SAVVAS

Research
Into Practice

Creating Language-Friendly and Literacy-Friendly Ecologies in Multilingual Schools

By Dr. Jim Cummins

Nationally, in the United States, about one-third of children aged 0-5 are growing up in families where at least one parent speaks a language other than English at home (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). The numbers in some states are much higher: California, 59%; Texas, 49%; New Jersey, 47%, New Mexico, 44%; Nevada, 43%. These children will constitute a significant proportion of elementary school students in the coming years. A variety of terms have been used to refer to this growing population, including "dual language learners," "multilingual learners," and "English learners (ELs)." Up to this point, a large majority of these students have been educated in English-only programs, with a relatively small minority currently attending dual language programs where English and another language (predominantly Spanish) are used for instructional purposes. Williams and colleagues (2023) summarized the placement of ELs in different educational programs as follows:

- First: the United States enrolls just under 8 percent of its ELs in dual-language immersion programs—the most effective means of supporting these students. Second: the country enrolls just over 8 percent of ELs in bilingual education (ESL, Transitional)—generally the second-best way of supporting their success. Third, and finally: this means that over 83 percent of U.S. ELs are enrolled in some form of English-only instruction (generally some type of English as a Second Language, or ESL, programming).

The research evidence points to some long-term benefits associated with dual language programs. For example, a recent U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded that "Over time, schools with higher percentages of students enrolled in dual language immersion English instruction were associated with slightly higher rates of growth in reading scores" (GAO, 2024, p. 1). Similarly, a comprehensive research review by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) concluded: "Syntheses of evaluation studies that compare outcomes for ELs instructed in English-only programs with outcomes for ELs instructed bilingually find either that there is no difference in outcomes measured in English or that ELs in bilingual programs outperform ELs instructed only in English" (2017 p. 280).

Dr. Jim Cummins
Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada.

Jim Cummins is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto, Canada. Over the past 50 years, his research and collaborative work with teachers have exerted a significant influence on the education of multilingual learners in contexts around the world. He has contributed to numerous educational programs during this time focusing on promoting students' literacy engagement and building in ELL supports to make academic content accessible.

These benefits of dual language programs for English language and literacy development occur despite the fact that students in dual language programs are spending less time learning through the medium of English. For example, in a typical dual language program, about 50% of the instructional time is spent in each language. The academic and linguistic benefits associated with language and literacy development in two languages include increased knowledge about how language works (metalinguistic awareness) (e.g., Bialystok, 1988), greater ability to multitask (e.g., Bialystok, 2011), and enhanced acquisition of additional languages (e.g., Cenoz & Valencia, 1994). By contrast, many bilingual students in monolingual English programs quickly lose their fluency in their home language, develop minimal, if any, literacy skills in that language, and sometimes even feel ashamed that they speak a language other than English (e.g., Boatman, 2023; Wong Fillmore, 1991).

> “Language-friendly policies and pedagogies acknowledge students’ home languages as cultural and intellectual assets.”

A limitation of dual language programs, however, is that they are feasible to implement only when there are significant numbers of students from the same language backgrounds in a school district or local school. In schools that are linguistically highly diverse, with students from many different languages enrolled, it is generally not possible to implement dual language programs.

In this paper, I want to suggest that we are no longer limited to just two broad programmatic choices when it comes to educating multilingual learners. There is an alternative approach that can deliver many of the linguistic, cognitive, and academic benefits of dual language programs within the context of English-medium instruction. This approach involves adopting language-friendly and literacy-friendly instructional policies and practices, which can be implemented within both English-only programs and dual language programs, with benefits for both multilingual and monolingual English-speaking students.

Language-friendly policies and pedagogies acknowledge students’ home languages as cultural and intellectual assets and communicate this reality explicitly to students and families. There is a focus across the curriculum on drawing students’ attention to language and connections across languages. A literacy-friendly school (or preschool) ensures that all students are immersed in a print-rich environment that not only promotes strong decoding skills, but also enables students to expand their knowledge of the world, and encourages them to engage actively and critically with information, ideas, and alternative perspectives on social and scientific issues. A literacy-friendly school serving multilingual learners will also include language-friendly pedagogies that promote students’ literacy in their home languages in addition to English.

There is considerable research evidence that implementation of language-friendly and literacy-friendly instruction has the potential to respond directly to the opportunity gaps experienced by linguistically diverse, economically disadvantaged, and socially marginalized students. In other words, the creation of language- and literacy-friendly pedagogical directions can contribute to reversing patterns of underachievement among these social groups.

