1 Key Concepts in Teaching Young Multilingual Learners

Multilingual learners (ML), students who speak languages other than English, have been an increasing population all over the world for several years (de Oliveira & Westerlund, 2020; Gibbons, 2015; Gunderson, 2009). In Australia, 15 percent of the primary and secondary school student population is students classified as English Learners (ELs) (Michell, 2021). In Canada, over two million students were enrolled in second language programs in 2020 out of a total population of five million primary and secondary students. An increase in the population of students whose first language is not English has also been consistent in the United Kingdom, with 19.3 percent of the primary and secondary school population representing students whose first language is not English in 2021, an increase of 2 percent from 2015 (Clark, 2022). In the United States, more than 9 percent of the US elementary and secondary (K-12) student population consists of students identified as ELs, which represents over 3.8 million students in US schools, as of fall 2020 (NCES, 2020). The largest number of these students is found in California, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, Puerto Rico, and Texas. However, states such as Arkansas, Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia have experienced more than 200 percent growth in the numbers of ELs in schools.

This population growth in many English-speaking countries around the world means that there needs to be a concerted effort to address their needs and prepare their teachers. Typically, these MLs take English as a second language (ESL) classes or participate in programs where both their home language and English are used to develop their language proficiency before they enter the general education classroom. Yet the number of ESL specialists in schools is limited, and many school districts do not serve the full number of these students. Most MLs spend only a portion of their day with bilingual or ESL teachers. These students, then, attend general education classes most of their time in school.

This Element addresses this specific population of students and adds to the existing literature on teacher preparation for MLs in primary English-speaking contexts. We provide an overview of research focusing on language teaching practices for young multilingual learners in primary classrooms. The term “young multilingual learner” refers to primary school children, with ages ranging from approximately five to twelve years old, at various English-language proficiency levels. Pedagogy-informed research studies conducted in primary (K-5) classrooms are used to develop research-informed pedagogies for young multilingual learners in primary classrooms. We use the notion of
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culturally sustaining teaching practices to provide examples from pedagogy-informed research studies. The focus on early (K-3) and intermediate (4–5) grades provides a range of illustrations of such practices. We conclude with implications for teacher education and the preparation of teachers of young multilingual learners.

1.1 Terminology
The terminology used to describe the target student population we address in this Element varies considerably. There is little agreement in the scholarly literature as to what name best describes these students. Although each designation has different connotations and issues, various terms are favored by researchers within distinct research traditions depending upon one’s philosophical commitment, sociopolitical orientation, and unique focus. These include emergent to advanced bilingual student (EAB), multilingual learner (ML), bi/multilingual student, plurilingual learner, additional language speaker, English language learner (ELL), English learner (EL), limited English proficient (LEP) student, non-native speaker (NNS), second language (L2) speaker, among others. We chose to use the term “multilingual learner” (ML) in this Element since it has a positive connotation that emphasizes these students’ various language abilities, instead of using other terms highlighting the students’ limitations (e.g., LEP and NNS) or with a focus on English learning (e.g., ELL and EL). The term “MLs” refers to students who speak a language or languages other than English at home and who are learning English as an additional language. Young multilingual learners are children in primary schools, with ages ranging from approximately five to twelve years old at various English language proficiency levels. This intentional designation aims to underscore the linguistic assets that MLs bring to the classroom (García & Kleyn, 2016).

1.2 Teacher Preparation for Multilingual Learners
General education teachers who did not have this student population before in their classes are now seeing high numbers of MLs among their students. General education, content area teachers need knowledge and practical ideas about addressing the academic language needs of MLs because they have the dual responsibility of facilitating MLs’ content learning while also supporting their ongoing English language development. Teachers need to develop a knowledge base, expertise, and competencies necessary to effectively work with MLs. There is evidence that many in-service and pre-service teachers feel uncomfortable and unprepared to work with MLs, and need theoretical and
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This needed preparation includes specific competencies – essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions – that all teachers should develop for teaching MLs (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marín, 2010; Howard & Aleman, 2008). These include subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, integration of pedagogy, learning and culture; knowledge of effective practices that include understanding of students’ lives, communities, and larger social and political discourses; understanding the distinction between everyday and academic language; knowledge of SLA; understanding the role of home language (L1) in learning the second language (L2); advocating for MLs; drawing on community engagement; and using multiple assessments. Another area that has been deemed effective in teaching MLs is the ability to tap into different “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) that students’ families share. Moll’s research addressed how family members use their funds of knowledge to sustain their families both economically and socially, and how these relationships connect them with other members of the community.

