
Multilingualism in the Classroom: "I think it's helping my
brain grow"

Jim Cummins

The University of Toronto

ECIS ESLMT Conference Copenhagen March 2017

ECIS ESLMT Conference

A Dramatic Shift in Orientation over 20 Years From ESL + MT to Multilingual Pedagogy

- It's like ABC in Danish. Exploring and exploiting literacy and linguistic diversity in the classroom
Speaker: Helle Pia Laursen
- Opening Boundaries: A Conversation on Crosslanguage Pedagogies in Multilingual Classrooms
Speakers: Fred Genesse, Else Hamayan
- Teaching and Learning in an Interlingual / Equal Rights Classroom
Speaker: Eithne Gallagher
- Translanguaging in the Secondary School
Speaker: Patricia Martin
- Expanding Your MT Definition: Bringing Identity Language Into Your School.
Speakers: Mindy McCracken, Lara Rikers
- Innovative Use of Home Languages in the Multilingual Classroom
Speaker: Joris Van den Bosch
- Our Ongoing Journey of Home Language Integration: The Ups and Downs
Speakers: Ron Rosenow, Karen Serritslev
- Keeping Multilingualism Alive in Your Classroom: Come and Share!
Speaker: Roma Chumak Horbatsch
- Teaching in Tandem: Fostering Connections across Languages of Instruction strand: Leadership and Professional Development
Speaker: Liz Howard
- Mother Tongue at the Center: Using Structured Translanguaging in the International Schools
Speaker: Eowyn Crisfield

Manaan: "I think it's helping my brain grow"

- Manaan, a grade 6 student in Floradale Public School in the Greater Toronto Area, reflected on the experience of reading, retelling, and creating books in his two languages, English and Hindi. This bilingual experience came about as a result of the multilingual approach to literacy development initiated by the teacher librarian in the school, Padma Sastri.
 - One of the ways in which Padma brought children's languages into the life of the school was through reading and dramatizing stories in the school library; students read stories in English to their class and then they, and/or other students, would summarize these stories in their home languages.
 - Sometimes, students (like Manaan in the video) tell a story in their home language and then other students who speak that language explain it in English.
 - At the time of the research (c. 2004), Floradale students spoke 44 different languages and their families came from 88 different countries of origin.
-

Manaan's Insights

- In an interview with researcher Sarah Cohen, Manaan expressed his delight at the opportunity to tell or retell a story in Hindi, his L1:
 "It feels great, I feel perfect, I feel like I'm back in India."
- He feels good about the feedback he gets from his teacher (Padma Sastri):
 "When I say a story in Hindi my teacher says, 'You were very good and your pace was good.' That makes me feel good."
- He also speculates on how the interchange between his two languages, as he listens to stories in English but prepares to retell them in Hindi, is affecting his brain and his cognitive functioning:

I think it's helping my brain grow because first I'm hearing it in English when Mrs. Sastri is reading the story and I divide my brain in two parts: this part is English and when she is reading, my memory's going in here, going toward there, and coming in Hindi so I feel like my brain is growing at the same time. (Cohen & Sastri, 2006).

Three Questions

- Is there research evidence to support Manaan's observation that processing two languages helps his brain grow?
 - Is there research evidence to support the efficacy of instruction that promotes productive contact and interchange among students' multiple languages (teaching for transfer)?
 - How can we implement multilingual instructional strategies (*teaching through a multilingual lens*) when the teacher may speak none of the multiple languages represented in the classroom (apart from English)?
-

Question 1

Is there research evidence to support Manaan's observation that processing two languages helps his brain grow?

Bilingualism/Multilingualism is a positive force in children's cognitive and academic development when its development is supported by the school

- A large number of empirical studies carried out since the early 1960s have reported a positive relationship between the development of active bilingualism and students' linguistic, cognitive, and academic growth.
 - Barac and Bialystok (2011) summarized their review of the research as follows: "the experience of speaking two languages yields cognitive benefits in the areas of attentional control, working memory, abstract and symbolic representation skills, and metalinguistic awareness" (Barac & Bialystok, 2011, p. 54).
 - The most consistent findings are that bilinguals show more developed awareness of the structure and functions of language itself (metalinguistic abilities) and that they have advantages in learning additional languages (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider (2010).
-

