction

Many factors have contributed to the increase in second language instruction and language immersion in preschools in the U.S. and around the world. In our modern world, people travel to the opposite ends of the globe to do business. Families are spread out among the continents, bringing their language with them and adopting the new.

Becoming bilingual or multilingual may be necessary for some, but often, it is a choice. People of cultures around the globe are intending to preserve their native languages through their children. Language revitalization programs have emerged world-wide (Mayan language in Central America; Gaelic in Ireland and Scotland; Native American tongues in the U.S., to name a few) which offer language immersion programs. Young children around the world are, "ambassadors who can build bridges across cultures" (Carver-Akers, Markator-Soriano, 2007, p. 42).

Another factor contributing to the increase in language acquisition among children is the presence of language immersion elementary schools as a public school option in some communities. In addition to their regular studies, children in these schools gain fluency in a second language. Simultaneously and as a result, they also gain in brain function. Modern psychologists have continued the study of how managing two languages at the same time requires a control mechanism. Because of the need to resolve the competition between the two languages effectively, enhanced cognitive control is seen in bilingual children relative to monolingual children and adults. Evidence suggests that there are cognitive benefits to learning and mastering more than one language, specifically an increase in executive function

(Poarch and van Hell, 2012, p. 537). In addition to the practical nature of speaking more than one language, these cognitive benefits may be one reason people choose immersion schools for their children.

With continued interest in language acquisition and preservation, and an increase in the number of non-native English speaking U.S. citizens, the presence of dual-language learners and multi-lingual children in classrooms is growing. The numbers are growing even more rapidly for the preschool years due to increasing immigration and birth rates (Center for Public Education, 2012). These families may choose to use a heritage language exclusively at home or in tandem with the local language, rendering the children either DLLs or bilingual, respectively. As today's U.S. immigrants seek to pass on their native tongue to their children, many times speaking only this in the home, they are leaving it to schools and society to provide the English language instruction (Center for Public Education, 2012). Thus, many educators require the skill to teach children for whom English is a new language.

This presence of DLLs may be especially true in a Montessori School. The international existence of Montessori education is likely to be a contributing factor in the diversity in its enrollment. According to some families enrolled in a Midwestern Montessori school that is the setting for this study, the international presence of Montessori education is what initially attracted them to the program.   We begin then with the premise that in similar communities across the United States, today's Montessori Children's House guide is likely to encounter students whose first language is not that of the classroom. It is important that s/he be equipped with strategies for accommodating these children.

Literature Review

Overview

In a review of literature on supporting language learners, a common theme emerged: children who are learning a new language in the classroom environment benefit from the kind of support referred to by constructivist theorists as 'scaffolding' (Charlesworth, 2014, p. 358) and linguists as 'sheltering' (Rosanova, 1998, p. 17). Through efforts that bridge understanding, the community provides the means for language acquisition. Relationships with the teacher, as well as support and interaction with peers within the community and in the context of the classroom environment, provide both the structure and the means for learning.   An environment best suited to support language learners, as found in a well-prepared Montessori classroom, offers what Rosanova terms opportunity for 'guessability' (1998, p. 17), meaning giving children experiences with language that increase their ability to cross reference and apply language across subjects and contexts. Study of the physical world and engaging in practical life activities promotes talk, drawing, writing and dramatic play (Genishi, Stires, Yung-Chan, 2001, p. 7). Children learn vocabulary from daily interactions that are concrete and related to their experience. They also learn vocabulary through dialogue with adults who ask questions, respond, and describe events or objects (Sancho Passe, 2013, p. 51).

In order to shelter language learners, repetition and context are critical. The teacher must, in the beginning especially, speak using simple phrases and gestures. "Although it is important to challenge children to grow in their understanding of the new language, it is also important that the teacher constantly repeat phrases that the children know and understand without

difficulty. This is important because it builds children's self-confidence and gives them the

courage to take the risks necessary to learn more" (Rosanova, 2007, p. 14).   In addition to this

critical practice of repetition, reinforcement occurs when the curriculum for a class of language

learners, though not altered, proceeds at a slower pace (Genishi, et al., 2001, p. 16).

Flourishing relationships, important for all children, are even more so for the language learner.

"Establishing connections between adult and child and child and child mattered as much as

connections between words and print" (Genishi et al., 2001, p. 2). In a Montessori classroom,

the adult/child relationships are further enhanced through the multi-age environment. The

older, more experienced children will support their peers, modelling and helping their friends

to gain confidence in their own use of the target language (Rosanova, 2007, p. 11). During

group gatherings, native speaking peers join the teacher in modelling language, sheltering their

friend's learning.

