

Leveraging Economic and Linguistic Funds of Knowledge through Biliteracy Strategies

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Social studies teachers in language immersion settings are tasked with simultaneously teaching students social studies content while also scaffolding target language acquisition. An abundance of resources exists for teaching social studies, yet language immersion teachers often rely on collaboration with colleagues to create lessons and translate materials and resources. As part of a U.S. Department of Education professional development grant, the authors of this article, two university professors and two Spanish language immersion teachers, embarked on a collaborative project to develop an upper elementary social studies curriculum for students in Spanish/English two-way dual language immersion settings. In these immersion contexts, many students come from multilingual homes, where two or more languages are spoken, while other students come from monolingual homes where Spanish or English is spoken. Thus, the focus of this upper elementary curriculum project was two-fold: we aimed to (a) support biliteracy and metalinguistic awareness¹ while students (b) applied history and economic knowledge and forms of representation to consider the compelling question, *How do multinational communities support the economy?*

Economic and Linguistic Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge, namely the abundance of social, economic, historic, and linguistic knowledge within families and communities² served as the backbone for the curriculum project. A funds of knowledge framework acknowledges that all students

come to school from families and communities with experiences and skills that can be leveraged as assets to make learning relevant, meaningful, and engaging. In the case of this curriculum, students conducted inquiry into the economic experiences, knowledge, skills, and home language practices within their

family when they interviewed adults in their home. As a funds of knowledge focused curriculum, linguistic and social studies content knowledge becomes organic, responsive, and student-centered.

Students in Spanish/English dual language immersion classrooms may be immigrants or may have family members who came to the United States from countries in Latin American and the Caribbean. Many language immersion teachers are immigrants themselves. For example, the immersion teachers who collaborated with us on this project are from Mexico and Colombia. Thus, language immersion teachers also bring to the classroom linguistic and economic funds of knowledge they can contribute to the learning experience. However, it is important to note that teachers do not need to be bilingual or multilingual to apply biliteracy strategies in their

classrooms. All teachers need a positive understanding of bi/multilingualism to recognize that they can draw upon students' home language to support literacy.

Multilingual Perspectives and Bilingualism

In schools in the United States, monolingualism is considered the norm and has traditionally supported a deficit-laden understanding of bilingualism.³ In this perspective, bilingualism is seen as a detriment that hinders students' learning of the dominant language. However, around the world bi/multilingualism is mundane, "neither unusual nor unexpected."⁴ In fact, research indicates bi/multilingualism is an asset with numerous economic, cognitive, and socio-cultural benefits.⁵ Going further, students' home language practices should be viewed as a foundational architecture for the dynamic development of students' language use in all contexts.⁶ Thus, many teachers in the U.S. must engage in an ideological shift away from normative monolingualism to understand the multilingual perspectives that inform biliteracy strategies. For example, one common monolingual assumption is that a bi/multilingual speaker's languages remain siloed and distinct. However, bi/multilingualism is a practice of hybridity, where speakers use their entire linguistic repertoire in "complex and dynamic ways" by regularly mixing and switching from one language to the other through processes

such as codeswitching⁷ and translanguaging practices. Code switching occurs when an individual alternates between different languages, dialects, or formal and informal ways of speaking. Relatedly, translanguaging refers to the myriad ways that individuals use their entire linguistic repertoire to make sense of and interact with the world around them.⁸ When teachers support students' multilingual development through translanguaging and biliteracy practices, they reinforce the importance of students' linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge for meaningful and equitable learning.⁹

Biliteracy strategies can be defined broadly as a continuum of practices where two or more languages are used in or around reading and writing.¹⁰ Effective biliteracy strategies in this curriculum include practices such as collaborative writing, vocabulary bridges that connect school and home language, conversations around children's literature, and family engagement.¹¹ The strategies described in this article were designed for upper elementary students in dual language immersion settings. Regardless, biliteracy strategies are best practices that can easily be differentiated for any K-12 grade level. Teachers should also note that these strategies are effective practices for English language learners in non-immersion settings. For example, code switching and strategies described in this article, such as cognate recognition, read alouds,

collaborative writing, and integrating funds of knowledge and home languages are appropriate instructional strategies at any grade level.¹²

To frame the curriculum, we integrated NCSS C3 Framework standards¹³ with language learning standards from the American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages.¹⁴ In addition to these standards, content obligatory and content compatible language learning objectives were made explicit. Content obligatory objectives refer to learning targets that address words and concepts directly related to social studies knowledge and forms of representation. For example, in this curriculum students need to learn words in Spanish and English that are directly related to content knowledge from the C3 Framework disciplines of economics and history. Included in these content obligatory objectives are language cognates—words in Spanish and English with similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation. Examples of cognates in this economics and history curriculum are family/familia, economy/economía, and fruit/fruta.