Bilingual Pupils Do Better in Exams, Study Finds

By Richard Gartner

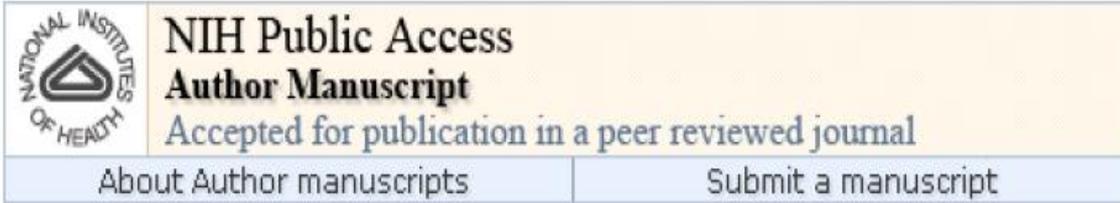
THE INDEPENDENT

LONDON - Bilingual children are far more likely to get top-grade passes in exams in all subjects, a report has found.

A study of Portuguese children at secondary schools in London showed that those who were encouraged to continue studying their native language were five times as likely to achieve five top grade A* to C grade passes at GCSE.

The study also found that 11-year-olds in Hackney who speak more than one language at home were outperforming pupils who only speak English, even in reading, in their national curriculum tests.

The report, *Positively Plurilingual*, is published today by Cilt, the national centre for languages, to coincide with a drive to encourage the take-up of community languages.



Cognition. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2010 September 1.

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[Cognition. 2009 September; 112\(3\): 494–500.](#)

Published online 2009 July 16. doi: [10.1016/j.cognition.2009.06.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2009.06.014)

Components of Executive Control with Advantages for Bilingual Children in Two Cultures

[Ellen Bialystok](#) and [Mythili Viswanathan](#)

“...the bilinguals were more skilled than the monolinguals in performing conditions that required inhibitory control and switching but not response suppression. Thus, ... bilinguals do not differ from monolinguals simply in inhibitory control but also demonstrate differences in the cognitive flexibility that underlies task switching.”



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Web address:

[http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/
090519172157.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/090519172157.htm)

Exposure To Two Languages Carries Far-reaching Benefits

ScienceDaily (May 20, 2009) — People who can speak two languages are more adept at learning a new foreign language than their monolingual counterparts, according to research conducted at Northwestern University. And their bilingual advantage persists even when the new language they study is completely different from the languages they already know.

Conclusion: Using 2+ languages is good for your brain

- **Ellen Bialystok and colleagues (2006) in Toronto:**

Examined age of onset of dementia (e.g., Alzheimer's disease) in a population of elderly people in seniors homes in Toronto. For bilinguals/multilinguals the age of onset of dementia was 4 years later than for monolinguals;

- **October 2011, Study in St. Michael's Hospital Toronto**

Researchers used brain imaging to identify deterioration associated with Alzheimer's; behavioural symptoms of brain deterioration appeared about 4+ years later in bilinguals/multilinguals than in monolinguals.

- **Alladi, D. M., Bak, T. H., Duggirala, V., Surampudi, B., Shailaja, M., Shukla, A. K., Chaudhuri, J. R., Kaul, S. D. (2013). Bilingualism delays age at onset of dementia, independent of education and immigration status. *Neurology*, 1938-1944. DOI: 10.1212/01.wnl.0000436620.33155.a4**

Study involved more than 600 participants in India. Overall, bilingual patients developed dementia 4.5 years later than the monolingual ones. A significant difference in age at onset was found across Alzheimer disease dementia as well as frontotemporal dementia and vascular dementia, and was also observed in illiterate patients.

Figure 6.1 EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM



However, when your wheels are nicely balanced and fully inflated you'll go farther...

Provided, of course, the people who made the wheels knew what they were doing.



Question 2

Is there research evidence to support the efficacy of instruction that promotes productive contact and interchange among students' multiple languages (teaching for transfer)?