Group Time Activities/Strategies

Group presentations and sharing times in the modern preschool classroom provide the children

with the chance to practice control of movement and listening and attending skills. They learn

to apply spoken language in a formal exchange of ideas.   These group periods can potentially

be difficult times for the language learner. If during these sessions, complex stories are read or

if this is a time of purely verbal instruction, interchange or conversation, the language learner

could be lost in a sea of words and phrases. Without the benefit of contextual clues in group

presentations, the children can easily be left behind. Songs can be memorized but unless

meaning is attached through visual cues, actions or other means, the language learner has little

chance of understanding what s/he is singing about. Teachers have to thoughtfully respond to

students' needs in ways that make the content comprehensible to language learners while

ensuring that it is engaging and challenging to proficient speakers (Gort & Pontier, 2013, p.

223).

Reinforcement and practice.

With the presence of language learners, group time must have the specific purpose of target

language reinforcement and practice. In Montessori terms, group time should primarily be

spent in an implementation phase known as 'second period' manipulation (Rosanova, 1998, p.

13). It is a time to witness and participate in the language as it is put to use.   It offers a chance

to increase comfort and ease through the use and repetition of nouns, verbs and expressions

(Carver-Akers, et al., 2007, p. 44).

Role play can also be an effective strategy. It gets students' actively participating and enriches

their social skills. It helps reduce inhibitions, deepens the involvement of the student and the

interaction between students and teachers and their peers. It gives students a chance to

communicate in a variety of authentic situations (Chaitanya & Ramana, 2013, p. 8).

To shelter learners, it is recommended that teachers reflect on prior experience at the

beginning of a presentation (Rosanova, 1998, p. 16). This practice could apply to individual,

small and large group presentations and even shared reading experiences, serving to repeat

and expand vocabulary, encouraging the children to generalize from earlier, similar

experiences. Connecting group activities to children's prior knowledge is engaging and a

scaffold, providing practice and repetition in the child's linguistic experience, even when the teacher cannot speak in both tongues (Gort, 2012, p.225).

Anchoring text.

Indeed, with increasing diversity, a teacher cannot be bilingual in every child's language. Thus the young child will encounter an immersed environment. With no translation available, sheltering the child's learning requires not only repetition and practice but also context. There are many ways to anchor words and text for language learners, providing a link between a child's understanding and prior knowledge and the targeted vocabulary and spoken or written language. By anchoring language with visual cues and hands-on experience, we are again scaffolding for the learner.

Games that involve props such as objects from the environment, gestures and picture cues, repetition, and vocab imprinting (labeling) offer practice with naming and describing words. Many games and activities can be incorporated into gathering time that focus on language-related knowledge and practice (Carver-Akers et al., 2007, p. 44).

Another way to anchor text is to pre-teach.   POLL (Personalized Oral Language Learning), a program in the Los Angeles Unified School District for dual language learning instruction, offers strategies such as one-on-one read-aloud sessions to discuss a book prior to a whole group reading session. To assist children during small or whole class gathering and sharing times, the teacher will provide individuals with an appropriate level of support, conferencing with the child ahead of time to help him prepare for his turn (Genishi et al., 2001, p. 7).

Other group time strategies include the use of rhyming songs and chants, visual cues and gestures, and vocabulary imprinting – the use of photographs, images, and word walls to introduce new concepts and vocabulary and deepen comprehension (Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa & Matera, 2013, p. 11). During group times, rhythmic repetition and movement is essential. It will support memory and engage the child as the song/chant plays back in his or her mind (Magruder, et al., 2013, p. 20).

The topic or the nature of the props/movement/gestures, or the structure and content of stories chosen to share, also all have potential impact (Parvaneh & Foster, 2011, p. 60). Teachers are advised to choose a book carefully, considering the story; whether it uses repetition of words and ideas; the book's length and the rhythm of its text; as well as the illustrations. The best resources are books with predictable text with good stories and/or information (Sancho Passe, 2013, p. 111).

With practice and repetition, and strategies that serve to anchor text for the language learner, small group instruction and whole-group gathering time can provide a special means for language acquisition among young children.

The Research Question

This study narrows the question of supporting language learners by focusing on the large group lesson, a common teaching practice in today's preschool classroom. These group presentations provide children with the chance to practice control of movement and listening and attending

skills. They also offer an opportunity for group instruction, reinforcing basic concepts, curriculum themes, 'show and tell', music, shared reading and conversation. There seems to be very little research done regarding the benefits or challenges of having DLLs in the group. It is the premise of this study that, if complex stories are read or if this is a time of purely verbal instruction, interchange or conversation, the language learner may be lost, not benefitting from any sort of contextual clues. Songs can be memorized but unless the meaning is attached through visual cues or actions, the language learner has little chance of understanding what he or she is singing about. Frequently, whole group gathering is a time that includes shared reading experiences. Stories that include fantastical characters or storylines may leave the language learner wondering about the connection between the language and the illustrations. We must choose books carefully (Sancho Passe, 2012, p. 111).

This case study of Russian-speaking DLLs explores best practices for supporting them through our immediate action as they absorb the English language. Beginning with the question of how best to accommodate language learners during large group lessons, we tested various strategies and reviewed what was observed, looking for patterns and clues from the learners themselves.