Before describing in more detail the pedagogical initiatives characteristic of language-friendly and literacy-friendly schools, let us clarify some terminology and highlight the unique power of educators, both individually and collectively, to create instructional environments that expand students’ intellectual horizons and affirm their emerging identities as linguistically and creatively talented people.

Clarifying Terminology

The term ***ecology*** refers to the relationships that exist between living things and their environment. When applied to teachers and students in educational settings, "ecologies" encompass the shifting social, cultural, linguistic, and physical relationships and interactions within classrooms and the school as a whole that influence students' academic engagement and achievement. For example, classroom libraries containing high-interest books that students are encouraged to read in class and bring home to read with family members contribute to an ecological space in which students are more likely to read for pleasure compared to classrooms that have very few print resources. At a macro level, classroom and school ecologies are influenced by national, state, and school district policies, curriculum materials, and funding. [1] However, at a more micro level, school leaders and educators within schools always have some degrees of freedom to interpret these macro-level directives, and to implement them in ways that are most likely to promote the personal and educational growth of their students.

In other words, even in highly constrained situations, educators have the option to exercise individual and collective choices to construct interpersonal spaces that will expand students' options for identity formation and academic engagement. For example, consider the contrasting identity messages communicated to multilingual students when educators welcome their home languages as resources for learning in the classroom as opposed to demanding that these languages, and the knowledge they encapsulate, be left at the schoolhouse door. Unfortunately, in the past (e.g., prior to the 1960s), school policies and instructional choices frequently constricted teachers' ability to expand minoritized students' opportunities for learning such that students' voices were silenced and their academic engagement minimized.

The emerging language-friendly schools' movement illustrates one powerful way in which educators within schools can reverse this historical process by creating interpersonal ecologies that affirm rather than devalue the cultural and linguistic knowledge that students bring to school.

The term ***multilingual schools*** refers to schools that have significant numbers of students who speak a language other than English at home. Across the United States in 2021, more than 21.3% of students were multilingual according to this definition. [2] The National Center for Educational Statistics (2024), reported that 10.6% (5.3 million) of these multilingual students were identified as English learners (ELs) eligible for support services to assist them in learning English. This number does not include students who were formerly identified as ELs but have been reclassified as fluent in English. Spanish-speakers comprise the largest proportion of English learners (76.4%).

The term ***minoritized*** is typically used to signal that societal power relations are operating to devalue the status of individuals or groups of people. Bishop (2013) noted that the term refers to a people who have been ascribed the characteristics of a minority and that, to be minoritized, "one does not need to be in the numerical minority but only treated as if one's position and perspective are of less worth; to be silenced or marginalized" (p. 74).

The term ***opportunity gaps*** is increasingly used to locate the source of educational underachievement in the systemic inequities in learning opportunities experienced by low-income, socially marginalized students, many of whom come from linguistically and culturally diverse communities (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). These opportunity gaps include social conditions, such as segregated and unsafe housing, inadequate access to health care and nutrition, and poverty, which reduces parents' ability to provide access to books and

other cultural resources. Opportunity gaps also derive from educational conditions, such as lack of access to early childhood education, attendance at under-resourced schools, and differential funding available to schools serving students from different socioeconomic and social groups.

I suggested previously that the implementation of language-friendly and literacy-friendly instruction has the potential to reverse patterns of underachievement among multilingual, minoritized, and economically disadvantaged students. In the next section, I summarize recent data on patterns of underachievement in American schools and try to provide answers to two central questions:

- Which groups of students (excluding those with special educational needs) experience disproportionate underachievement?
- What school-based instructional responses have demonstrated their efficacy both to respond to the opportunity gaps that give rise to underachievement and to transform underachievement into academic engagement and progress?

Academic Achievement of Multilingual Learners

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have consistently demonstrated disproportionate underachievement in reading skills among three groups of students: (1) linguistically diverse students who are learning English as an additional language, (2) students who are socially and economically disadvantaged, and (3) minoritized students such as Black and Latino/a students, whose communities have experienced discrimination and racism over many generations. There is considerable overlap among these three categories. Many multilingual students who are learning English as an additional language come from families that are experiencing the effects of poverty as well as various forms of prejudice and discrimination in the wider society. California researcher Patricia Gándara expressed the relationship between immigration status and poverty as follows:

>> Nearly two-thirds of immigrant children in the United States live near or below the poverty level. … Poverty has devastating effects on children's academic achievement, whether the students are English learners or native-born European Americans. … Poverty is a major predictor of absenteeism, poor grades and test scores, and high dropout rates. (Gándara, 2013: 160–161)

These relationships emerge clearly from the NAEP 2024 Reading data. On a composite index of socioeconomic status (SES), only 34% of low-SES Grade 4 students performed above the national average compared to 51% of middle-SES students and 77% of high-SES students. The number of books that students had in their homes was one of the components of this composite SES index. At the lower end of this scale, only 33% of Grade 4 students whose families had 0-10 books in their home scored above the national average compared to 63% for students who had 26-100 books at home and 65% for those with more than 100 books at home. The relevance of this literacy-related index is that while schools can't do much to change poverty-related factors like family income or overcrowding at home, they can, in principle, exert a major impact on students' access to books and opportunities to read.