'Two Solitudes' Assumptions Still Dominate Instruction in both Monolingual and Bilingual Programs

Wallace Lambert's Monolingual Instructional Principle



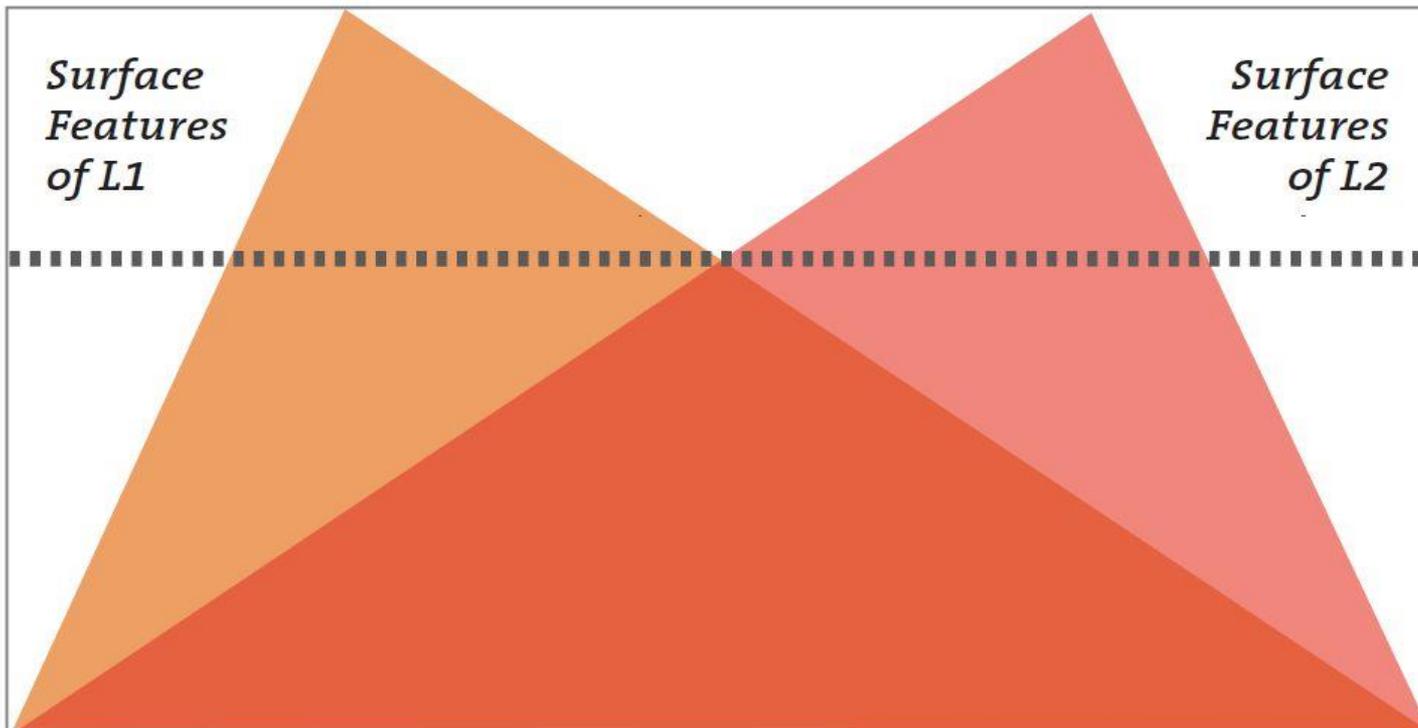
Some international schools still operate on 'English-only' assumptions.

This monolingual orientation also operates in some bilingual programs.

"No bilingual skills are required of the teacher, who plays the role of a monolingual in the target language ... and who never switches languages, reviews materials in the other language, or otherwise uses the child's native language in teacher-pupil interactions. In immersion programs, therefore, bilingualism is developed through two separate monolingual instructional routes" (1984, p. 13).

**Common Underlying Proficiency Model:
The Empirical Basis for Bilingual Instructional Strategies**

***The Dual Iceberg representation
of bilingual proficiency***



*Different languages don't occupy separate spaces in our brains:
There is overlap and interdependence among languages.*

Types of Cross-Lingual Transfer

- Transfer of **concepts** (e.g., understanding the concept of *photosynthesis*);
 - Transfer of **specific linguistic elements** (knowledge of the meaning of *photo* in *photosynthesis*);
 - Transfer of **phonological awareness** (knowledge that words are made up of different sounds);
 - Transfer of **morphological awareness** (how words are formed, roots, prefixes, suffixes, etc.);
 - Transfer of **cognitive and linguistic strategies** (e.g. strategies of visualizing, use of graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, vocabulary acquisition strategies, etc.);
-

Does the integration across languages mean that languages don't exist?