We undertook this Action Research study of systematic inquiry for our immediate teaching needs (Mertler, 2014, p. 4). Posing the research question: How can we accommodate DLLs during large group lessons, we set out to observe and learn from the children themselves. We also wanted to know: (1) what specific strategies appear to be more effective than others? (2)

What impact do props and movement have? and (3) What things might we consider when choosing books for shared reading?

The Setting and Participants

The purpose of this current study was to actively research, test and evaluate strategies that support language learners, specifically during group activities. It took place at a private Montessori school in the suburbs of Minneapolis, MN. This teacher-owned preschool has a current enrollment of 22, including 7 children in which one or both parents are first generation U.S. immigrants or residents with English as their second language.

The fact that one third of the children have this international family background may be because Montessori schools can be found around the world. Families who are living outside their native lands are likely to be familiar with the Method. The curriculum is common around the globe. For some, the Montessori school may represent a common thread when they find themselves in foreign lands. If a family were in need of relocating, their child could continue on the same path of education.

In the fall of 2014, a woman whose daughter had attended a Russian immersion daycare from birth and had spoken only Russian in the home was investigating schools for her preschool age daughter. Ultimately, she put her trust in this Montessori school to continue her daughter's education and begin her formal English instruction. Not long after the school year began, another young Russian mother enrolled her three year old daughter and in January, a third

child--a four year old boy--joined the class, all from the same daycare. Each came with little or

no English, rendering them dual language learners. During their most sensitive period for

language acquisition (birth to age 3), these children were introduced only to the Russian

language. In the home, they continued to speak only in Russian. Upon enrollment, each of the

children could read and/or write in Russian. As English language learners, while they remain in

a sensitive period for language until age six, they are now conscious of their learning

(Montessori, 1995, p. 27). It is work.   These DLLs stand in contrast to the Lebanese twins in the

class who have been taught English and Arabic simultaneously from birth. These latter children

are considered bilingual. The dual language learners are likely to experience more isolation

during any given group activity.

The task before us was to integrate these 'foreign' language speaking children into the

classroom community and begin their formal instruction in spoken and written English. Our

setting is not the same as an immersion school in which all children are language learners. Nor

is this one in which the teacher can provide translations. We must rely heavily on appropriate

strategies to both engage the child and shelter his/her learning.

At this Montessori school, large group gatherings are the place we introduce ourselves formally

to the community, through our actions and our words. We share ideas and information, stories

and lessons that follow an integrated curriculum. For all children and for the language learners,

these sessions give us an opportunity to both integrate and instruct. Our case study focuses

specifically on language learners as they were engaging in the variety of activities typical in this

classroom.   The use of gestures and props, songs and movement activities, study of the

calendar, shared reading and simple conversation during group gatherings were the specific strategies used for this study.

Methodology and Data Collection

Having DLLs in the class requires a shift in teaching focus, without a doubt. In order to study best practices and most effectively serve the immediate needs of these young learners, the teachers at this Montessori school adopted Dr. Paul Epstein's circular C.O.R.E. observation model: -Connect-Obtain-Reflect-Enable- (2012). For the purposes of this formal observation we used Epstein's model to direct our intent: *Connect* with the children through group activities; *Obtain* data through video for observation and scrutiny; *Reflect* on the data; and finally *Enable* refinement in the use of group time strategies, once again circling back to connection through best teaching practices. We undertook a qualitative case study of first two girls, then a boy and a girl over the course of 7 months. Video-taped group sessions were carefully observed. The children's attentiveness and participation was analyzed and plotted in 30 second increments. Average attentiveness was calculated for each child and compared across 18 lessons over the course of the academic year. These lessons, described in Appendix 1, are a random sample of group activities surrounding curricular topics covered at this school throughout the academic year. A variety of activities and props were used including books, gestures and movement, music, a whiteboard and models, as well as conversation.

The children's and teacher's behavior and interactions were reflected upon. Annotated notes were taken during systematic review of the video-taped sessions. Our aim was to note

supportive measures, accommodations and strategies employed by the teacher that appear to best support the language learners while engaging all of the children in the group.

Findings and Discussion

The specific group activities and lessons presented during this study follow the established practices and curriculum of the school. The teachers, while they have no formal training in teaching English as a second language, collaborated about the topics and what accommodations might be included, knowing that there were language learners in the group. For example, singing familiar songs became a practice at the beginning of lessons while children were gathering, replacing the usual conversation. This shift helped involve the language learners and allow them to participate along with the other children.   Visual cues and gestures were used frequently. Repetition and a slow pace became part of the teacher's conscious efforts. Given our observations of the language learners in the video-taped lessons, we conclude that, overall, group lessons are supportive and that certain strategies prove move engaging than others.