Guided by a socially oriented theory of language, which places special importance on the relationship between contexts and patterns of language choices for meaning making, teachers can provide opportunities to prepare language learners to participate in authentic learning contexts and meaning making through scaffolding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Classrooms where teachers are able to create an environment with high challenge and high support are those where not only MLs but all students can benefit (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Knowing how to support MLs’ academic language development continues to be a key competency for teachers (Cummins 2001; Peercy et al., 2022; Schleppegrell 2004). Recent criticism targeting the teaching and learning of academic language has labeled them as hegemonic (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This perspective claims that instruction focused on academic language idealizes the linguistic practices of White people and devalues minoritized speakers’ linguistic repertoires (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García, 2020). But scholars in various fields have refuted these claims. They show how pedagogical approaches that focus on the development of academic language value and draw on minoritized speakers’ language practices while enabling their access to discourse practices typical of schooling (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Harman & Khoté, 2018; Schleppegrell, 2020). Some have called for the characterization of academic language as a hybrid that includes everyday and disciplinary ways of knowing (Gutiérrez et al., 2010). Teachers of young MLs can draw on the cultures of students, connect to their backgrounds and experiences, and use students’ home
languages and linguistic repertoires at the same time as they are code-breaking, or addressing the academic language demands of various content areas (de Oliveira, 2016; de Oliveira, Jones, & Smith, 2020). Students’ cultural and language affordances are optimized as joint learning activities with the development of academic language. This requires effective support, including support in what Gibbons (2015) calls “literate talk,” or talk that introduces concepts and provides discipline-specific ways of talking about these concepts with students. This kind of support that MLs need to receive starts in kindergarten, with the teacher using specific ways to scaffold language and learning (Gibbons 2014); therefore, teachers working with MLs need to have a deep understanding of these constructs in order to be effective with these students.

The purposeful use of the first language in the second language classroom is another key competency. However, monolingual instructional assumptions permeate second language education. Cummins (2005) highlights the following premises as the most common: “instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language, without recourse to L1,” “translation between L1 and L2 has no place in the learning and teaching of literacy,” “in L2 immersion and bilingual programs, the two languages should be kept separate” (p. 588). More so, in many classrooms, students’ heritage language is considered an impediment or is irrelevant to learning English (Cummins, 2005). Monolingual teaching approaches fundamentally disregard the nature of learning a new language, a process in which learners always relate the new language to the language they already know, whether they are consciously or unconsciously doing it. This is in spite of a substantial body of scholarship demonstrating that instructional programs, teaching strategies and educational policies, lesson objectives and tasks can and should integrate students’ languages and cultures (García & Jensen 2009; García & Li, 2014). Utilizing students’ L1 in the classroom has been proposed as a pedagogy that offers very positive results to oppose monolingual assumptions among teachers.

1.3 Teaching Young Multilingual Learners

Research on teaching young multilingual learners has shown that there are specific benefits for early language development in English, including increased time spent on language development, pronunciation and fluency facility, greater global awareness and intercultural knowledge, and development of bilingualism (Shin & Crandall, 2013). Other specific relevant content identified in the literature includes authentic language learning experiences (Short et al., 2018), culturally relevant texts (Herrera et al., 2015), scaffolding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005), message abundancy (Gibbons, 2015), and collaborative work.
with peers (de Oliveira, 2016). These practices are all relevant for addressing MLs’ cultural, linguistic, and overall academic needs (Hite & Evans, 2006).

Given the amount of time that young MLs spend with teachers, teacher discourse plays a significant role in their education, with the nature of these interactions having a major impact on student success (e.g., Johnson, 2019). As the medium of instruction, teachers’ language is directly connected to the content students learn. Moreover, teacher discourse models different registers, exposing students to academic language across subject areas and influencing how students view learning, language, themselves, and even their surrounding world (Johnston, 2012). Because of the critical importance of teacher discourse for young MLs’ language development, this Element highlights several excerpts and lessons focused on language from early (K-3) and intermediate (4-5) grades.

We organized this Element into three sections:

• **Practices for Teaching Young Multilingual Learners**, where we review research focusing on language teaching practices for young multilingual learners in primary classrooms. We emphasize contexts where English is the dominant language and medium of instruction.