Banyan tree

- Some researchers (e.g., García & Li Wei, 2014) have claimed that the multilingual's languages are so integrated with each other that it is no longer legitimate to talk about "languages" as separate entities.
- They argue that it is no longer legitimate to talk about home language and school language (or L1/L2).
- We can now "shed the concept of transfer... [in favor of] a conceptualization of integration of language practices in the person of the learner" (p. 80)

The Kahikatea Tree Metaphor - Sophie Tauwehe Tamati (NZ)





The Interrelational Translingual Network (ITN) is illustrated in the entwined entanglement of roots that connect the kahikatea trees together.

Transacquisition Pedagogy for Bilingual Education: A Study in Kura Kaupapa Māori Schools

Sophie Tauwehe Tamati, University of Auckland Ph.D. dissertation, 2016

Transacquisition pedagogy =
teaching for transfer

An 8-week intervention program involving Year 7 and 8 students focused on cross-linguistic meaning-making and conceptual knowledge building.

The intervention resulted in significantly improved English reading comprehension skills among students whose previous instruction had been largely through the medium of Maori.



Illustration: Enamul Huque

Tomer's Identity Text

I think using your first language is so helpful because when you don't understand something after you've just come here **it is like beginning as a baby**. You don't know English and you need to learn it all from the beginning; but if you already have it in another language then it is easier, you can translate it, and you can do it in your language too, then it is easier to understand the second language.

The first time I couldn't understand what she [Lisa] was saying except the word Hebrew, but I think it's very smart that she said for us to do it in our language because **we can't just sit on our hands doing nothing**.



Tomer shahar

gm

- ① When I write story in Hebrew I fill I back to my old class in Israel. Sometime I fill confused because I fill I am in Israel again and I start tocing my first word in Hebrew.
- ② I like reading books in Hebrew in Canada because in Canada pople spicing English. When I come to my home I leading my books in Hebrew and it is fun. In Hebrew I can read any book I wants but in English I need read small books and in Hebrew I can read big books.
- ③ When I allowed to use Hebrew it helps me understand English I thinking in Hebrew and write in English. If I read in English I think in Hebrew and I understand more.

Written by:

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Illustrated by:

Jennifer Du

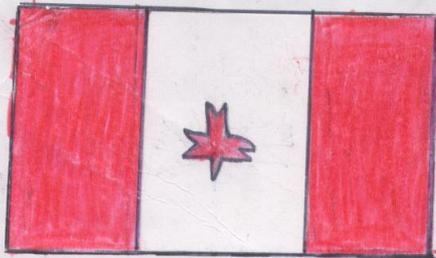
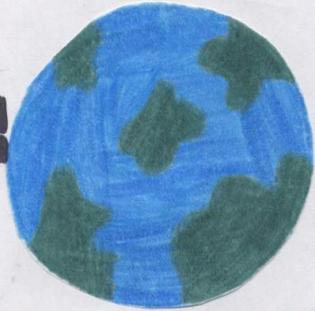


good bye...

Translated in
English
and Urdu

نیا ملک

THE NEW COUNTRY



...Hello!!

About The Authors

We are three best friends. Our names are Madiha Bajwa, Kanta Khalid, and Sulmana Hanif. We are in grade 7 at Michael Cranny E.S. in Maple, Ontario. This story we wrote mostly describes how hard it was to leave our country and come to a new country.

ہم تین بہت اچھی دوست ہیں۔ ہمارا نام ہے مڈیہ باجوہ، کانتہ خلیلہ،

اور سلمانہ حنیف۔ ہم ساتویں کلاس میں پڑتے ہیں اور ہم مائیکل

کریٹیو ایلیمنٹری اسکول میں پڑتے ہیں ہم میپل اوئیرمو جو

کینیڈا میں ہے۔ یہ ایک کہانی ہے جس میں بتایا جاتا ہے ایک

ملک سے دوسرے ملک میں جانا کتنا مشکل ہوتا ہے۔

Madiha's Reflections on *The New Country*



I think it helps my learning to be able to write in both languages because if I'm writing English and Ms. Leoni says you can write in Urdu too it helps me think of what the word means because I always think in Urdu. That helps me write better in English.

When I came here I didn't know any English, I always speak Urdu to my friends.

