

Language in the Classroom: The Role of Teacher Attitudes in Assigning Status to

Student Languages

Erin Siwek

Concordia University, Montréal

Discussion

Introduction

Research indicates that there are many benefits to balanced bilingualism (Gàndara, 2015). These include:

- Multinational perspective
- Increased problem-solving ability
- Less distractibility
- Higher likelihood of attending college

Teachers have a **critical impact** on both students' **achievement** in school and their **attitudes** toward their L1s (MacSwan, 2000, Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Given the size of the effect that teachers have upon their students and the importance of developing bilingualism, this study seeks to understand how teachers assign status to student L1s in the classroom.

Method

Anonymous, online survey:

- 11 short response questions
- 4 Likert scale questions
- 1 ranking question
- 34 respondents in final data set

Results

88% agreed or strongly agreed that "Student languages other than English can be a resource for classroom instruction."

82% have used a language other than English in the classroom.

Common classroom language policies included:

- L1 use if it does not disrupt learning or exclude anyone
- Using a common language in the classroom
- School appropriate use of any language

35% say language use in the classroom depends on context

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Jacqueline Peters for her support during this research project. I would also like to thank Sheryl Siwek for her help in distributing the survey.

References

Gàndara, P. (2015). *The implications of deeper learning for adolescent immigrants and English language learners.*

MacSwan, T. (2000). *The threshold hypothesis, semilingualism, and other contributions to a deficit view of linguistic minorities.*

Lee, J.S. & Oxelson, E. (2006). "It's not my job": K-12 teacher attitudes toward students' heritage language maintenance.

L1 linked to:

Safe place,
enhancing
learning,
connection

Exclusion,
rudeness,
distraction,
bullying

High status L1
Additive
bilingualism

Low status L1
Subtractive
bilingualism

Teacher attitudes toward own L2s:

Positive:
creates
welcoming
environment
for all
languages

Deficit-
based:
creates
exclusionary
environment
for languages



Teacher training was identified as a major area of need