Attentiveness and Participation

To begin reviewing lessons or strategies that best supported our language learners, we wanted to know if there were any indicators around the children's attentiveness and participation. Figure 1 shows the average attentiveness of the three children over the course of the 18 lessons. Due to their schedules and the fact that one left the country after the first of the year and another joined the class in January, the three children did not participate in all of the

lessons. Nevertheless, the results clearly demonstrate that, on the average, all of the three

children were mostly attentive during the lesson. We take this to reflect their effort, either

conscious or unconscious, to gain understanding in the target language.

To some degree it appears that we can link attentiveness to the child's stage of language

development. They all have their ups and downs, especially in the early days and weeks. Child

1 was the only one of the three DLLs that had been much exposure to English before entering

our program. She was already using phrases in English by the second recorded group session.

This is reflected in her level of attentiveness and ability to participate at that time compared to

Child 2. Review of Child 2 who participated in the most number of lessons over the course of

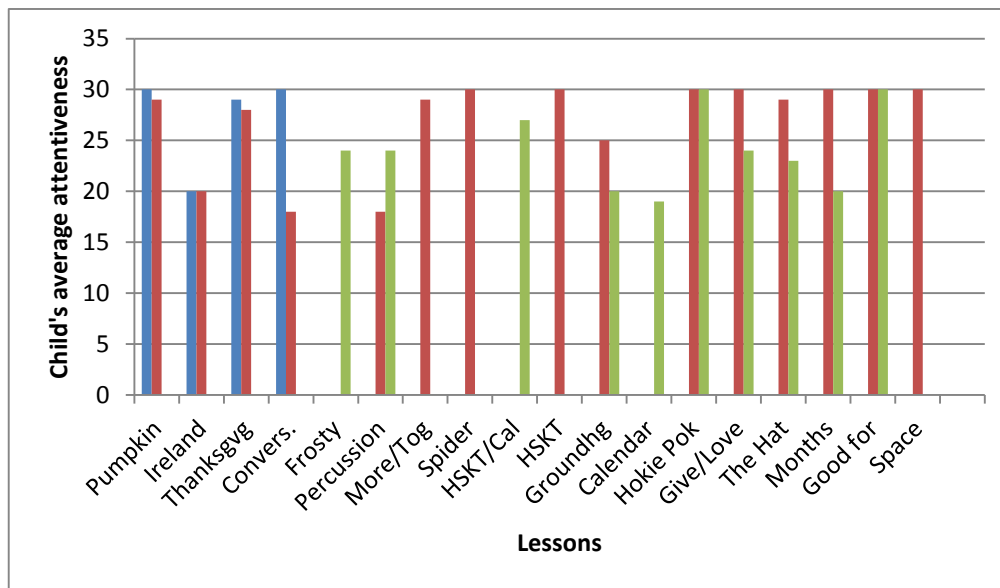the study shows that her active engagement increased over time.

Figure 1.   Average attentiveness/participation for Child 1-Blue, Child 2-Red, Child 3-Green

Periods of Inattentiveness

The nature of the lesson.

Not surprisingly, during periods of pure conversation the language learners all showed signs of

inattentiveness. Books, songs and movement proved to be more engaging than lessons with

props, except when the children were actively involved in discussion about the visual aid. The

interaction of the children in a lesson about body parts provides an excellent example of

effectively using props to engage all of the children. The teacher drew a snowman on the

whiteboard and involved the children in naming the parts of the body as she drew and labeled

them. Child 3 was the only DLL present for this lesson. It was one of the first lessons we

recorded after he had joined the class. During the first 4 ½ minutes of the lesson he was very

distracted, touching things around him and making eye contact with children nearby. First the

children sang Frosty the Snowman and then the teacher interacted with them to spell out the

title, "Frosty the Snowman". Even though there was no context for the lyrics of the song, the

young language learner smiled and seemed attentive while they sang. During the discussion

about the title, the DLL took cues from his friends and raised his hand when the teacher asked

the group if anyone knew how to spell the puzzle word 'the' as she wrote the words on the

whiteboard.   Otherwise, he continued to distract himself with things around him until the

teacher began to draw the body and its parts. He immediately became engaged, touching his

own body parts and repeating the words. When the teacher got the children involved by asking

where on the snowman she might draw the eyes and the mouth, he appeared to understand

exactly what she was referring to.   He clearly said, "No" along with the other children and

shook his head, smiling, when she asked if the mouth goes "Here?" pointing to the snowman's

torso. When she drew the ears, he laughed along with the other children and said, "Monkey!",

then, he tapped his head and the teacher responded with 'hair' and added it to the drawing. At

this time this child was so fully engaged, he was the one to suggest the next part, 'hands'.   At

the end of the lesson, he pointed to his belly button and insisted that she add this to the

drawing, smiling broadly. When the topic of this lesson was directly connected to the child's

prior knowledge he became as engaged as all of the children in the group. The boy's

inattentiveness in the beginning of the lesson was during a period of discussion in which the

teacher was using unfamiliar words to describe unfamiliar letters on the whiteboard. We

categorize this as a period in which no accommodation is made for the language learner. They

tend to disengage during such periods, distracting themselves, often turning physically away or

giving other physical signs of non-participation.