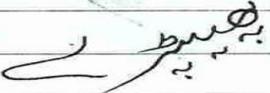
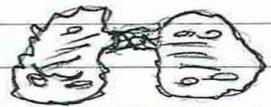
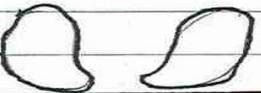
Other teachers they said to me "Speak English, speak English" but Ms. Leoni didn't say anything when she heard me speak Urdu and I liked this because if I don't know English, what can I do? It helps me a lot to be able to speak Urdu and English.

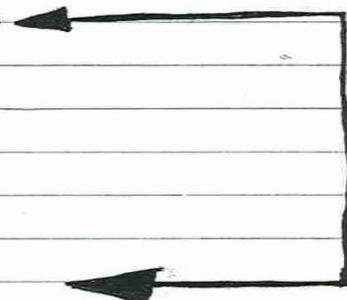
1). When I am allowed to write story in class using Urdu I feel very comfortable and very special and very important. I feel good that people see my Urdu and English story. I feel very comfortable because I no how to write in Urdu and ~~I no why~~ we write Urdu because we learn more English. I feel special because I don't want to forget my language.

2). I like reading story in Urdu because I like my language and I like reading into my language because it's really easy for me I like to read Urdu stories because I understand my language I like Urdu stories because some story is true.

3). When I am allowed to use Urdu in class it helps me to read and write English. When I have to learn new English words I remember them faster if I study the words in Urdu. Like this

New words

| English | UrDU | Picteur |
|---------|--|---|
| Lungs |  |  |
| Kidneys |  |  |
| heart |  |  |



Question 3

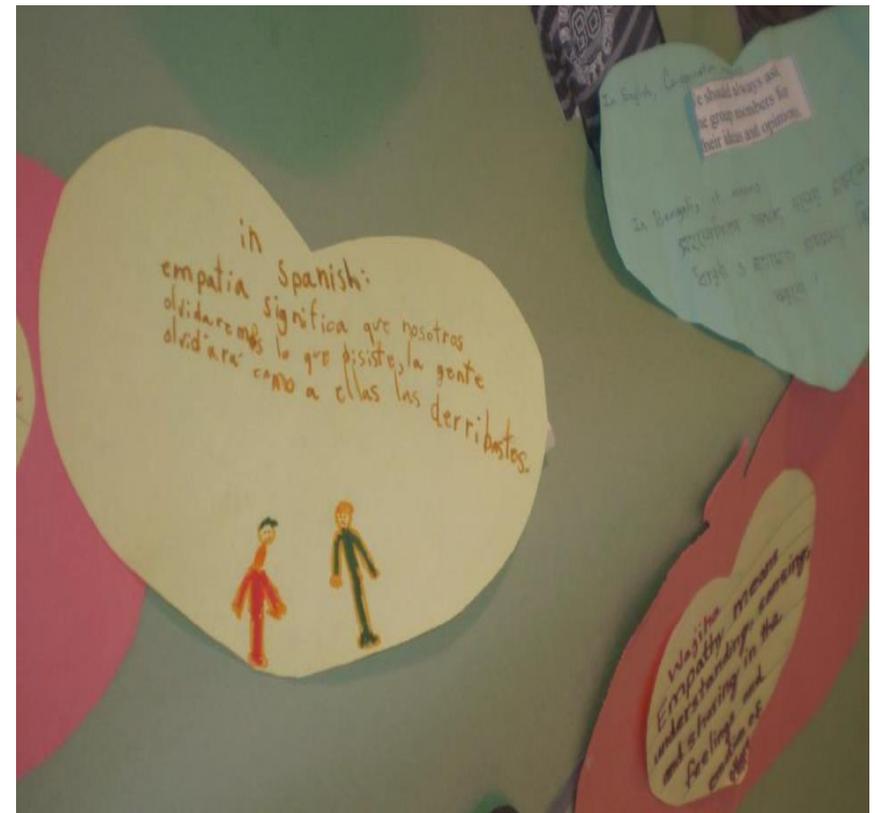
How can we implement multilingual instructional strategies (*teaching through a multilingual lens*) when the teacher may speak none of the multiple languages represented in the classroom (apart from English)?

A. Simple everyday practices to make students' languages visible and audible within the school

- Each day, one or two students bring a word from their languages into the classroom and explain why they chose that word and what it means. All students and the teacher learn that word.
 - All students including the teacher learn simple greetings (hello, thank you, etc.) in the languages of the classroom. Students who speak these languages are the "teachers". The "teachers" can also show their peers and teacher how to write a few simple expressions in different scripts (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Greek, etc.).
-

Multilingual signs and examples of students' work in the school language and L1 are prominently displayed in school corridors and at the entrance to the school.