The NAEP also reported significant gaps across ethnic/racial groups. For example, among Grade 4 students categorized as "White," 65% performed above the national average compared to 37% for students categorized as "Black" and 41% for those categorized as "Hispanic." With respect to "English Learner" status, only 21% of Grade 4 students identified as English learners scored above the national average compared to 59% of those not identified as English learners. [3]

Based on NAEP data (and similar patterns from countries around the world – see Cummins, 2021), three sources of potential educational disadvantage can be identified (excluding special education needs):

- home-school language switch requiring students to learn academic content through a new language;
- social disadvantage associated with low family income and/or low levels of parental education;
- marginalized group status deriving from societal discrimination and/or racism in the wider society.

Some communities in the United States are characterized by all three risk factors or opportunity gaps (e.g., many Latino/a students). In other cases, only one risk factor may be operating (e.g., middle-class African American students, high-SES White European-background students learning English as an additional language). These three sets of opportunity gaps become realized as an actual educational disadvantage only when the school fails to respond appropriately or reinforces the negative impact of the broader social factors. These three sets of opportunity gaps and evidence-based instructional responses are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Instructional Responses to Student Opportunity Gaps

Student Background	Linguistically Diverse	Low Socioeconomic Status	Marginalized Status
Sources of Potential Disadvantage	• Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences	• Inadequate healthcare and/or nutrition • Housing segregation • Overcrowded and unsafe housing • Underfunding of schools In low-income areas • Limited access to print in home and school	• Societal discrimination • Low teacher expectations • Negative societal stereotypes • Identity devaluation • Stigmatization of L1/L2 language varieties ➡ Identity devaluation
Evidence-Based Instructional Response	• Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum • Engage students' multilingual repertoires • Reinforce academic language across the curriculum	• Maximize print access and literacy engagement • Reinforce academic language across the curriculum	• Connect instruction to students' lives • Implement culturally responsive pedagogy • Valorize L1/L2 language varieties • Affirm student identities in association with literacy engagement

Evidence-Based Instructional Responses

It is clear from Table 1 that in order to promote multilingual students' academic progress, schools must do more than just support them in learning the school language. They also need to respond to opportunity gaps associated with poverty and marginalized status in the broader society. Based on an extensive review of the research evidence, Cummins (2021) highlighted seven overlapping sets of instructional strategies that respond directly to the opportunity gaps experienced by linguistically diverse, socially disadvantaged, and marginalized students.

- Scaffold comprehension and production of language;
- Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;
- Engage students' multilingual repertoires;
- Maximize literacy engagement;
- Connect with students' lives and the knowledge, culture, and language of their communities;
- Implement culturally responsive or relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that affirms students' languages and cultures as personal and intellectual assets and builds on them to promote academic success;
- Affirm students' identities by enabling them to use their language and literacy skills to carry out powerful intellectual and creative academic work.

These instructional strategies intersect as they respond to the opportunity gaps that contribute to multilingual students' underachievement. As one example, consider projects that encourage newcomer students to write in their home language about topics that connect with their lives and then translate this writing to English (see Cummins & Early 2011, for multiple examples). These projects not only engage students' multilingual repertoires and promote literacy engagement; they also connect with students' lives, affirm their identities as creative writers with multilingual talents and also scaffold their learning of the school language as they collaborate with other students and adults to translate their writing from their L1 to the school language.

How do these instructional strategies connect with language-friendly and literacy-friendly schools? There is obviously a direct connect between language-friendly pedagogy and the strategy of engaging students' multilingual repertoires and between literacy-friendly pedagogy and maximizing literacy engagement. However, as we will see from the instructional examples in the following sections, language-friendly and literacy-friendly schools create inclusive ecosystems that facilitate implementation of all of these instructional strategies.