Books with topics that the children were familiar with proved the most engaging. During a

shared reading about Groundhog Day, both of the Russian children appeared bored and lost,

except when the teacher changed her voice to a deep pitch when reading one character's

comments. The children were much more engaged during the reading of books about food and

health or the lifecycle of a pumpkin, for example, when the topic was linked to their prior

knowledge.

The nature of the lesson did not appear to affect the DLL's desire to participate. They actively

entered into the activity with either words or actions, even when they were not prompted, in

nearly 80% of the lessons/activities.   They would appear to take cues from their peers, raising

their hand along with the others even when it was clear that they did not comprehend the

question being asked. As expected, the periods of inattentiveness decreased over time as
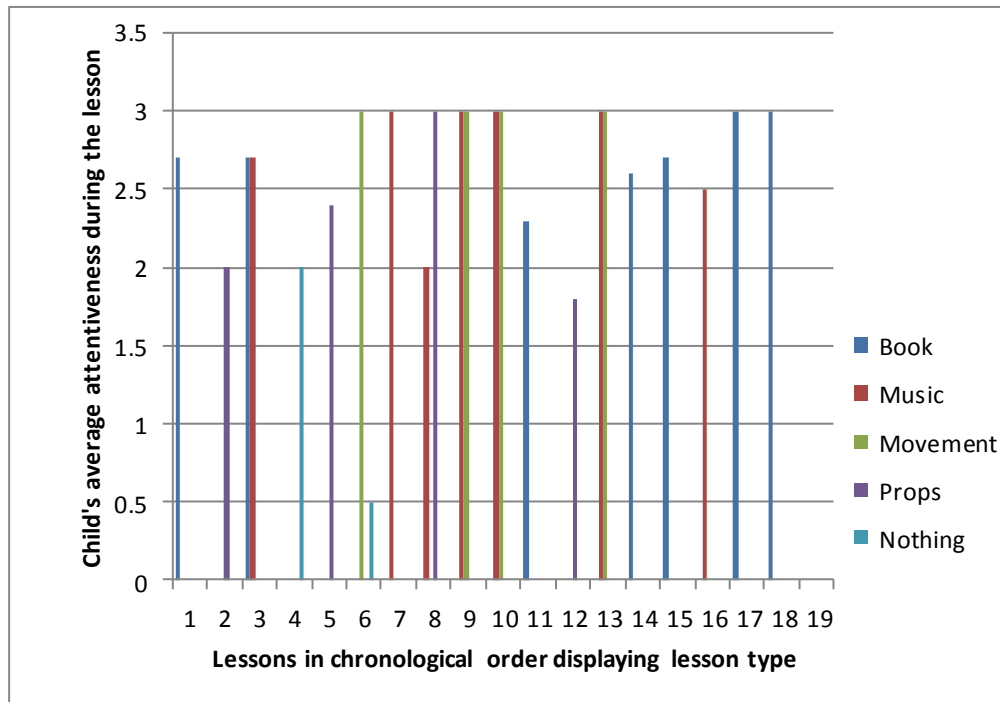
understanding and language skills increased.

Figure 2. Attentiveness by lesson type

Physical disengagement/taking a break.

In the early days of each child's experience during large group sessions, at some point they

demonstrated their lack of comprehension by turning their bodies physically away from the

group. They also appeared to use this strategy of physical disengagement when they found the

need to take a break. During one music lesson, both DLLs showed their attentiveness when

participation was required. When the children's involvement was paused and the teacher used

only conversation, both children appeared to disengage. One turned his body around, his back

to the group. The other's frustration showed clearly in her facial expression.   In another

lesson, the lifecycle of a pumpkin was told in story form using picture cards followed by a song.

The words to the song reinforced the story and used repetition for practice: "First we plant

some little seeds, little seeds, little seeds…"   During the story, one DLL was very taken with the

picture cards and extremely attentive but when it came to the song she became inattentive and

did not participate. This may have been because she was either saturated or not comfortable

forming a string of words, even repeated, just yet. Another DLL in the group who is at a more

advanced stage never lost concentration and sang along, clearly forming the words as they

were repeated.

Supportive Strategies

Relationships with peers.

The two Russian girls in the class were close friends outside of school. Surprisingly, much of the

time they did not choose to sit next to each other during group sessions and as a result their

relationship did not prove a distraction during these times. The one time they did interact

during the video-taped group lesson, they did so in English. A 'show and tell' lesson, given by a

teacher about her Irish heritage, included props: the world map, a large shamrock and a photo

of an Irish child. Even though these visuals supported some parts of the lesson, much of the

content was abstract. During a time of sharing, the children were looking at the photo of the

child and asked "What do you see?" One boy said, "I see green," referring to the field of grass

the child was sitting in. Next, one of the language learners said, "I see a little baby." For the

remainder of the lesson, the two girls pretended to rock an infant in their arms, completely absorbed in their own interaction.