This communicates to parents and students that students' linguistic talents are seen as educational and personal assets within the school.



B. Encourage students to use their L1s for reading, research, note-taking

- Encourage students to use L1 for group planning of projects which will be presented to the wider class in the school language (L2). In these cases, L1 is used as a stepping stone to better performance in L2 where limited L2 skills do not impede students' ability to engage with the project.
 - Encourage parents (and/or students) to read and/or tell stories in L1 in the home both as a means of expanding L1 knowledge into literate spheres and also expanding their children's knowledge of the world.
 - Invite community members to come to class to read and/or tell stories in community languages (see Naqvi et al., 2012).
-

Ensure that the school library has a good collection of L1 and dual language books for students to read and parents to check out for reading at home.



Develop students' language awareness by encouraging them to compare their languages

Appendix II.

From Robin Perseid's Grade 4 class

How Arabic and English are different?

| English | arabic |
|--|--|
| (1) Starts from left to right | Starts from right to left |
| (2) Noun comes after adjective e.g. The green apple | Noun come before adjective e.g. The apple green |
| (3) English we say "yes" to our parents and friends. | To our parents we say "Hazzar" (حاضر) which is more respectful and serious. It means "I'm here" or "I'm ready" but the meaning changes depending on country. More descriptive words and details when we speak about something. |
| (4) Uses less words to describe something e.g. A short girl | More descriptive words and details when we speak about something. because one word can have more than one meaning e.g. "حلوى" - hullwa can mean Candy or a cute girl. |
| (5) E is capitalized for English Our language group is arabic | You don't capitalize the first letter of the word arabic |

Group members: Faisal, Wegdan, Osama, Al-Ossama

C. Using technology in creative ways to build awareness of language, geography, and intercultural realities

- **Google Translate** can be used for a wide variety of purposes—for example, newcomer students write in L1 and then use Google translate to generate a rough version in English. The teacher and/or other students can then help the newcomer student edit this rough version into coherent English prose.
 - **Google Earth** can be used to “zoom into” the towns and regions of students’ countries of origin. Students can adopt a comparative approach to compare aspects of their countries of origin to Canadian realities that are incorporated into the curriculum expectations of the social studies curriculum. Obviously, parents can participate in this process by describing aspects of the culture and landscape and supplying additional artifacts.
-

Grade 5 teacher, Tobin Zikmanis, in the Peel District School Board addressed the Ministry curriculum expectations in the Data Management Unit of the Math curriculum by having students carry out a language survey of the entire school.

Students then used spreadsheet software to generate a variety of graphs (e.g., pie charts, bar graphs) to display and disseminate their findings.

Grade 5

Data Management Unit:

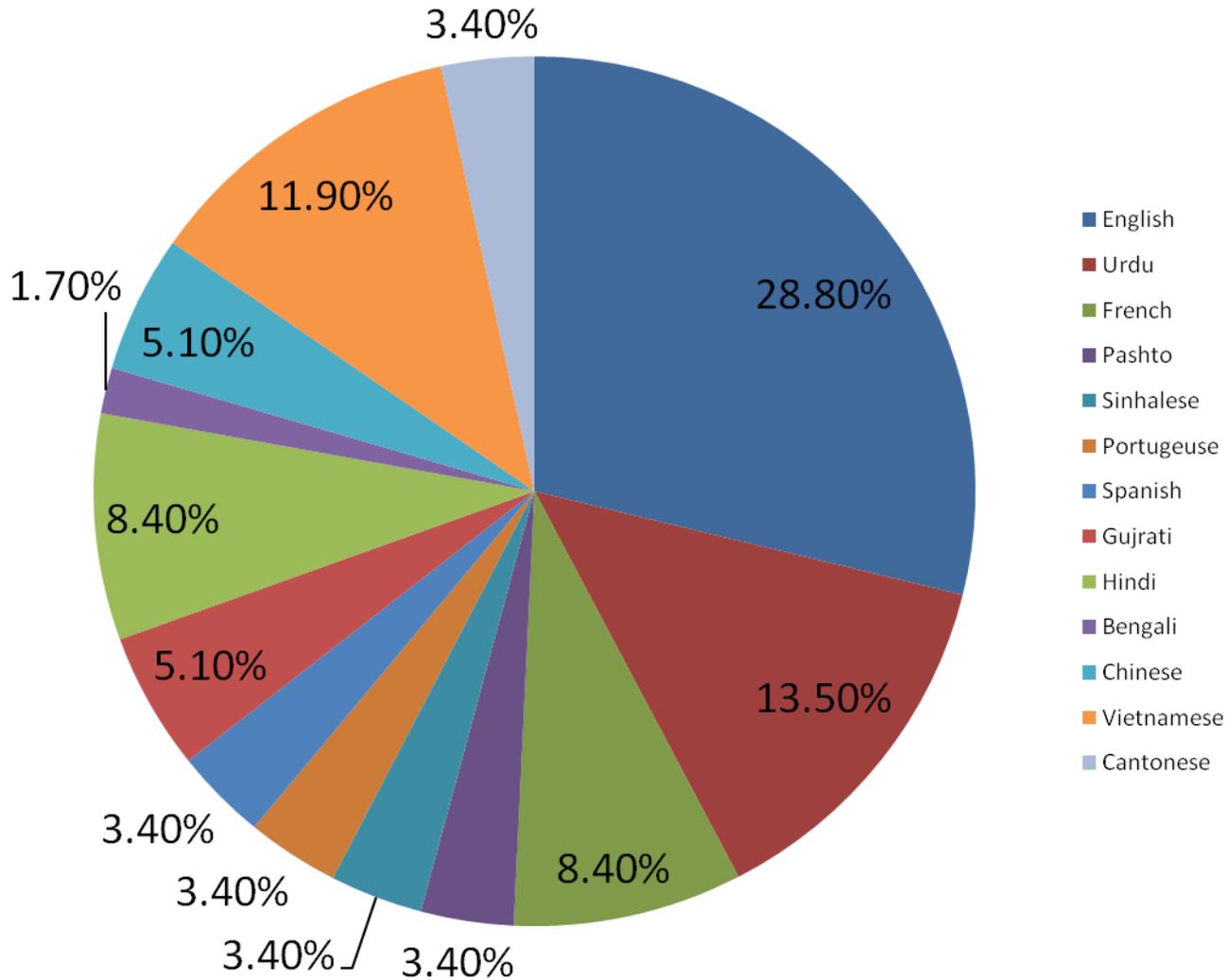
Thornwood's Diversity Project

Teacher: Tobin Zikmanis

School: Thornwood P



Grade 5 - Languages Spoken

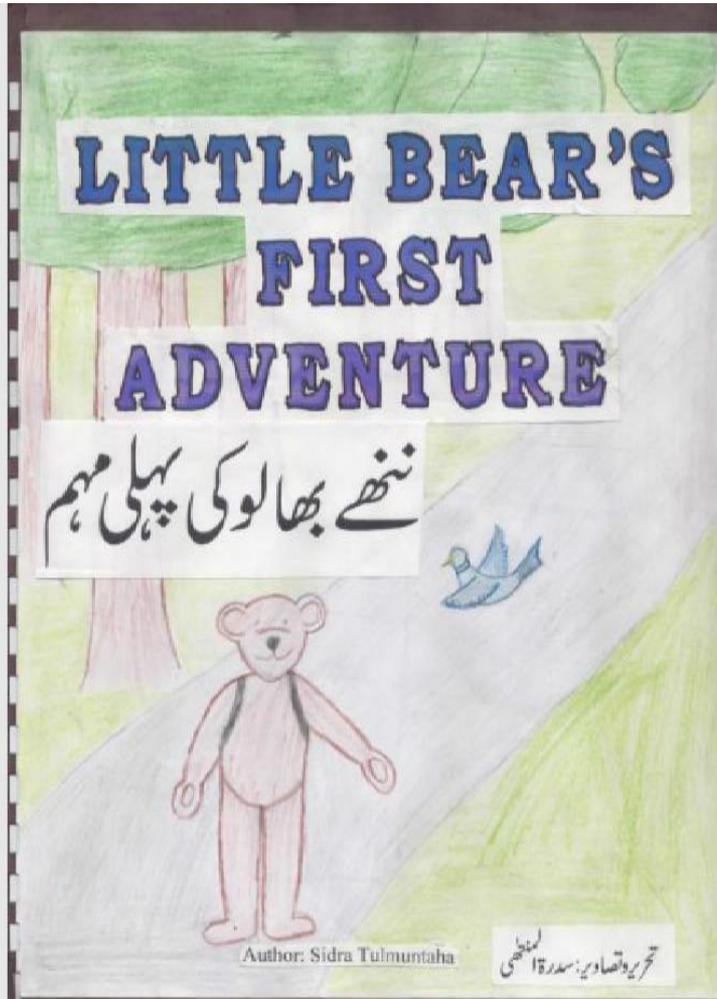


D. Dual language project work

- A wide variety of “translanguaging” resources, activities, and projects have been described in the publication *Translanguaging* written by Christina Celic and Kate Seltzer (2011) as part of a City University of New York and New York State project (available for free download at: <http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/publicationsresources/>)
- Dr. Roma Chumak-Horbatsch of Ryerson University has also documented a wide variety of multilingual instructional activities in her book *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* published by University of Toronto Press in 2012. Her website is: www.mylanguage.ca.

-

Students can write and web-publish dual language stories or projects.



THE DUAL LANGUAGE SHOWCASE

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[Thornwood Public School](#)

A Thornwood Public School (Peel District School Board), York University, and OISE/University of Toronto Project

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Students can use their two (or more) languages to write stories based on wordless picture books
(project carried out with primary school students by Dr. Nadeen Ruiz and teacher education candidates in California)



Students can collaborate with partner classes in distant locations (across the world or across the city) to carry out a variety of projects involving dual or multiple languages.

These projects could focus on social justice issues (e.g., environmental policies or income disparities in different countries).

The DiaLogos Project: A Partner Class Collaboration between Schools in Rhodes and Toronto

- Students collaboratively completed a short story begun by Evgenios Trivizas (a well-known Greek children's writer) called *The Dance of the Ostriches*;
 - 80 different stories were written. 59 stories were written by the students in Greece (35 stories in Greek and 24 in English) and 21 stories were written by students in Canada (9 in Greek and 12 in English). Some texts included both languages, reflecting students' attempt to use the target language.
-

Figure 8.2 A Template for School-based Language and Instructional Planning

| Collaborative Pedagogical Inquiry: Articulation Choices and Taking Collective Action | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Instructional Options | Current Realities: Where Are We? | Vision for the Future: Where Do We Want to Be? | Getting It Done: How Do We Get There? |