Language-Friendly Schools

The Language-Friendly Schools network was initiated in 2019 by Ellen-Rose Kambel, a lawyer based in The Netherlands focused on human rights, and Emmanuelle Le Pichon, an applied linguist currently working at the University of Toronto in Canada (see Le Pichon & Kambel, 2022, and languagefriendlyschool.org). The overall vision of the Language Friendly Schools' network is that, as educators, we should be working as a whole school community to transform our schools into language-friendly ecosystems

- where students' languages are recognized and affirmed,
- where all students can expand their identities as they become aware of how language works in our heads, our families, and our societies, and
- where students can begin to use their entire multilingual repertoire for powerful (identity-affirming) purposes.

The educational rationale for affirming the value of students' multilingual talents derives from case studies carried out in multiple countries over the past 25 years that have demonstrated multiple ways in which multilingual students' home languages can play a significant positive role in promoting academic engagement and achievement, even in contexts where many languages are represented in the classroom and the teacher does not speak these languages (e.g., Anderson & Macleroy, 2016; Bergroth et al., 2022; Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; Chow & Cummins, 2003; Cummins & Early, 2011; Little & Kirwin, 2019).

The following strategies illustrate ways in which teachers can encourage students to use their entire multilingual repertoire to support learning and overall conceptual development:

- Each day, teachers invite one or two students to share a word from their home languages with their classmates and explain why they chose that word and what it means. Over time, students and teachers learn a variety of words and expressions in different languages.
- Teachers ensure that examples of students' work in their various home languages and in the school language are prominently displayed in school corridors and in individual classrooms. This reinforces the message that students' diverse languages are both personal and educational assets.
- Students work in groups and/or with parents to display different writing systems or orthographies in their classroom or in the school library.
- Students write and publish online dual language or multilingual stories or projects. Older multilingual students can write dual language stories intended for younger students to read.
- Students choose a poem from their home language to translate into English and share with the class. This activity can be carried out individually or in small groups.
- Across subject areas, teachers encourage students to conduct research online in their home languages for class projects.

Multiple other examples of language-friendly pedagogy or "pedagogical translanguaging" can be found in Celic and Seltzer (2013) and Cummins (2021). These activities also benefit monolingual English-speaking students who become curious about and aware of global languages and cultures. The ecology that emerges in language-friendly schools is clearly expressed by Little and Kirwin (2018, p. 321) on the basis of their detailed case study of a highly successful Irish multilingual school in a working-class area of Dublin: "Pupils are engaged with language, its uses and varieties throughout the school. They welcome new pupils because they bring new languages with them." A core characteristic of language-friendly schools is that they generate classroom communities focused on language exploration.

"A core characteristic of language-friendly schools is that they generate classroom communities focused on language exploration."

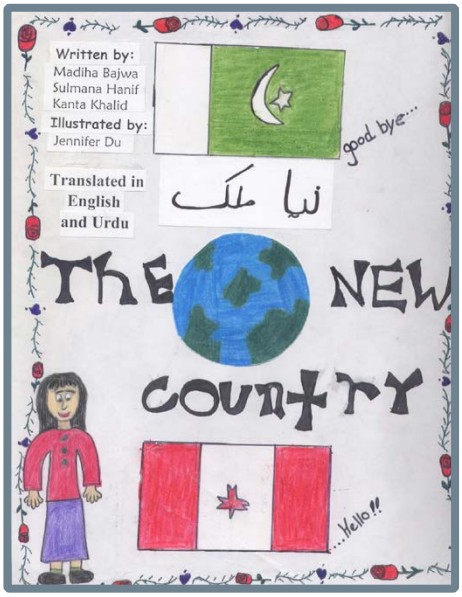
The following example illustrates the potentially profound impact of these instructional strategies on students themselves (Cummins & Early, 2011).

"I Can Show You That I Am Something." This quotation comes from a presentation made by Grade 9 student Kanta Khalid in October 2005 at the Ontario Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESL) conference in Toronto, Canada. Kanta discussed the 20-page English-Urdu dual language story, entitled "The New Country," that she and her friends, Sulmana and Madiha, had written and web-published two years previously under the guidance of their teacher, Lisa Leoni. The project was written by the three students as a culminating project for a unit on immigration taught as part of the Social Studies curriculum. The students initially discussed and planned the project in Urdu; they wrote the first draft in English and revised the English version with help from their teacher. They then translated the English version into Urdu (see http://www.multiliteracies.ca/index.php/folio/viewGalleryBook/8/42/0).