In the Montessori classroom the children interact within a prepared environment in which materials are at their disposal for use and practice. In so doing, they interact with peers and adults in a naturalistic environment, engaging in everyday conversation and applying spoken language to materials and activities. This carries over into the group lesson in which, with the aid of a visual, children model language along with adult. They demonstrate cultural practices as well, sheltering the language learner in a supportive, productive and peaceful way.

Relationships with adults.

As educators, we provide the bridge the child will cross into their world of knowledge. Perhaps instinctively, the language learner frequently positioned him/herself next to the presenter or in front of the visual aid. This may be in an attempt to get the most out of the lesson. It may also be linked to a positive connection between the adult and child.   We will be responsible for presenting opportunities for reinforcement before and after group sessions to further deepen the child's comprehension. The adult must model proper use of the spoken and written word in the formal exchange of the group.

Anchoring Text.

There are many ways in which we can anchor words and text for the language learner. In so doing, we help them consciously build on their previous knowledge as they learn to navigate the new idiom. We are scaffolding between the familiar and the unfamiliar when we use visual cues. Only 2 of the 18 lessons recorded over the course of this study did not include some

visual aid or related gesture. This gets the children participating and, through the use of their hands and visual sense, comprehension deepens.

 We witnessed children make their own connections during presentations, looking for the familiar. When she sees the photo of an Irish child sitting in a field of green grass, one DLL exclaimed, "I see a little baby." This is something she could relate to. Prompted by a visual aid she was able to construct this phrase in the new language even though she does not yet understand much of the spoken language in the presentation.

The children's love of and request to repeat the song, *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, resulted in an impromptu lesson one day about spiders. A model of a spider was brought to the group and the children passed it around discussing its features and counting its legs. A trip to the playground to show the children a spout would be another way to anchor the lyrics and increase understanding. A follow up lesson on invertebrates would further support the child's learning.

Interaction and participation on the part of the DLLs indicates that props, gestures and visual cues are supportive. Picture cards, books, sign language, whiteboard drawing, the calendar and other items that we might not otherwise use when there is no language barrier, proved to anchor the text for language learners.

Rhythmic repetition, chants, rhymes and movement all seem to be supportive measures as well. It did at times appear that the movement was the focus of an activity. The song, *Head Shoulders, Knees and Toes* was sung many times over the course of the year. When Child 3 first

came and began to learn the song, his attempt to follow the actions of the song (not yet

understanding the meaning of the words) seemed to detract from his focus on the lyrics. What

we found was that, with familiarity and repetition, the actions become second nature and he

began to sing along. In another example, both Child 2 and 3 would begin spontaneously singing

either the days of the week or the months of the year song when the teacher began a lesson on

the calendar, connecting the words in the song to the prop.

Reinforcement and practice.

One of our aims was to increase the comfort and ease of learning for language learners through

repetition. Indeed, repetition is built into the very pedagogy of the Montessori Method. The

Three Period Lesson guides the child from introduction to mastery of a concept. The teacher

will present a shape, for example, and say, "This is a square." This First Period is followed by a

time of practice known as the Second Period in which the child shows recognition of the

concept. During this time, repetition and manipulation occur until, finally, the child can answer

the question of the Third Period, "What is this?" Group time is an ideal opportunity to engage

in second period practice and manipulation for all children. As part of many lessons throughout

the year, a review of the calendar took place. This topic was then extended into the classroom

through our birthday work, large moveable calendar, tracing and other activities.   Review of

the calendar gives an opportunity for all of the children to practice identifying numbers and

repeating the days and months.

Indeed, evidence of the children's understanding came in small doses at first. During the

nonverbal or silent period, we watched for signs of understanding as the children absorbed the

unfamiliar sounds for the second language and we watched for cues in body language, the

environment, actions of their peers and other visual cues (Sancho Passe, 2013, p. 52). Our

language learners frequently copied the actions of other children during group conversations,

raising their hands along with the others even when they clearly had no idea what the teacher

was asking. Over time, we witnessed their correct response to repeated verbal commands.

During a movement activity, the teacher invited the children in song to 'turn the other way'.

Most of the children seemed distracted and did not respond, whereas one language learner

was the first to act as she turned in a circle. This reflects the concentration and effort we

witnessed over and over again as these young language learners worked to master this new

language.

Role play.

Activities in which the children move their bodies in response to lyrics of a song are a means of

role play for them. In addition, the Montessori practice of teaching lessons of Grace and

Courtesy to the group, engage the children in role play reinforces the meaning of the new

language and offers a chance for practice. Examples of how the teachers used role play at this

Montessori school include activities for movement and song as well as sign language.

Pace.

