

Chapter 6

Story Cubing Strategies: A Culturally Responsive Practice for Young Dual Language Learners

Michelle L. Amodei

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, USA

Laura J. Strong

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

ABSTRACT

Educational expectations vary according to a child's culture. In the United States and many other parts of the world, the population of young people entering the educational system is becoming more culturally diverse. In response, educators seek new ways to adapt pedagogical practices to meet the needs of diverse learners. Storytelling is a universal approach that is practiced in many cultures, and story cubes are highly motivating because they encourage children's personal and relevant contributions while addressing the following language domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The first part of this chapter provides a framework for linking the needs of dual language learners to developmentally appropriate practices using storytelling, and the second part addresses the importance of storytelling for young children who are dual language learners while providing specific strategies for using story cubes as a culturally responsive approach to enhancing and supporting linguistic, social, and cognitive development.

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Abba walks down the hall toward her Kindergarten classroom, anticipating the day ahead. Of the 29 students she teaches, 19 of them are Dual Language Learners who speak 13 different languages. She loves the challenges of teaching this group of multilingual, multicultural children because the students are amazing. She can really see their growth from the beginning of the year to now. Ms. Abba incorporates many strategies to build early literacy skills in her students and values the development of the "whole" child. She knows that each child has a unique "story" of their lives.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9348-5.ch006

Like the young children in this story, Dual Language Learners (DLLs) come from different cultures and countries, and typically reside where their native language is not spoken. Dual language acquisition is often fostered through multi-modal, pedagogical approaches. Children in their early childhood years rely heavily on oral language to communicate, express themselves, and learn. For many, oral language is their primary method of gathering information and understanding the world around them.

This chapter focuses on ways teachers can provide culturally relevant opportunities for young Dual Language Learners to develop oral language skills. The practice of storytelling is explored as a tradition that is practiced among most cultures, and a foundation from which culturally responsive pedagogical strategies can be developed. Storytelling is a foundational strategy supported through various instructional practices and theoretical frameworks. This chapter addresses connections regarding the instructional relevance of storytelling to the works of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Coll.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the pedagogical practice of storytelling in the early childhood classroom through the use of story cubes. Cubes are a multifaceted, highly engaging, kinesthetic tool that can be used in a multitude of culturally and developmentally appropriate ways with Dual Language Learners. Because of the unique needs of Dual Language Learners, who by definition are still acquiring fluency in their home language as they seek to learn another language, it is crucial to consider strategies that are developmentally appropriate and relevant to students' cultural backgrounds.

Finally, specific strategies are suggested for those seeking to implement the use of story cubes in diverse, early childhood classrooms. Examples of types of cubes are shown through pictures, and activity ideas are shared that include procedural strategies.

NEEDS OF DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Accelerated growth in the number of young dual language learning students has necessitated increased emphasis on the development of policies and practices that will best meet the unique needs of this growing demographic worldwide. Dual Language Learners (DLLs) by definition are either acquiring both their home language and a second language simultaneously from a very young age, or have achieved a beginning mastery of their home language and are now learning a second language sequentially (Buyess, et al., 2014). Whether acquisition of a second language is happening simultaneously or sequentially, these students face unique challenges due to the significance of oral language skill development in overall acquisition of literacy skills. Furthermore, because DLL students may still be in early stages of home language fluency due to their age, they may face greater challenges as they strive to achieve fluency in a second language. So where are educators to start? How can DLL students be best supported on their path to second language learning while still acquiring native fluency in their home language? Which strategies exemplify best practices?

Oral Language Development

Numerous research studies have provided well documented evidence to support the significance of well-developed oral language skills to literacy growth and the mastery of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in both a student's home language and their second language (Spencer & Wagner, 2017; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Students who have well-developed oral language skills, which include:

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