Both Kanta and Sulmana had arrived in Toronto in Grade 4 and were reasonably fluent in English, but Madiha was in the very early stages of acquisition. In a typical English-only

classroom, Madiha's ability to participate in a Grade 7 social studies unit on the theme of immigration would have been severely limited by her minimal knowledge of English. She certainly would not have been in a position to write extensively in English about her experiences, ideas, and insights. However, when the social structure of the classroom was changed in very simple ways that permitted her to collaborate with her friends and draw on her home language knowledge and literacy, Madiha was enabled to express herself in ways that few English learners experience. Her home language, in which all her experience prior to immigration was encoded, became once again a tool for learning. She contributed her ideas and experiences to the story, participated in discussions about how to translate vocabulary and expressions from Urdu to English and from English to Urdu, and shared in the affirmation that all three students experienced with the publication of their story as a (hard copy) book and on the Internet.

Figure 1. Cover page of "The New Country"



This affirmation was powerfully expressed by Kanta in her presentation to educators at the TESL conference:

> How it helped me was when I came here in Grade 4 the teachers didn't know what I was capable of. I was given a pack of crayons and a coloring book and told to get on coloring with it. And after, I felt so bad about that—I'm capable of doing much more than just that. I have my own inner skills to show the world than just coloring and I felt that those skills of mine are important also. So, when we started writing the book ["The New Country"], I could actually show the world that I am something instead of just coloring. And that's how it helped me, and it made me so proud of myself that I am actually capable of doing something, and here today [at the Ontario TESL conference] I am actually doing something. I'm not just a coloring person—I can show you that I am something. (Leoni et al., 2011, p. 50)

Kanta's account illustrates the major themes of this paper. Multilingual students' academic performance will be enhanced when teachers enable students to use their entire multilingual repertoire to engage actively and creatively with literacy in ways that affirm their personal and academic identities. This project not only engaged students' multilingual repertoires but also promoted strong literacy engagement. Interviews with the students showed how the translation process drew their attention to language (e.g., differences in

sentence structure between Urdu and English), scaffolded expansion of their vocabulary in both languages, connected directly with their lives, and affirmed their personal, academic, and intellectual identities.

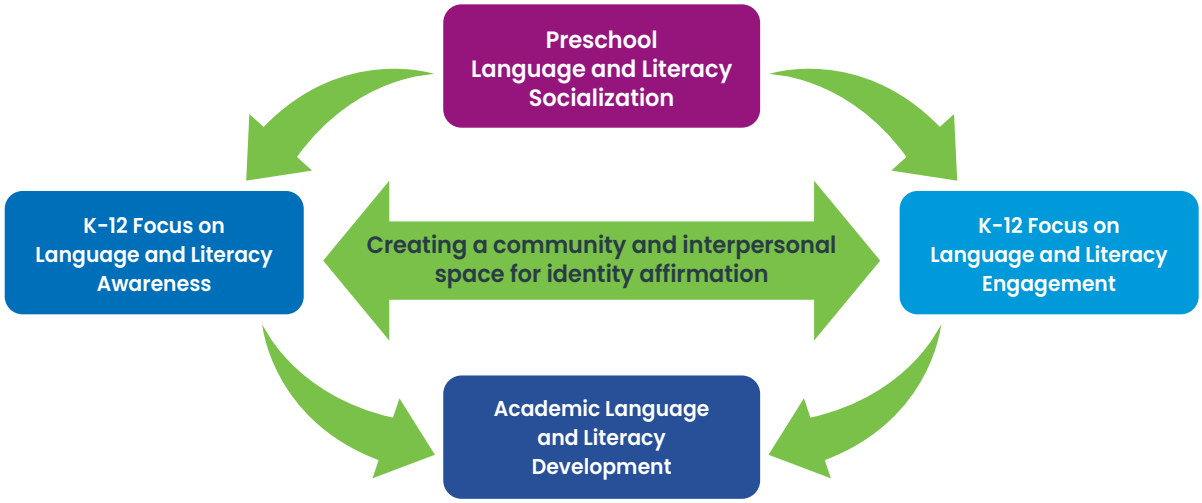
Literacy-Friendly Schools

The 2024 NAEP findings considered previously documented the strong relationship between exposure to books in the home and students' reading development. There is compelling empirical evidence that interventions to create an ecology of literacy socialization in the preschool years can enhance children's concepts about print, phonological awareness, and overall language knowledge, all of which contribute to successful reading and writing development in the early years of schooling (e.g., Neuman, 1999; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Wylie & Thompson, 2003). Hall and Moats (2015) summarized the empirically demonstrated benefits of reading aloud to children as follows:

>> Reading aloud to a child is a critical activity in helping a child gain the knowledge and language skill that will enable good comprehension later on. Reading aloud increases background knowledge, builds vocabulary, and familiarizes children with the language in books. (p. 29)

Extensive research (reviewed in multiple publications such as Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2021; Cremin & Scholes, 2024; Cummins, 2021; Guthrie, 2004; Hiebert, 2010; Krashen, 2004) also demonstrates that students who engage actively with reading develop significantly stronger reading skills than those who engage less frequently with reading. The causal nature of these relationships has also been demonstrated (e.g., Sullivan & Brown, 2016). These findings are particularly relevant in light of the fact that students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds experience significantly less access to print and opportunities to engage with literacy in their homes, neighborhoods, and often in their schools than students from more advantaged backgrounds (e.g., Duke, 2000; Hemmerechts, et al., 2017).

