

Second Language Education in the Early Years: Implications on Literacy Learning

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is not merely about learning its words and its grammar but is also learning about concepts, intellectual skills and such (Cummins, 2000: 18-19) that are usable skills in the first language. Many authors seem to think that this is mostly related to metalinguistic abilities (Bialystok, 2001; Garfinkel et Tabor, 1991; and others, see Gaonac'h: 2006). These skills, during early childhood, seem to be closely linked to later literacy competences, including reading and writing. Indeed, Cummins explains through his CUP theory that these skills are “linked and interdependent” (2001: 18) for additive bilingual subjects, who have a high proficiency in both of their languages. As these researchers worked mostly on balanced bilingualism in children, we are wondering if these advantages could also be seen on monolingual children who learn a second language at school in the pre-literacy years. If this was the case, how would the second-language learning influence and help develop first-language abilities and literacy? Would it be possible to easily develop a method for children in all types of schools, without the generally high costs (financial and human) of a bilingual education? The aim of this presentation is to explore how this could be effective and if it is, how we could apply this easily in any setting. It uses a case-study currently taking place in Paris, France, following 38 French-speaking children during two years from age 5 to age 7.

Keywords: early childhood education; ESL; literacy; metalinguistic; second language education