Finally, the teachers slowed the tempo of songs in order to create a pace more comfortable for

language learners to hear and speak/sing. In one rendition of *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* the teacher

changed the lyrics to *The Great Big Spider* and sang very slowly in a low voice. Likewise, the

children loved to sing *Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes* very slow and then very fast. We also

witnessed the teacher read books at a slower pace than she might when only reading to native

speakers. This accommodation can support all of the children, especially considering the

presence of younger three year olds in the group. Often, their behavior mimics that of the

language learner as they too are mastering the use of the language in a formal setting.

The Magic of Books

Over and again we witness the DLL's complete absorption when books were being read. They

appeared just as attentive, sometimes more, than the English-speaking children. The fact that

they are read to in their home language and that illustrations anchor the text is likely to

contribute to their interest. We witnessed them consciously bring themselves back to a state of

attentiveness when they became distracted, confirming that this is work for them.

During shared reading, the teachers supported the DLL's comprehension by gesturing and

pointing to items in the illustrations when reading about them. In one example, the child

gestured waving when the characters say goodbye, pointed to items on the pages such as

spoon, arrow, rocket ship and later tipped her head and closed her eyes when the character

goes to sleep. During the reading of a book about Thanksgiving, the teacher read at a slow and

comfortable pace. She pointed to illustrations to reinforce vocabulary and repeated new

language, "There they are shucking corn." Highlighting the verb is scaffolding for all of the

children and specifically helpful for the language learners. The book, by its worldwide

presence, is an anchor, a link to these "DLL's prior experience. The illustrations anchor the text

and engage the children. There is no doubt that books draw the attention of all children and

that the images therein help deepen comprehension.

Individualized Support

The practice of following the child in the Montessori Method is especially valuable when DLLs are present. In our study, the teacher's knowledge of the stage of each language learner proved quite helpful. The children were supported individually, allowing them to gain confidence in using the target language.

For example, the song, *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* is a favorite and was sung frequently during the time children were gathering. To support Child 3 who clearly loved to participate but was still learning the words and proper pronunciation, the teacher paused before she began the song and reviewed the body part names with the language learner beside her. The other children waited patiently and the teacher celebrated saying, "I think he's got it!" and then continued on with the song. Further support and reinforcement is recommended outside of the group in individual or small group lessons.   This practice of pre-teaching or follow-up can deepen comprehension. The integrated classroom found in a classic Montessori school allows the teacher to find ways to repeat and reinforce language development on an individualized basis.

During the next stage of telegraphic and formulaic speech, single word utterances reflect the child's level of understanding as they make connections and build on their previous knowledge (Sancho Passe, 2013, p. 52). Early on, Child 2 was very attentive during a presentation of the lifecycle of a pumpkin, in which picture cards were used. She sat right next to the presenter, focusing heavily on the visual prompts. The teacher used only single sentences to describe each card, repeating target vocabulary, "seeds, sprout, etc." When the third card was

presented, the child pointed to the picture and said, "Flower". The teacher nodded to confirm.

Soon after, during a shared reading experience, the same child pointed and said, "yellow" when

others were responding to the question, "What vegetables do you see?" She did not know the

term vegetables but participated at her own level, nonetheless. Her efforts were rewarded by

the teacher who confirmed that, yes, the corn was yellow.

Ultimately, a language learner reaches the stage of productive language use (Sancho Passe,

2013, p. 52). During a sharing session which involved only conversation, the teacher prompted

one DLL to participate, expecting that her skills and experience would allow her to succeed.

This child had advanced to the stage of forming phrases and building her own sentences. The

teacher did not single out the other DLL in the group, knowing that her language development

had not yet reached this stage.   The conversation took place on the morning after the children

had returned to school after the Thanksgiving break with the simple but open ended topic of

"What did you eat for Thanksgiving." When the child responded, "I eat …..turkey", the teacher

smiled broadly, encouraging the child and followed up with another familiar question, "Do you

like turkey?" The child immediately responded with ease, "Yes, I like turkey." Continuing the

conversation, the teacher then asked very specifically, "What else did you eat for Thanksgiving?

Did you eat potatoes?"   She continued asking questions with vocabulary the child is likely to

know, "Who did you eat Thanksgiving dinner with?" This time, no prompt was needed and the

child answered, "Mommy and Daddy." Her demeanor reflected satisfaction and pride at having

participated in a meaningful way as part of the group.

Action Plan

When facing the challenge of how to best support both language learners, and all of the children, during group activities we saw patterns emerge and stages unfold. Our research directly aided us, as teachers, in introducing the English language to dual language learners in our immediate charge. The things we learned from other educators is valuable and provided a basis for our practice. One question that remains untested for us is that of which books to use and which to avoid during shared reading experiences. The phenomenon of the children's love of books and their attention during reading sessions reflects the global nature and universal love of this prop. This first phase of observation uncovered a key question. Now that we know that we have their attention with books and that the content has a direct impact on their understanding, this knowledge will guide our selection of books to share. Our experience with books that left our language learners bored and lost shed light on the need to select books and stories with care.