Figure 2. The complementary roles of awareness and engagement in language and literacy development



Unfortunately, in current debates about reading instruction, the importance of literacy engagement has frequently been overlooked by policymakers and educators. The framework outlined in Figure 2 attempts to make a very simple but crucial point regarding the research evidence on effective reading instruction. Specifically, it argues that optimal literacy

instruction in school (kindergarten through Grade 12) will emphasize the complementary and ongoing relationships between (a) promoting students' awareness of how language and literacy work and (b) maximizing students' opportunities to engage actively with literacy.

Language/literacy awareness includes the explicit teaching of phonics in the early grades and developing students' knowledge of morphological patterns later in elementary school. This pedagogical focus also prioritizes explicitly reinforcing language knowledge across the curriculum and exploring how language uses, such as informing, analyzing information, and (unfortunately) deceiving and exploiting, intersect with societal power relations.

The research data strongly suggests that a focus on language/literacy awareness will be much more effective when it is combined with the active and ongoing creation of an ecology of literacy engagement. This ecology is both material and interpersonal in nature. It provides ample access to high-interest and motivating texts and opportunities for all students to read texts in multiple genres, and it combines this access with interpersonal encouragement from teachers and peers to read, write, and critically discuss ideas and issues across the curriculum.

Teachers can promote a culture of literacy engagement in their schools by implementing the following strategies:

- Ensure that schools serving multilingual students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have well-stocked libraries, ideally including books in relevant community languages, that students can take home to read with family members;
- Encourage multilingual parents to tell stories and read to their children from an early age in their home language (and in the school language if parents are fluent);
- In the preschool and early grades of primary school, read and dramatize engaging stories to students on a daily basis;
- Create a community of readers within the classroom where students discuss fictional and non-fictional books, connect stories and ideas to their own lives and interests, and explore the deeper meanings of what they are reading;
- Encourage students to write in a variety of genres and display examples of students' multilingual writing in the classroom and school corridors.

In summary, based on the evidence-based framework presented in Figure 2, a literacy-friendly school (or preschool) can be described as follows:

>> Literacy-friendly schools ensure that all students are immersed in a print-rich environment from the earliest stages of their schooling. In the early grades, students experience daily opportunities to listen to stories, poetry/songs, and other forms of text being read aloud by the teacher or other adults. During the course of these read-alouds, the teacher draws students' attention to various aspects of the written text and how it relates to the spoken language. Students are also taught explicitly and systematically in small-group or whole-class mini-lessons to pay attention to how spoken and written language relate to each other and are given opportunities to explore these relationships through their own writing. Students are encouraged to develop strong motivation to engage with books of multiple genres both in the school and in their homes. Multilingual and/or newcomer students who are learning the school language are supported in their efforts to read and write the school language while at the same time encouraging continued development of their home language and transfer of conceptual and literacy-related knowledge across their two languages. This process of dual language literacy development can be significantly enhanced through the use of digital texts that incorporate dynamic and individualized multilingual supports.

Figure 3. Creating an identity-affirming school environment: Multilingual books in the school library (Crescent Town School, Toronto)

Conclusion

Language-friendly schools and literacy-friendly schools are two sides of the same coin. Language-friendly pedagogy naturally evolves towards literacy-friendly pedagogy as teachers communicate with parents and caregivers about the benefits of promoting their children's home language and literacy skills. Within the ecology of language-friendly and literacy-friendly schools, teachers and families can collaborate in expanding the range of multilingual books in classroom and school libraries (see Figure 3). These multilingual books can be used by teachers to get a sense of newcomer students' literacy skills in their home language (see Chow and Cummins, 2003). Teachers can also encourage students' home language literacy development and crosslinguistic transfer of concepts and literacy skills by inviting them to write and share with the class a book review in English of a home language book they have recently read or that a family member has read to them.

To conclude, let us return to the issue of how explicit instruction of sound/symbol relationships, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies are related to the creation of classroom and school ecologies that support literacy development. There is a large consensus among reading researchers that explicit instruction of the components of reading (and writing) plays a crucial role for most students in fostering literacy development. For example, the ability to decode is a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition for comprehending text, and vocabulary, together with the conceptual knowledge that it embodies, is crucial for reading comprehension. In fact, from a psychometric perspective, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension become virtually indistinguishable as students progress through the grades (e.g., Grabe, 2004).