| Literacy Engagement How can we maximize the students' interest in and engagement with reading, writing, and other forms of cultural expression (e.g., art)? | | | |
| Content How do we adapt curriculum materials to link with students' existing knowledge and cultural background? | | | |
| Cognition How can we modify instruction to evoke higher-order thinking among students learning the school language? | | | |
| Tools How can we use tools such as computers, digital cameras, camcorders, web pages, etc., to enhance academic engagement and achievement? | | | |
| Assessment How can we complement mandated provincial/state assessments in order to present to students, parents, and administrators an accurate picture of students' academic progress? | | | |
| Language/Culture What messages are we giving students about the value of their languages and cultures? | | | |
| Parental Involvement How can we engage parents effectively as co-educators in such a way that their cultural knowledge and experience can support their children's academic progress? | | | |

What Image of the Student Are We Sketching in Our Instruction?

Capable of becoming bilingual and biliterate?

Capable of higher-order thinking and intellectual accomplishments?

Capable of creative and imaginative thinking?

Capable of creating literature and art?

Capable of generating new knowledge?

Capable of thinking about and finding solutions to social issues?

Fundamental Principle

If you want students to emerge from schooling after 12 years as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented,

then treat them as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented from the first day they arrive in school.

Resources

- www.multiliteracies.ca (Multiliteracies project)
 - <http://www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/> (Dual Language Showcase)
 - Celic, C. & Seltzer, K. (2012). *Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators*. New York: CUNY/NYSIEB.
(<http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/publicationsresources/>)
 - Chumak-Horbatsch, R. (2012). *Linguistically appropriate practice: A guide for working with young immigrant children*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
 - Cummins, J. & Early, M. (2011). *Identity Texts: The Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
 - McWilliam, N. (1998). *What's in a word? Vocabulary development in multilingual classrooms*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
 - Roma Chumak-Horbatsch's website focusing on home language maintenance
<http://www.ryerson.ca/mylanguage>
-

Resources (continued)
