



Mindfulness and Growth Mindset in the Bilingual/ESL Classroom

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Abstract

The effects of the COVID pandemic have had serious impacts on English learners and Emergent Bilinguals. Mindfulness and Growth Mindset are two socio-emotional strategies that could have a positive impact on the classroom culture and English learners and Emergent Bilingual so that their language proficiency, literacy development, and academic success are supported socio-emotionally for their continued learning.

Keywords: Bilingual Education, ESL Education, Second Language Acquisition, Mindfulness, and Growth Mindset

1. Introduction

The challenging experiences in our communities because of COVID 19 and other natural disasters have created an extra burden for our English learners and Emergent Bilinguals. Over the past two years, through a pandemic, schools have experienced circumstances unlike any previous. In addition, the school administrators, teachers, students, and parents have been bombarded with inclement weather that has added an additional layer of issues for those that live in poverty. When children became aware of the transition to remote learning and the possibility of no school, many cheered and celebrated, but when COVID 19 forced over a billion children out of classrooms, often with little or no resources at home, the excitement came to an end (Page, 2021).

Andrew Kay, CEO, of the World Literacy Foundation, stated over “770 million people in the world can’t read or write a single sentence” (World Literacy Foundation, 2020). With the existing literacy gaps as large as this, the pandemic only caused a downward spiral to the lives of children and their futures. Without crucial literacy skills, children might never be able to reach their full potential and may suffer the consequences of unemployment, poverty, and many more lifelong problem (Page, 2021)

Challenging Times

Almost one quarter of U.S. children (10 million) speak a language other than English at home. (U.S. Census, 2019). For all students, becoming proficient readers and writers is the key to academic success. This is very true for English learners (EL) or Emergent bilinguals (EB) in our nation’s schools. Some of these children enter a school system that lacks the capacity to understand and embrace their unique needs and assets (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Teachers have designed lessons and activities to serve their English learners and Emergent Bilinguals through distance learning, however, they should also consider social-emotional needs that already exist for this student population. Social emotional learning are skills and processes through which children and adults acquire, and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Brackett, et.al, 2019) Research shows that social and emotional skills are a prerequisite to thinking and learning skills that comprise the focus of education. Emotions drive attention, which facilitates learning and enhances memory. The social aspects of the learning environment also contribute significantly to learning. For all children, but especially for English learners that are learning a second language and becoming acculturated to the U.S. culture, addressing SEL skills is especially important.

2. Methods

This article was developed from a conceptual perspective. Looking at the possible impact that two socio-emotional strategies, when implemented in a Bilingual/ESL classroom setting, would impact the English learners and Emergent bilinguals and their teachers positively and improve the students' self-esteem, identity, and language acquisition. A review of the current literature was conducted using current and former studies that have been published, and journal articles that have also been developed noting the impact of mindfulness and growth mindset on students in elementary and secondary students. The work of Stephen Krashen in second language acquisition was also reviewed noting the impact of the affective filter can on students' learning a second language. The connections between these three concepts were explored and connected to bilingual and ESL classrooms using the Affective Filter Hypothesis as developed by Stephen Krashen.

3. Results

Second Language Acquisition-Affective Filter

In Stephen Krashen's second language acquisition hypotheses, the importance of the affective filter is stressed. Stephen Krashen addresses the affective filter as part of the language acquisition device (LAD) and its key role in the acquisition of language. Language learning ultimately occurs in the mind of the learner where mental structures and mechanisms process and organize the language to which the learner is exposed. In brain-based learning researchers have stressed that the limbic system houses the amygdala which is the seat of emotion and is very important (Sprenger, 2020). The limbic system controls hormonal systems: the stress response system and the trust/love system (Cantor, 2019) When stressed, cortisol is released triggering stress. By contrast, when we care about and trust someone, oxytocin is released, and we feel connected. Feeling connected and part of something bigger than ourselves is a key to learning a second language.

Research suggests that three internal processes, play an important role in the acquisition of a second language: the filter, the organizer, and the monitor (Burt, Dulay & Krashen, 1982). The filter appears to be the first hurdle that incoming language must pass. It screens all incoming factors: the learner's motives, attitudes, and emotional states. The learner's emotional states are also part of the filter. Research has shown that the less anxious and more relaxed the learner, the better language acquisition proceeds (Burt, Dulay, & Krashen, 1982). Thus, the importance of English learners and Emergent bilinguals participating in SEL (socio-emotional learning) activities within a positive classroom environment benefit greatly in their language development.