However, despite the importance of explicit instruction, the research is also clear that much of the language knowledge that children and students develop is acquired implicitly rather than explicitly. This point is expressed clearly by Mark Seidenberg, an influential researcher in current debates about the science of reading:

>> Little of the information that supports reading is learned via explicit instruction. Think of vocabulary: Of the thousands of words a person knows, only a small fraction were explicitly taught. Most are learned implicitly—without instruction or conscious awareness—while using written and spoken language. This "statistical learning" relies on the brain's ability to pick up patterns in the use of words in sentences. We also know far more about print and print-sound correspondences than we are taught. Developmentally, a relatively small amount of explicit instruction scaffolds the vast amount of implicit learning on which reading and language depend. (Seidenberg, 2023).

What kinds of ecologies are likely to foster this "vast amount of implicit learning" that takes place in students' homes and schools? In this paper, I have made the case that for all students, but particularly for multilingual, minoritized, and economically disadvantaged students, language-friendly and literacy-friendly ecologies are significantly more likely to foster academic progress than ecologies that ignore students' linguistic talents and that fail to foster a love of reading and opportunities to write effectively and creatively.

Let us give the last word to a Grade 5 student who participated in one of the early multilingual projects in the Toronto area (Cummins & Early, 2011). This student expresses eloquently and powerfully the essence of language-friendly pedagogy:

>> "I don't care if people make fun of my language or say, 'What kind of language are you speaking?' I would just proudly say, 'I am speaking my language and I like my language, so go bother someone else.' I feel that every day I should speak my language so I can remember it in my future. This is my only chance to learn my language so when I grow up, I will remember my language and it will be in my heart. Another thing I will remember in my heart will be the wonderful school who taught me my language and helped me out. I will remember my teachers who took time to make me feel proud of my language."

Notes

1. Croft (2019) reports a $23 billion difference in funding—a difference of roughly $2,226 per student—between school districts serving predominantly white students and those serving predominantly non-white students.

2. https://www.statista.com/statistics/476804/percentage-of-school-age-children-who-speak-another-language-than-english-at-home-in-the us/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20about%2021.3%20percent,not%20speak%20English%20at%20home

3. NAEP Report Card: Reading. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/performance-by-student-group/?grade=4

References

Allington, R. L., & McGill-Franzen, A. M. (2021). Reading volume and reading achievement: A review of recent research. Reading Research Quarterly, 56(S1), pp. S231–S238. | doi:10.1002/rrq.404

Anderson, J., & Macleroy, V. (2016). Multilingual digital storytelling: Engaging creatively and critically with literacy. Routledge.

Bergroth, M., Dražnik, T., Llompart Esbert, J., Pepiot, N., van der Worp, K., & Sierens, S. (2022). Linguistically sensitive teacher education: Toolkit for reflection tasks and action research. https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2022021018583

Bialystok, E. (1988). Levels of bilingualism and levels of linguistic awareness. Developmental Psychology, 24(4), 560–567. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.24.4.560

Bialystok, E. (2011). Coordination of executive functions in monolingual and bilingual children. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 110(3), 461–468. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2011.05.005

Bishop, R. (2013). Indigenous and other minoritized students. In J. Hattie & A. M. Anderman (Eds.), International guide to student achievement (pp. 74–76). Routledge

Boatman, C. (2023, February 24). Highlighting the benefits of being bilingual. Edutopia. https://www.edutopia.org/article/benefits-being-bilingual/

Boykin, A. W. & Noguera, P. (2011). Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap. ASCD.

Carbonara, V. & Scibetta, A. (2020). Integrating translanguaging pedagogy into Italian primary schools: Implications for language practices and children's empowerment. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 25(3), 1049–1069. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1742648

Celic, C. & Seltzer, K. (2013). Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB guide for educators. New York, NY: CUNY-NYSIEB. https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/04/Translanguaging-Guide-March-2013.pdf

Cenoz, J., & Valencia, J. F. (1994). Additive trilingualism: Evidence from the Basque Country. Applied Psycholinguistics, 15, 195-207.

Chow, P. & Cummins, J. (2003). Valuing multilingual and multicultural approaches to learning. In S. R. Schecter and J. Cummins (Eds.), Multilingual education in practice: Using diversity as a resource (pp. 32–61). Heinemann.