As we go forward, we will also consider the benefits of previewing and reviewing the books and concepts that are shared during group time. We will increase our efforts at pre-teaching and follow up that is directly related to the vocabulary and topics of group sessions. This in itself will offer practice and reinforcement, anchoring and scaffolding.

We also honor our commitment to Montessori Peace Education in which all beings are recognized as part of our shared cosmic life experience. As we circle back after this reflection, we commit ourselves once again to our C.O.R.E. practice, using strategies that "Enable"

language learners, giving them ease and comfort and a sense of success and confidence. (Epstein, 2012)

One thing that we found very engaging and truly a bridge between us all was our sense of humor. More than once, the universal language of laughter brought us together, even when words could not. This too will guide us as more and more language learners enter our classrooms.

Appendix 1

Group Lessons and Activities

This random sample of lessons and activities were video-taped between the months of

October, 2014 and April, 2015.

1). Lifecycle of a pumpkin. Using picture cards, the teacher told the story of the lifecycle of a

pumpkin from seed to table. She used single sentences to describe each card, repeating key

vocabulary. Following the story a repetitive song was sung that reinforced each of the picture

cards. "First we plant some little seeds, little seeds, little seeds (repeat), they are growing."

2). Ireland. To prepare for show and tell the coming week, the teacher modelled telling about

her Irish heritage. Props were used including a large shamrock, a large photograph of a baby in

Irish lace sitting in a field of green and the Montessori colored Continent Map. The teacher

engaged in conversation with the children asking, "What do you see?" as she held up the

picture of the infant.

3). Thanksgiving. First, the children engage in movement and song. As children are gathering

they sing and move to "We are walking/hopping, etc. on the line." Next they participate in

"One little turkey" as children sit or stand according to the numbers in the song. Finally, the

teacher engages in a shared reading experience for the children, entering into related dialog

throughout the story.

4). Thanksgiving break. No props, song, or movement supplement this dialog between the

teacher and children seated around the elliptical line. One child at a time enters into

conversation with the teacher, answering her questions about their Thanksgiving break.

Children raise their hand when they have a comment or question.

5). *Frosty the Snowman*. For this lesson, the children were gathered in a group on a large rug,

all facing the teacher and the whiteboard at her side. First, they learned some verses to the

song, *Frosty the Snowman*. Using a dialog format, the teacher wrote the title on the

whiteboard and drew a snowman and its body parts, labelling each as they progressed. The

second part of the lesson was highly interactive.

6).   Rest time in music. Following a field trip to a performance by the Macalester College

African Music Ensemble, the teacher demonstrated rests in 4l4 time. This music lesson in which

the children tap out the beat on their laps proceeded the playing of percussion instruments as

guided during the second part of the lesson.

7). *The More We Get Together*. The children sing this song using sign language as they have

done many times since the beginning of the school year. The teacher sits with them on the

elliptical line and sings and signs with them.

8). *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*: As the children are gathering on the elliptical line for group time,

Child 2 spontaneously breaks out in song. Using the hand gestures that have been connected

to this song over the course of the school year, she continues to sing over and over again.

Following her interest, the teacher asked some children to bring a model of a spider so that

they can discuss it. The children passed the spider to one another, counting its legs and

describing it.

9). *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*/The Calendar.   This favorite song with movement while

the children sit on the elliptical line is often repeated. In this lesson, the teacher sits next to the

newest DLL and noticeably slows the pace of the song.   Following the song, the children are

directed to a large moveable calendar on an easel as they have been many times before. The

teacher reviews the day of the week, the date, the month and the year, reminding children to

raise their hands if they wish to participate.

10). *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*. This time, the teacher reviews the vocabulary in a

spoken exchange with the DLL just before they sing together.

11). Groundhog Day. During this discussion of the holiday, followed by the shared reading of a

fictitious story the children gather round the teacher's chair.

12). Calendar. The review of the day, date, month and year is all dialog, using the moveable

calendar as a prop.

13). *The Hokie Pokie*. The teacher leads the group, naming body parts for each verse as the

children are moving and singing on the elliptical line.

14). *Give a Little Love*. This story of a girl with 10 heart shaped balloons of various colors

reviews counting backwards as the story unfolds with her giving the balloons away one by one.

15). *The Hat*. This story by favorite author Jan Brett is read with little interaction.

16). *These are the Months of the Year*. The song, naming the months is another frequently

sung as children gather on the line.

17). *Good for Me and You*. Mercer Mayer's story is of Thanksgiving includes illustrations of

many healthy foods and activities. This is a highly interactive session between the teacher and

children.

18).   *There's No Place Like Space*: During a time when children were studying our solar system,

this informative Dr. Seuss book was shared as the children gathered around the teacher's chair.

There is some interaction between the teacher and children.

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