Social Emotional Learning and English Learners/Emergent Bilinguals

Focusing on the social emotional learning, mindfulness and mindset would establish a positive classroom environment for English learners and Emergent bilinguals to work to overcome the stresses of learning a new language, literacy development, and overcoming the emotional challenges that the COVID 19 pandemic, trauma experienced in their homes because

of the pandemic, and other related family difficulties faced by poverty, family deaths, and lack of life resources. The prolonged social isolation of the English learners and Emergent bilinguals interrupted their development of English language, literacy, and content knowledge (Sugarman and Lazarin, 2020). English learners have additionally endured high levels of stress and formidable challenges developing meaningful relationships with their peers and teachers (Williams and Marcus, 2021). To foster self and social awareness, concerned educators are dedicating time at the beginning of their lessons to non-curricular aligned reflection, discussion, and interpersonal skill building. Resources are available from CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional learning, and can be utilized in whole class or small group discussion and provide opportunities for learning about peers and strengthening classroom relationships (Kinsella, K. 2022).

Mindfulness in the Bilingual/ESL Classroom

Emerging research has illustrated the many benefits of integrating mindfulness approaches and skills for both teachers and students (Jennings, et.al, 2013). Our students are experiencing stress at levels never seen before. One in 10 preschoolers has had suicidal thoughts (Whalen, Dixon-Gordon, Belden, Barch & Luby, 2015). Roughly 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys in U.S. high schools try to harm themselves even when they are not attempting suicide (Monto, McRee, & Deryck, 2018). Student stress occurs at all socioeconomic levels (Armstrong, 2019).

Mindfulness is the non-judgmental awareness of each present moment in time. Mindfulness has been defined as "maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily relaxation, and surrounding environment with openness and curiosity (Browning, A., 2020). Mindfulness is essentially the practice of cultivating attention to foster greater self-awareness and self-knowledge about thoughts, feelings, and sensations and how they can affect one's actions. Some of the benefits of mindfulness lead to the concepts of kindness, self-awareness, and self-management as part of socio-emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs include (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision making (CASEL, 2012) Similarly, by using mindfulness practices, students increase their own self-awareness. Similarly, by using mindfulness to cope with strong emotions related to learning a second language, students improve self-management skills. If we add kindness and compassion toward others as a key element in mindfulness practices, then students will be improving their relationship skills (Armstrong, 2019). It is very important for English learners and Emergent bilinguals to experience a classroom that has a positive classroom environment that will help and support them in developing their English language.

Mindfulness has been found to support academic learning in several ways. At the beginning of a new day or class session, mindfulness can help students focus on the tasks that they will face during the day or in a class period. The brief time that is taken from the academics will pay off in terms of better focus on the assignment being presented. This is also true for transitions between activities. The teacher can simply ask the students to recenter themselves in preparation for learning. A second way is by helping to overcome test anxiety. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness practice can help students by taking a one-minute mindfulness break that students can use before or during the taking of a test. A third way that mindfulness contributes to better academic performances is by

improving cognitive functions that are critical for learning, including working memory, planning, reflection, self-regulation, and attention. In a randomized controlled study with 5th and 6th graders in the mindfulness group scored higher than controls on measures of executive functions and significantly outperformed controls with respect to their end of year math grades (Schonert-Reichl et.al., 2011 in Armstrong, 2019).

Mindfulness can be a valuable approach for creating conditions in the classrooms that are responsive to all students, including English learners and Emergent bilinguals, including those who have experienced adversity during the pandemic or exposure to trauma. Mindfulness can also support a positive school in which students feel safe, welcome, and a sense of control over their experiences by helping them to develop decision-making and communication skills that will help them in school and beyond (Browning, A. 2020). This is essential for English learners and Emergent bilinguals. Students learn relationship building and learning, which are closely linked. In the development of these skills, cooperative learning has proven to be a learning strategy that has been effect in language development. Techniques involved in mindfulness practice can actually change the brain in ways that support the students in emotional reactivity. Studies involving neuroimaging have linked changes in brain responsible for attention enhancement, emotional regulation, and stress reduction (Tang, Y, Holzel, B., & Posner, M. (2015).

Any educational model or learning environment can incorporate mindfulness into education, and it doesn't require a full class period. In fact, much like other strategies to support children's social and emotion learning, mindfulness is best taught and learned as an integral part of wider school structures, practices, routines, and curricula (Browning, A. 2020). The implementation of mindfulness must consider the needs and understanding of the administration, teachers, children, and parents.