Content compatible objectives are not directly related to social studies knowledge and forms of representation. These language learning objectives are taught within the context of the lesson and are transferable to other subject areas and outside the walls of the classroom. For this series of lessons, we chose to focus on indirect pronouns (me, te, le, nos) and

Figura Sensorial/Sensory Figure

Instructions: Complete the sentences and draw a sensory figure of Dolores Huerta or César Chavez.

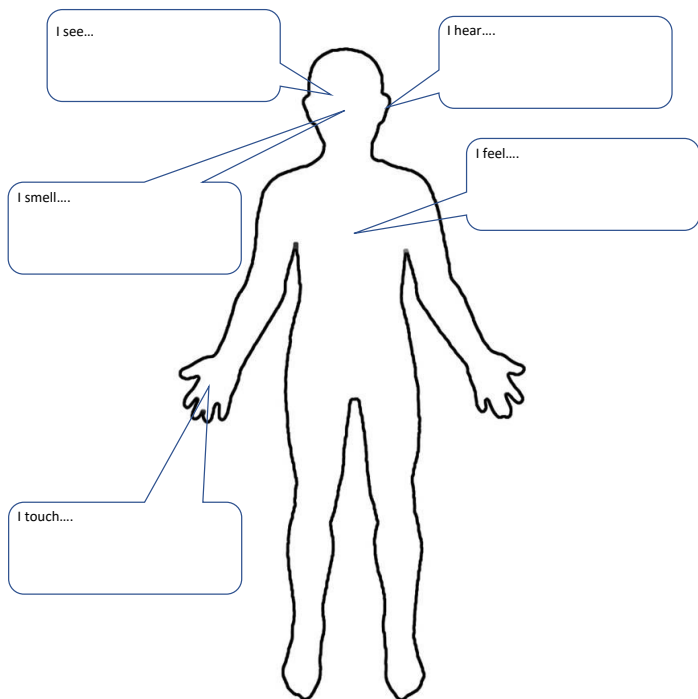
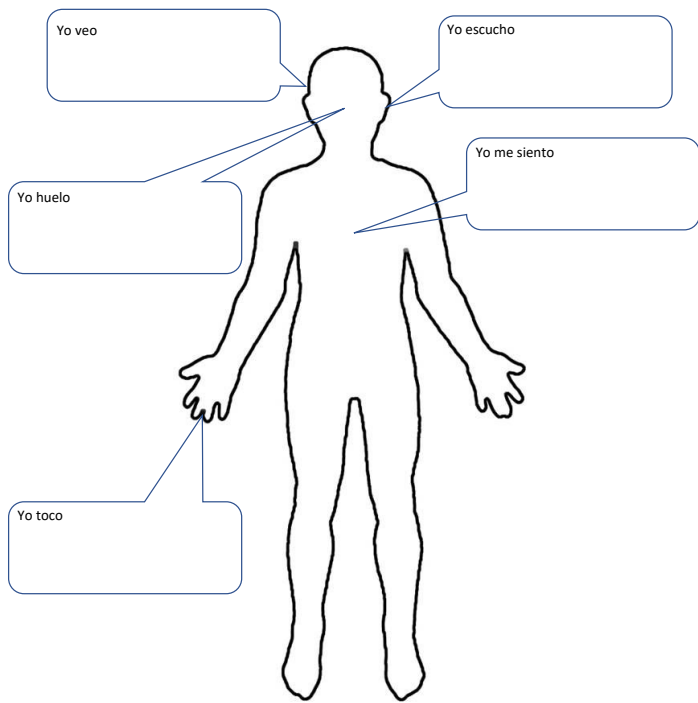


Figura Sensorial/Sensory Figure

Instrucciones: Complete las frases y diseña la figura sensorial de Dolores Huerta o César Chavez.



Spanish verbs for the senses such as *me huelo* (I smell), *me veo* (I look), *me toco* (I touch), *me siento* (I feel). Methods and strategies for teaching social studies and content knowledge were sequentially structured to provide students with opportunities to engage with literature in Spanish and English, integrate economic and linguistic funds of knowledge from their families and community, and demonstrate their understanding of content, using both languages, through classroom discussions, processing assignments, and product-based assessments.

It is important to acknowledge the power of English as a dominant language in this socio-cultural learning context. Thus, separate spaces for English and Spanish instruction were created to protect the use of Spanish and to prevent English from becoming the de facto language spoken among the children. For the most part, students experienced separate literacy instruction in Spanish and English. Student's instruction was predominantly in English while they were with an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher. However, the bulk of instruction in social studies, science, and math was in Spanish. The Spanish and ELA teachers worked in tandem, with the explicit goal to "connect literacy instruction in each language to converge into what is called biliteracy instruction."¹⁵

In the curriculum activities, teachers, students, and families

engaged in a process of co-creation as they apply their funds of knowledge to drive the trajectory of the content and linguistic knowledge. Specifically, students' home language and economic knowledge is foregrounded to make the lessons personal and culturally relevant.¹⁶ For this curriculum students explored the compelling question *How do multinational communities support the economy?*, and the following supporting questions guided the content focus:

1. How did Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta improve their communities?
2. How do immigrants contribute to the economy?
3. How do adults in our community support their families?