• **Practices in Action: Evidence and Examples from Pedagogy-Informed Research Studies**, where we provide five main practices and specific examples from our classroom-based research in grades K-5 to illustrate a range of culturally sustaining teaching practices. We define pedagogy-informed research as connected to classrooms that specifically address pedagogical practices for MLs in the context of a general education classroom.

• **Implications for Teacher Education**, where we conclude the Element with implications for teacher education and the preparation of teachers of young multilingual learners.

## 2 Practices for Teaching Young Multilingual Learners

This section reviews research focusing on language teaching practices for young multilingual learners in primary classrooms. We emphasize contexts where English is the dominant language and medium of instruction.

### 2.1 Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2012) build on the ever-popular concept of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014) by going beyond the act of making content relevant to students and responding to their cultures, which Paris (2012) has stated does not necessarily help
“sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism” (p. 95). Instead, culturally sustaining pedagogies address the multiethnic and multilingual nature of many classrooms and help support “the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). Paris advocates for a pedagogy that maintains the practices of students while also expanding their repertoires to include “dominant language[s], literacies and other cultural practices” (p. 95) so students are also able to critique such practices. Importantly, one of the goals of culturally sustaining pedagogies is to help perpetuate and foster “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95) which is a crucial goal in the education of multilingual learners. Paris and Alim (2012) suggest that, “culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the life-ways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling” (p. 1).

With such rich multiethnic and multilingual classrooms in various parts of the world, we find it essential to highlight specific instructional practices that embody culturally sustaining pedagogies that enable educators to create learning environments in which all students are educated effectively and equitably.

2.2 Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

There are a number of language teaching practices identified in the literature as effective strategies for working with young multilingual learners, but for our purposes we highlight those that we believe enact culturally sustaining pedagogies for young multilingual learners in primary classrooms: incorporating students’ funds of knowledge, drawing on interactional scaffolding moves, utilizing students’ L1, using multimodal instruction, and applying a functional approach to language development (see Figure 1).

2.2.1 Incorporating Students’ Funds of Knowledge

One practice that enacts culturally sustaining pedagogies is incorporating students’ funds of knowledge (FOK; Moll et al., 1992) in the classroom. The term “FOK,” initially defined as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133), has evolved to now include students’ interests more broadly (Hedges et al., 2011) and the ways of knowing that they develop from peer groups, communities, and popular culture (Moje et al., 2004). As such, we define students’ FOK as the dynamic knowledge, skills, and practices developed in households and...
Students’ FOK are crucial sources of information that can lead to more effective teaching practices (Hogg, 2011), but it takes purposeful planning that can be challenging, especially when teachers are faced with scripted curricula (Mead, 2021).

Researchers have long advocated for curriculum and instruction to draw on students’ FOK (see Hogg, 2011; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Rodriguez, 2013; Short et al., 2018) and prior research has examined how teachers leverage students’ FOK in the classroom in order to create a more inclusive, engaging learning environment, to support students in understanding new content, and to assist students in developing their English language skills (e.g., Blair et al., 2018; Keefer et al., 2020). For example, Turner and others (2019) leveraged elementary students’ experiences and understandings as they were introduced to mathematical modeling. More specifically, students drew on their prior experiences to identify important quantities and relationships, to make assumptions, to analyze and interpret the reasonableness of their solutions, and to revise their models when needed.
Another practice that enacts culturally sustaining pedagogy is utilizing interactional scaffolding in the classroom. Early scholars in the field (e.g., Wood et al., 1976) recognized that scaffolding was a means for adults to help children work within their zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978), effectively bridging the gap between their current and future independent performance. This scaffolding is often accomplished as students work with a teacher or a more advanced peer, gradually releasing responsibility as they become capable of successfully completing the assigned task on their own (Bruner, 1983).