A few activities that are relatively easy to implement in classrooms and schools include the following:

1. **Silent 60:** Start class by having all students sit quietly for 60 second ready for learning. You can add a focus on a particular sound in the room, an image you provide or on the students' breathing. Start with 15 seconds and gradually increase.
2. **One Minute for Good:** Start the class by having students reflect for a minute about something that has gone well or something that they are grateful for. This can be done in writing, pair shares or small or large group discussions.
3. **Morning Classroom Conversations:** Start the day with a quote that can stimulate short conversations to help middle and high school students begin to interact with classmates in supportive ways.
4. **Three Breaths:** Have students take three deep breaths at regular intervals, such as before class changes or whenever strong feelings of anxiety or tension arise. This is a good practice for staff also.
5. **Speak Your Mantra:** Develop a phrase that helps you keep focus and keep p perspective. Repeat it often, when you encounter roadblocks and when things

are going well. (Elias, M. 2021)

Mindset in the Bilingual/ESL Classroom

Another integral and essential socio-emotional skill is mindset. Dweck (2019) identifies the distinction between fixed mind-set, the belief that intellectual abilities are static and largely unchangeable. A growth-mindset is a belief that intellectual abilities are malleable and can be improved with learning through the use of strategies, practices, and effort. Dr. Dweck (2019) further elaborates that her work demonstrates that whatever type of mindset individuals adopt can have a major impact on their life across a variety of contexts, in school, family, and friends, and in the workplace. Teaching students that their brain is like muscles can be a great metaphor for understanding behind the idea of growth mindset (Sprenger 2020). The same is true for one's brain: the more you work at learning and problem solving, the easier those things become. Similarly, the students learn about emotions and their causes, and grow in ability to identify factors that create emotions, analyze how their emotions affect their behavior and how their behaviors affect others.

Breaking down their belief that intelligence is static can be a challenge but with proper groundwork and education, little by little a mindset can shift. Expecting a mind-shift immediately is not realistic; after all some educators and parents have had a fixed mindset belief of most of their lives. Believing that all children can, with effort, perseverance, and motivation succeed is the heart of belief. One of the reasons for the shift in thinking about intelligence is due to the new technology that examines the function and make of the brain. Neuroscience has had a significant impact on teaching and learning. Recent brain research negates the notion that intelligence is "fixed" from birth. Both formal and informal studies show that the brain can develop with proper stimulus. Other current research in neuroscience emphasizes neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the ability of the to change, adapt, and "rewire" with new connections. We can see that process in stroke victims that can many times completely overcome the results of a brain injury to regain what they have lost (Ricci, 2017)

"It turns out the summer vacation is a massive disadvantage or poorer kids. Richer kids get a lot of help over the summer. Their homes are filled with books and things that advance their knowledge, they go to camp and have activities. But poor families cannot do that. To improve, as a society would have to provide it in the first place. During the school year, poor kids actually outlearn richer kids. Then they stall over the summer." (Newman, 2008, p, 5)

Many educators do not realize that approximately 75% of abilities are attributed to psychosocial skills, which some researchers refer to as non-cognitive skills only about 25% of innate intelligence contributes to achievement (Olszowski-Kubilius,2013). The cultivation of these skills is very importance for those students that have not developed these abilities, or talents. The skills that must be modeled, taught, and cultivated include but are not limited to perseverance, resiliency, grit, optimism, coping with disagreement within discourse, self-confidence, coping skills in dealing

with failure, ability to handle positive and negative feedback, and can move forward with perseverance and resiliency. This research finding is very important for our bilingual/ESL teachers to take into consideration when working with second language learners. The importance to recognize that second language development is going to take time. Giving second language learners the time to develop their vocabulary and make mistakes is all part of the process. The role of the teacher is to encourage and help the student develop some of these coping skills that are essential to their success in school (Ricci, 2017).

When educators model positive learning states, they are supporting students in their learning. It is a foundation of effective instruction and learning. When students are positively engaged and focused on learning, they experience more growth and are likely to experience a growth mindset. A teacher can model positive and engaged mindset by telling the students what she/he is excited about learning and why you love reading and how it has impacted your life and share how learning has changed your life for the better. While emphasizing that positivity can help support learning, educators can let the students know that both positive and negative are natural, and a wide range of emotions is expected throughout life (Wilson & Conyers, 2020).

Academic mindset is the result of four conceptual and identity frames all braided together by our limbic brain to create mindset. These four elements make up our internal mindset scripts.