Cremin, T., & Scholes, L. (2024). Reading for pleasure: Scrutinising the evidence base – benefits, tensions and recommendations. Language and Education, 38(4), 537-559. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2324948

Croft, J. (2019, February 27). A new report finds predominantly white school districts get $23 billion more in funding than nonwhite ones. CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/27/us/education-funding-disparity-study-trnd/index.html

Cummins, J. (2021). Rethinking the education of multilingual learners: A critical analysis of theoretical concepts. Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J., & Early, M. (2011). Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools. Trentham Books.

Duke, N. (2000). For the rich it's richer: Print experiences and environments offered to children in very low and very high-socioeconomic status first-grade classrooms. American Educational Research Journal, 37, 441–478.

Gándara, P. (2013) Meeting the needs of language minorities. In P. L. Carter and K. G. Welner (Eds.), Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance (pp. 156–168). Oxford University Press.

Guthrie, J. T. (2004). Teaching for literacy engagement. Journal of Literacy Research, 36, 1–30.

Hall, S. L., & Moats, L. C. (2015). Why reading to children is important. In Albert Shanker Institute, The American Federation of Teachers, and The Core Knowledge Foundation (Eds.), Literacy ladders: comprehension (pp. 22 29). American Federation of Teachers. https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/literacy-ladders.

Hemmerechts, K., Agirdag, O., & Kavadias, D. (2017). The relationship between parental literacy involvement, socio-economic status and reading literacy, Educational Review, 69(1), 85-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1164667

Hiebert, E. H. (Ed.) (2010). Reading more, reading better. Guilford.

Krashen, S. D. (2004). The power of reading: Insights from the research. 2nd edition. Heinemann.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. American Educational Research Journal, 32, 465–491.

Le Pichon, E. & Kambel, E-R. (2022). The language friendly school: An inclusive and equitable pedagogy, Childhood Education, 98(1), 42-49.

Leoni, L., Cohen, S., Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Bajwa, M., Hanif, S., Khalid, K., & Shahar, T. (2011). 'I'm not just a coloring person': Teacher and student perspectives on identity text construction. In J. Cummins and M. Early (Eds.), Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools (pp. 45-57). Stoke-on-Trent, England: Trentham Books.

Lewis, M., & Samuels, S. J. (2005). Read more—read better? A meta-analysis of the literature on the relationship between exposure to reading and reading achievement. University of Minnesota.

Lindsay, J. J. (2018). Interventions that increase children's access to print material and improve their reading proficiencies. In R. L. Allington and A. McGill-Franzen (Eds.) Summer reading: Closing the rich/poor reading achievement gap (pp. 41–58). New York: Teachers College Press.

Little, D. & Kirwin, D. (2019). Engaging with linguistic diversity. Bloomsbury Academic.

Migration Policy Institute (2022). Learning more about dual language learners. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/dll-infographic-2022-web-final.pdf

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) (2017). Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi:10.17226/24677

National Center for Educational Statistics (2024). The condition of education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf/english-learners-in-public-schools

Neuman, S.B. (1999). Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy. Reading Research Quarterly, 34(3), 286-311.

Neuman, S.B., & Celano, D. (2001). Access to print in low-income and middle-income communities: An ecological study of four neighborhoods. Reading Research Quarterly, 36, 8-26.

OECD. (2010). PISA 2009 results: Learning to learn—Student engagement, strategies and practices (Volume III). Paris: Author. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/17/48852630.pdf

Scarborough, H. S., & Dobrich, W. (1994). On the efficacy of reading to preschoolers. Developmental Review, 14(3), 245-302.

Seidenberg, M. (2023, December 14). Is the "Science of Reading" becoming too much of a good thing? Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-is-the-science-of-reading-becoming-too-much-of-a-good-thing/2023/12

Sullivan, A., & Brown, M. (2013). Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London. Retrieved from www.cls.ioe.ac.uk

U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). (2024, July 25). K-12 Education: Student, teacher, and school characteristics associated with English Learners' academic performance. GAO-24-106360. https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106360.pdf.

Williams, C. P., Meek, S., Marcus, M. & Zabala, J. (2023, May 15). Ensuring equitable access to dual-language immersion programs: Supporting English Learners' emerging bilingualism. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/ensuring-equitable-access-to-dual-language-immersion-programs-supporting-english-learners-emerging-bilingualism/

Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6, 323–346.

Wylie, C., & Thompson, J. (2003). The long-term contribution of early childhood education to children's performance—evidence from New Zealand. International Journal of Early Years Education, 11(1), 69-78. doi:10.1080/0966976032000066109

JA.MJ.ReaPri.581L0314MJ1

SAVVAS
LEARNING COMPANY

Savvas.com
800-848-9500

03-25v1

Join the Conversation
@SavvasLearning