For this article we chose to focus on the biliteracy strategies in the curriculum. However, the entire curriculum can be found on the ImmersionLA website listed in the Biliteracy Resources section of this article.

Biliteracy Strategies

In one lesson, students became familiar with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, two Hispanic activists who worked together to improve the economic conditions of immigrant farm workers in the United States. Students engaged with a biographical collection of poems about Chavez's life in a book titled *César: ¡Si Se*

Puede! Yes, We Can!.¹⁷ During an initial read aloud of the poem aptly titled *¡Si Se Puede! Yes, We Can!*, students began a process of identifying and recording cognates and other important vocabulary on an anchor chart. Then, the teacher organized students in pairs to create sentences using a first-person perspective, regular verbs, and vocabulary words from the poem. For example, students would create sentences such as: I am simple, (Yo soy sencillo); I am American (yo soy americano); I have a shirt, (yo tengo una camisa). Next, students modified their sentences using indirect pronouns (me/I, te/you, le/you, nos/us). Throughout this process, the class referred to the co-created anchor chart to strengthen their metacognitive understanding of how cognates, and direct and indirect pronouns are used in Spanish and English.

In another biliteracy activity, students explored the bilingual children's book *Side by Side: The Story of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. Lado a lado: La historia de Dolores Huerta y César Chávez*.¹⁸ During an initial read aloud, students identified, discussed, and recorded new cognates and reflexive verbs in the book. In subsequent readings, students focused on Dolores Huerta's contributions to the community, including her career as a teacher and her contributions as an activist. Next, students discussed reasons Chavez's family immigrated to the U.S., how his family contributed to the economy, and difficulties immigrants face as farmworkers. Then, students used a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast how Huerta and Chavez's lives became intertwined through activism and highlighted how they supported each other in



Original painting of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta by Denver artist Alex Palacio, commissioned by La Lucha

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their fight for equitable pay for farmworkers, improved safety and health, and immigration reform. To process this activity in Spanish and English, students created sensory figures of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez in both languages using the target verbs for this lesson (see sensory figures on p. 144).

To draw family engagement into biliteracy activities, students interviewed adults in their family, in their predominant home language, to identify economic and linguistic funds of knowledge and to inquire about stories of family members who migrated to the United States or within the United States. Regardless of whether English or Spanish is spoken in the home, most families in the United States have stories about migration, whether it is migration to or within the United States. We need to offer a word of caution here; if the teacher believes there might be undocumented families present in the classroom, the use of home interviews to elicit funds of knowledge is not recommended.

During their interviews, students asked their adults to expand on questions such as, “What languages do or did people in our family speak?”, “What types of jobs and experiences does our family have?”, “What types of skills and education do we have in our family?”, “Why did our family move to the United States or to this town?”, and “What difficulties did our family face when we moved?”.

After students completed their interviews, they shared information about their family’s funds of knowledge and migration stories with the class. To debrief, the class created a chart to compare and contrast different responses from families.

When the chart was completed, the teacher reintroduced Cesar Chavez into the discussion as an example of an immigrant and highlighted his economic and historic contributions to our society. To accomplish this, the class read the English language book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*.¹⁹ This NCSS notable trade book was also a recipient of the Pura Belpré Award, an award given to Hispanic authors and illustrators for producing outstanding children’s literature that portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Hispanic cultural experience. To engage students with the book in English and Spanish, students began their interaction with the text through a picture walk in Spanish where the teacher engaged them in discussion to explicitly reinforce target vocabulary, including anticipated cognates. Afterwards, the story was read in English while cognates were identified, and unfamiliar vocabulary was discussed and added to the cognate and vocabulary anchor chart.

As a summative assessment, students created a bilingual timeline in small groups that included important historical events in the lives of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. To create the timeline, students

applied target vocabulary and cognates, engaged in collaborative multilingual speaking and writing, and created a culminating product that reinforced their understanding of chronology. As a product-based assessment, the timeline provided an opportunity for the teachers to formally assess students’ social studies content knowledge and language development.

Conclusion

Throughout these activities, students’ bilingual listening skills, reading comprehension, oral proficiency, and writing skills were scaffolded and assessed through discussions, analysis of poetry, creation of sensory figures, and the summative timeline. The funds of knowledge framework and biliteracy strategies we employed leveraged students’ home language and familial economic knowledge and experiences as assets to organically drive the content and reinforce the idea that families and communities have the capacity to generate rich social studies knowledge. ■

Notes

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Bilingual Resources for Teachers
ImmersionLA:
www.immersionla.org/resources?language=Spanish

Colorín colorado:
A bilingual site for educators and families of English.
www.colorincolorado.org

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