- Our sense of mastery and competence as learners is based on past experiences and sense of preparedness.
- Our belief in our ability to move about the world freely and control of our external world.
- Our deep belief in ourselves and our ability to achieve what we put our mind and energy toward.
- Our explanatory story that we tell ourselves about why we are or aren't Competent learners. (Hammond, 2015)

Carol Dweck (2007) in her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* points out that what we believe about ourselves as learners and our ability to be effective are the catalysts for learning. Her research supports decades of other research findings that tell us students with positive mindset are more willing to engage, work harder, and persevere during challenging assignments that challenge them. On the other hand, students with negative mindsets are more likely either act up or zone out in response to their internal belief that they cannot be successful (Hammond, 2015). These elements make up the script that comes embedded in our limbic brain "programs" in our safety-threat system. The programs are stored in the hippocampus and recognizes patterns of our sense of competence, self-efficacy, and ability to grow as a learner. At a certain point, the brain believes that the same patterns will continue, so it creates a software program that will run on autopilot to help us to pay attention or not when to put forth effort or not. The hippocampus feeds thalamus, our brain's air-traffic controller, and the amygdala, the guard dog. The way the brain chooses to interpret and encode this information results in either a fixed

mindset (not a risktaker), or a growth mindset (will to take a chance) (Hammond, 2015).

According to Loretta Hammond (2015) academic mindset cycle includes the following steps.

1. "Academic mindset: Student begins with the belief that learning is relevant and is worth paying attention. His belief is reinforced by evidence of progress.
2. Engagement: Brain's attention is by positive emotion, physical energy, curiosity or an activity signaling the brain to engage.
3. Effort-Engagement gives way to assessing, managing, and regulating mental energy needed to complete the task, understand the concept, or solve the assignment.
4. Task-Performance-Student applies various cognitive to complete the task or to understand the concepts based on mental energy assessment. Student is willing to adjust perseverance and tenacity (effort and grit)
5. Feedback on Progress-Self-assessment and external feedback help brain to go back and adjust misconceptions or revise the task, which deepens learning and builds a sense of accomplishment and competence. This strengthens mindset."

Wilson and Conyers (2020) designed and developed the following seven principles to continue developing their own growth mindsets and support the development of growth of their students:

1. "Understand the mindsets so that awareness is maintained with regard to which mindset one is engaged in and what impact it has on motivation and performance.
2. Keep plasticity front of mind as a scientific foundation for developing growth mindsets. Understanding that learning changes the brain can increase motivation.
3. Learn with practical optimism as an approach to support a growth mindset through increased engagement, focused energy, and resilience in the face of challenges.
4. Set growth goals and establish target with a level of challenge that is not too easy or too difficult.
5. Get the feedback needed to continuously improve learning and sustain a growth mindset.
6. Improve methods—like those shared throughout this book—to increase successful learning outcomes and sustain a growth mindset over time.
7. Focus on progress, not perfection, and celebrate incremental gains."

4. Conclusions.

Despite the importance of devoting class time for SEL activities that promote mindfulness and growth mindset with a focus on personal growth and positive relationship building, English learners often remain shy and afraid to participate because of their English language and competence. It is importance to be selective and relevant in the types of sharing prompts presented for these students. If the English learners or Emergent bilinguals hardly ever participate little insight into the lives of these culturally diverse class members will be shared. Some suggestions are to assign initial community building prompts being aware that some of these students may have limited track record of positive

prior experiences. Like all students benefit from a complexity progression, moving from discussion topics that are more accessible and affirming. For initial discussions, provide response frames and precise word banks. Also, you might structure partner interaction prior to class discussion. In working in small or large groups, the teacher may select students who will initiate the discussion prompt after the English learner has worked on the prompt with a partner. Also work with partners to volunteer for the final reporting.

Emerging research has provided the many benefits of integrating mindfulness approaches and a growth mindset culture for both teachers and students. In addition, making sure that our English learners and Emergent bilinguals are having the opportunity to experience mindfulness and growth mindsets in their Bilingual, Dual Language and ESL classrooms will enable and develop in the students the road to their English language proficiency development and academic success while the students keep their culture and identity. These students have faced and continue to face many challenges in their daily lives but developing these two skills and using various strategies for engagement, participating in SEL and oral language activities will help all students appreciate their diversity and positively impact English learners and Emergent bilinguals' linguistic ability in their classrooms and to become productive citizens in world.

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