While scaffolding originated in studies of tutoring (e.g., Wood et al., 1976), it has since evolved to capture classroom research and practice (e.g., Athanases & de Oliveira, 2014), where it has shown to be especially important for MLs’ participation in classroom discourse (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Interactional scaffolding involves teachers making use of different moves, making explicit connections between students’ prior experiences and their current and future learning, using appropriation, recasting, elaboration, cued elicitation, and recapping. These moves are instrumental in how teachers engage students in the learning environment, and they can support multilingual learners in developing oral language in the context of the classroom along with skills for interacting in a range of situations. Participation in rich classroom discourse is a key resource for learning from elementary to middle school years and beyond, where the language of schooling becomes more demanding (Gibbons, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Classroom discourse, and specifically the notion of interactional scaffolding, appears to be a promising practice in classrooms with MLs (Garton & Copland, 2019; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Johnson, 2019; Short et al., 2018). Typically, this scaffolding is implemented through the initiation, response, and feedback sequence (IRF). Teachers implement the IRF sequence by asking a question, listening thoughtfully to students’ responses, and providing feedback in a way that encourages students to remain engaged, at times by asking them to clarify their response, provide additional details, or ask a question of their own. The IRF sequence contrasts with the typical structure of classroom discourse, Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE), which has been shown to inhibit continued conversation (Mehan, 1979). Based on the context, teachers can draw on any one of the various scaffolding moves when providing feedback to students. For instance, the teacher may incorporate students’ prior knowledge and experiences, referencing their unique out-of-school and home experiences and shared experiences from previous teaching and learning activities. The
teacher might also utilize cued elicitation, which involves the teacher using strong verbal or gestural hints about expected responses. Teachers often use this move to provide a substantial amount of support for students to participate or when attempting to make material more memorable (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Additionally, through appropriation, the teacher may incorporate the language and tools used by their learners in their own dialogue for their own purposes. When doing so, teachers typically recast the wording of the student into more academically appropriate discourse. This reshaping of students’ contributions allows the student to be a co-participant in the discourse, but it also enables the teacher to effectively move the discourse forward (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2017). At times, the teacher may incorporate elaboration, which involves supplementing students’ contributions with extra information. Elaboration can also be used to ask students to provide more details for their own contributions, which allows them to continue their involvement in the discourse. Additionally, the teacher may use recapping to give a brief summary of the main points of an activity, lesson, or interaction. This can be very helpful for students as it provides them with a connection between key concepts, highlights the information students should have gathered from the activity, lesson, or interaction, and provides students with a clear focus for future learning. There has been increased interest in interactional scaffolding in research in both primary (de Oliveira, Jones, & Smith, 2020) and secondary (Johnson, 2019) classrooms. In fact, de Oliveira, Jones, and Smith (2020) found additional interactional scaffolding moves than the ones found by earlier research and have established a model that teachers can utilize when integrating this type of classroom discourse support (see Figure 2).

### 2.2.3 Utilizing Students’ L1 in the Classroom

Closely related to incorporating students’ FOK in the classroom is the idea of utilizing students’ L1 in the classroom. Over the years, various scholars have investigated the use of students’ first language in multilingual contexts (e.g., Polio & Duff, 1994; Ramos, 2005; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008) and advocated for creating classroom spaces that support students’ bilingual and biliteracy development (Gallo, 2014; Martínez et al., 2008; Reyes, 2012). One of the first studies to examine the use of L1 in teaching came from Cook (2001), Using the First Language in the Classroom. In this important piece, Cook disentangled arguments against the use of L1 and put forth several ways that the L1 could be used in the classroom as a valuable resource (e.g., convey meaning, explain grammar, collaborative learning).
Following this study, other scholars (e.g., Cummins, 2007; Gort & Pontier, 2013) investigating the use of L1 in the classroom also identified benefits for MLs, including cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural. Research has shown that using the L1 in the classroom can play an important role in developing students’ cognitive potential. Central to this finding is the concept of transfer (Cummins, 2005) and the idea that MLs have the ability to transfer their existing metalinguistic and metacognitive skills and strategies from their L1 to their learning of English (Cummins, 2001, 2007) which can contribute to their language development and overall academic success. In order to promote this transfer, researchers call for teachers to explicitly teach language transfer (e.g., systematic attention to cognate relationships across languages; Cunningham & Graham, 2000; de Oliveira, Gilmetdinova, & Pelaez-Morales, 2015).

Apart from supporting students’ cognitive growth, utilizing the L1 in the classroom has been identified as a resource for developing students’ emotional, social, and cultural capital. By using students’ L1, teachers are conveying to children that their proficiency in the L1 “is an important accomplishment that is acknowledged and appreciated within the classroom” (Cummins, 2005, p. 588). Additionally, when teachers build on student’s L1 as a source of prior knowledge, they recognize the skills and knowledge that students possess across languages, which can send affirmative messages about the value of knowing and learning multiple languages (Cook, 2007; Cummins, 2001, 2007;).