REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Early Childhood, Educator Effectiveness
March 2019

Question:

What types of instructional strategies are used for teaching Spanish or other foreign languages to nonnative speakers during early childhood?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about instructional strategies for teaching foreign languages during early childhood. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on instructional strategies for teaching foreign languages during early childhood. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed instructional strategies for teaching Spanish or other foreign languages to nonnative speakers ages 2–3 and information about early childhood dual immersion programs. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Daloiso, M. (2007) *Early foreign language teaching*. Venice, Italy: Guerra Edizioni. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michele_Daloiso2/publication/310464626_Early_Foreign_Language_Teaching/links/582ed8ab08ae138f1c0314f7.pdf

From Chapter 4 – The methodological dimension: "In this chapter we dealt with the methodological dimension of Early Language Teaching Methodology (ELTM) and sought to highlight how knowledge about the acquisitional and linguistic dimension (cf. 2, and cf. 3, respectively) has certain repercussions in defining the early acquisition paths of the foreign languages (FL). In particular, we:

a. outlined an approach that begins with a conception of language acquisition (LA) that is connected to the overall growth of the pupil and that specifies the contribution that the FL makes in the cognitive, cultural, relational, and semiotic education of the child (cf. 4.1);
b. established certain criteria for defining educational, linguistic aims, and for selecting linguistic contents for the FL early approach, highlighting how these decisions need to begin with and be informed by an understanding of the pupil's neuropsychological characteristics and linguistic and communicative competences that have already matured in his mother tongue (cf. 4.2 and 4.3);
c. discussed the opportunity of a playful methodology based on a respect for infant neuropsychology by using neuro-sensorial stimulation, operativeness, and implicit acquisition (cf. 4.4);
d. developed some considerations about language teaching methodology (LTM) techniques that better realize the early teaching of the FL, also noting the fact that certain commonly used techniques can promote different memory systems (cf. 4.5 and 4.6);
e. proposed an operative model, the Acquisition Unit, that responds to the limits and neurological potentialities of the pupil along a path that sets linguistic and formative objectives and that therefore leads towards the joint development of linguistic (in FL) and cognitive abilities (cf. 4.6)."

Genesee, F. (2015). Myths about early childhood bilingualism. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, *56*(1), 6–15. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1f41/7eb291a72761e4597ec8dd41d08bc763eab0.pdf

From the abstract: "There has been growing interest in children who learn language in diverse contexts and under diverse circumstances. In particular, dual language acquisition has become the focus of much research attention, arguably as a reflection of the growing awareness that dual language learning is common in children. A deeper understanding of dual language learning under different circumstances is important to ensure the formulation of theories of language learning that encompass all language learners and to provide critical information for clinical and other practical decisions that touch the lives of all language learners. This article reviews research findings on dual language learning in both school and nonschool settings, among simultaneous and sequential bilinguals, and in typically developing learners and those with an impaired capacity for language learning. Key findings with respect to 4 common myths about dual language acquisition in young learners are discussed: (1) the myth of the monolingual brain; (2) the myth that younger is better; (3) the myth of time-on-task; and (4) the myth that bilingualism is not advisable for children with developmental disorders or academic challenges."

Kearney, E., & Ahn, S.-Y. (2014). Preschool world language learners' engagement with language: What are the possibilities? *Language Awareness*, *23*(4), 319–333. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1038486; full text available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271752377_Preschool_world_language_learners%27_engagement_with_language_what_are_the_possibilities

From the abstract: "What does development of language awareness among very young world language learners look like, especially when they have relatively infrequent exposure to the language they are learning? Adopting an 'engagement with language' (EWL) perspective and attending closely to classroom discourse, our research analyses interactional data drawn from several Head Start preschool classrooms (children aged 3–5 years) in order to both establish what sorts of explicit language awareness such young learners display in episodes of EWL and point out what other opportunities for cultivating language awareness are latent, but ultimately unexploited, in the classroom discourse excerpts presented. Our analysis is the basis for the claim that world language education more broadly, especially in the case of young learners, can be enhanced if curriculum and instruction intentionally focus on developing language awareness and deepening EWL."

Mavilidi, M.-F., Okely, A. D., Chandler, P., Cliff, D. P., & Paas, F. (2015*). Effects of integrated physical exercises and gestures on preschool children's foreign language vocabulary learning. Educational Psychology Review*, *27*(3), 413–426. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071971; full text available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281148671_Effects_of_Integrated_Physical_Exercises_and_Gestures_on_Preschool_Children's_Foreign_Language_Vocabulary_Learning

From the abstract: "Research suggests that integrating human movement into a cognitive learning task can be effective for learning due to its cognitive and physiological effects. In this study, the learning effects of enacting words through whole-body movements (i.e., physical exercise) and part-body movements (i.e., gestures) were investigated in a foreign language vocabulary task. Participants were 111 preschool children of 15 childcare centers, who were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Participants had to learn 14 Italian words in a 4-week teaching program. They were tested on their memory for the words during, directly after, and 6 weeks after the program. In the integrated physical exercise condition, children enacted the actions indicated by the words to be learned in physical exercises. In the non-integrated physical exercise condition children performed physical exercises at the same intensity, but unrelated to the learning task. In the gesturing condition, children enacted the actions indicated by the words to be learned by gesturing while remaining seated. In the conventional condition, children verbally repeated the words while remaining seated. Results confirmed the main hypothesis, indicating that children in the integrated physical exercise condition achieved the highest learning outcomes. Implications of integrated physical exercise programs for preschool children's cognition and health are discussed."

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask A REL Pacific at McREL. (2015). *At what age or grade should a second language be introduced in indigenous language environments?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/askarel/aar14.asp

Additional Organizations to Consult

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages: https://www.actfl.org/

From the website: "The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching and learning of all languages at all levels of instruction. ACTFL is an individual membership organization of more than 12,500 language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate education, as well as government and industry.

"Since its founding (in 1967), ACTFL has become synonymous with innovation, quality, and reliability in meeting the changing needs of language educators and their students. From the development of Proficiency Guidelines, to its leadership role in the creation of national standards, ACTFL focuses on issues that are critical to the growth of both the profession and the individual teacher."

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- ("early childhood" OR preschool) AND instruction AND "foreign language"
- ("early childhood" OR preschool) AND instruction AND ("dual immersion" OR "dual language immersion" OR "two-way immersion")

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant sources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover information available within the last ten years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Reference sources: IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on February 15, 2019. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.